

BOYS' LOVE DRAMAS AND VIEWER PERCEPTIONS:
A STUDY ON *2GETHER: THE SERIES*' IMPACT
ON UNITED STATES' FEMALE PERCEPTIONS

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTERS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS
May 2024

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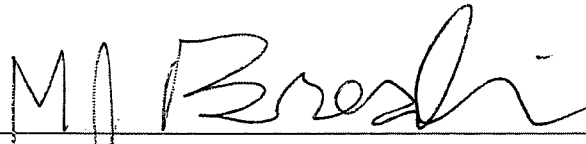
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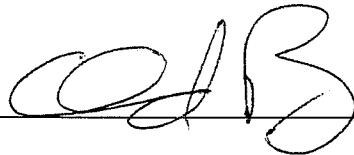
THESIS APPROVED FOR
A MASTERS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

International programming has expanded beyond its initial bounds as a result of media globalization. Streaming platforms such as Netflix and YouTube have opened up new genres to a lot of the world. Partially due to the availability of Asian-produced television shows, the popularity of various genres has increased. The "Boys' Love" (BL) drama genre is highly favored in Asia, as it delves into the romantic connections between two males. While several Asian nations are currently making BL dramas, Thailand has been highly successful and has drawn viewers from around the world.

Existing literature on BL dramas is limited; this is particularly the case while looking up Thai BL dramas, particularly the episodes of *2gether: The Series*. Most studies focus on fandom behavior and reactions to BL dramas in nations other than Thailand, mainly China and Japan. Thailand is often considered the most successful at making popular BL dramas, which means that dramas from that region are more likely to have a greater influence on how viewers perceive shows in the genre. This study focuses on the Thai BL drama *2gether: The Series* as the program of examination because of the popularity of the series and the increased possibility that viewer perceptions may be altered.

The research conducted in this study will add to the expanding, if still small, body of knowledge about BL dramas. In addition, the study will shed light on how viewers—especially women from the United States—perceive Asian culture in relation to popular Asian-produced television. The study would be useful to researchers looking into the possible worldwide effects that the very popular BL drama genre may have on the BL community as well as social, political, and foreign policies. The study's findings will also provide light on how the BL community is stereotyped in BL dramas, and whether these portrayals reinforce or replicate viewer

preconceptions of the BL community. The findings may help producers and content creators have a better understanding of how depictions may serve to perpetuate unfavorable perceptions about the BL lifestyle.

To examine the consumption of BL dramas and its impact on United States female audiences' perceptions of the Thai BL community and whether the perceptions are reflected in Thai BL drama themes, this study will use a triangulation method--a combination of qualitative and quantitative research.

To examine *2gether: The Series* influences the perceptions of United States female viewers, a survey method will be used in the form of an open-ended questionnaire. The participants for this study are adult United States female viewers. A thematic analysis will be used to examine and identify the themes portrayed in the Thai BL drama *2gether: The Series*. This will provide insight into the type of themes that are portrayed and the relationship between the themes and audience perceptions of the BL community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have undertaken this journey without my thesis chair, Dr. David Nelson. Dr. Nelson, I would not have been successful throughout this process without your guidance. I am extremely grateful for the contributions made by my thesis committee members, Dr. Mike Breslin and Dr. Chad Perry.

Many thanks to everyone who participated in this project. I am so grateful for the time and energy you put into your responses.

Special thanks to Kari, my best friend and proofreader. Your thoughts and encouragement kept me going.

A huge thank you to my mom and dad for always encouraging me to pursue my dreams. To my siblings, thank you for listening to my frustrations over the last year. I am also grateful to my grandparents for your love and support. To my grandfather who was not able to see me complete this journey, thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my cat, Misha, and my dog, Thor, for their emotional support.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Asian Programming: Boy's Love Dramas

Due to media globalization, international programming has reached beyond its original borders. Streaming services like Netflix and YouTube have introduced large regions of the world to new genres. Due to the past successes of Asian-produced programs, other genres have grown in popularity. From the Korean wave of K-pop music to the latest global success of Asian-produced programs like *Squid Games*, *The Untamed*, and *Girl from Nowhere*, Asian programming has become one of the most sought-after genres in the world (Rizzo, 2023). In response to the world popularity of Asian programming, Netflix announced a multi-million-dollar investment in producing more Asian programming for its global video platform (Kim, 2023). One of the most popular Asian genres is the “Boys’ love” (BL) drama, a drama exploring the relationship between two men (Jerome et al., 2022). Although there are multiple Asian countries actively producing BL dramas, Thailand has been the most successful and has attracted a global audience (Koaysomboon, 2020; Reddy, 2023).

International Popularity: Thai BL Dramas

The popularity of BL dramas started in 2014 and continues to grow in Asia making it increasingly easy for American audiences to view the genre. De Guzman (2022) suggests that global lockdowns in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have factored into the growing worldwide popularity of BL dramas. BL dramas in foreign languages are available on Netflix,

YouTube, Viki, and other streaming platforms with women being the largest viewers of BL dramas produced in foreign countries (Kawano, 2019; Shepherd, 2023).

Thailand is one of the most popular countries in Asia in producing BL dramas (Enomoto et al., 2022; Nair, 2023). Reddy (2023) asserts that Thailand's BL dramas have risen above the competition presented by other countries producing BL Dramas. De Guzman (2022) adds that BL drama productions in the region are "Thailand's soft power, doing for the Southeast Asian nation's global image what the yoga boom has done for India or K-pop for South Korea" (para.3). In 2021, Thailand's Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP) secured nearly \$11 million in foreign investments in the BL Industry.

One of the more popular Thai-produced BL dramas is *2gether: The Series*. The drama is considered by many Asian entertainment media outlets to be the most popular BL drama in the world (De Guzman, 2022; Enomoto et al., 2022; Pawa, 2022; Shepherd, 2023). However, popularity often brings unwanted attention from critics.

The BL Drama and Public Criticism

BL dramas feature romantic relationships between two males (Jerome et al., 2022) and are popular among young women (Kawano, 2019; Shepherd, 2023). Due to its content, local officials often criticize BL drama programming in the mostly conservative regions of Asia (Haynes, 2019; Reuters, 2022). China has imposed many bans on BL dramas and deemed them "harmful" to morals (Zhang, C., & Zhang, M, 2022, para. 4). Even members of the Thai BL community criticize the content in BL dramas as stereotypical portrayals that cultivate and reinforce distorted views of the BL community (Barrios, 2021). Gross (1994) claims that television portrayals have a significant impact on people's preconceptions about these groups

because many television viewers may have limited firsthand experience with members of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. Barrios (2021) mentions the common themes of internalized homophobia, stereotypical dominant and submissive roles, and rape being positively framed in BL dramas. Critics add that because stereotypes influence attitudes and perceptions of reality (Morgan et al., 2009), the use of stereotypes has the potential to negatively shape viewers' perceptions about homosexual relationships if they lack personal experiences with the community.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, proposed by Gerbner & Gross (1976), asserts that the consumption of television shapes viewers' attitudes and beliefs, therefore reinforcing the media's portrayal as a representation of reality. Shanahan & Morgan (1999) reiterate that cultivation analysis is not designed to research messages in the short term; rather, it is intended to examine the broader relationship between media message consumption and the beliefs of large groups of people over longer periods.

Cultivation theory has held up over the decades since its inception. The results of an enormous amount of research carried out in previous years provide credence to the theories that long-term television exposure does affect social change and that cumulative television exposure assimilates worldviews and cultivates images and concepts matching what is seen on TV (Mosharafa, 2015). Some viewers are more susceptible than others, as Morgan et al. (2009)

suggest that audiences with little prior knowledge are more likely to be influenced by content portrayed in the media.

Assuming the content of Thai BL drama television shows mirrors the perceptions of the study participants (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983; John & Carey, 1992), it is reasonable to conclude that the television themes shape the thoughts of other members of the public. Gerbner's cultivation theory (1976) suggests that audiences who watch television programming consistently over a longer period are more likely to perceive a reality reflective of the television message. As a result, socially stereotyped media messages about minorities and fringe groups reinforce viewer perceptions and may have a negative effect on social, political, and economic views related to the groups. However, Gerbner adds that "personal experiences" often resonate strongly and can reinforce or even dismiss the portrayals in television programming (Gerbner et al., 1980).

Purpose of Study

The literature on BL dramas is limited; this is especially true when researching Thai BL dramas, specifically the episodes of *2gether: The Series*. The majority of the research covers fandom activity and responses to BL dramas in countries other than Thailand, largely China and Japan (Baeker & Hao, 2021; Jerome et al., 2022; Shimauchi, 2023). As noted earlier, although multiple Asian countries are actively producing BL dramas, Thailand is the most successful in creating popular dramas (Enomoto et al., 2022; Nair, 2023) and, therefore more likely to have a larger impact on viewer perception. Due to the increased likelihood of a larger population of viewer perceptions being impacted, and the popularity of the series, this study is focused on

Thai's BL drama *2gether: The Series* as the program of examination (De Guzman, 2022; Enomoto et al., 2022; Pawa, 2022; Lai, 2023; Shepherd, 2023).

The aim of this study is to examine the themes in the popular Thai BL drama and the impact they have on United States perceptions, particularly women. Literature related to the perceptions of female audiences in the United States of Thai BL dramas is non-existent. BL actors have “gained a large following among mostly women, mainly heterosexual, not only in Thailand and the United States but in China, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and even Latin America” (Jirattikorn, A., 2023, para. 1). The focus will be on whether the show's portrayals cultivated or reinforced preconceived stereotypes of the Thai BL community among the female population.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are United States females' (USF) perceptions of the Thai BL community prior to viewing BL dramas?

RQ 2: What are the USF's perceptions after viewing the content in Thai's *2gether: The Series*?

RQ 3: Were the USF's prior perceptions changed, modified, reinforced, or added to after exposure to Thai's *2gether: The Series*?

RQ 4: What impact, if any, did personal experiences with the BL community have on the USF's perceptions?

Methodology

Qualitative: Survey: The Open-ended Questionnaire

The first phase of this study will consist of an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended survey will allow for richer responses and allow the researcher to explore the subject matter in greater detail versus a closed-ended survey where the participant is restricted in their choices (McLeod, 2023).

The purpose of the survey is to examine the prior knowledge and perceptions of the sampled viewers related to the BL community and how *2gether: The Series* may have influenced their perceptions after exposure. The questionnaire will be disseminated to United States female audiences of BL dramas. The questionnaire will be created using Qualtrics and will be delivered digitally. Participants will be recruited through Instagram, Reddit, Tumblr, and X. This method will widen the potential pool of participants.

The first set of questions in the survey will gather data prior to viewing the proposed BL drama in order to gauge the sample's preconceptions of the BL community. After viewing season one of the proposed BL dramas, a second set of questions will be administered to understand whether the portrayals in the BL drama, *2gether: The Series*, cultivated new or modified perceptions or simply mirrored the sample's prior perceptions.

The raw data from the questionnaire will be coded using a deductive and inductive analysis and sorted into categories and tables to develop a comprehensive representation of the participant's responses (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Then, as stated, the data will be studied to determine if there is a connection between the sample's reported perceptions of the Thai BL community and themes derived from the program.

Quantitative: Thematic Analysis

The second phase will consist of a thematic analysis to examine and identify the themes portrayed in the Thai BL drama *2gether: The Series*. A thematic analysis allows the researcher to analyze meaning, theme, and concepts related to the content, and explore and interpret patterns across the data (Joffe, 2012).

A thematic analysis of season one of *2gether: The Series* will be conducted equaling 13 episodes. A thematic analysis process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) will be used to determine the steps and definitions to take before conducting the thematic analysis. This will provide insight into the themes and concepts that are portrayed and the relationship between the themes and audience perceptions of the BL community. The thematic analysis will be performed by the researcher and reviewed by a second coder, a graduate student with experience in thematic analysis, to create a coefficient intercoder reliability of .70 or above (Frey, et al., 1991; Lombard, et., al, 2010), which has been defined as the minimum threshold for reliability. Both coders will access the series episodes through the streaming platform *Viki* to ensure that the English subtitles are accurate and consistent.

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to the growing, but limited, field of research related to BL dramas. Furthermore, the study will provide insight into audience perceptions, particularly women from the United States, related to Asian culture through the viewing of popular Asian-produced programming. Researchers studying the potential global impact the internationally popular BL drama genre has on the BL community and social, political, and international policy would benefit from the study. Additionally, the results of the study will provide insight to BL

drama portrayals and the stereotyping of the BL community, and whether these portrayals cultivate, or mirror preconceived audience perceptions of the BL community. Producers and content creators could benefit from the study in better understanding how portrayals may potentially reinforce negative stereotypes related to the BL lifestyle. And, finally, the study will add to the cultivation theory's sociological framework.

Outline of the Study

The introductory chapter describes the basis for the study. This chapter contains the general information, background, purpose of the study, and research questions, both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies, theoretical framework, significance of the study, and the outline of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the history and origins of the BL drama genre and supporting literature in the area related to the programming concept. The chapter also includes the current literature and studies relating to cultivation theory and its relevance to this study.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative and quantitative methodologies used in the study and the procedure and reasons for selecting the participants in this study. The chapter also includes the study designs, data collection methods, analysis of data, and phases and descriptions of the thematic analysis process related to the methodologies in this study.

Chapter 4 discusses the results received from the questionnaire distributed to the participants, the participant demographics, and the findings of the thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 consists of the conclusion, limitations, and future recommendations for further studies based on the data collected from the qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will cover the (a) origins of the BL genre, (b) BL drama fan culture, (c) audience motivations, (d) BL dramas and media stereotypes, (e) cultivation theory, and (f) the related supporting literature of the cultivation theory as demonstrated in BL dramas in shaping audience perceptions.

The Origins of the BL Genre

The BL drama genre is a recent phenomenon with roots that can be traced back to Japan (Prasannam, 2023; Shimauchi, 2023). Prasannam (2023) explains that the genre originated in Japanese manga and was referred to as “yaoi.” An article from Kawano (2019) clarifies the distinction between BL and “yaoi ” in Japan, “Boys’ love focuses on romance and is less extreme, while ‘yaoi’ goes all the way with explicit sex scenes” (para. 7). In Japan, the two male characters in the relationship are categorized as *seme* or *uke*. Suki Desu (2023) defines *Same* as the “attacker.” This character is portrayed as more dominant and masculine and is typically the “top” in the relationship (meaning they are the one who penetrates). Desu defines *Uke* as the “receiver.” This character is depicted as more submissive and feminine and is usually the “bottom” in the relationship (meaning they are the one being penetrated). In Japan, female fans of yaoi are called *fujoshi* which translates to “rotten girl” (Dinatha et al., 2021).

The history of “yaoi” is further discussed by Mizoguchi (2003). Mizoguchi points out the various themes and tropes that were common in “yaoi” throughout history. Some of the tropes mentioned are, “(1) rape as an expression of love; (2) one or both of the protagonists maintaining that they are straight even after they are homosexually involved; (3) the top/bottom roles in sex

corresponding to the masculine/feminine appearance of the protagonists; (4) the roles never reversing; and (5) sex always involving anal intercourse,” (Mizoguchi, 2003, p. 55-56). This attitude toward the main characters’ roles in the relationship carries over to the characters in Thai BL dramas. This is not uncommon in media portrayals of homosexual relationships. Evidence has shown that homosexual relationships are often portrayed through a gendered or heterosexual lens (Ivory et al., 2009). Although they are usually less explicit than “yaoi,” some Thai BL Dramas make it clear which character fits the role assigned to them, and it is rare to see these tropes being subverted.

BL Drama Fandom

The BL genre is widely popular in other countries and has caught the attention of researchers. Shimauchi (2023) focuses on Japanese fans of BL dramas and their online activity. The author’s premise is that BL dramas are transnational and transcultural. As a result, fans from around the world are interacting online sharing their experiences and learning from one another. Zsila & Demetrovics (2017) briefly discuss the extensive online communities developing content for BL fans. The authors point out that the internet has played a key role in the global popularity of the BL genre and its adoption by multiple streaming platforms (i.e. Netflix). Kinori (2022) suggests that lockdowns during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic played a role in the popularization of the genre. Kinori points out that *2gether: The Series* was released during the pandemic and frequently trended on social media, leading social media users to become curious about the series.

BL dramas have created an international fanbase. Jirattikon (2023) adds that the largest international followers of BL dramas and the actors are mainly “heterosexual women” (para. 1).

As the BL community grows, so does the demand for more fan engagement. One way this is done is through public events that bring together fans and actors from BL dramas. These events are organized by the various companies that produce BL dramas and draw in many fans and have begun to reach beyond Thailand's borders. The main actors from the drama *2gether: The Series* hosted meet and greets with fans in 2020 that were held in Beijing, Tokyo, Seoul, New York, and London (Enomoto et al., 2022). The cast of the BL drama *Between Us* will be hosting a fan meet-up in Singapore in 2024 (Raeburn, 2023). Another popular BL drama *KinnPorsche* held a world tour for its cast, traveling to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Singapore, and South Korea (Mathew, 2022). These events do not just bring fans together; they also generate revenue for the actors and creators of BL dramas. Fans can purchase tickets to gain access to various experiences with cast members similar to the fan meet-ups that are often held with K-pop groups. Ardhiyansyah et al. (2021) suggest that companies can use fan loyalty to increase profits.

“Shipping”

Another important aspect and common practice in the BL community is the “shipping” of two people. As explained by Romano (2016) this term refers to the desire for two people to be in a relationship and can refer to fictional characters or real people. “Pairing names,” a.k.a “ship names,” is another term Romano references, which are portmanteaus of the names of the people or characters being “shipped.” Some BL dramas go as far as using “ship” names as the name of the drama. Examples of this are *KinnPorsche* and *TharnType*.

There is also significance in the placement of the names. Rahmawati et al. (2018) explain that the name of the character or person who is confirmed or suspected of being the *seme* or

“top” usually comes first in the ship name, and the name of the character or person who is confirmed or suspected of being the *uke* or “bottom” comes second in the ship name. This is true when looking at *KinnPorsche* and *TharnType*. In these BL dramas, the characters Kinn and Tharn are the *seme*, and Porsche and Type are the *uke*.

The “shipping” of actors in BL dramas is also prevalent in the BL community. When the main couple in a drama has strong chemistry, fans will often begin to “ship” the actors in real life. Some production companies and actors may actively encourage this behavior through “fan service.” BL actor Perth Nakhun (2023) explains that as a form of “fan service” the BL actor may purposefully engage in activity to entice the fans and bring more attention to their drama, but Nakhun points out that sometimes “fan service” is not done intentionally. He mentions that fans may simply be reading into normal friendly behavior between actors and using that behavior to reinforce the belief that the actors might be in a relationship. Sometimes popular acting pairs that fans ship together are cast in multiple BL dramas. This may be done by companies to maintain their audience. One example of this is the popular ship of actors Off Jumpol Adulkittiporn and Gun Atthaphan Phunsawat. The pair are also known by the ship name OffGun and have worked together on multiple BL dramas including *Theory of Love, Not Me, Senior Secret Love: Puppy Honey*, and *Our Skyy*.

Audience Motivations

Research from Saito (2011) examined the motivations of “fujoshi,” fans and their willingness to engage in BL content. These motivations are also explored by Zhou et al. (2017) who explain that previous research on the topic has suggested that young women in patriarchal societies can feel oppressed and submissive in heterosexual relationships and that consuming or

creating BL content is a way to resist this oppression. As Saito explains, male characters in BL dramas are typically shown as equals but still embody stereotypical masculine and feminine traits. Saito then points out a “homosexual’s heterosexuality” paradox that is created by the equal qualities of the characters compared to the clear power divide that is presented in the characters’ sexual behavior. Saito suggests one explanation for this paradox is that “unlike the male aggressive/female passive relationship typical in men’s heterosexual pornography, BL emphasizes the pleasure felt by both the seme and the uke” (p. 185).

Media Stereotypes

The first use of the word “stereotype” can be traced back to 1850 meaning “image perpetuated without change” (Looti, 2022). More modern stereotypes have been reflected as early as the 19th century in women’s magazines as to the image and characteristics of an “American woman” (Kitch, C.L., 2001). However, the first look at modern-day media stereotypes was completed in 1922 by Walter Lippmann in his work titled, “Public Opinion.” Stereotypes are characteristics that are widely believed about specific groups. Rothenberg (2007) states that the media has “the power to stereotype the elderly, ethnic groups, gays and lesbians, and the institutionalized” (p.51). As suggested by Morgan et al. (2009) media stereotypes can influence attitudes and perceptions of reality. Early research on stereotypes focused on ethnic stereotypes (Katz & Braly, 1933; Deaux & Lewis, 1984). Research on stereotypes later expanded to include gender, sexuality, attractiveness, social class, age, and mental disorders (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Madon, 1997; Herek, 2002).

BL dramas have the potential to normalize homosexual relationships in more conservative Asian countries, but Nimma (2021) suggests that the potential influence that BL

dramas must normalize homosexuality is undercut by the stereotypes often present. BL dramas often have themes of internalized homophobia, stereotypical dominant and submissive roles, and rape being positively framed (Barrios, 2021). Van Meer & Pollman (2021) reiterates that there are numerous stereotypes about homosexuality and that the media plays an important role in the creation of these stereotypes. A study conducted by Blashill & Powlishta (2009) determined that stereotypes related to sexuality in 2009 were similar to stereotypes based on sexuality 20 years prior. Blahill & Powlishta found that gay men were typically seen as less masculine and more feminine. As a result, media themes and concepts portrayed can have a significant impact on the viewer's perception and their reality related to the subject.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation defined

The cultivation analysis is the theoretical foundation to explain how United States female (USF) audience perceptions are shaped by viewing the content in the Thai BL program, *2gether: The Series*, and how personal experiences impact those perceptions (Morgan et al., 2009). The sociological theory is well-established and is one of the most cited theories in media research (Bryant & Miron, 2004).

According to the cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner et al., 2002), the cultivation process starts with the most commonly embedded messages, portrayals and images across most programs often “inescapable” for viewers (Gerbner, 1998, pg.181); as a result, shaping viewers' attitudes and beliefs by making them believe that the world as it is portrayed in the media as a true representation of reality.

Television and Cultivation Theory

From its introduction at the 1936 Chicago State Fair and to its mass adoption in the late 1940s, television is one of the most controversial and studied mass mediums in mass communication research. As early as 1955, it was suggested that the increase in violence in North America was the product of television viewing (Stossel, 1997), which later led to public concerns about the effects of television viewing on children. In 1977, attorneys for Ronny Zamora, a 15-year-old accused of murdering an 82-year-old woman, pleaded “not guilty” due to “television intoxication.” Though the defense was not successful, the well-publicized court case reinforced what many government officials, parents, civic groups, and church leaders believed—that television viewing is harmful.

One of the most notable early researchers of television and its potentially harmful effects on the viewer was conducted by psychologist Albert Bandura. Bandura is often remembered for his early studies related to TV viewing and aggression. The BoBo doll experiment conducted in the 1960s is his most notable study in which Bandura exposed children to adults beating, kicking, and abusing a BoBo inflated doll. He concluded that children could learn and model aggressive behaviors and will likely act on them (Langer, E., 2021). Soon after Bandura’s experimental study, a massive rush to research television’s impact on the viewing audience ensued.

By the 1970s some 3,000 studies were conducted related to television and its impact on the viewer (Langer, 2021). In 1971 Lyndon B. Johnson and Congress commissioned a group of scientists to investigate the impact television violence had on Americans (DeFleur, M.L. & DeFleur, M.H., 2022). While the majority of the studies focused on the effects of television

violence on the audience, George Gerbner, who had conducted a variety of empirical studies related to media influences, focused on a wider set of issues in his *Cultural Indicator* study. In his 1968 study, George Gerbner looked more closely at the structure, thematic content, and representation of people through television and its impact on the audience's views, beliefs, and attitudes to a wide range of issues and topics (Gerbner, 1998). The study used a three-prong approach: 1) the institutional process and pressure placed on the development of the media message, 2) the pervasive messages and images related to the television content, and 3) whether viewers' social reality mirrors the themes and portrayals in television programming (Gerbner, 1998, p.179). Gerbner concluded that institutions do influence the creative process as to the themes and portrayals due to their ubiquitous use and the financial gains received. In addition, heavy viewers were more likely than lighter viewers to hold views, beliefs, and attitudes closely related to the "television world" view. The more "interaction of the messages and context" the viewer had, the more likely the cultivation process would be increased (p. 182). Other studies followed and supported Gerbner's findings, which led to decades of literature validating the cultivation process and its principles.

Cultivation and Personal Experiences

Later studies included another factor that played a role in the cultivation differences between heavy viewers and light viewers. Gross and Morgan (1985) and Rothschild and Morgan (1987) suggested that one's views can be influenced by whether television portrayals are manifested in the viewer's social world. For example, parental co-viewing may have a positive or negative impact on adolescents based on the level of the parent's involvement, and viewers who are part of a "cohesive" and stable peer and family group are more resistant to cultivation.

However, if the viewer had a direct personal experience with the television portrayal, they are more likely to believe the TV version as reality. Gerbner describes this as “resonance” and that it would “amplify” the cultivation process (p. 182).

Mainstreaming

Gerbner’s research strongly suggests that television plays a significant role in how one determines their social reality based on the programs they tend to, due to the culturally pervasive and homogenous themes and portrayals embedded in the program. He described this phenomenon as “mainstreaming.” Gerbner explains that a heavy viewer’s values, attitudes, and beliefs will become blurred due to the excessive and consistent images and messages portrayed in television over time (DeFleur, M.L. & DeFleur, M.H., 2022). In 1999, a look at two decades of cultivation studies concluded that television does contribute to one’s beliefs and perspectives (Shanahan, J., & Morgan, M., 1999).

Personal experiences may have a negative or positive effect, but clearly do have some influence on the level of cultivation one experiences. In summary, he concluded that one could only understand how a person perceives people, groups, institutions, policies, and products by looking closely at the “mainstreaming” of culture through television (Gerbner, et, al., 1978).

Cultivation and Imported Programs

From the inception of satellite technology to the development of the internet, TV programming has been more accessible than ever. This made it possible for international audiences to view television programming from all over the world. Although the United States media has the largest footprint in the world, a massive wave of international programming has

poured into the United States for the last decade. From the “Beatles invasion” in the 1960s to the rise in popularity of Bollywood movies, the American audience’s appetite for international programming is insatiable. This has led to a massive body of literature in the area of international programming and cultivation.

Cultivation analysis on sex roles, gender, social stereotypes, and other related topics in television have been completed in numerous countries, reflecting the country’s cultural, social, economic, political, and historical context from which it has developed (Gerbner, 1998, p. 189). As a result, mainstreaming and understanding cross-cultural images and messages is now a component of studying cultivation and international programming. For example, Kang and Morgan (1988) found that the United States programming in Korea created a more liberal view of women’s roles in society among Korean women, but created hostility among Korean men (Gerbner, 1998). In 2013 a cultivation study examined the effects of South Korean soap operas on Vietnamese female audiences and whether the soap opera consumption would have a positive effect on Vietnamese women’s desire to marry a South Korean man. The researchers concluded that the Vietnamese women’s desire to marry a South Korean man was cultivated by the soap opera and supported the anecdotal view that transnational marriages between Vietnamese women and South Korean men are on the rise (Hong & Tee, 2013). A cross-cultural study investigating a Thai TV series’ impact on Chinese viewers’ perceptions of foreign cultures' traditions, habits, norms, and values, suggested that the cross-cultural transmission of culture can cultivate positive relations and create favorable cultural views and more cultural awareness (Tirasawasdichai et al., 2022).

Financially, international programming is completely globalized. Netflix and other international streaming networks have invested millions in developing Asian programming,

creating a great demand for the imported product in the United States. Asia has been one of the fastest regions in developing new genres of TV programming. One of the more popular genres from Asia that is rapidly developing a following in the United States is the “Boys love” (BL) drama (Kim, 2023).

According to Morgan et al. (2009), current research using cultivation theory focuses more on specific genres such as the BL drama. The cultivation theory suggests that the United States female audience's exposure to the BL genre may shape their perceptions of reality related to the BL community. International audiences have very little contact with the BL community demonstrated in Thai BL dramas. As a result, international audience members depend on preconceived notions of the BL community or cultivated views through mediated experiences. Morgan et al. (2009) confirm that audiences with little prior knowledge of the BL community are more likely to be influenced by the content in BL Dramas.

Prasannam & Chan (2023) focus on how BL, as a genre, constantly disrupts societal gender and sexuality norms. The authors suggest that BL dramas are garnering public support for the LGBTQ+ community through audience exposure to BL dramas. Furthermore, research from Żerebecki et al. (2021) supports the assertion that the way characters in BL Dramas are portrayed will further influence the audience's views on sexuality and gender.

Nevertheless, if the portrayals of homosexual characters in BL dramas influence the way that they are seen in society, then these portrayals must be done accurately to avoid harmful effects. Jerome et al. (2022) focus on the consumption of BL dramas by gay male viewers. The authors explore audience motivations for watching BL dramas suggesting that socio-cultural reality may play a role. The authors focused on gay male viewers in countries where homosexuality is not readily accepted or tolerated. The participants suggested that while they

could identify with the characters in the dramas, they were only able to do so in certain ways. The authors concluded that while there are aspects of BL dramas that the participants were able to relate to, these dramas were unable to reflect the experiences that these participants had when dealing with the “real world.” This implies that audience perceptions were cultivated to view homosexuality inaccurately to some extent and that the audience had limited personal experiences with this community; therefore, they were dependent on their perceptions derived from television stereotypes.

BL dramas are often set in a world where homophobia does not exist. Rather than focusing on or including the real-life struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, many of these dramas prefer to portray these relationships as ordinary and accepted (Chan, 2023). The lack of representation of LGBTQ+ struggles may lead foreign viewers to cultivate an inaccurate idea of what life is like for the LGBTQ+ community in Thailand. Prassanam & Chan (2023) argue that BL dramas are garnering support for the LGBTQ+ community while pointing out, “the immense potential of BL to not only speak to its fans, who create a parallel and more tolerant world of reality for themselves, but they also articulate for its producers and writers a political agenda for greater social justice” (para. 18). This is important to note considering that Thailand has been experiencing political turmoil for more than 20 years (Metaveevinij, 2023).

BL Dramas and Thai Politics

In Thailand's earlier history, the country was led by royalty and nobility, but a constitutionalist coup in the 1930s allowed for electoral politicians (Rhum, 1996.) Thailand is currently a constitutional monarchy. The country is under political unrest as a number of coups have occurred in previous years (Rasheed, 2023.) The election held in May of 2023 resulted in a

majority of liberal party members calling for political reform being elected to various government positions (Sengupta, 2023). Human Rights Watch (2024) points out that although Thailand has a reputation for being socially accepting of members of the LGBTQ+ community, there are currently no laws in place to protect their rights.

Metaveevinij (2023) discusses political activism and its relationship to BL dramas and points out that the BL drama *Not Me*, which focused heavily on social injustice in Thailand, was something that BL dramas had previously avoided. The creation of this drama was a turning point for the genre. *Cutie Pie*, another popular Thai BL drama, featured the topic of gay marriage in Thailand, which is currently illegal. Despite gay marriage currently being illegal in Thailand, other Asian countries consider Thailand to be a safe haven for members of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ individuals from China have been flocking to Thailand in recent years (Tang, 2023). Laws surrounding gay marriage in Thailand are currently at the front of Thai politics. Early in 2024, the lower house of the Thai parliament passed a same-sex marriage bill (Regan & Olarn, 2024). This law must be approved by the senate and king before it becomes a law. If the law were to be approved, Thailand would become the third Asian country to legalize gay marriage (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Summary

The studies discussed in this chapter strongly suggest that the portrayals demonstrated in BL dramas have the potential to shape and cultivate public views and have an impact on social, political, and international policy related to the LGBTQ+ community. As a result, this impacts the community as a whole, whether negative or positive, through stereotypes depicted by the show's creators. Perceptions about the Thai BL community created by the consumption of BL

dramas by the United States female audiences can be better understood by using the cultivation theory.

Chapter 3

Methodology

To examine the consumption of BL dramas and its impact on United States' female audiences' perceptions of the Thai BL community and whether the perceptions are reflected in Thai BL drama themes, this study will use a triangulation method--a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Though there is no magic bullet to using a combination of research methods, the use of a triangulation method is “generally considered to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study and to enhance the rigor of a research study” (Heale & Forbes, 2013, para. 6).

Qualitative Method: Open-ended Questionnaire

To examine how *2gether: The Series* influences the perceptions of United States female viewers, a survey method will be used in the form of an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended survey will allow for richer responses and allow the researcher to explore the subject matter in greater detail to gain a better understanding of the participant's responses versus a closed-ended survey where the participant is limited in their choices and lack the opportunity to reflect (Knott et al., 2022; Mcleod, 2023).

The questionnaire will be disseminated to United States females who view the BL program proposed and will require no face-to-face interaction. This will help reduce the chance that participants will not answer honestly to avoid being judged or perceived in a certain way, especially since this can still be a sensitive topic for some individuals (Meisters et al., 2020).

The questionnaire will be created using Qualtrics and will be delivered digitally through messages on Instagram, Tumblr, and Reddit. This will allow for a wider and more diverse pool of participants.

The raw data from the questionnaire will be coded using a deductive and inductive analysis and sorted into categories to develop a comprehensive representation of the participant responses (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). The data will then be studied to determine if there is a connection between the audience-reported perceptions of the Thai BL community and themes derived from the program.

Participants

The participants for this study are adult United States female viewers. United States females were selected due to their massive female viewership of the BL drama genre (Joffet, 2012; Jirattikon, 2023) and the lack of research dedicated to “American” female perceptions related to BL dramas.

The participants will be identified only through their age, gender, and sexuality to ensure they meet the criteria for the study. Participants will be collected from BL drama fan pages on Instagram, Tumblr, Reddit, and X accounts. These platforms are popular destinations for women who view and discuss BL dramas. Only responses from participants who are 18 years or older will be collected for use in this study.

Research Questions Design

The first set of questions will collect information about the participants' demographics. This data set will provide an understanding of the age, sexual identity, and race of the participants. This information is valuable in understanding the differences and similarities that

may arise among the different age groups, ethnicities, and sexual identities related to their perceptions of the BL community.

1. How old are you?
 - a) 18-23
 - b) 24-29
 - c) >30

2. Which of the following best describes your gender identity?
 - a) Woman
 - b) Man
 - c) Transgender Woman
 - d) Transgender Man
 - e) Non-binary
 - f) Other Self-described gender
 - g) Prefer not to say

3. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
 - a) Straight
 - b) Gay or Lesbian
 - c) Bisexual or Pansexual
 - d) Asexual
 - e) Other Self-described sexuality
 - f) Prefer not to say

4. Choose one or more races you consider to be:
 - a) White or Caucasian

- b) Black or African-American
- c) Alaskan Native or Native American
- d) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- e) Spanish, Hispanic or LatinX origin
- f) Other
- g) Prefer not to say

The second set of questions will assess the participant's perceptions of the BL genre and the community prior to media exposure. These questions will address the preconceived notions related to their exposure to BL dramas and to their experiences with the BL community. This information is valuable in order to set a benchmark as to the participant's prior perceptions to ascertain if the program had an effect on their perceptions in subsequent research questions.

A. What knowledge related to the Boys' Love (BL) TV genre did you have before viewing your first BL show?

B. How were you introduced to the BL community?

C. What were your perceptions of the BL community prior to viewing your first BL drama?

D. From where were your perceptions of the BL community mostly derived?

E. How long have you watched BL drama programming?

A third set of questions will assess the participant's perceptions derived from the themes viewed in the Thai's *2gether: The Series*. These sets of questions will investigate whether the

program had an impact on their prior perceptions, and if so, what themes shaped their perceptions. As Gerber and Gross (1976) alluded to, media portrayals may change or reinforce prior notions related to the subject matter after viewing alternative messages.

A. How did the viewing of the Thai's *2gether: The Series* influence your current perceptions of the BL community?

B. What themes of the BL community had the biggest impact on your perceptions after watching *2gether: The Series*?

C. In your opinion, what themes were accurately portrayed in *2gether: The Series*?

D. In your opinion, what themes were not accurately portrayed in *2gether: The Series*?

A fourth set of questions will assess the changes associated with the participant's perceptions after viewing Thai's *2gether: The Series*. This question will examine if the participants' prior perceptions were changed, modified, added to, or reinforced, and if so, in what ways did they shape the participants' perceptions. Gerbner and Gross (1976) suggested that after media exposure, the viewer will store and categorize themes, practices, and behaviors associated with the subject matter as their "reality" based on media portrayals.

A. How did the viewing of the Thai's *2gether: The Series* change, modify, reinforce or add to your prior perceptions of the BL community?

B. How would you define your current perceptions related to the BL Community?

The fifth set of questions will assess the impact of personal experiences on the participants' perceptions related to the Thai BL community. Gerbner (1980) concluded that the viewer's social experiences and interactions could have an impact in shaping their reality related to their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors manifested from the television portrayals.

- A. What prior experience have you had with the Thai BL community?
- B. How do you engage in the Thai BL community online or in person?
- C. How have your personal experiences impacted your perceptions of the Thai BL community?
- D. In your opinion, what themes and portrayals in Thai's *2gether: The Series* are accurate based on your personal experiences with those who identify with the Thai BL community?

Data Storage

Data will be collected and stored on a secure computer in a locked room. The only people with access to this data will be the primary investigator (PI) and co-investigator. Both will be responsible for the security of the data. This data will be kept for 3 years in electronic format, and the PI will be responsible for the digital destruction of data.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research opens the door for the researcher to be flexible as to what data will be analyzed and how the data will be interpreted. The interpersonal and personal components of qualitative research are its biggest strengths; however, it will be challenging to replicate when

one cannot model the exact analytical thought of the researcher (Patton, 2015). In short, there is no straightforward forward test for reliability and validity; the researcher must use their own intellectual ability to fairly and accurately interpret the data and communicate it effectively. In this study, themes, categories and patterns were drawn from the survey, and conclusions were made to answer the original research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015).

Quantitative Method: Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis will be used to examine and identify the themes portrayed in the Thai BL drama *2gether: The Series*. A thematic analysis allows the researcher to analyze meaning, theme, and concepts related to the content, and explore and interpret patterns across the data (Joffe, 2012). Its origins come from content analysis and has evolved into a popular research method for analyzing content because of its flexibility and ability to provide rich and detailed data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The thematic analysis will be performed by the primary researcher and reviewed by a second coder to create a coefficient intercoder reliability of .70 or above (Frey, et al., 1991; Lombard, et. al, 2010). Both coders will analyze and access the series 13 episodes through the streaming platform *Viki* and coordinate their efforts to communicate their analyses to achieve the minimum coefficient standard for reliability. This will provide insight into the type of themes portrayed and the relationship between the themes and audience perceptions of the BL community.

The thematic analysis of *2gether: The Series* was conducted in phases. The phases followed by the researcher(s) were developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as seen in Table 1.

The authors assert that literature about thematic analysis is lacking. The research conducted by Braun & Clarke is intended to fill the gap in knowledge about thematic analysis and guide future researchers.

Phase 1 was adapted to better fit the research being conducted. The results of the questionnaire will then be compared to the findings of the thematic analysis to establish a connection.

Table 1

Phases and Descriptions of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Watching all episodes of the show, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.

Table 1 Continued

5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

From Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Summary

Assuming the themes of Thai BL dramas reflect the perceptions of the study participants (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983; John & Carey, 1992), it is reasonable to conclude that the television themes shape the thoughts of other members of the public. Gerbner's cultivation theory (1976, 1980) suggests that audiences who watch television programming consistently over a longer period are more likely to perceive a reality reflective of the television messages. As a result, socially stereotyped media messages about minorities and fringe groups reinforce perceptions and may have a negative effect on social, political, and economic policies related to the groups.

Gerbner also adds that “personal experiences” often resonate strongly and can reinforce or even dismiss the portrayals in television programming (Gerbner et al., 1980).

This chapter outlined the methodology that will be utilized to conduct research. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative research will be used to collect and analyze data. A questionnaire will be used to gather first-hand information from United States female audiences. A thematic analysis of *2gether: The Series* will analyze the themes present in the show by using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis Phase Process.

Chapter 4 will provide the results from the open-ended questionnaire and the themes noted in the thematic analysis of the program: *2gether: The Series*. Chapter 5 will include the discussion, limitations, and implications of the study, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will cover the qualitative results of the questionnaire and conclude with the quantitative results of the thematic analysis of *2gether: The Series*. An overview of the qualitative portion of the study is explained as to why a number of participants were dismissed from the study. The first qualitative data set in this chapter is the demographics of the participants related to the participant's age, race, and ethnicity of those who participated in the study.

The second data set will provide the responses to each research question related to the participants' perceptions of the BL genre and community prior to exposure to the genre. The third data set will assess the perceptions of participants derived from watching *2gether: The Series*. The fourth data set will evaluate the changes in participants' perceptions after viewing *2gether: The Series*. The fifth set of data will assess how personal experiences may have influenced participants' perceptions of the BL genre and community.

Qualitative Results

Open-ended Questionnaire

Survey Demographics

The questionnaire was designed using Qualtrics. It was then made available to participants for three weeks on the platforms Reddit, Tumblr, and Instagram. The questionnaire received a total of 69 responses, but 48 were discarded. Of those 48 discarded submissions, one

did not agree to the consent form, and nine were not in the targeted sample demographics. An additional 38 submitted incomplete questionnaires. This resulted in a total of 21 respondents.

The demographics of the remaining 21 respondents are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percent %
Age	18-23	4	19.0%
	24-29	3	14.3%
	>30	14	66.7%
Sexuality	Straight	6	28.6%
	Gay	0	0.0%
	Bisexual/Pansexual	11	52.4%
	Asexual	3	14.3%
	Other	0	0.0%
	Prefer Not to Say	1	4.8%
Race	White/Caucasian	14	70.0%
	Black/African American	1	5.0%
	Alaskan Native or Native American	0	0.0%

Table 2 Continued

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Spanish, Hispanic, or LatinX	3	15.0%
Other	2	10.0%
Prefer Not to Say	0	0.0%

Respondents fell into one of three age groups: 18-23, 24-29, and >30. Of the 21 responses meeting the criteria for the study, four (19.0%) fell into the 18-23 age group. Three (14.3%) fell into the 24-29 age group. The remaining fourteen (66.7%) respondents were in the >30 age group. More than half of the qualifying respondents were in the >30 age group.

Of the 21 participants, six (28.6%) identified as straight, none (0.0%) identified as gay, 11 (52.4%) identified as bisexual or pansexual, three (14.3%) identified as asexual, no (0.0%) respondents identified as a sexuality other than the ones listed, and one (4.8%) preferred to not disclose their sexuality.

Of the questionnaire's 21 respondents, 14 (70%) were White or Caucasian, one (5%) was Black or African American, none (0%) were Alaskan Native or Native American, none (0%) were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, three (15%) were Spanish, Hispanic, or LatinX origin, two (10%) were Other, and none (0%) preferred to not disclose their race.

Open-Ended Questions

The following section summarizes the responses to the open-ended survey. Each table represents the participant's responses to each research question. The tables are divided into two categories: frequency and percentage.

Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 contain a summary of the data set related to the participant's responses to research question one.

RQ 1: What are United States females' (USF) perceptions of the Thai BL community prior to viewing BL dramas?

Table 3

Knowledge Prior to Exposure

What knowledge related to the boys' love (BL) TV genre did you have before viewing your first BL show?

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Other LGBTQ+ Media	4	16.7%
Yaoi	5	20.8%
Fanfiction or Literature	3	12.5%
Little Knowledge	7	29.2%

Table 3 Continued

No Knowledge	5	20.8%
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*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

Table 3 demonstrates the knowledge participants had prior to viewing their first BL dramas. Knowledge of other LGBTQ+ media was mentioned by four (16.7%) of respondents. Participants mentioned familiarity with yaoi five (20.8%) times. Three (12.5%) participants said that they had knowledge of BL fanfiction or other BL literature. Seven (29.2%) said they had little knowledge of the genre, and five (20.8%) said they had no knowledge of the genre prior to viewing their first BL drama. This data set suggests that the majority of the participants had little or no knowledge of the BL genre or community prior to exposure.

Table 4*Introduction to the BL Community**How were you introduced to the BL community?*

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Friend	4	16%
Blogs	2	8%

Table 4 Continued

Fanfiction or Literature	4	16%
Other Asian Dramas	1	4%
Social Media	10	40%
Streaming Platforms	3	12%
Unsure	1	4%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

Table 4 demonstrates how respondents were introduced to the BL genre. The majority of respondents (40%) said that they were first exposed to the genre through social media. Four said a friend introduced them to the genre. Streaming platforms such as *Netflix* and *Viki* and other Asian dramas were mentioned by five respondents. Four said that male/male fanfiction or literature introduced them to the genre, and two found the genre through blog posts. This data set suggests that social media platforms are the driving force in introducing the participants to the BL community. This is likely associated with their viewing behaviors and the content viewed by those they follow on their personal social media platforms.

Table 5*Prior Perceptions**What were your perceptions of the BL community prior to viewing your first BL drama?*

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Negative Perception	1	4%
Positive Perceptions	4	16%
Fans/Audience	7	28%
None/Unsure	13	52%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

Of the 21 respondents, 13 said they had no prior perceptions or were unsure about what their perceptions were about the genre. Seven respondents mentioned perceptions of the fans of BL; four of those respondents viewed fans as toxic or obsessive. One respondent described the BL community as, "shallow fangirls who just want to watch softcore porn." Another respondent said they assumed that the audience was mostly straight women. Four respondents expressed positive perceptions of the community. Another respondent said their perceptions of the community were negative. Another respondent said they thought that the genre was popular in Asia. Though the majority were exposed to the BL community through some form of media as noted in the last table, most did not have a strong perception related to the BL community.

Table 6*Sources of Perceptions**From where were your perceptions of the BL community mostly derived?*

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Social Media	11	55%
LGBTQ+ Community	2	10%
Yaoi/BL Manhwa	2	10%
Unsure	5	25%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

When asked about where their perceptions about the genre were derived, 11 respondents said social media, which supports earlier responses to the survey. Two said that their experiences with the LGBTQ+ community helped shape their perceptions of the genre. Five respondents were unsure. Two respondents said they were influenced by “yaoi” and BL manhwa, the term for Korean comics and graphic novels. In all, social media is the driving force from where the participants gained their perceptions to the BL community.

Table 7*Time Spent Watching BL Dramas**How long have you watched BL drama programming?*

Response	Frequency	Percent %
<1 Year	6	28.6%
1-4 Years	11	52.4%
5+	3	14.3%
N/A	1	4.8%

Of the 21 respondents, six had been watching BL programming for less than one year, 11 had been watching for 1-4 years, three had been watching for five or more years, and one responded N/A. This clearly states that most of the participants had some level of long-term viewing related to the BL genre, which may shape their perceptions as Gerbner and Gross (1976) suggested in the cultivation theory.

Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 contain a summary of the participant's answers related to research question 2.

RQ 2: What are the USF's perceptions after viewing the content in Thai's *2gether: The Series*?

Table 8*2gether: The Series' Influence on Perceptions*

How did the viewing of the Thai's 2gether: The Series influence your current perceptions of the BL community?

Response	Frequency	Percent %
No Change	8	38.1%
Unsure	2	9.5%
Positive Change	4	19%
Negative Change	1	4.8%
Poor Representation	6	28.6%

The respondents were mixed as to how one's perceptions were influenced after exposure. Eight respondents said there was no change and two said they were unsure about how the show changed their perceptions. Six said that the *2gether: The Series* wasn't a "good representation" of the genre, or the show was "not good." Four had positive views of the BL community after watching the show. Those four respondents mentioned a good storyline and good characterization. One respondent said that the show's popularity and large fan base led to "toxic behavior within the community."

Table 9*Impact of Themes on Perceptions of the BL Community*

What themes of the BL community had the biggest impact on your perceptions after watching 2gether: The Series?

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Increased International Fans	2	9.1%
Toxic Fans	4	18.2%
LGBTQ+ Rights	3	13.6%
Little to No Homophobia	4	18.2%
Unsure/No Change	9	40.9%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

This data set suggests that a fair number of participants did not see the program as having a positive change on their perceptions of the BL community and one had a strong negative view of the BL community (33.4%), while only 19% indicated a positive impact after exposure. Nine respondents said there was no change, or they were unsure about how the themes changed their view of the community. Four said that they noticed there was usually little to no reference to or emphasis on “homophobia” or “societal acceptance” in the genre. Four mentioned “obsessive” or “toxic fans” of actors in the genre. Two said that they noticed an increase in international fans of

the genre after the release of *2gether: The Series*. Three respondents mentioned “LGBTQ+ rights” and “societal acceptance.” This data set may suggest that a large number of the participants (40.9%) are seeing consistent themes associated with other BL dramas, by stating that there was “no change” or they were unsure about how the themes changed their view of the community

Table 10

Accurate Themes

In your opinion, what themes were accurately portrayed in 2gether: The Series?

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Friendship	1	4.5%
Love at First Sight	1	4.5%
Coming to Terms with Sexuality/Coming Out	4	18.2%
New Love	4	18.2%
Fate/Destiny	2	9.1%
Attitudes Toward LGBTQ+	4	18.2%

Table 10 Continued

Miscommunication in Relationships	2	9.1%
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Unsure	1	4.5%
None	3	13.6%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

When asked what themes were portrayed accurately in *2gether: The Series*, three respondents said that the series failed to portray any themes accurately. Other respondents said the following themes were portrayed accurately: miscommunication in relationships, coming to terms with sexuality, fate and destiny, coming out, love at first sight, attitudes toward LGBTQ+, friendship, and new love. The other themes noted by the participants suggest that there is a consistency in what themes are notably present in the BL drama series, with “coming to terms with sexuality,” “new love,” and “attitudes towards LGBTQ+” as the more noted themes by participants.

Table 11

Inaccurate Themes

In your opinion, what themes were not accurately portrayed in 2gether: The Series?

Table 11 Continued

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
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Queer Characters	8	34.8%
Attitudes Toward LGBTQ+	4	17.4%
Physical Intimacy	5	21.7%
Development of Relationships	6	26.1%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

When asked what themes were not accurately portrayed in *2gether: The Series*, nine respondents said that the series did not portray queer characters or attitudes toward homosexuality accurately. Within those responses, there were mentions of stereotyping. Six respondents said that the show did not accurately represent physical intimacy or the development of relationships. This supports the criticism noted in earlier chapters, that BL dramas often reinforce stereotypes and misrepresent the BL community.

Tables 12 and 13 provide a summary of the data set related to research question three. RQ 3: Were USF's prior perceptions changed, modified, reinforced, or added to after exposure to Thai's *2gether: The Series*?

Table 12

2gether: The Series' Impact on Prior Perceptions

How did the viewing of the Thai's 2gether: The Series change, modify, reinforce or add to your prior perceptions of the BL community?

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Representation	2	9.5%
Fans	6	28.6%
Increased Interest in the Genre	4	19.0%
No Change/Unsure	9	42.9%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

When asked about how viewing *2gether: The Series* changed, modified, reinforced or added to their perceptions, nine respondents said that there was no change, or they were unsure. Four respondents reported increased interest in the genre. One of those respondents said they felt an increased understanding of the genre after watching *2gether: The Series*. Two said they were happy that LGBTQ+ characters were being represented. Six respondents said their perceptions of BL fans were impacted. Of those six respondents, three described BL fans as “toxic” or “crazy.” While the majority did not see a change in their set of perceptions, the majority (57.1%) did see some impact on their perceptions.

Table 13*Current Perceptions**How would you define your current perceptions related to the BL Community?*

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Toxic Fans	7	25.0%
Growing Popularity	4	14.3%
Encourage LGBTQ+ Acceptance	3	10.7%
Online Community	14	50.0%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

The majority of the participants defined their perceptions in a positive light, while a small percentage (25%) had negative views about the BL community. After participants were asked to define their current perceptions of the BL community, fourteen respondents said they had a positive online community with other fans of BL. Four respondents said that they believed the genre's popularity has, and will continue, to grow. Three said that BL encourages acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. Seven participants said that many fans are "toxic" or have an unhealthy relationship with the genre.

Tables 14, 15, 16, and 17 provide a summary into the participant's responses to research question four.

RQ 4: What impact, if any, did personal experiences with the BL community have on the USF's perceptions?

Table 14

Prior Experience with the Thai BL Community

What prior experience have you had with the Thai BL community?

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Interactions with Fans	4	17.4%
Other BL Content	9	39.1%
None	10	43.5%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency will not equal the total number of respondents.

Respondents were asked what prior experience they had with the Thai BL community, and as expected, the majority of the respondents (43.5%) said that they had no prior experience before watching their first Thai BL drama. Four respondents said that they had interacted with or were aware of fans of Thai BL dramas via online. Nine respondents said they had consumed other BL content. Examples given were fanfiction and BL dramas from other countries. The data clearly suggests that the majority who did have prior experience with the Thai BL community had it through digital means.

Table 15*BL Community Engagement**How do you engage in the Thai BL community online or in person?*

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Online	21	84%
In Person	4	16%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency will not equal the total number of respondents.

When interacting with members of the BL community, a large portion use the web. All 21 respondents said they interacted with the BL community online, mostly through social media. Four respondents said they also interact with the community in person. Respondents also discussed how their perceptions of the BL community influence their online interactions with the community. Of those, six respondents expressed concern for fans of the genre, referencing the toxic or obsessive behavior that they see online. Three said that they were able to have positive interactions online that helped shape their perceptions of the community.

Table 16*Personal Experiences' Impact on Perceptions**How have your personal experiences impacted your perceptions of the Thai BL community?*

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Age	3	14.3%
Positive Fan Interactions	4	19.0%
Negative Fan Interactions	6	28.6%
None/Unsure	8	38.1%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

This data set demonstrates a mix of positive and negative experiences among the participants after being asked how their personal experiences impacted their perceptions of the Thai BL community. Three respondents said that their age affected the way they viewed the BL community. One respondent described herself as “motherly” about younger members of the community and their “ability to maintain a healthy perspective about the genre and actors.” Six said that interactions with and observations of other BL fans have negatively impacted their perceptions of the community. They, too, did not expand on what experiences negatively impact their perceptions. The same goes for the four who said that positive interactions with and observations of other BL fans had positively impacted their perceptions of the community. Eight

respondents said they were unsure or did not believe that any personal experiences affected their perceptions of the BL community.

Table 17

Accurate Themes Based on Interactions with the Thai BL Community

In your opinion, what themes and portrayals in Thai's 2gether: The Series are accurate based on your personal experiences with those who identify with the Thai BL community?

Response	Frequency*	Percent %
Representation	1	4.5%
Fans	2	9.1%
Sexuality	3	13.6%
Unsure	16	72.7%

*Refers to frequency mentioned by respondents. Therefore, the total frequency may not equal the total number of respondents.

This data set clearly demonstrates that the majority of the participants have never viewed or been exposed to the Thai BL community and, as a result, were “unsure” of the themes and representations made in the Thai series. One participant said that the representation of LGBTQ+ characters was accurate. Two respondents said that the representation of BL fans was accurate.

Three respondents said that the show's portrayal of a person coming to terms with their sexuality was accurate. And, as noted, most of the respondents (16) were unsure.

Summary

Responses received from the questionnaire indicated that *2gether: The Series* did not have a significant impact on United States females' prior perceptions and post-perceptions of the BL community after exposure to *2gether: The Series*. However, it can be reasonably concluded that long-term exposure could have had an impact on why the majority of the participants' perceptions were not impacted. Of the 21 respondents, (66.7%) had been watching Thai BL dramas for more than a year, and other participants indicated that they were familiar with BL content or other LGBTQ+ content prior to watching *2gether: The Series*. This may suggest, as Gerbner and Gross (1976, 1998) alluded to in the cultivation theory, that long-term exposure can create and reinforce common and consistent themes related to the media portrayals, therefore creating a "reality" for the viewer. Responses also suggest that perceptions of the BL community are often affected by interactions with and observations of other fans of BL dramas. This supports the notion, as Gerbner noted, that personal experiences and external relationships may have an impact on one's perceptions related to electronic representations. Though Gerbner implied "physical connections" as an "experience" in his work, it could be argued that "digital" connections and interactions may also have the same effect. Some responses indicated that *2gether: The Series* was not a good representation of the BL community, which supports much of the criticism the genre receives from those within the BL Community.

Quantitative Results

Thematic Analysis

Intercoder reliability

A thematic analysis was used to examine and identify the themes portrayed in the Thai BL drama *2gether: The Series*. The purpose of the analysis is to examine the themes represented in the series and the relationship between the themes with the audience perceptions of the BL community derived from the qualitative survey.

The thematic analysis was performed by the researcher and reviewed by a second coder to create a coefficient intercoder reliability of .70 or above (Frey, et al., 1991; Lombard, et. al, 2010). Both coders analyzed and accessed the series of episodes through the streaming platform *Viki* and coordinated their efforts to communicate their analyses in order to achieve the minimum coefficient standard for reliability. There was a slight disagreement on what themes should be measured. It was decided to eliminate one theme as it was difficult to define and measure consistently. A total of seven themes were analyzed in 13 episodes of *2gether: The Series*. Over the course of the 13 episodes, the frequency of the seven themes was disagreed on 21 times. After a discussion between coders and a second review of the show, the number of disagreements on the frequency of these seven themes was reduced to six. Of the 91 times the seven themes were present, six instances were disagreed on resulting in an intercoder reliability of 93.4%.

After exceeding the minimum standards for reliability, the thematic analysis revealed several themes across the 13 episodes in season one. Table 18 lists the seven themes and final definitions agreed upon by the two coders after the completed analysis. The seven themes found

in *2gether: The Series* were 1) sexuality, 2) miscommunication, 3) friendship, 4) fake relationships, 5) fan girls, 6) harassment, 7) and physical intimacy.

Table 18

Definitions of Themes

Theme	Definition
1) Sexuality	Main character's sexuality, a main character's attraction to another character, or a main character coming to terms with their sexuality.
2) Miscommunication	Miscommunication or misunderstandings between any characters who are, or will be, in a relationship with each other.
3) Friendship	Friendships of the main characters and the merging of separate friend groups into one.
4) Fake Relationships	Mentions of any fake relationships between main characters or a main character with a minor character.
5) Fan Girls	Fangirls or fanboys of any main character.
6) Harassment	Unwanted flirting, touching, or stalking of a main character. This does not include the actions of fangirls or fanboys.

Table 18 Continued

7) Physical Intimacy	Physical intimacy between any main characters or a main character with a minor character. This refers only to romantic physical intimacy and not platonic intimacy.
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The frequency of certain words, phrases, or behaviors relating to each theme were noted by the coders in each episode. This was done to determine what themes of the show were more prominent than others as some themes do not appear in every episode. Table 19 lists the themes that appear in each episode and the frequency of words, phrases, or behaviors that align with the theme and its definition.

Table 19*Episode Themes*

Episode Number	Themes Present	Frequency Per Episode	
		Coder One	Coder Two
1	Sexuality	5	5
	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	3	3
	Friendship	8	9

Table 19 Continued

	Fake Dating	6	6
	Obsessed Fans	7	7
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	8	8
2	Sexuality	3	3
	Friendship	7	7
	Fake Dating	4	4
	Obsessed Fans	10	10
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	4	4
	Physical Intimacy	2	2
3	Sexuality	4	4
	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	5	5
	Friendship	5	5
	Fake Dating	7	7
	Obsessed Fans	9	9
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	11	11
4	Sexuality	9	9

Table 19 Continued

	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	2	2
	Friendship	1	1
	Fake Dating	3	3
	Obsessed Fans	9	9
	Physical Intimacy	5	5
5	Sexuality	6	6
	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	2	2
	Friendship	9	9
	Fake Dating	2	2
	Obsessed Fans	4	4
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	1	1
	Physical Intimacy	9	8
6	Sexuality	5	5
	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	2	2
	Friendship	9	9
	Fake Dating	5	5

Table 19 Continued

	Obsessed Fans	6	6
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	2	2
	Physical Intimacy	12	12
7	Sexuality	7	7
	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	6	6
	Friendship	6	6
	Fake Dating	6	6
	Obsessed Fans	1	1
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	2	2
	Physical Intimacy	9	10
8	Sexuality	6	6
	Friendship	13	13
	Obsessed Fans	7	6
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	1	1
	Physical Intimacy	6	6
9	Sexuality	3	3

Table 19 Continued

	Friendship	8	8
	Obsessed Fans	5	5
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	2	2
	Physical Intimacy	9	9
10	Sexuality	2	2
	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	10	10
	Friendship	9	9
	Obsessed Fans	2	2
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	2	2
	Physical Intimacy	15	15
11	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	2	2
	Friendship	5	5
	Obsessed Fans	1	1
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	5	6
	Physical Intimacy	9	9
12	Sexuality	3	3

Table 19 Continued

	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	7	7
	Friendship	3	3
	Harassment/Unwanted Flirting	1	0
	Physical Intimacy	9	9
13	Sexuality	1	1
	Miscommunication/Misunderstandings	7	7
	Friendship	11	11
	Obsessed Fans	4	4
	Physical Intimacy	17	17

Summary

To examine the consumption of BL dramas and its impact on United States female audiences' perceptions of the Thai BL community and whether the perceptions are reflected in Thai BL drama themes, this study used a triangulation method--a combination of qualitative and quantitative research.

To examine *2gether: The Series* influences the perceptions of United States female viewers, a survey method was used in the form of an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire revealed that *2gether: The Series* did not have a significant impact on United

States females' perceptions of the BL community. Regardless of familiarity, respondents suggested that other BL dramas played a more significant role in shaping their perceptions. Viewers who consumed LGBTQ+ or BL content on a regular basis showed more noticeable changes in their perceptions. This supports the idea that heavy viewership and long-term exposure are more likely to result in modified perceptions. This supports Gerbner and Gross' notion that long-term viewing will shape the viewer's perceptions and reinforce values, attitudes, and beliefs related to media representations (1976, 1998).

A thematic analysis examined and identified the themes portrayed in the Thai BL drama *2gether: The Series*. The thematic analysis revealed several themes that were also mentioned by participants in the questionnaire. Some of the more prominent themes noted by the researchers were the themes of "friendship," "coming to terms with sexuality," "physical intimacy," "obsessive fans," and "unwanted flirting/harassment." Of the seven themes, "friendship" was the only theme that appeared in all 13 episodes, with "sexuality" appearing in 12 of the 13 episodes.

Chapter 5 will discuss the findings in greater detail related to the data collected from the two methodologies. Limitations and implications of the study will be covered with suggestions for future research and a conclusion.

Chapter 5

Discussion/Conclusion

This study attempts to evaluate United States females' perceptions of Thai BL dramas using a triangulation methodology by combining both a qualitative approach: an open-ended questionnaire and a quantitative method: a thematic analysis. Gerbner's cultivation theory was used to explain the effects that may occur from exposure to televised portrayals of the BL community and its influence on one's personal perceptions of the BL community.

Questionnaire Discussion

Responses to the questionnaire suggested that the perceptions of viewers completely new to the genre were not significantly impacted after watching *2gether: The Series*. Those respondents did not report any significant impact on their perception after watching the series. One respondent said, "I don't think I was influenced by it to the point where I thought a certain way." However, some reported that the show made them want to watch more BL dramas. One respondent said, "I think the series made me more interested in BL..." Gerbner's cultivation theory (1976, 1998) suggests that perceptions are changed over time, and this is supported in the participants' responses.

Responses to the questionnaire suggest that *2gether: The Series* did not have a significant impact on United States females' perceptions. One respondent said, "*2gether* was not the first BL I watched...By the time I finally watched *2gether*, I had already formed my opinions of the BL community." Some participants stated that other BL dramas were more impactful on their perceptions, "Compared to other series...it wasn't very impactful other than pulling in new

viewers.” Multiple responses suggest that *2gether: The Series* is not an adequate representation of the genre. Respondents said, “It was fine. Not great but good enough to finish,” and, “*2gether* is not the best BL drama out there.”

Nevertheless, viewers who were familiar with LGBTQ+ content prior to watching *2gether: The Series* were impacted more by the show. Regardless of familiarity, respondents suggested that other BL dramas played a more significant role in shaping their perceptions. Viewers who consumed LGBTQ+ or BL content on a regular basis showed more noticeable changes in their perceptions. One respondent said, “I first watched it recently after a string of more maturely rated BL shows and *2gether* really revitalized my appreciation for deeper and more thought characterization and emotional buildup between the main characters than I had seen in a while so I appreciated that and it positively influenced my perception.” This supports the idea that heavy viewership is more likely to result in modified perceptions as Gerbner and Gross (1976, 1998) suggested.

Research Questions Discussion

Responses to the questionnaire were used to answer the following research questions in this study.

RQ 1: What are United States females' (USF) perceptions of the Thai BL community prior to viewing BL dramas?

According to the questionnaire, United States females' (USF) perceptions of the Thai BL community prior to watching BL dramas were mixed. Respondents who were familiar with LGBTQ+ content that is not considered BL typically had positive perceptions of the community.

Respondents who were entirely unfamiliar with the genre had no prior perceptions or their perceptions were negative. Negative perceptions of the community revolved heavily around the toxic or obsessive fans of the genre. One respondent said, "As an older BL viewer, I am sometimes concerned in a motherly way about younger members of the community and their ability to maintain a healthy perspective about the genre and actors." Another respondent said that fans of BL dramas, "Can't see the difference between fiction and real life."

RQ 2: What are the USF's perceptions after viewing the content in Thai's *2gether: The Series*?

USF responses did not suggest that watching *2gether: The Series* had a notable impact on their perceptions. Nearly half of the respondents stated that there was no change after watching *2gether: The Series*. Four respondents said that after watching the show, they had positive experiences with the BL community online, so their perceptions were positively influenced. Six respondents said that the show was either not a good representation of the genre or that it wasn't a good show in general. This suggests that watching *2gether: The Series* had a negative impact on their perceptions. However, cultivation theory says that viewers' attitudes and beliefs are shaped by the content they consume and makes them believe that the world portrayed in this content is a true representation of reality. The impact that *2gether: The Series* had on viewers' perceptions was less noticeable than the impact of interactions with other people in the BL community.

RQ 3: Were the USF's prior perceptions changed, modified, reinforced, or added to after exposure to Thai's *2gether: The Series*?

USF's prior perceptions were not drastically changed, modified, added to, or reinforced after watching *2gether: The Series*. Nine respondents said that there was either no change in their perceptions or that they were unsure how the series changed their perceptions. Eight respondents said that other BL dramas were much more impactful on their perceptions of the genre. One respondent said, "As an older queer American woman who lived through the AIDS epidemic, I'm jaded about politics and wary of non-gay some shows are. Newer shows are better about illustrating the life I've seen/lived." This respondent is referring to the lack of realistic physical intimacy and romantic chemistry between characters. This was mentioned by other respondents as well. One respondent said, "The main characters don't feel genuinely queer." While another respondent said, "The characters didn't really seem to be into each other. No affection. No real kisses, despite the threat of kissing someone until they dropped."

RQ 4: What impact, if any, did personal experiences with the BL community have on the USF's perceptions?

Age impacted USF's perceptions of the community. Respondents from the >30 age range expressed concern for younger fans. They pointed out the toxic or obsessive fans of the genre and said that their age and experience helped them better understand the behaviors of younger fans. One respondent said, "The fan behavior I've seen...has affected my perceptions of the Thai BL community negatively." Another respondent described herself as "motherly" to those younger viewers who watch BL dramas.

Experience or familiarity with the LGBTQ+ community also impacted USF's perceptions. USF who had prior knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community demonstrated an open mind to the genre and were less hesitant to get involved. As suggested by Gerbner (1998),

viewers who had a direct personal experience with the television portrayal are more likely to believe the TV version is reality.

Thematic Analysis Discussion

There were several themes found in the thematic analysis of *2gether: The Series* and in the questionnaire responses. The themes noted in the thematic analysis and questionnaire had similarities, but there were some themes that were not mentioned in both.

“Sexuality” was a significant theme in the show and in the participants’ responses. It appeared in 12 of the 13 episodes. There were many direct or indirect references to a character’s sexuality or acceptance of their sexuality. One respondent said, “I think the theme surrounding Tine's internal reconciliation of his sexuality being different from what he previously assumed about himself was really well done and felt like a very natural and gradual process that reflects real life for many people.”

“Physical intimacy” was also prevalent in the show and in the participants’ responses. Respondents to the questionnaire stated that the main characters did not accurately portray the physical intimacy between romantic partners. However, there was a considerable amount of physical intimacy and discussion of physical intimacy between characters in relationships. Discussions and mentions of physical intimacy were more prevalent than explicit displays of physical intimacy. One of the main characters in *2gether: The Series* continuously made comments about wanting to have physical intimacy with the other main character, but these actions never occurred. Much of the physical intimacy in *2gether: The Series* featured the main characters holding hands, caressing each other’s faces, or hugging. Respondents said that the progression of physical intimacy in a relationship was not accurately depicted in the show.

“Friendship” was a prominent theme of the show and was mentioned by participants of the questionnaire. It was the only theme that appeared in all 13 episodes. The main characters are often seen spending time with their friends. Eventually, the two separate friend groups merge into one as the main characters’ relationship develops.

“Miscommunication” was an important but less common theme. Characters in relationships with each other often fail to communicate properly or misunderstand each other. One respondent said these miscommunications were often big reactions to small problems, “It seemed that conflicts were overly blown out of proportions.”

There was also a theme of harassment of a main character. “Harassment” was mentioned by respondents. One main character was heavily pursued by two minor characters after making it clear that he was uninterested. One of these minor characters, Green, was discussed by a respondent, “The very aggressive manner in which they portray Green's pursuit of Tine in the first few episodes particularly felt like it could send a negative message that could lend credence to the homophobia-based fear of being hit on by a man that is a repeated concern raised by that subset of the population.”

Fan girls and boys of a main character played a significant role in the show. These fans were often portrayed as loud and obsessed with one of the main characters. They followed the main character around and invaded his privacy on multiple occasions. One respondent mentioned that this toxic fan base is reflective of fans of the BL genre.

“Fake relationships” were another noticeable theme in the first half of the series. This theme was pointed out by respondents and drives the plot of the series. The plot of *2gether: The Series* is centered around the development from a fake relationship to a real relationship between the two main characters.

Limitations

The design of this study, the coding process, and definitions were created by the author and may include unintended biases and imperfections. This could make the study difficult to replicate. Additionally, this study was conducted by a female researcher from the United States who did not watch BL dramas prior to conducting this study. It is possible that this could lead to unintentional biases in this study. This study would have benefited from choosing a different BL drama to focus on. Although *2gether: The Series* is widely recognized as the most popular BL drama, it is also frequently regarded by viewers as a poor representation of the BL genre. A BL drama that is highly rated by viewers may have resulted in a more comprehensive look at how BL dramas impact audience perceptions.

Recommendations

This study uses cultivation theory to examine United States; females' perceptions of the Thai BL community and how *2gether: The Series* impacted those perceptions. This study examined only one BL drama. To form a better understanding of how BL dramas shape United States females' perceptions, a larger study of more BL dramas should be conducted. Future studies should include BL dramas with different maturity ratings. Responses to the questionnaire heavily suggested that the physical intimacy portrayed in *2gether: The Series* was not accurately depicted. Studies on BL dramas that feature these themes may be useful in future research on how depictions of physical intimacy in BL dramas impact audiences. It is also recommended that studies be done on the perceptions of audiences from other countries. As noted in earlier chapters, the popularity of the BL drama is universal. Although there is existing research on

audiences of BL dramas, the majority of the literature is limited and tends to focus on Japanese and Chinese audiences. Studies on additional audiences would provide additional information on foreign audience perceptions. A study on Thai audience perceptions of BL dramas would provide significant information to this field and expand the limited literature currently relevant to this topic. Furthermore, studies focusing on LGBTQ+ viewers and their perceptions of the BL community may be beneficial in determining how BL dramas impact the perceptions of individuals who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Implications of Study

Although this study did not indicate that *2gether: The Series* played a significant role in shaping viewers' perceptions, it did provide information that can be used to benefit future research on viewer perceptions of the BL genre. Participants in the questionnaire pointed out that there were specific aspects of the program that played a larger role in shaping their perceptions. The study did, however, support the cultivation theory notion that long-time, heavy viewers of television representations are more likely to have their perceptions shaped by the content they consume. This study will also contribute to Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process and the steps in analyzing television programming.

Conclusion

To examine the consumption of BL dramas and its impact on United States' female audiences' perceptions of the Thai BL community and whether the perceptions are reflected in Thai BL drama themes, this study used a triangulation method--a combination of qualitative and

quantitative research. Using these two methodologies provided the researcher with valuable information to evaluate the connections between the two sets of data.

To examine *2gether: The Series* influences the perceptions of United States female viewers, a survey method was used in the form of an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was disseminated to United States females who viewed *2gether: The Series*. The data was then studied to determine if there is a connection between the audience-reported perceptions of the Thai BL community and themes derived from the program. Although there were 69 responses submitted, only 21 were able to be used. This resulted in a small sample size.

A thematic analysis was used to examine and identify the themes portrayed in the Thai BL drama *2gether: The Series*. The thematic analysis was performed by the primary researcher and reviewed by a second coder. Both coders analyzed and accessed the series 13 episodes through the streaming platform *Viki* and coordinated their efforts to communicate their analyses in order to achieve the minimum coefficient standard for reliability. The researcher and second coder utilized Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process in guiding the organization of the analysis. This provided insight into the type of themes that were portrayed and the relationship between the themes and audience perceptions of the BL community.

In the end, existing research suggests that frequent long-time viewing of content can impact viewers' perceptions of the media representations and their reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, 1998). The themes from the thematic analysis of *2gether: The Series* were noted in the respondents' views in the questionnaire, however, not all. However, this study indicated that *2gether: The Series* did not have a significant impact on viewers' perceptions after exposure to *2gether: The Series*. This is likely due to a large majority of the participant's previous long-term exposure to other BL drama content prior to exposure. This, too, supports Gerbner's theory that

long-term media exposure has a lasting impact on one's views, beliefs, and attitudes related to the subject.

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Appendix A

Open-ended Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
 - a) 18-23
 - b) 24-29
 - c) >30

2. Which of the following best describes your gender identity?
 - a) Woman
 - b) Man
 - c) Transgender Woman
 - d) Transgender Man
 - e) Non-binary
 - f) Other Self-described gender
 - g) Prefer not to say

3. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
 - a) Straight
 - b) Gay or Lesbian
 - c) Bisexual or Pansexual
 - d) Asexual
 - e) Other Self-described sexuality
 - f) Prefer not to say

4. Choose one or more races you consider to be:
 - a) White or Caucasian

- b) Black or African-American
- c) Alaskan Native or Native American
- d) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- e) Spanish, Hispanic or LatinX origin
- f) Other
- g) Prefer not to say

5. What knowledge related to the Boys' Love (BL) TV genre did you have before viewing your first BL show?

6. How were you introduced to the BL community?

7. What were your perceptions of the BL community prior to viewing your first BL drama?

8. From where were your perceptions of the BL community mostly derived?

9. How long have you watched BL drama programming?

10. How did the viewing of the Thai's *2gether: The Series* influence your current perceptions of the BL community?

11. What themes of the BL community had the biggest impact on your perceptions after watching *2gether: The Series*?

12. In your opinion, what themes were accurately portrayed in *2gether: The Series*?

13. In your opinion, what themes were not accurately portrayed in *2gether: The Series*?

14. How did the viewing of the Thai's *2gether: The Series* change, modify, reinforce or add to your prior perceptions of the BL community?
15. How would you define your current perceptions related to the BL community?
16. What prior experience have you had with the Thai BL community?
17. How do you engage in the Thai BL community online or in person?
18. How have your personal experiences impacted your perceptions of the Thai BL community?
19. In your opinion, what themes and portrayals in Thai's *2gether: The Series* are accurate based on your personal experiences with those who identify with the Thai BL community?
20. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

Coding Scheme and Categories for Thematic Analysis

Table 18*Definitions of Themes*

Theme	Definition
8) Sexuality	Main character's sexuality, a main character's attraction to another character, or a main character coming to terms with their sexuality.
9) Miscommunication	Miscommunication or misunderstandings between any characters who are, or will be, in a relationship with each other.
10) Friendship	Friendships of the main characters and the merging of separate friend groups into one.
11) Fake Relationships	Mentions of any fake relationships between main characters or a main character with a minor character.
12) Fan Girls	Fangirls or fanboys of any main character.
13) Harassment	Unwanted flirting, touching, or stalking of a main character. This does not include the actions of fangirls or fanboys.

14) Physical Intimacy

Physical intimacy between any main characters or a main character with a minor character. This refers only to romantic physical intimacy and not platonic intimacy.

Appendix C

IRB Review Form



April 23, 2024 IRB Application #: 2024-034 Proposal Title: Working Title: Heterosexual American Female

Audience Perceptions of Thai Boys' Love Dramas Type of Review: Initial Review-Expedited Exempt

Investigator(s):

Paige Lokey
David Nelson, Ed.D.

Dear Ms. Lokey and Dr. Nelson:

Re: Application for IRB Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

We have received your materials for your application. The UCO IRB has determined that the above named application is APPROVED BY EXEMPT REVIEW. The Board has provided expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110, for research involving no more than minimal risk and research category (3a) Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection and at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Date of Approval: April 22, 2024

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. A stamped, approved copy of the informed consent form will be made available to you. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used, where applicable. Any modification to the procedures and/or consent form must be approved prior to incorporation into the study.

Please let us know if the IRB or Office of Research Integrity and Compliance can be of any further assistance to your research efforts. Never hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'MPowers'.

Melissa Powers, Ph.D.

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