

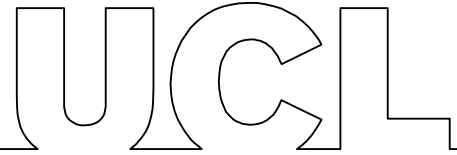
Exploring Gender Roles in Boys' Love (BL) Web Dramas: From Chinese Generation Z Females' Point of View

CANDIDATE NUMBER: FKCX9

STUDENT NAME: Shuyi Zhang

MODULE CODE: BGLP0005

WORD COUNT: 14655



IGP MSc COURSEWORK

DECLARATION OF OWNERSHIP AND COPYRIGHT FORM

1. DECLARATION OF OWNERSHIP

I confirm that I have read and understood the guidelines on plagiarism produced by IGP and UCL, that I understand the meaning of plagiarism as defined in those guidelines, and that I may be penalised for submitting work that has been plagiarised.

This piece of coursework must be submitted electronically through Turnitin on Moodle by the stipulated deadline. I understand that the coursework cannot be assessed unless it is submitted online and that penalties will be applied for late submissions as per UCL and IGP guidelines unless there is an approved case for Extenuating Circumstances or Reasonable Adjustments.

I declare that all material is entirely my own work except where explicitly, clearly and individually indicated and that all sources used in its preparation and all quotations are clearly cited using a recognised system for referencing and citation. Should this statement prove to be untrue, I recognise the right of the Board of Examiners to recommend disciplinary action in line with UCL regulations.

2. COPYRIGHT

The copyright of the coursework remains with me as its author. However, I understand that anonymised copies may be made available to future students for reference. Please, tick the box if you DO NOT want this report to be made available for teaching purposes.

Abstract

This research examines whether gender roles in BL dramas reinforce or challenge traditional gender concepts when viewed from the perspective of Chinese Gen Z women. It includes a discussion of male, female, and queer roles, with a focus on the portrayal of female characters and whether there are misogynistic attitudes in the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas.

Combining a mixed method from questionnaires and in-depth interviews, this study shows that BL dramas challenge traditional gender concepts by providing a novel perspective and constructing diverse gender roles to a certain extent, and also explains why Chinese Gen Z women love and become fans of BL dramas. However, when it comes to the focus on female characters, Chinese Gen Z women believe that they still maintain a critical attitude even though most of the roles are positive. That is, the female characters in BL dramas are still inevitably playing supporting functions and lack personal development. Even if the main characters in BL dramas are male, the audience still wants to see more memorable female characters with independent storylines and positive characteristics. It is worth mentioning that this study also found that the setting of a strong and a weak male protagonist can make the audience feel that it reinforces traditional gender norms and shows the nature of heterosexuality.

Keywords: Boys'love, BL dramas, China, Female perspectives, Gender roles, Gender norms, Misogyny

Contents

Abstract.....	3
Table of Figures.....	6
List of Abbreviations.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	8
1.Introduction.....	9
1.1. Background to the research.....	9
1.2. Research questions.....	10
1.3. Research objectives.....	10
1.4. Overview of the dissertation structure.....	11
2. Literature review.....	12
2.1. Introduction.....	12
2.2. Theoretical framework.....	12
2.2.1 Boys’ Love Culture and Its Development in China.....	12
2.2.2 Queer Representation in BL.....	14
2.2.3 Perception of Gender Roles in BL Dramas and the Female Gaze.....	14
2.2.4 The “Feminine” Portrayal and Misogyny.....	16
2.2.5 Generation Z.....	19
2.3. Gaps in existing research.....	20
3. Methodology.....	20
3.1. Introduction.....	20
3.2. Research design and methods.....	20
3.3. Data analysis method.....	23
3.4. Ethical considerations.....	25
4. Findings.....	25

4.1. Quantitative Findings.....	25
4.1.1 Demographics and viewing habits.....	25
4.1.2 Queer representation in BL dramas.....	27
4.1.3 The female portrayal in BL dramas and misogyny.....	27
4.1.4 Perception of gender roles in BL dramas.....	29
4.1.5 Future development of BL dramas.....	29
4.2. Qualitative Findings.....	30
4.2.1 New Perspectives Can Be Reasons for Consuming BL Dramas — Queer Representation and Female Gaze.....	31
4.2.2 The (Un)Awareness of Misogynistic Attitudes in BL Dramas — Detailed Perception of Misogyny.....	32
4.2.3 Positive Female Roles and Misogyny are Intertwined — Depiction of Females Roles.....	33
4.2.4 More “heterosexual” and “top/bottom” settings reinforce stereotypes for the viewers than for female characters. — Comparative Perception on Gender Roles.....	33
5. Discussion.....	34
5.1. Comparison with existing literature.....	34
5.1.1 Gender roles interpreted from the perspectives BL dramas provide.....	34
5.1.2 Gender roles interpreted from the depiction of females in BL dramas.....	35
5.1.3 Challenging or reinforcing gender norms?.....	37
5.2. Implications of findings.....	38
5.3. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.....	39
6. Conclusion.....	40
References.....	42
Appendices.....	51

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Demographics and Watching Habits.....	25
Figure 2 Diagram of watching reasons of viewers.....	27
Figure 3 Non-parametric Correlation between female portrayal, misogyny and positive attitude towards traditional gender norms.....	28
Figure 4 Diagram of the Degree of awareness of gender equality and impact on own gender identities by watching BL dramas.....	29
Figure 5 Themes Generated from Interviews.....	31

List of Abbreviations

BL	Boys' Love
Gen Z	Generation Z
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-spirited, and Asexual

Acknowledgements

Words cannot express my gratitude to UCL and IGP. I would not have been able to embark on this new, challenging and fulfilling journey without them, and I have benefited greatly from their generous provision of world-class academic resources and expertise. Amidst this, I would also like to express my thanks to my supervisor, Dr Sadeghi Givi, Fatemeh, and module leader, Dr Yuan He, without whose generous support, my study would not have been possible.

Special thanks to all the BL dramas I have watched, they are part of my entertainment and spiritual sustenance. They have accompanied me through many lonely days. I found a lot of enjoyment in BL dramas, which also stimulated my thinking and made me want to complete this research. From now on, my knowledge and critical understanding of BL dramas will be further advanced.

I would also like to thank my old friends in China and new friends in the UK for their help in my highs and lows. They have influenced and inspired me all the way. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, whose trust and support over the decades have kept my spirits and motivation high. It is their effort and selfless dedication that allow me to stand on their shoulders and see the world.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

Boys' Love or BL, also known as Tanbi or Danmei (耽美) in Chinese, originated in Japan (Yaoi) and has gained popularity in other Asian countries, notably Thailand, China, and South Korea (Kwon, 2021). This culture, which used to be dominated by the literary system, has also been brought onto the screens. BL web series or dramas have become particularly popular among Chinese Gen Z women in recent years due to the increasing availability of international media, the proliferation of streaming platforms, and the growing interest in romance in all its forms (Chen, 2021). BL dramas typically depict romantic relationships between male protagonists with a combination of fantasy and emotional depth, and they have gained a significant following in China.

The popularity of the BL web series among young Chinese women is intertwined with broader cultural and social dynamics. China's complex relationship with gender and sexuality roles provides a unique context for studying the impact of BL dramas. Traditionally, Chinese society adheres to strict gender norms and faces challenges in advancing LGBTQ+ rights and representation (Song et al., 2023). These dramas offer audiences the opportunity to escape traditional social norms and provide space to explore other forms of relationships and identities (Zhang, 2016). They have also responded to the times by becoming channels through which audiences can guide and challenge these norms.

While BL dramas often depict idealised and romanticised male relationships, it is necessary to investigate whether these narratives reinforce or challenge existing gender stereotypes. Born as a Gen Z woman who is also a fan of watching web series, it springs to my mind whether the BL web series or dramas will or have, in a way, affected my gender perception invisibly, including the roles, behaviours and attitudes that BL world depicted. Focusing on gender, one of the most significant reasons is that the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas varies greatly, with some BL dramas not even featuring standard female characters (e.g. *KinnPorsche The Series*, 2022). Some series marginalise female characters and portray them as unfavourable or stereotypical. On the other hand, some BL stories contain well-developed female characters who contribute positively to the storyline. After watching so many BL dramas myself, I do not often think about this issue based on the plots. But when I used it as an opportunity to search on Chinese social networks and talk about it with my female friends, I realised that it's a much-debated topic. We discovered that BL dramas are double-edged swords. They are complex in promoting an understanding of female development and portraying different gender roles. As BL dramas grow rapidly in China, the audience base is also huge. Facing an audience of primarily female viewers, there are a lot of critical voices about the impact of BL dramas on gender attitudes. Thus, in the broader field of sociology beyond entertainment, I think it's well worth exploring the concepts associated with feminism.

This study aims to analyse the portrayals of different gender attributes in BL dramas and the impact on viewers' perceptions of gender roles stereotypes. In addition, understanding whether the portrayal of female characters in these dramas can shed light on issues of misogyny

in the media or not and discuss the influence on current gender norms. Besides entertainment, to see whether BL dramas can indeed influence viewers' perceptions. For Generation Z women in China, these dramas may provide a way to explore their gender and sexual identities, as well as promote greater understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ issues. Ultimately, this study seeks to understand the personal and broader social implications of the BL culture.

1.2 Research questions

1. How do Boys' Love (BL) dramas challenge or reinforce existing gender norms in Chinese society according to Chinese Gen Z females?
2. How do Chinese Gen Z female viewers interpret the perspectives BL dramas bring and the depiction of female roles in BL dramas? How do these aspects impact perceptions of gender roles?

1.3 Research objectives

Following the background introduction, the main objectives of this study are as follows:

First, the main purpose of this study is to study how BL dramas interact with and influence existing gender norms in Chinese society through the perspective of Chinese Gen Z female viewers. This mainly includes analysing whether BL dramas challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles in the eyes of these audiences and exploring how they interpret the depictions of these roles in BL dramas. Gender norms often closely influence the formation of gender roles by providing the broader cultural context in which specific roles are defined (Best & Williams, 2001). Even though BL dramas are centred on the relationship between the two male protagonists, there are a lot of other perspectives and characters that can be discussed. In addition, this study seeks to understand how these interpretations influence viewers' perceptions and attitudes toward different gender roles, gender fluidity, and femininity.

Second, based on the elaboration of the first objective, the second objective is to assess how Chinese Gen Z women view the perspectives BL dramas bring and the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas. These will involve assessing the cultural impact of BL's popularity, particularly whether it has impacted or shaped young women's understanding of gender attitudes in the context of shifting gender norms in China. The study will help to understand the details of participants' perceptions of female portrayal. Female characters are depicted in a positive way and can serve as allies in support of protagonists, adding depth and diversity to the story. However, they may also be portrayed as antagonists or unnecessary obstacles in romantic relationships, potentially reinforcing traditional female norms. These issues are related to "misogyny" in BL dramas. It is widely recognised that misogyny is a result of patriarchy (or

male-dominated societies), and this study will look specifically at the choice of terminology used and detailed meaning in the literature review section. Therefore, whether well-developed and positively portrayed female characters are perceived and accepted by fans can challenge gender norms and contribute to a more inclusive representation of gender and sexuality, is one of the goals of this study. Going a step further, by exploring the intersections of female portrayals and misogynistic attitudes, it is also worth examining whether BL dramas can offer media of different relationships and experiences, challenging traditional Chinese storytelling conventions. In essence, the aim is to understand how viewers of BL dramas perceive them as dealing with gender roles, focusing specifically on how they portray women, treat with misogyny, and represent queer identity.

1.4 Overview of the dissertation structure

The dissertation begins with an introduction that provides the background to the study and outlines the significance of the chosen topic through the researcher's personal experiences in watching BL dramas. The study's main objectives and the research questions are presented next. Following the introduction, the literature review in five sections provides an in-depth examination of existing research relevant to this topic, which defines BL dramas and their original cultural significance in China. It gives a summary of queer representation, the depiction of females in BL media and brings about misogyny. It identifies gaps or debates in the literature the study seeks to address. The methodology chapter outlines the mixed-method research approach used in this dissertation. It describes the research design, including detailed data collection, sampling techniques and data analysis procedures. The findings chapter presents visual results such as tables, graphs, or charts from the questionnaire data. Themes and codes from the interview will be utilised to enhance the presentation of key findings and to facilitate reader understanding.

In the discussion chapter, the findings are analysed and interpreted concerning the research objectives and theoretical framework established in the literature review. This section explores the implications of the findings for answering the research questions, for example, analysing the implications of viewers' interpretations for understanding gender norms and roles in Chinese society. It critically considers the limitations of the research and suggests a path for future research. Finally, the conclusion chapter summarises the essential findings of the paper, highlighting the significance of the research topic on BL culture in the broader context. By providing a comprehensive overview, the conclusion offers closure to the whole study while inviting further investigation of the topic.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This dissertation's literature studies are divided into five main sections: the development of BL culture in a global context and the BL web series in China, the queer representation in BL dramas, extending to the social gender theory behind the rise of the BL genre, female image and misogyny in BL dramas. Gender-related studies will be followed by an introduction to the female gaze and a critical analysis of gender roles in BL dramas. The first big part would suggest the reasons for the popularity of BL and what it has brought to modern women. The latter session is where the contradictions and questions are raised. Then, other points of view have been advanced by the critics of BL culture, and lastly, a brief thesis regarding Generation Z is presented.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Boys' Love Culture and Its Development in China

The term Boys' Love (BL) was originated from Japan. It is associated with Yaoi (no crimes, no point, and no meaning) fiction, homosexual comics and illustrated novels created primarily by women for women (Mizoguchi, 2003). Yaoi was an underground fan culture at first. In the 1990s, with publishers producing works aimed at female audiences in various media forms, it grew to a commercial genre. McLelland (2005) concluded that female fans see BL as a reaction to traditional and formulaic heterosexual romance stories, as well as a way of self-expression. The "gay boom" that happened in the media market at that time contributed to the cultural advancement of Yaoi in Japanese society (Kwon, 2021), including the changing role of women in the family. It also further internationalised Japanese BL culture and changed the impression of homosexuality. (Ogawa, 2017). In the late 20s, Yaoi and BL gained global popularity through fan translation and community dissemination outside of Japan (Kwon, 2021). This also made homosexual couples "no longer a secret that cannot be told" (Ji, 2016, p. 2), and mainstream media has gradually moved their focus to this genre.

Several scholars (Louie, 2012; Zhang, 2016; Hu, Jun & Liao, 2023) mentioned that it was in the last two decades that Asian countries and regions have strived to develop the BL series industry. Particularly in Thailand, 2007's *The Love of Siam* took BL to new heights in Thailand. Through the characters' growing experiences, they showed the trouble that comes with being gay. The film expanded the potential audience for BL stories and had a major impact on the BL industry in Thailand, for breaking the "taboo". It became one of the first BL films to be released in cinemas at a time when homophobia was still a major obstacle in Thai society (Reddy, 2023). During the 2020s, more Thai BL series were released than ever before, demonstrating the incredible demand for the genre (Gu, 2020). Besides romance, there are many themes in Thai BL dramas, such as horror, comedy, action and history. Baudinette et al. (2022) explained that there is no clear dividing line between BL in Asia and the LGBTQ+ genre in the West. Some Western media also depict romantic relationships between men in a similar ideological BL tone and style

(Zsila, 2017). However, these are usually part of broader LGBTQ+ series rather than explicitly labelled as BL. Among the biggest hits of 2022, the web series *Heartstopper* is rated as “Utopia” by Ghanem (2023). Zsila (2017) found that these kinds of shows share similarities with the BL genre in depicting love and youth. However, Li (2009) explored that the genre of the BL series has its own specific stylistic and thematic conventions that cater to its target audience compared to LGBTQ+ dramas. Gu (2020) continued by noting that the distinctive marketing strategy for females is also a reason why Thai BL dramas have also gained viewers not only from Asia but also all over the world. Due to cultural roots and similarities in aesthetics, the themes in Thai dramas are more easily accepted and resonated with Chinese audiences. (Chen, 2011, as cited in Gu, 2020).

According to Li (2009), homosexuality is still stigmatised as an implicit social “threat” in China. Therefore, the Internet has become the only way to access BL works in mainland China. The Internet’s anonymity supplies a safer environment to publish, circulate, and discuss BL works. Early danmei works took the form of articles and were shared on forums and websites run by students, such as Jinjiang Literature City (jjwxc.net, 2003-), which has 7 million registered users and over 50,000 contracted writers (Lavin et al., 2017). The articles on the site cover various sexual orientations and topics, and it is best known for the high quality of BL works. It has become a key and guided website for Chinese viewers to approach BL culture.

Following the unique circumstances in China, Kennedy (2009) pointed out that the spread of BL films and TV dramas has also been affected by the tight control of the government’s media communication. The censorship from the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) has formed the current reformed dramas, in which its incarnation had categorised expressions of homosexuality as obscene or unhealthy sexual content that should be removed or selectively deleted (Zhou, 2017, as cited in Ng & Li, 2020) This provoked severe combat over the content review of online dramas. So, in these circumstances of orthodox social norms, it is hard to go from creating, adapting to watching works from diverse gender cultures. As described above, under the long influence of Confucianism, the traditional field of Chinese film and television dramas has been wholly heterosexualised. However, the commercialisation of film and television and the drive towards globalisation have allowed BL culture to develop paradoxically in China (Zou, 2022). For example, more and more people are starting to watch overseas BL web series via streaming platforms. With a more open atmosphere, turning to watch foreign series seems to be more accessible and direct. Although there is much literature on the barriers and motivations for the development of BL dramas in China, such as the emphasis on breaking tradition and questioning the solely heterosexual culture, unfortunately, few scholars have paid attention to the further development on the impact of the spread of foreign series in China, such as the impact on the domestic adaption of Danmei, the behavioural changes of female viewers on watching BL series, and whether it triggers the local communication around BL topic or not.

2.2.2 Queer Representation in BL

As a further extension to the context and research questions, the concept of queer also provides hints behind the social issue of BL dramas. Queer is an all-encompassing term that covers a wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities that fall outside the mainstream norms of heterosexuality and cis-sexuality. However, in this study, the audience's own orientation is not the focus, but it will examine how viewers consider the characters in BL dramas from a "queer" perspective.

BL can be seen as queer because it breaks down the stable category of gender identity and makes it fluid (Lin, 2022). Numerous scholars (Wong, 2020; Kwon, 2021; Liang, 2022) pointed out that the BL genre promotes an important stamp within the larger queer community, and it provides an important venue for building courage and support for queer expression. Manuel (2009, as cited in Morikawa, 2022) also mentioned the interactions between viewers and queers inside the genre as a new phenomenon of females who enjoy observing the queer world like BL dramas: sexualising homosexuality makes heterosexual viewers "queer". This kind of psychological orientation was again mentioned by Wong (2020) as an interest in finding alternative modalities of the affective tendency in queer and neoliberalism in China. To view the characters as queer or not is an important factor that reveals the perception of gender roles in BL dramas. For example, Welker (2006, as cited in Ho, 2022) has referred to the way in which BL's queer image can free viewers from gender binaries and heteronormativity. Ho (2022) conducted studies that the sexually ambiguous gender roles that queer explains can also provide viewers with a site for the exploration of their gender and sexual identities. Similar points are made below in the specifics of gender theory's articulation of BL dramas as a large-volume medium.

Queer representation is also intertwined between the characters in BL dramas and reality. With the propagation of mass media, BL fandom has appeared on websites, forums, and social media, and it has become a subcultural community in China. Female viewers interact with fellow fans, share fan works and participate in queer. It provides alternative spaces for them to explore and challenge societal norms and expectations from the society (Liao, 2019). In the analysis instructed by Feng and Luo (2022), they concluded that audience participation mediates the relationship between watching BL dramas and attitudes towards queer relationships. This finding suggests that the strong influence of fan engagement in BL dramas has triggered both online and offline discussions about the queer scene, queer identities, and queer rights, thereby fostering more tolerant attitudes towards same-sex relationships in contemporary China. Based on the previous study, this research will continue to look into the fact of the matter that the queer representation in BL dramas of current generation Z female fans.

2.2.3 Perception of Gender Roles in BL Dramas and the Female Gaze

Gender roles are a set of norms of behaviour and values that relate specifically to men and women (Hasan, 2020). BL culture creates a space for women suppressed by both the social gender norms and the freedom of creation. The portrayal of same-sex relationships in BL dramas often inspires a longing and emotional connection that transcends traditional romantic narratives

into society, so-called BL-derived awareness (Baudinette et al., 2022). Several researchers (Welker, 2011; Nakajima, 1991, as cited in Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017) take the equivalent position that the BL genre offers a space designed for women looking to break free from limiting gender stereotypes and conservative gender expectations. The BL genre provides an escape and aesthetics that offers an alternative to the traditional heterosexual romance (Zhang, 2016). More than a simple romantic reveal, this longing reflects a more profound desire for authentic emotional and relational fulfilment. The framework of gender studies provides the lens through which gender differences are constructed, perceived and experienced in BL dramas. The perception of gender roles derives from the gender norms that may be presented in BL dramas, which is where this study wants to dig more in-depth. Gender studies provide the foundation and a place where women oppressed by traditional gendering can breathe, and imagination can stretch freely. Kwon (2021) also mentioned that BL is a substantial expression of the rise of gender issues in East Asia, which have long been suppressed by heterosexual patriarchy.

De Beauvoir (2016) interpreted this in her book *The Second Sex*. She aimed to show that women are not born “feminine”, but that society has made them “subject” and flattened them into objects. Some studies (Xu & Yang, 2013; Kwon, 2021) pointed out that the position of women in East Asian culture has been greatly influenced by Confucianism, such as the need for women to carry on the family line and provide for the family. Under this ideology, Chinese women are taught from a young age to obey their fathers, serve their husbands and follow their sons (Yao, 2019). Larson (2000) also addressed that it is “innate and natural” for women to self-sacrifice for the family. This yearning resonates with broader themes in social gender theories, such as women’s perceptions and inquiries for identity, expressions of female desire, and power dynamics in relationships. So, this repressed sentiment towards female characters is aptly released in BL culture. Behaviours such as watching BL dramas, discussing BL episodes and creating second thoughts about them are all related to gender theory on a deeper level. This is why BL series is not popular among men. In Ji’s (2016) survey on audience analysis of BL dramas, only 14% of the respondents were men who had seen or heard of BL dramas. However, there is still a lack of literature that investigates straight men’s views of gender in BL dramas, and most of the existing primary surveys are about women. Women are being more dominant audiences, so there is a certain degree of difficulty in investigating other genders of viewers.

The term “gender” occurred in the advances in social studies, as did the discussions on the differentiation of gender and sex. Gender is a broader concept as a social construction (Lorber, 2018) that is more than just men and women. Previous studies have emphasised the role of gender. For example, Smith (2007, p.5) argued that “gender refers to aspects of self that are an individual’s masculinity and femininity, or in other words, his or her nonphysiological self”. Dated back, Bem (1993) suggested that masculinity and femininity are two kinds of gender dimensions that can be distinct or entangled, which means a man or a woman can be very socially endowed with so-called virility and can also have womanhood. Gender stereotypes are linked to traditional social roles and inequality in gender prescriptions (Prentice & Carranza,

2022). Pagliassotti (2008, as cited in Kwon, 2021) also believed that the theme of “androgyny” in the main characters is a significant factor in the popularity of BL.

At the end of the last century, early research by Jung (1991) proposed two archetypes that describe the traits of each other in the unconscious psychology of men and women, namely the Anima and Animus archetypes. Anima refers to the feminine side of the male spirit, and Animus refers to the masculine side of the inner women (Kast & Whitcombe, 2012). It has triggered the subsequent exploration of gender fluidity, which can also be reflected in today's BL stories and the analysis of the psychological reasons of BL audiences. Specifically, female fans may project their male intentions onto male characters in relationships, exploring their desires, fantasies, and emotional experiences through BL perspective narratives (Zhang, 2016). A similar situation can be seen in terms of the subversive power dynamics in watching sports (Toffoletti & Mewett, 2012; Esmonde et al., 2018), that women can “gaze” at the bodies of male athletes. This could be a counterturn of the male gaze, which positions men as objects for women to watch and consume. The particularity of BL works is also considered as a kind of aesthetic taste for men (Li, 2022). Sexy characters attract female viewers. Therefore, BL dramas must be sexy enough to attract viewers’ attention (Morikawa, 2022).

The female gaze in media, particularly BL dramas, offers a unique perspective centred on the interests and desires of female viewers, often subverting traditional male-dominated narratives and echoing the challenges and subversion of conventional binary gender identities (Quynh, 2022). BL reverses the male gaze in patriarchal societies and transforms it into a perspective of the female gaze, presenting the male as an object of desire and giving women the opportunity, even though fantasy, to gain feelings of overpowering the male (Guo, 2019, as cited in Huang & Chiao, 2022). The other thing is that Asian production companies recognise and cater to the female gaze and have been doing so for much longer than the West (thequeenofsastiel, n.d.). By giving women more complex, autonomous and diverse roles, the female gaze can influence perceptions of gender roles and promote more egalitarian gender positions.

2.2.4 The “Feminine” Portrayal and Misogyny

The studies above suggest non-binary perceptions of gender, which allows these theories to be well reflected in BL dramas and challenges gender norms: women can reverse their traditional gender roles in creating and watching BL dramas and can “gaze” at the men in the dramas from a higher position. However, even in these seemingly progressive spaces, many researchers have raised questions about the potential problems associated with female characterisation.

First, the traditional gender roles are still shown in BL culture, even though the main characters are two males. Whether partners in male homosexual relationships share power equally is also controversial (Li, 2009; Zhou et al., 2018). Narratives in BL fictions and mangas are often structured in a dichotomy-like manner (Wood, 2006), whereby depicting a dominant character (“seme” / “top”) and a passive character (“uke” / “bottom”). Characters like these often

resemble female stereotypes both physically and emotionally (Zhang, 2016). Welker (2006) and Zsila & Demetrovics (2017) argue that BL is another form of heterosexuality. To increase the commercial value and cater to the desire for “pretty boys” in the gaze of young women, some BL authors highlight the “Girly Masculinity” (Zhang, 2016, p. 10) of male characters in their works. Even though previous scholars have come up with the ideas of gender fluidity, others still argue that this not only aggravates women’s stereotypes of homosexual men but also aggravates the stereotypes belonging to femininity. According to Zhou et al. (2018), on a sample of 87 BL stories, the outcomes can be generalised to although the majority of gay male characters in BL stories are portrayed as showing at least some masculinity and femininity at the same time, neither the roles nor the relationships have been portrayed equally. Mizoguchi (2008, as cited in Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017) claimed that “uke” is a symbolic representation of women of the ideal self-image of female-male couples. However, scholars have found that this emotional mapping may also be a form of female escapism or self-liberation. But they have not directly addressed the question of whether this behaviour reinforces or undermines traditional notions of gender, such as whether women are entitled to the rights and freedoms they ideally deserve. They also did not analyse deeply the interaction between “girly masculinity” and “gender fluidity”.

Second, misogyny is one of the issues incorporated in BL culture (Madill et al., 2022). Misogyny means hatred or prejudice against women and usually manifests itself in men (Kendall, 2024). Smith (2013) argued that it is not only women themselves that can be referred to as misogyny, but also the distaste and devaluing of femininity, feminisation and all things and meanings associated with women. Ueno (2015) wrote in her book *Disgust Against Women* that misogyny is both “contempt for women” for men and “self-hatred” for women. In today’s society, both men and women can be misogynistic. Why is there misogyny in a culture that seems to be made for women? BL dramas are often portrayed as marginalising or negatively portraying women, which can perpetuate harmful stereotypes (Zhang, 2016; Kwon, 2021; Garg & Yang, 2023). In Garg and Yang’s words were “serving as a catalyst for male intimacy, a sense of being offended became evermore pronounced” (p. 772). In contrast, Aoyama’s (2013) study pointed out that in some cases, BL works can still demonstrate the importance of women. In Yoshinaga’s texts, for example, “girls and women are not silenced or marginalised; they play positive, powerful, and interesting roles.” (p. 15). So, the misogynistic plot setup seems to depend more on the intentions and ideas of the drama producer.

BL dramas usually cater too much to female fantasies and the female gaze because of the commercial benefit, but this can sometimes lead to the objectification of characters, beautifying male figures, and idealising or simplifying reality (Zhou et al., 2021). By positioning women as consumers of media that commodifies male relationships rather than promoting true gender equality (Zhou et al., 2018), this dynamic may inadvertently reinforce notions of masculinity.

Masculinity is embedded in society (gender) rather than biology (sex) (Stets & Burke, 2020) and is a self-perception and portrayal created by men for men (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). It does not directly address the issue of women’s representation. However, toxic

masculinity often contains misogynistic attitudes that reinforce the demeaning and subordination of women (Simões et al., 2021). So, when it comes to women's presentation in BL dramas, I still choose the misogynistic attitude rather than masculinity. The concept of patriarchy is a broader system of social organisation. In short, it means that men hold power (Kaufman, 1994; Sultana, 2012). Manne (2017, p. 47, as cited in Richardson-Self, 2018, p. 260) said that "patriarchy-enforcing mechanisms that are 'hostile, threatening, and punitive' are misogynistic." Misogyny is embedded in patriarchy, but focusing solely on patriarchy may weaken specific investigations of anti-women sentiment. In addition, the patriarchal system theory covered in BL is contradictory. On the one hand, women resist the hetero-normative paradigm of patriarchy by controlling the BL narrative. Paradoxically, these fans also acknowledge the hegemony of hetero-normative norms and male gender order in same-sex relationships (Zhang, 2016). Besides, patriarchy involves examining structural inequalities, while misogyny focuses on explicitly negative attitudes toward women. Therefore, the focus of this study is not to discuss the balance of contradictions in this circumstance but to explore whether gender norms have been impacted from the perspective of the intersection of BL roles and female portrayal. While masculinity and patriarchy are more general concepts, misogyny is mainly related to the way women are depicted and treated in media (Ogbonna & Lokawua, 2017). This attention allows for a detailed examination of whether BL dramas contribute to or counteract harmful stereotypes about women. The misogynistic elements in BL dramas are the key to revealing the patriarchy.

In reality, BL dramas based on depictions of a beautiful relationship between two attractive males have promoted male actors, and male actors even took the place of female actors to endorse cosmetics for the mainstream customers of women when they become famous, etc. All these have sparked discontent among some Chinese female netizens. A well-known entertainment account, @Luo Beibei, pointed out on Weibo: "The actual effect of BL adaptations' popularity is misogyny. Although I know that the demand for this kind of viewing may also be the result of rebelling against misogyny, women don't want to be objectified, so they simply pull themselves out and only look at men. But the practical effect is more misogynistic, where female characters are excluded from the narrative. In reality, actresses won't get a chance in commercial activities, and endorsements are taken by actors." (Zeng, 2021) Therefore, exploring how BL dramas strike a balance between female control and the portrayal of female characters can reveal whether they are genuinely challenging gender norms or still upholding traditional misogynistic views.

Moreover, BL culture has also been criticised regarding sexual minorities by a significant number of authors in literature. Mizoguchi (2003) debated that the explicit depictions of male homosexual behaviour in Yaoi works may exclude heterosexual male readers even more thoroughly because of homophobia and, in a way, deepen the stereotype of gays.

2.2.5 Generation Z

Generation Z is defined as those born after 1996 (Cilliers, 2017) who have grown up with the most significant changes in the networked society, such as the Internet, mobile phones, and laptops (Singh, Dangmei, 2016, cited in Dolot, 2018). They are the first generation of digital natives to have 100 per cent access to technology and the digital world. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z is 3 times more likely to prefer streaming services like Netflix than traditional TV (Fowler, 2023). They are also addicted to social media and creative content. With the imagination and faith in mass media communication, the creators of BL have promoted the further development of Gen Z's capabilities in the real and virtual worlds. Seifert's (2019) study found that women are twice as keen on TV dramas as men. Among them, previous studies (Correa et al., 2010; Ward & Grower, 2020) emphasised that young adult women that are 18-30 years old are more likely to be actively involved in online fan communities.

2.3 Gaps in existing research

First, in the research method, much of the existing literature uses secondary reviews and content analyses to find descriptions of gender roles and misogyny issues in BL stories. However, very little has been done through direct first-hand narratives, such as asking BL viewers and surveying BL female creators to find out what they think about the topics. Besides, there has been little investigation of the issues of gender norms in BL dramas compared to BL literature and manga. Li (2009) has conducted survey methods regarding BL comics, however, the focus of the study was more on sensational and sexual components but not centred on female representations.

Second, in the context of the investigation of BL culture, previous research has shown that gender theory has focused and stood on women's status and has stimulated women's sense of "consumption" of men. However, less evidence supports the idea that these fans are fond of BL works for this reason (Zhou et al., 2018). The motivations for the BL craze may vary from person to person, such as production, characters or actors, theme, etc. There is still limited primary research on this aspect exploring whether viewers critically engage with BL series in terms of their potential to challenge or reinforce existing gender norms.

Third, previous research can only be considered a first step towards a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between gender perceptions and the development of BL culture. For example, BL dramas do not show the real situation of queer (Zhou et al., 2021; Jerome et al., 2022), and queer representation is also a part that interacts with gender roles (Lin, 2022). Nonetheless, this study is set among misogyny, queer representation, and the dynamics perceptions of gender roles, which have not been integrated together by previous studies. Last but not least, although there are many influential BL works after the 1990s to 2000s, it seems that from the 2010s onwards, there is a lack of analysis of BL dramas (Quynh, 2010). This study wants to bring back attention to the once-heated and currently subsided BL series.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research will include two phases, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve complementation and make the study more comprehensive. For phase 1, a questionnaire will be sent to the potential participants regarding demographics, habit tracking, and overall feelings about the BL dramas or web series. For the qualitative approach as phase 2, in-depth interviews will be held to have a more comprehensive and detailed conversation with the BL viewers.

3.2 Research design and methods

The rationale for mixing these two types of methods in one study is based on the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient on their own to capture the trends and details (Ivankova et al., 2006; Creswell et al., 2011). When used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for more robust analysis, leveraging each's strengths. One of the models used in this study is sequential explanatory design. Plano Clark (2011) interpreted it as quantitative data first being collected and then qualitative data being collected to help explain detailed quantitative results. Ivankova, Creswell and Stick (2006) concluded that the quantitative data and its subsequent analysis provide an overall understanding of the research question. Following qualitative data and its analysis, refine and interpret these statistical results by exploring participants' perspectives in greater depth. Researchers can prioritise any phase that fits most. For this study, quantitative data can show a general picture of the research questions, and then through the qualitative phase, the reasons behind them can be explained. For instance, if a survey indicates that a significant number of viewers believe BL shows have misogynistic themes, the interview can explore specific examples, personal influences, and contextual explanations. When the results of survey appear in a certain "abnormal" way, the interviewees can help find the key to the question and some details in the investigation process, which can effectively reduce the time cost and improve the efficiency of the research (Ji, 2016). Combining quantitative and qualitative methods allows for triangulation, increasing the validity of the findings (Morse, 1991).

The goal of a survey is to understand a large population by surveying a sample (Mohajan, 2020). Ball (2019) addressed the benefits of online surveys, including speed and coverage, simplicity, low cost, and flexibility. Callegaro et al. (2015, as cited in Ball, 2019) mentioned that respondents often prefer online questionnaires because they can answer at their own convenience and pace, which may increase response rates. However, there are limitations to questionnaires, such as the exclusion of those who do not use the internet frequently, responses to open-ended questions that cannot be further analysed through follow-up questions, respondents not being able to understand unfamiliar or ambiguous terminology at the moment of answering (Ball, 2019); and anonymised responses that do not guarantee authenticity. So, in general, to address these possible causes of bias, online surveys will be distributed through various channels,

following the principle of random sampling within the target group, as well as manually filtering to pick out valid samples.

The base philosophy of qualitative research is interpretivism. Unlike positivism, interpretivism is more concerned with depth. The different social realities that evolve with culture, environment, and the times are all elements of this paradigm (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Interpretation ideas are based on the individual, so results can vary from person to person. In order to address the issue of responses to open-ended questions, one of the most common ways is to conduct semi-structured interviews. The interviews allowed researchers to clarify participants' responses and dig deeper into themes. This helped to reveal underlying attitudes and beliefs about gender norms and images of female characters that may not have been apparent in questionnaire data. Semi-structured interviews have a guide of questions but allow for flexibility and investigation based on the previous respondent's answers. These interviews provide an opportunity to gain insight into participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences. Wilson (2013) summarised the pros of providing the potential to discover unexplored cases and the chance to discuss complex topics such as gender norms and misogyny. It also requires less training time than other forms of interviews because it has a set of specific questions and can be done via the Internet. However, the limitations of the "interviewer effect" may influence the information given regarding the different backgrounds of the potential interviewers, such as age and educational level. It is also important to control the balance and maintain consistency in each interview (Wilson, 2013). The findings of mixed-method research may be time-consuming and difficult to generalise because the answers will be from person to person.

Following the above paradigm, the questionnaire survey initially aims to filter for valid respondents and collect relevant data. The title of the survey includes the desired respondents as Chinese Gen Z females who have been exposed to BL dramas. The questionnaire will be pilot-tested during the design phase to ensure its validity and reliability in collecting the necessary data. Pilot testing involves administering the questionnaire to a small representative sample of respondents (around five people) from the target population. This process will allow the researcher to identify possible problems with the clarity, comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the questionnaire questions before full distribution. Feedback from the pilot testing serves as a basis for adjusting the questionnaire to improve its face validity and reliability, ultimately ensuring that it accurately captures the intended research objectives.

Then, the questionnaire will be snowballed by looking for suitable candidates from the researcher's immediate social circle and also from the social media groups that the researcher is in. The purposive sampling is used by social networking apps that are mostly used by Chinese netizens, such as WeChat, Sina Weibo, and WhatsApp. On Sina Weibo, there is a special "BL drama Super Topic", a feature where people with common interests gather together to form a circle, similar to an interest tribe. The groups on these social networking sites were created by fans of BL dramas so the questionnaires could be distributed to reach the target group accurately. To broaden the scope of the questionnaire's generalisation, it will also be distributed from

Chinese internet sites with a large number of active interacting users, such as Xiaohongshu (a.k.a. RED) and Bilibili.

The survey consists of 27 questions (see Appendix A), including rating scale questions and non-Likert scale questions (e.g. demographic, frequency, and yes/no questions) to measure various constructs. Multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions are also included for preferences. The questions are drafted according to survey examples and findings from previous literature and are set to provide general knowledge about the terms relevant to this study. So, potential participants who will be recruited in phase 2 will be verified to have a basic understanding of the concept and content of the study. The questionnaire question consists of five sections:

Part 1: Demographics. This part used three questions to inquire about the basic profile information of the participants, including age group, occupation and educational level.

Part 2: Viewing habits. In this part, participants will be asked about their watching habits, preferences for watching platforms, countries, and the degree of exposure to BL dramas in the past years.

Part 3: Contents of BL dramas. In this part, respondents are required to answer their thoughts on the reasons for watching BL dramas, the female-related content, the perception of misogyny, queer representation, the intersection of queer representation and the portrayal of female characters in the BL dramas.

Part 4: Overall understanding of BL dramas. In this section, participants can select their opinions on the growing trend of BL dramas, make a comparison and put forward the most needed improvements. Further questions are asked to estimate the contents of BL dramas in the future.

Part 5: The part that is used for semi-structured interviews. Participants can leave their contacts here for further communication.

Due to the limited scale of questionnaires and the need to ensure that the research data is detailed, thorough, and objective, the second part of the research will use semi-structured interviews. Interviews will be conducted either online or face-to-face, depending on the situation. The interviewees will be selected from those who have answered the questionnaire and would like to have a further in-depth conversation or are straightly recruited for the interview only. The researcher will check the potential interviewees' answers to the previous questions, such as cognitive questions on misogyny and queer. This ensures that interviewees have relevant experience and perspectives that will be discussed in the interviews and on the topics of interest. According to the literature review, BL dramas have created outlets and discussion points for women in terms of social themes and gender perspectives, such as the non-traditional role portrayal of men and homosexual relationships, which challenges gender norms and allows women to have more power of speech to a certain extent. However, in terms of female characterisation, many scholars have identified the misogynistic side of female characters, which

has deepened the stereotype of women in society, so interviews will focus on the misogyny and queer of characters to reveal the relationship between these two aspects and gender norms. As well as the intersection of misogyny and female characterisation from the point of view of the actual audience. The outlines of questions asked in interviews are designed according to this direction (See Appendix C).

Each interview will last about 30 minutes and will be conducted at locations based on the participants' choice. The interviews will be conducted mainly in the local language (Chinese). The interviewee's expressions will be noted from the conversations. The expression of emotions will be included in the scope of the study, which will help to gain more perceptual knowledge beyond the standard interviews and to pay attention to specific questions with more ideas and insights for the study. With the data from questionnaires, the demographics centrally distributed from broad sampling can be seen. For example, since the questionnaires are posted online, young people use the Internet more frequently, and students are likely to be more active on the Internet than the working population. So, the demographic distribution in the questionnaires may not be evenly represented. To avoid sample bias, interviews will be conducted with as many subjects that can be dispersed across demographics, such as age, occupation, years of viewing BL dramas, and preferences.

3.3 Data analysis method

Quantitative Analysis:

For the returned questionnaires, data statistics were performed and analysed using the sociological survey software SPSS, after which being quantified of each category to find out the descriptive statistics in frequency and central tendency to show the experiences and perception of most respondents with the BL dramas. Non-parametric tests were run to analyse the attitudes of different groups of participants. Since this survey was conducted on the Internet, several filtering methods were used to control the reliability and validity of the questionnaire:

(1) All the participants must fulfil all the criteria of being Chinese Gen Z Women. The recruiting information is written clearly and in the title of the questionnaire, which states participants required in this study.,

(2) Duplicate IP addresses are invalid. The same or the repeated appearance of the same network address was regarded as invalid to ensure the authenticity of the questionnaire data.

(3) Time limit for answering the survey. Based on the average length of time for answering all the questions in the pilot test, the answering time is controlled to be between 60 seconds and 500 seconds. Questionnaires with less or more than this time were also considered invalid.

(4) Questionnaires with all the same options, such as "Neutral", were also invalid.

Due to limited time and platform constraints, the questionnaire eventually received responses on a total of four different platforms: Sina Weibo, Xiaohongshu, WeChat, and wjx.com. 112 responses were received in a three-week period, of which 89 were valid.

Qualitative Analysis:

Sample Group of Interviewees				
Sample Number	Age Range	Occupation	Education Level	BL Dramas Consumption Period
1	21-23	Employed	Undergraduate	4-5 years
2	21-23	Student	Postgraduate	2 years
3	24-26	Student	Postgraduate	7 years
4	24-26	Student	Postgraduate	3-4 years
5	27-29	Self-employed	Undergraduate	3 years

The interviewees were selected following the above criteria. Interviews were recorded, transcribed in the local language (Chinese), and translated into English. The average interview time was 50 minutes (N=5). According to the thematic analysis of qualitative data by Braun and Clarke (2012), the procedure of the analysis included, firstly, familiarising oneself with the data by repeatedly reading the interviews. Then, outlining the initial codes. Next, looking for themes and which different interviews were critically checked to coordinate with the aims of the study (Marte-Marie et al., 2017). The following steps are to review or modify the underlying themes, and the similarities can be combined. However, Braun & Clarke (2006) mentioned that if the research has a very small sample like this one, there may be considerable overlap between the coding phase and determining the preliminary topic. Then, defining and naming the themes. Lastly, generating the final report. I marked the highlights of the conversation transcripts first during the interviews and then read them thoroughly several times after concluding the interviews to familiarise myself with the entire body of data. Next, I uploaded the recorded data, or the modified transcripts generated from the interviews and coded them into thematic nodes. Next, I generated the corresponding analyses of the data results, which were presented in different themes regarding the major aspects this study emphasised: queer representation, female perspectives and female portrayal (and misogyny).

Following the sequence of data gathered, after analysing data from qualitative analysis first, the findings will be shown in a triangular analysis by comparing the answers from the questionnaires and the themes generated from the interviews. Different methods were used to collect data on the same construct of this study and supplement each other. It can also help to cross-validate findings and strengthen the validity of questionnaire results.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This research was conducted following the ethical guidelines of University College London and was approved by the University College London Review Board or Ethics Committee (protocol code: Z6364106/2024/06/217 social research; approval date: 18 June 2024). The first section of the survey is the consent information, which all respondents were required to read and agree to: “I consent to the above and begin the survey.” The Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form were sent to the interviewees, and they were asked to sign and return a copy of them to me before the interview was conducted. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

4. Findings

4.1 Quantitative Findings

4.1.1 Demographics and viewing habits

Figure 4.1 Demographics and Watching Habits

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-20	1	1%
	21-23	38	43%
	24-26	24	27%
	27-29	26	29%
Occupation	Student	47	53%
Status	Employed	31	35%
	Self-employed	9	10%
	Unemployed	2	2%
Education Level	Primary School	0	0%
	Middle School	2	2%
	High School	2	2%

	Undergraduate	46	52%
	Postgraduate and above	39	44%
Watching BL Frequency	Daily	10	11%
	Weekly	32	36%
	Monthly	14	16%
	Occasionally	33	37%
Number of Series Watched In a Year	0-1	10	11%
	1-2	25	28%
	3-5	38	43%
	6-10	11	12%
	11 and more	5	6%

Table 4.1 shows the demographic data and viewing habits of samples. Although the age of the target respondents has been restricted to Gen Z, I have narrowed the age group down to four groups, with the largest sample of 21 to 23 years old (43%) and the smallest sample of 18 to 20 years old (1%), with only one sample out of 89. In terms of the occupation background of the respondents, more than half of them are students, and another 30% are employed employees. All of the samples have a secondary school education or above, including 46 with a bachelor's degree, which accounted for 52% of the total. Less than 5 percent have a high school degree or less.

In terms of exposure to BL series, most respondents watch BL dramas occasionally (37%), but 36% of respondents also watch them weekly, while the number of daily and monthly viewers is not very significant. Among them, 38 (43%) viewers watched four to six BL series in the last year. One-third watched one to three. And 11% of respondents did not finish one series, while 12% of them watched eight or so. Only five people have seen more than ten BL dramas in a year. Around 80% of the samples choose to watch BL dramas on streaming platforms and social media.

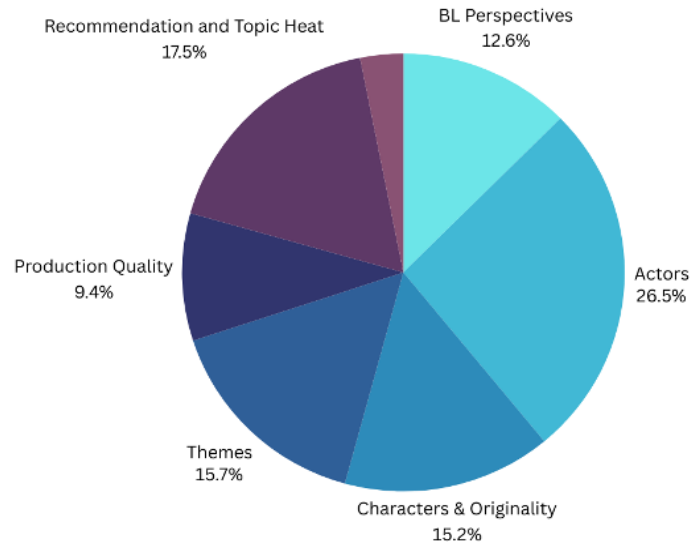


Figure 4.2 Diagram of watching reasons of viewers

According to the respondents, 26.5% watched BL dramas because of the actors, such as the leading actor’s appearance, acting skills and other personal charm. The second biggest reason was recommendations and popularity (17.5%). Only one in ten viewers will watch BL dramas because they are BL fans and enjoy the perspective BL brings. (See figure 4.2)

4.1.2 Queer representation in BL dramas

Since the concept of “queer” requires a certain theoretical basis, and in the Chinese society where heterosexual norms prevail, not all people understand the connotation of queer, I also found in the pilot test that women who understand “queer” will be less than those who understand “misogyny”. In the total sample of 89 people, 54 (61%) of them had heard about the term “queer”. Among them, 73% of viewers would consider or sometimes consider the leading actors in BL dramas as queer characters. In the perception of queer representation and the intersection of the portrayal of females in BL dramas, in other words, how did the viewers see the interaction between female characters and queer male protagonists? More than 60% of them hold positive opinions of the interaction for both but consider the potential for more delicate improvements in the relationship. However, there are still 15% of viewers regarded the alongside dynamics were imbalanced, in which queer representations were done well, but the portrayal of female characters lacked depth or marginalised female characters further.

4.1.3 The female portrayal in BL dramas and misogyny

When the participants were asked about the image setting of female characters in BL dramas, the results show that their perception and recognition of negative and positive portrayals were inconsistent. Although people who see “jealous and stubborn” as stereotypical and “confident and independent” as non-stereotypical are both mostly distributed in the “somewhat” range, there are only half as many samples who see the former as particularly negative compare

to the latter as particularly positive. As for the “not much” range, those who thought such negative descriptions were more than twice as likely as positive ones. This was also evident in subsequent interviews.

Overall, around half of respondents (45%) had a positive attitude towards female characters in BL dramas. However, the standard deviation indicates that while some participants tended to have a positive view, there was some variation, with a percentage of respondents holding neutral (33%) or negative views (13%). The majority of people have heard misogyny (86 out of 89), but only 58% of them will associate it with BL dramas. The rest of the 42% of viewers will not connect misogyny with BL dramas. A different tendency was reflected in the awareness of misogynistic themes or attitudes in viewing BL, in which about 80% of the audience noticed such attitudes in BL dramas.

Figure 4.3 Non-parametric Correlation between female portrayal, misogyny and positive attitude towards traditional gender norms

	Attitude towards challenging traditional gender norms
Positive attitude towards female portrayal	.267*
Awareness of misogyny	.284**

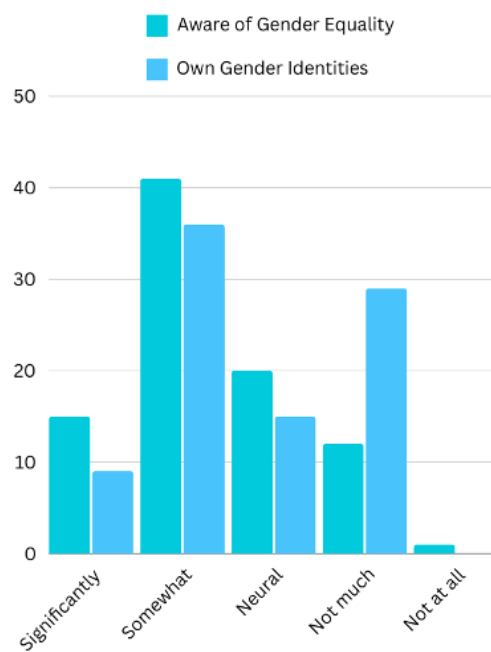
* $p < 0.05$ Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** $p < 0.01$ Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The above table shows that there was a weak to moderate correlation (0.267) between attitudes toward female portrayal and attitudes towards gender norms. This correlation suggests that viewers with positive attitudes toward female portrayal also tend to believe that BL dramas challenge traditional gender norms. The significance value of 0.011 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant, meaning that there is a reliable association between the two constructs in the sample. In other words, positive portrayals of women in these dramas are associated with a sense of progress in gender norms.

There was a moderate positive correlation (0.284) between the level of awareness of misogyny and the attitude towards challenging gender norms. This indicates that as viewers become more aware of discrimination against women in BL dramas, they are more likely to find BL dramas challenge traditional gender norms. A significance value of 0.007 shows a highly significant relationship in this sample.

4.1.4 Perception of gender roles in BL dramas



(Figure 4.4 Diagram of the Degree of awareness of gender equality and impact on own gender identities by watching BL dramas)

As shown in Figure 4.4.1, the bar chart shows two aspects of responses: gender equality awareness and the influence of one's own gender identity on the perception of gender roles in BL (Boys' Love). The Y-axis represents the number of respondents, while the X-axis classifies their responses. In terms of gender equality understanding and the impact of their gender identity, the largest group of both respondents was classified as "somewhat", indicating an above-average level of impact in both areas. However, it is worth noting that a significant number of respondents (around 30%) also felt that the gender relationships in the BL series did not affect their own gender identity or understanding of identity. "Somewhat" or "not much" are two big parts that indicate that the viewers had varying degrees of personal connection to their gender identities and the relationships portrayed in the BL series. In terms of "significant", there is a substantial difference between the two aspects, and more respondents believe that BL dramas have a more significant impact on arousing the awareness of gender equality than their own gender identity.

4.1.5 Future development of BL dramas

This part is not the main research purpose of this study but an exploratory analysis of the main research questions on the development trend of BL dramas and to give signs and hints in the discussion section. The study on gender roles in BL dramas only provides some possible findings.

In the multiple choices question, the options are mainly divided into three categories related to this research: Expected benefits and positive development (e.g., BL challenges traditional concepts of gender), perceived shortcomings and negative development (e.g., BL can lead to misogyny and reduce the female audience), and neutral or mixed development (e.g., the perception that BL is merely a form of entertainment). First, the most shared view was that more than 60 of respondents recognised BL dramas' role in promoting understanding of sexual minorities like homosexuality. The second most widespread option emphasises the positive impact of BL dramas on young audiences' gender cognition and provides role models for gender identity. Similarly, the audience recognised that BL dramas help to question and challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes in the future.

Opinions vary in a small number as to whether the BL series is primarily for commercial purposes or whether it is oversaturated. For example, 15 respondents stated that BL dramas were for commercial and entertainment purposes only. Very few people predict that the female audience for the BL series is likely to decline. 78% of the respondents would like to see more BL dramas in the future that incorporate themes of breaking gender norms and LGBTQ+ issues. In the advice on improvement section, more than half of the respondents believed that "More positive portrayal of female characters, although not the main character" and "More diverse characters" were useful. The quality and storytelling techniques were their second-tier choices.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Based on the preliminary statistics of the questionnaire survey, I learned about the reasons for Chinese women of Z Era to watch BL dramas, their perceptions of queer representation, their understanding of female perspectives and misogyny, and how these perceptions relate to so-called gender roles and norms in general. Among the selected interviewees who have a certain understanding of the above topics, I made an in-depth analysis of the participants' views on whether the reasons for their consumption of BL dramas included new perspectives and whether the portrayal of female characters strengthened or challenged traditional gender norms, and came up with the following themes. The themes emerged based on the topics the study focused on and the response data (See Figure 4.5 as the coding example that I initially generated from the notes taken down during the interviews). According to the explanation of Braun & Clarke (2006), a theme is characterised by no strict structure but by its importance. After searching themes, I concluded and excerpted the dialogue material of these themes that are related to the research questions in three major themes. Following the principle of anonymity, the numbers 1 to 5 below are the designations for each interviewee.

<p>Theme: The Perspective BL Brings Subtheme: Initial Consumption from Female Perspectives of BL Dramas Codes: Projecting women onto other genders of the characters, Female friends' recommendations, Favourable male image, Favourable male actors, Self-emotion expressions.</p> <p>Subtheme: Queer representation Codes: Excitement and enthusiasm for novel characters and innovative plot settings, Queer dynamics in relationships, Queer is new and "forbidden" in China, Idealised homosexuality, The gender fluidity of queer characters.</p>	<p>Theme: The Impact on Gender Roles Subtheme: Challenging traditional gender norms Codes: The gender fluidity of queer characters, Breaking the rules of heterosexual roles, Males can be 'feminine', An escape or utopian feeling from traditional norms.</p> <p>Subtheme: Reinforcing traditional gender norms Codes: Still a heterosexual world in gender roles, Misogynistic attitudes on "bad girls", The male characters are beatifying the "real male", The female is absent.</p>
<p>Theme: Portrayal of Female Characters Codes: Positive female roles, Females are independent, Female characters don't get involved in the relationships, Lack of depth as supporting actresses, Female characters as plot facilitators, Marginalisation of female characters, Negative images of females are not prevailing, Will not focus on the portrayal of females.</p>	<p>Theme: Substitute Feelings and Personal Preferences Codes: Desire for equality in relationships, Emotional resonance, Connection between the reality and virtual world, Focus on the overall viewing experience, Different sensitivity to misogynistic themes and attitudes, Not sure about the cultural perceptions of gender roles.</p>

(Figure 4.5 Themes Generated from Interviews)

4.2.1 *New Perspectives Can Be Reasons for Consuming BL Dramas — Queer Representation and Female Gaze*

4/5 of the participants reported that the new perspectives on gender roles that BL dramas bring could be a reason why they watched them. The interviewees also emphasised that the setting in which these kinds of thoughtful and innovative perspectives are perceived was one of the most attractive points for BL dramas. But one of the viewers conveyed a neutralising attitude that she thought watching BL dramas is like watching any other genre of dramas from an

outsider's point of view or god's perspective. She did not realise the difference in perspectives. Excerpts from the interview below show participants' views on the matter:

1: *I can choose to watch the men I like, such as "rich and handsome" men. I mean... compared with reality, BL dramas will give me a sense of utopia.*

3: *But my personal favourite feature is double A ... I like them because they are based on a relationship of mutual respect and equality. I think it is a healthy relationship that I look forward to.*

4: *The standpoint of the plot is actually an ideal state for women, with relatively few contradictions in relationships. And it's also a love that's forbidden, which has caught my interest and will be the reason I watch it!*

5: *BL dramas are dominated by male characters, so I don't need to put my own feelings as a woman into them...*

4.2.2 *The (Un)Awareness of Misogynistic Attitudes in BL Dramas — Detailed Perception of Misogyny.*

When asking about giving examples or opinions regarding misogynistic attitudes or themes in BL dramas, I noticed that all the interviewees showed a bit of hesitation. Some of them asked me again to define and distinguish the so-called "misogynistic attitude" in the media and societal context. The respondents could not easily express the evident misogynistic attitudes. An interviewee reported that the whole society is misogynistic, so why bother to judge the entertainment? Another one thought being aware of misogynistic attitudes doesn't affect the viewing of BL dramas (*While "affected manners" female characters may be a traditional stereotype. But this could happen in reality, so I'm not sure whether this is misogynistic.*) This statement is partially reflected in the questionnaire: Among those participants who have heard misogyny, 40% of them will not associate misogyny with BL dramas. In comparison, only 10% of them will often do so.

2: *The characters are more diverse than most of the Danmei works in China, including various conflicts regarding religion. Thus, the discussion on misogynistic themes is a relatively small part compared to the progressive gender roles BL dramas created. They actually have a lot of potential to improve.*

3: *Most BL dramas focus more on the love lines between the main characters rather than pushing the plot by belittling the females.*

4: *General female characters who do not have an emotional connection with the male protagonist will not make me feel very misogynistic.*

4.2.3 *Positive Female Roles and Misogyny are Intertwined — Depiction of Females Roles*

The misogyny in the media as broadly defined in literature: 1. Marginalising or stereotyping female characters; 2. There are absolutely no female characters. When I conveyed this to the interviewees, I found that, in fact, most of them still had more or less such a perception and agreed with it. In the questionnaire, half of the participants chose “the female portrayal in BL dramas is positive”. So, I combined this “positive portrayal” with the potential misogynistic attitudes, and these female viewers gave a more comprehensive description:

2: *Yeah, that makes sense. Women in BL are often supporting roles, and there may be no way to shape them to be solid and complete. However, being the facilitators of the story can only be described as normal characters, not negative ones.*

3: *Although the female characters are positive, most of them will be described as silently guarding and being gentle in the plots. Females are still the weak party in the feelings, maintaining the nature of conciliation in love.*

4: *I watched a lot of BL dramas, and it is undeniable that women will be marginalised in some of them, but (I feel that) female characters with independent development of the storyline will be an excellent part of the BL drama. For example, Ms Choko, in the Japanese drama *Ossan’s Love*, does not haunt and abandon herself in the face of marriage problems. She is a very mature and decent woman, telling the audience that even if divorced, staying independent still has many possibilities. This kind of positive role makes me feel inspired.*

5: *The portrayal of female characters in BL dramas is mixed. Some are very positive, and others are relatively simple and even a little stereotypical. They are not as diverse as the male characters.*

4.2.4 *More “heterosexual” and “top/bottom” settings reinforce stereotypes for the viewers than for female characters. — Comparative Perception on Gender Roles*

After discussing the above-detailed concepts, the interviewees had a relatively complete view of the perspective and female description of BL dramas. When asked whether BL dramas as a whole reinforce traditional gender norms, 80% of respondents talked about the sex role of characters. The participants explained in several ways. First, they thought there was an imbalance in the setting of the roles between the two male protagonists in BL dramas. For example, the “top” is portrayed as an aggressive playboy, and the “bottom” is shy and easily teased. Second, the informant mentioned that women are not really a “sex” in BL dramas but a form of social gender. For example, in a BL drama that has a very clear distinction between the dominant and submissive roles, the problem may be bigger in leading to a heterosexual matching of gender roles. Audiences would still see the weaker or more vulnerable party as “socially-gendered women”. Thus, this issue will be reinforcing gender stereotypes. More than one interviewee noted that BL dramas were still heterosexual works if the “top/bottom” settings were distinct and obvious.

5. Discussion

5.1 Comparison with existing literature

This section will integrate the findings and extant studies to focus directly on the study's objectives.

5.1.1 Gender roles interpreted from the perspectives BL dramas provide

First, regarding the queer representation in BL dramas, around 40 per cent of viewers did not comprehend this term. This perception can be reflected in the Japanese BL fans, and they claim that BL characters are different from queer and their “homo is not gay” (Ishida 2007b, p. 114, as cited in Fermin, 2013). However, Tian (2020) argued that BL should always be interpreted queerly since BL is a flexible space for expressing all aspects of non-straight cultural production and reception. Under this perspective, this study developed with all of the interviewees expressing that they perceived this genre as “queer”. The informants also considered that the queer relationships shown in BL dramas can help them have a clearer understanding of gender roles. These findings add to the study done by Welker (2022), who proposed that BL has the potential to raise awareness of gender issues and thus promote the liberation of gender and sexual expression for young female fans. BL is also queer (Lin, 2022; Welker, 2022) as it both breaks down gender norms and fosters defiance of those norms. The findings reveal similar opinions that viewers may begin to question traditional gender roles and norms when watching BL dramas, for BL dramas bring them a “queer” perspective in thinking about the male-male relationships and also the different roles that are played by the female characters. Their senses of different gender roles are broadened, and they may think more about the diversity of gender relations (Ho, 2022). The participants added further that BL dramas may be instructive for some young people who are exploring their sexuality.

To be more specific, the interviewees put forward a feeling described as a “conflict between appearance and hidden desires” or a “disharmony between social norms and personal identity” of the male-male relationships in BL dramas. That is, this taboo stems from the conflict between the outward appearance (conforming to traditional heterosexual norms in behaviours and appearance) with the unspoken queer subtext, creating an atmosphere of secrecy, tension and even “danger” because of the risk of social judgment or exclusion. This corresponds to Ge’s (2022) contention that the “hidden text” of BL or Danmei adaption works in China is the confidential enjoyment of romance between men, which runs counter to the larger social context. Because they know that the Chinese government’s official policy on sexual minorities is “not encouraging, not dis-encouraging and not promoting” (Ge, 2022, p. 1029), so under the censorship system, Chinese dramas can only vaguely describe boys love as “bromance”, and there are no relatively open BL dramas. In the content analysis done by Wong (2020), queer desire in BL media is used as an emotional potential to overcome China’s existing neoliberal inequalities, which is also called “emotional overcoming”. The findings in Chinese Gen Z females reflected a part of it with that queer representation in BL dramas is one of the most attractive points for them to oppose the heterosexual normative in Chinese society. For gender

orientation, even though the representation in BL dramas is still idealised to a certain degree (Jerome et al., 2022), ⅔ of the participants in this study acknowledged that BL dramas can help them gain knowledge about homosexuality. Moreover, they would like to see more BL dramas combining the whole LGBTQ+ community in the future.

Welker (2022, p. 11-12) addressed that queer dimension in BL is “not just of young female fans but even of cisgender heterosexual men who are not necessarily fans themselves.” The gender-inclusive BL accepts and explores the previously denied homosexual subjectivity while expressing the alternative subjectivity of women (Tian, 2020). Thus, to be more precisely oriented to the object of this study, the second point is the analysis of the findings of female perspectives, or the female “gaze”. As a genre that is female-oriented (Zhang, 2016), the perspectives of female audiences are more complex than solely queer but a larger gender issue. As mentioned earlier, De Beauvoir (2016) and Prentice (2022) explained a sense of repressed sentiment toward gender stereotypes, which are associated with inequalities in traditional social roles. The quantitative findings tell that BL dramas have somewhat to significantly brought about the awareness of gender equality for female viewers. Informants in interviews also emphasised that as a Chinese woman who was born and raised in a conservative social background, BL is breaking the traditional female roles by not centring on female characters. Their views recall the previous research by Zhang (2016), which found that gender relationships in BL embody a sense of equality and independence, resonating with the young generation’s desire for a new gender order. This new gender order corresponds to exploring pluralistic temperament (Carl Jung, 1991; Pagliassotti, 2008, as cited in Kwon, 2021). This study found that the reason why Chinese Gen Z women watch BL shows has a lot to do with the actors and characters, for example, the informant expressed picking the men she wanted to watch. It echoes Zhou et al. (2021) that women are more likely to reverse typical gender hierarchies and gendered romantic relationships by creating and watching male-male romances than through heterosexual romances. With the strong attention of women, BL presents the diversity of men for females to appreciate, and female characters are likewise no longer associated with stereotypical gender roles. According to the examination of BL narratives with reality by Wood (2006), women’s consumption of BL has shown their dissatisfaction with the fantasies offered by mainstream media and traditional heterosexuality. BL (manga) seems to project a more hopeful queer vision of love and desire. Similar findings are found in Sørensen’s (2024, p. 57) newest study, in which she argued that “this can be seen as an attempt to break traditional norms and expand male standards.” Allowing men to be portrayed differently from stereotypes is conducive to gender normalisation, and gender roles are no longer just “masculine” or “feminine”.

5.1.2 Gender roles interpreted from the depiction of females in BL dramas

From the first point of view, we can see that the female audience can occupy an active and dominant position in terms of perspective. BL genre and the media of dramas provide a place for women to release themselves and have the right to choose and “gaze”. However, it is

also heatedly debated by previous studies (Mizoguchi, 2015, as cited in Kim, 2022) that BL dramas are inherited with the essence of misogyny and should be abandoned by female consumers. According to the content analysis of the BL dramas by Garg and Yang (2023), female images in BL dramas are often stereotyped and limited. Besides, the depiction often revolves around screaming, obsessed fans, envious villains or conventional mothers. However, this is inconsistent with the findings of this study. The quantitative findings showed that participants commonly had a positive view of images of women but slightly lower awareness of misogyny, and there were some differences in their perceptions. Regarding the perception of the characteristic depiction of female characters, the audience is more tolerant of the negative portrayal than the active affirmation of the positive portrayal of women in BL dramas. This finding is not directly aligned with the previous study, but Nagaike (2015) made a similar attempt with gay people rather than young women, in which the viewers indeed perceived both positive or negative depictions of the roles that reflected their own gender identities in BL dramas. This situation was also reflected in the interviews, viewers perceived female portrayal as positive or normal in general but did not sense apparent negative portrayal. Among the participants, the minimum number of years of BL exposure was two years, and she had probably seen two to three BL dramas. The one with the most has joined the BL community for seven years and has seen dozens of BL dramas.

It is worth noting that these so-called positive depictions of women may be more focused on shaping the female character itself. One of the informants voiced that a positive depiction with an independent storyline of female characters would leave a deeper impression. She would be inspired and encouraged by these female roles, which are not traditionally performed in dramas. These female characters are well-developed in addition to paying attention to the major storyline of the male roles. The positive and powerful roles are becoming more prominent in females' view (Aoyama, 2013). This is also in response to the survey participants' belief that positive portrayals of women challenge traditional notions of gender.

Compared to Garg and Yang's (2023), which mainly focuses on the depiction of the female character setting itself, such as qualities and characteristics, there are other descriptions of the misogynistic attitude in BL drama based on the depiction of female role function, in other words, the aspects of "instrumentalising as mere objects" (Ge, 2020), "marginalised roles" (Zhang, 2016; Kim, 2022) and "few relevant female roles" (Pužar, 2023). The research conducted by Ge (2022) pointed out that women internalise misogyny while opposing heterosexual patriarchy. One manifestation of this was that these young female audiences showed great hostility to female characters and even actresses who destroy the relationship between the male protagonists, which makes the misogyny more obvious. Based on this issue, this study communicated with the participants regarding the function of female characters in the dramas, and they shared opinions similar to those of the previous pieces of literature. For example, they all agreed that the female portrayal in BL dramas is meant to move things along or as a supporting role in BL, there is no way to portray women completely. But unlike the scholars (Kim, 2022; Lin, 2022; Garg & Yang, 2023;) who hold misogynistic attitudes toward BL

dramas, my participants show more of a “dual ambivalence” (Ge, 2022) regarding this topic. The portrayal of female characters in BL dramas is mixed. They can be accepted by positively depicted but without a complete storyline because they are for plot-pushing purposes. These female characters can also function in other ways. Just as my interviewees also pointed out, the supportive role can be either male or female, so they will not feel compelled to be depicted as a woman. This response reminds me of Zhang’s (2016) study, which voiced that “A female figure in BL is villain first and then woman second.” Zhang (2016) also mentioned that in this regard, the absence or marginalised representation of women seems to help these viewers justify their right to stare at men. Thus, as my participants mostly recognise the innovative perspectives BL brings, they may be aware of misogynistic themes but still think that BL dramas are challenging gender norms.

5.1.3 Challenging or reinforcing gender norms?

In summary, to probe into the question of how do BL dramas challenge or reinforce existing gender norms, the answer is a combination of perspectives and portrayal of female characters. As Madill et al. (2022) revealed, BL has brought a paradox of gender roles, the first dimension is the direct misogynistic part of the absence or stereotyping of female roles. The second one is the idealised male relationship in BL shows. It sometimes reinforces the idea that only men can have pure love and understanding, which may indirectly devalue the position of women in relationships. The participants in the study did not think the same way because they extended a similar theoretical framework that Li (1998) put forward, “social gender norms, such as pregnancy and marriage, only constrain the heterosexual relationship” (p.106 -107). Many institutions in society are designed for heterosexuals, so whatever BL or GL are just carriers of breaking heterosexuality. As a kind of escape from reality, the pursuit of idealised love and entertainment thinking is more than the consideration of gender concepts (Madill et al., 2022). A more recent study by Valenti (2005) stated the same way that women enjoy watching BL because it is entertaining in a non-threatening way, free from the anxieties and problems that come with being a woman, such as pregnancy and social misogyny. Even if there is some issue related to the problems of women, the informants mentioned that they can simply just choose not to watch it. Besides, BL dramas have better impressions than other mediums like manga and literature. This can be part of the reason why the general perceptions of misogyny in BL dramas are not as high as the researcher’s image at first.

In other words, watching the stories of males can bring the sense of vicariousness female viewers feel when watching BL dramas. So, the negative female portrayal is overridden by domination and escapism (Zhang, 2016; Lin, 2022). BL fantasy offers fresh narratives, characters, struggles, and romantic themes that straight women know little about in real life (Kwon, 2021). The overall positive perspectives of the findings shown can consist of positive female traits but somewhat negative settings like instrumentalisation and marginalisation. The key is to acknowledge and understand these complexities, as Ge (2022) and Zhang (2016) have

put forward. The viewers believe in enjoying BL dramas, perhaps more than any other genre, stimulating critical thinking about relationship equality and gender diversity and promoting the attack on traditional notions of gender. I can see from the participants' responses that being aware of the link between misogyny and BL dramas does not mean denying the positive effects of BL dramas. The participants believed that the ideal or constructed world depicted by BL dramas was a way to counter or challenge traditional gender roles with innovative relationships (Zhao, 2014).

On the other hand, as an increasingly popular genre, it is undoubtedly BL dramas that still often reflect and replicate the ideological and emotional distribution of implicit heterosexuality and traditional patriarchy, so the vision of a true emancipation process for women still needs to be corrected (Pužar, 2023). For example, female characters are always portrayed negatively, and viewers may subconsciously accept these stereotypes (Kwon, 2021; Garg & Yang, 2023). The findings of this study were not completely and directly in line with such an attitude. Instead, the findings reveal that the Chinese Gen Z female viewers still maintained a more conservative and inclusive attitude towards misogyny in BL dramas. However, they talked about the comparative perception of gender roles, which is aligned with implicit heterosexuality and may reinforce gender norms. The discussion is shown in the unexpected findings section below. The relevant findings support that viewers' perception of female images and awareness of misogynistic attitudes are related to their belief that BL dramas challenge traditional gender norms. The significant correlation found from the quantitative method between these constructs suggests that viewers critically view gender issues in BL dramas by recognising both positive and negative elements while being more likely to view these shows as progressive regarding gender norms. This provides empirical evidence for the interconnectedness of perspectives and portrayal of females among the audience.

5.2 Implications of findings (unexpected findings)

As mentioned in 4.2.4 in the findings, implicit heterosexuality in BL dramas is found in the “top/bottom” (“seme-uke”) settings in BL dramas. This was not inspected scrupulously from the questionnaires or elaborated on well before the interviews. However, it was conveyed by several participants, which resonates with the ‘feminine’ portrayal of characters.

The participants considered the misogynistic attitudes were not obvious in the depiction of female characters themselves, but were one of the male protagonists being too “feminine”. There is a male or female bias in the BL drama setting, which makes it look like a heterosexual drama even though it is obviously a boys’ love show. Even male characters are socialised to be female because whether it’s in romantic relationships or sexes or in their social status, they are seen as “weak” and “gentle” males. This not only supports but also extends the study done by Zhou et al. (2021) that the seme-uke couples in BL fit into traditional heterosexual gender roles, as the top characters are mostly masculine and the bottom characters are mostly feminine. Zhou, Paul and Sherman also found that even though the androgynous of the male characters can be a

way of challenging gender roles, because of the negotiation of male and female traits, there is also no guarantee that relationships are truly equal and free from gender norms.

However, this setting is so popular and prevailing in BL culture explained that it has a market among female viewers. Some participants of this study also said that their friends are fans of the “seme-uke” type of BL dramas. The opinion of Nagakubo (in Blair, 2010, as cited in Zhou et al., 2018) was that female viewers tend to project themselves onto the uke characters as heterosexual fantasies. How to define the depiction of uke in relation to the depiction of females is subjective and a matter of opinion. This also provokes a future study point for further investigation.

5.3 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

One major limitation was that due to the restrictions of each platform (for example, Xiaohongshu.com cannot send the website by post, which will be banned), the link of the questionnaire cannot be directly opened to interested people, but the questionnaire needs to be sent through the active communication of both researcher and participants, which brings certain obstacles to the convenience of the survey. Secondly, since the questionnaire survey was conducted on the Internet, it cannot be guaranteed that all the respondents would be 100 per cent in line with the ideal survey population. However, in the questionnaire screening process, this study tried to control it and turn it into an effective database. As this study was a more conceptual and abstract one, questionnaires may not capture all the dimensions of a complex concept. In addition, participants were required to have a certain knowledge background. I think this complexity also explains that only a very small number of people with high school education or below participated in this study. In addition, responses to a single concept may be influenced by temporary emotions or specific circumstances, which are difficult to control, so this study adopts a mixed approach to echo the results from multiple perspectives.

Another limitation was that the number of women who agreed to be interviewed could not be evenly distributed, and the number was not large. This presents an obstacle to sample generalisation. With a larger sample size, the results of this study should be more generalizable and richer. So, the current study could serve as a pilot for further research. Since this study focused on Generation Z women in China, future researchers could consider expanding the scope to other gender audiences or from heterosexual and other non-heterosexual defined audience groups. From the interviews, there is actually a cognitive bias among the audience. That is, BL dramas seen by most viewers may be evaluated well because such dramas are more likely to be popular and attract people to watch them. Therefore, if there is a misogynistic tendency in the dramas, it may not be seen by people, resulting in the BL dramas that there is not too much negative evaluation bias.

However, I think that an intersectional approach to this more subjective subject also has certain benefits and neutralises these drawbacks. As can be found from this study, the results of the questionnaire survey are still relatively simple and single. In fact, respondents still have many

deeper opinions and different concerns worthy of careful consideration. A questionnaire survey can inform the whole situation and provide a certain convenience and entry point for in-depth research.

6. Conclusion

In this study, I raised a question about gender roles triggered by my personal viewing of BL dramas. Since gender roles are socially given concepts (Lobster, 2018), they relate to male, female and non-binary gender theories. Based on the theories, this study took “women” as the central point and focused on the “female perspective” and “female role” to explore the cognition and thinking of Chinese female BL viewers of Generation Z on the concept of gender roles in BL dramas. BL culture may provide new perspectives for females for the reformation of currently recognised gender roles while it may still keep the traditional stereotypes and show anti-feminist content. These inclusive perspectives are also represented by queer identity, which will be a complementary part of further exploring how BL dramas can challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms. The terms can be applied to specific individuals and larger systems, societies, or cultures by analysing whether BL dramas have been renovated to portray male media that “cater” to the female perspective.

BL culture has developed from the end of the last century to the present, has formed a mature and unique work style, and has also brought diversified fan culture. Generation Z Chinese women, through the development of the Internet and media, can watch male-dominated TV dramas with a female-centric perspective. Female viewers who are very familiar with and love BL culture believe that it can examine men with “subversive and voyeuristic eyes”. At the same time, females can free themselves from the patriarchal world and stereotypical heterosexual romance through alternative aesthetics and plots that are different from other genres in the dramas (Zhang, 2016). Similar views are mentioned in many literature reviews of BL culture. BL dramas satisfy the curiosity of some young women about male same-sex partnerships and sex in an intuitive way through the coordination of pictures, audio and other senses while breaking the traditional gender concept, allowing female viewers to project such desires and control subsequent rights (such as fan support behaviour and secondary creation behaviour). With the help of BL dramas, women can become the masters of this idealised world.

But everything has its own two sides, and BL drama is no exception. This study pointed out that BL dramas do challenge traditional norms in terms of female perspective and part of female roles, but the infiltration of “misogyny” has not been avoided. Its expression lies in the fact that female characters are always in the supporting position in BL dramas. Although they can shape positive character traits, they are easily marginalised and ignored, or they are still at a disadvantage. Most participants believed that BL still focused on male-male relationships, and there was still much room for improvement in the arrangement of female characters. In fact, in the specific examples given by the participants, we have seen successful female characters with

both positive and independent storylines appear in BL dramas, and these roles would bring a deep impression on female audiences. This allows BL dramas to balance different gender stereotypes and jointly break the traditional norms of men and women. In addition, such overly idealised BL stories may beautify the image of men or fuel women's obsession with homosexuality. These reinforced gender and sexual stereotypes and biases.

Fortunately, female viewers in this study could still distinguish between reality and drama, and their "sense of engagement" was not as strong as some articles suggest. BL series can still enhance the gender awareness of the young female generation and create a certain effectiveness. Darling-Wolf (2003) argued that queer culture may promote a shift in female influence in China in the future. The manifestation of gender norms and gender stereotypes in BL dramas directly or indirectly affects the audience's awareness and internalisation of the contents of these norms. Audience perceptions can also influence how BL plays are created and received. Therefore, presenting diverse and innovative BL dramas still leaves much room for development. Growing awareness of and demand for gender equality and positive gender representations could drive future developments towards challenging norms and reducing content that triggers misogynistic thinking.

Finally, as this study revealed that some of the male characters in BL dramas have traditional female characteristics, it may also affect the female audience's gender role awareness. Because the setting of "clearly distinguished seme/top and uke/bottom" will still give the audience a "heterosexual" feeling, and the "uke" party happens to have some female role norms. It would be more complex and deeper than the female character itself because this scene is related to BL's sex situation. Future BL drama researchers can further study the paradox and significance of the setting of BL emergence for female audiences or other audiences.

References

- Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 39-43.
- Aoyama, T. (2013). BL (Boys' Love) Literacy: Subversion, Resuscitation, and Transformation of the (Father's) Text. *US-Japan Women's Journal*, 43(1), 63-84.
- Ball, H. L. (2019). Conducting online surveys. *Journal of human lactation*, 35(3), 413-417.
- Baudinette, T., Bunyavejchewin, P., Fermin, T. A. S., Jacobs, K., Lai, H. H., Dredge, K. N. B. C., ... & Wei, W. (2022). *Queer transfigurations: Boys love media in Asia*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Bem, S. L. (1993). *The lenses of gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*. Yale University Press.
- Best, D. L., & Williams, J. E. (2001). Gender and culture. *The handbook of culture and psychology*, 195-219.
- Blair, M. M. (2010). She should just die in a ditch: Fan reactions to female characters in boys' love manga. In A. Levi, M. McHarry, & D. Pagliassotti (Eds.), *Boys' love manga: Essays on the sexual ambiguity and cross-cultural fandom of the genre* (pp. 159–176). Jefferson: McFarland.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). *Thematic analysis*. American Psychological Association.
- Callegaro M., Lozar Manfreda K., Vehovar V. (2015). *Web survey methodology*. London: Sage Publications. Cited in Ball, H. L. (2019). Conducting online surveys. *Journal of human lactation*, 35(3), 413-417.
- Chen (2011). Research on the Dissemination of Thai TV Series in China (Doctoral dissertation, Chongqing University). [泰国电视剧在中国的传播研究] In Gu, J. (2020). Chinese fans' attitude towards Thai boy's love tv dramas, boy love tv actors and their intention to travel to Thailand.
- Chen, Z. T. (2021). Poetic presumption of animation, comic, game and novel in a post-socialist China: A case of a popular video-sharing social media Bilibili as heterotopia. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 21(2), 257-277.

- Cilliers, E. J. (2017). The challenge of teaching generation Z. *PEOPLE International Journal of Social Sciences*.
- Correa, T., Hinsley, A. W., & De Zuniga, H. G. (2010). Who interacts on the Web?: The intersection of users' personality and social media use. *Computers in human behavior*, 26(2), 247-253.
- Creswell, J. W., Klassen, A. C., Plano Clark, V. L., & Smith, K. C. (2011). Best practices for mixed methods research in the health sciences. *Bethesda (Maryland): National Institutes of Health, 2013*, 541-545.
- Damian, F. (2023). Gen Z viewers watch 3 times as much streaming content as live television. Retrieved from <https://www.thecurrent.com/gen-z-viewers-watch-3-times-streaming-content-live-television-ctv>
- Darling-Wolf, F. (2003). Male bonding and female pleasure: Refining masculinity in Japanese popular cultural texts. *Popular Communication*, 1(2), 73-88.
- De Beauvoir, S. (2016). The second sex. In *Social Theory Re-Wired* (pp. 367-377). Routledge.
- Esmonde, K., Cooky, C., & Andrews, D. L. (2018). "That's not the only reason I'm watching the game": Women's (hetero) sexual desire and sports fandom. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 42(6), 498-518.
- Feng, H., & Luo, X. (2023). Boy's love drama exposure and attitudes toward same-sex relationships: Applying a moderated mediation model in the Chinese context. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 16(2), 168-185.
- Garg, D., & Yang, X. (2023). Beyond a queer utopia: interrogating misogyny in transnational boys love media. *Continuum*, 37(6), 770-782.
- Ge, L. (2022). Dual ambivalence: The Untamed Girls as a counterpublic. *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(5), 1021-1033.
- Ghanem, M. (2023). "heartstopper" Season 2 review: Netflix series returns more queer and joyous than ever. Retrieved from <https://www.thewrap.com/heartstopper-season-2-review-netflix-joe-locke-kit-connor/>
- Gu, J. (2020). Chinese fans' attitude towards Thai boy's love tv dramas, boy love tv actors and their intention to travel to Thailand.

- Guo (2019). Information construction of rotten women: A case study of the community of rotten women in Pulang [unpublished master's thesis]. [腐女的資訊建構: 以曠浪的腐女社群為例.] Shixin University. In Huang, S. Y., & Chiao, H. (2022). How Much Do You Know About Fujoshi: The Discussion of Psychological Needs of Fujoshi from the Feminist Perspective
- Ho, M. H. S. (2022). "Queer" Media in Inter-Asia: Thinking Gender and Sexuality Transnationally. In *Media in Asia* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 226–238). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003130628-18>
- Hasan, N. (2020). Changing Gender Role Portrayal in Media: Survey-Based Study.
- Hu, T., Jin, J., & Liao, L. (2023). A Transmedia 'Third' Space: The Counterculture of Chinese Boys' Love Audio Dramas. *Asian Studies Review*, 47(4), 836-854.
- Huang, S. Y., & Chiao, H. (2022). How Much Do You Know About Fujoshi: The Discussion of Psychological Needs of Fujoshi from the Feminist Perspective. *Taiwan Journal of Consultative Psychology*, 10(1), 51-78 <https://www.airitilibrary.com/Article/Detail?DocID=P20121015004-N202301030028-00003>
- Ishida, H., 2007a. Gei to kyōkan suru joseitachi. *Yuriika*, 39(7), pp. 47-55. As cited in Fermin, T. A. S. (2013). Appropriating Yaoi and boys love in the Philippines. *electronic journal of contemporary japanese studies*.
- Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field methods*, 18(1), 3-20.
- Jerome, C., Ahmad Hadzmy, A. J. B., & Su Hie, T. (2022). "I Can See Myself in Them, but They Are Not Me": Asian Boys' Love (BL) Drama and Gay Male Viewers. *Social Sciences*, 11(4), 163.
- Ji, S., (2016) *Audience Analysis for Chinese Slash Network Play*. (Thesis for Professional Master Degree, Liaoning University).
- Jung, C. G. (1991). *Psyche and symbol: A selection from the writings of CG Jung*. Princeton University Press.
- Kast, V., & Whitcombe, B. (2012). Anima/animus. In *The handbook of Jungian psychology* (pp. 113-129). Routledge.

- Kaufman, M. (1994). Men, feminism, and men's contradictory experiences of power. *Theorizing masculinities*, 5, 142.
- Kendall, E. (2024, June 20). misogyny. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/misogyny>
- Kennedy, J. J. (2009). Maintaining popular support for the Chinese Communist Party: The influence of education and the state-controlled media. *Political Studies*, 57(3), 517-536.
- Kwon, J. (2021). The past, present, and future of boys love (BL) cultures in East Asia. In *Transnational convergence of East Asian pop culture* (pp. 96-112). Routledge.
- Larson, E. A. (2000). Mothering: Letting go of the past ideal and valuing the real. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 54(3), 249-251.
- Lavin, M., Yang, L., & Zhao, J. J. (Eds.). (2017). *Boys' love, cosplay, and androgynous idols: Queer fan cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*. Hong Kong University Press.
- Li, L., (2022). *A study on the gender construction of tanbi elements in current chinese network dramas*. (Master dissertation, Ningxia University).
- Li, Y. (1998). *Subculture of homosexuality*. Be Jing: Daily China Publications.
- Li, Y. (2009). *Japanese boy-love manga and the global fandom: A case study of Chinese female readers* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Liang, S. (2022). Chinese female desire, gaze, and identity construction: A case study of "Boys Love." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 28(3), 317-336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2022.2098556>
- Liao, S. (2019). "# IAmGay# What about you?": Storytelling, discursive politics, and the affective dimension of social media activism against censorship in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 21.
- Lin, J. (2022). *A Qualitative Exploration of Discourses in Fan Community, /r/boyslove*.
- Lorber, J. (2018). The social construction of gender. In *Inequality in the 21st Century* (pp. 347-352). Routledge.
- Louie, K. (2012). Popular Culture and Masculinity Ideals in East Asia, with Special Reference to China. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 71(4), 929-943. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23357427>

- Madill, A., Zhao, Y., & Chao, T. Y. (2022). History and research review of contemporary female-oriented male-male erotica (boys' love) in Chinese-speaking regions. *Project Resilience*.
- Manuel, S. L., 2009. Becoming the homovoyeur: consuming homosexual representation in Queer as Folk. *Social Semiotics*, 19(3), pp. 275–291. In Morikawa, M. (2022). The Effective Paratextual Messages of the Japanese Gay TV Drama Series Oosan's Love. *Expert Journal of Marketing*, 10(1).
- Marte-Marie, W. K., Gabrielsen, A. K., Falch, A. L., & Dag-Gunnar Stubberud. (2017). Intensive care nursing students' perceptions of simulation for learning confirming communication skills: A descriptive qualitative study. *Intensive & Critical Care Nursing*, 42, 97-104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iccn.2017.04.005>
- McLelland, M. (2000). Is there a Japanese'gay identity'?. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 2(4), 459-472.
- McLelland, M. (2005). The world of Yaoi: The internet, censorship and the global 'boys'love'fandom. *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 23(1), 61-77.
- Mizoguchi, A. (2003). Male-male romance by and for women in Japan: A history and the subgenres of" yaoi" fictions. *US-Japan Women's Journal*, 49-75.
- Mizoguchi, A. (2008). *Reading and living Yaoi: Male-male fantasy narratives as women's sexual subculture in Japan*. University of Rochester. In Zsila, A., & Demetrovics, Z. (2017). Redrawing the Boundaries of Gender and Sexuality: A Psychological Reconceptualisation of the Boys' Love Phenomenon. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, 9, 34-49.
- Mizoguchi, A. (2015). BL shinkaron: bōizurabu ga shakai wo ugokasu. *Tokyo: Ohta Shuppan*. In Kim, H. (2022). Rethinking the Meaning of Boys Love in an Era of Feminism. *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*, 92-107.

- Mohajan, H. K. (2020). Quantitative research: A successful investigation in natural and social sciences. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 9(4), 50-79. doi:<https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v9i4.679>
- Morikawa, M. (2022). The Effective Paratextual Messages of the Japanese Gay TV Drama Series *Ossan's Love*. *Expert Journal of Marketing*, 10(1).
- Morse, J. M. (1991). Approaches to qualitative-quantitative methodological triangulation. *Nursing research*, 40(2), 120-123.
- Nakajima, A. (1991) *Communication fuzen shougoukun* [The Syndrome of Communication Failure]. *Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo*. In Zsila, A., & Demetrovics, Z. (2017). Redrawing the Boundaries of Gender and Sexuality: A Psychological Reconceptualisation of the Boys' Love Phenomenon. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, 9, 34-49.
- Ogawa, S. (2017). *Producing gayness: The 1990s "gay boom" in Japanese media* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas).
- Ogbonna, D. C. C., & Lokawua, M. (2017). Media prejudice against women: impact on gender narrative". *International Journal of Development Research*, 7(09), 15115-15118.
- Pagliassotti, D. (2008). Better than romance? Japanese BL manga and the subgenre of male/male romantic fiction. In Kwon, J. (2021). The past, present, and future of boys love (BL) cultures in East Asia. In *Transnational convergence of East Asian pop culture* (pp. 96-112). Routledge.
- Prentice, D. A., & Carranza, E. (2002). What women and men should be, shouldn't be, are allowed to be, and don't have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. *Psychology of women quarterly*, 26(4), 269-281.
- Pužar, A. (2023). " BL"(Boy Love)," GL"(Girl Love) and Female Communities of Practice and Affect in South Korea. *Družboslovne razprave*, 39(102), 63-84.
- Quynh, D. N. X. (2022). *Exploring the Fujōshi Gaze in Contemporary Boys Love Manga: An Approach from the Perspective of Laura Mulvey's Feminist Film Theory* (Doctoral dissertation, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University).
- Reddy, V. P. S. (2023). The past, present and potential future of Thailand's "Boys' love" series. Retrieved from <https://gobserver.net/5612/culture/the-past-present-and-potential-future-of-thailands-boys-love-series/>

- Richardson-Self, L. (2018). Woman-Hating: On misogyny, sexism, and hate speech. *Hypatia*, 33(2), 256-272.
- Schrock, D., & Schwalbe, M. (2009). Men, masculinity, and manhood acts. *Annual review of sociology*, 35, 277-295.
- Seifert, L. (2019). *Gender Differences in the patterns of Video-on-Demand Watching: An Experience Sampling Study* (Bachelor's thesis, University of Twente).
- Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., & José Santos, S. (2021). The new feminist frontier on community-based learning. Popular feminism, online misogyny, and toxic masculinities. *European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 12(2), 165-177.
- Smith, B. (2007). *The psychology of sex and gender*. Boston: Pearson / Allyn & Bacon.
- Singh, A.P., Dangmei, J. (2016). Understanding the generation Z: the future workforce. *South-Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3(3), 1–5. In Dolot, A. (2018). The characteristics of Generation Z. *E-mentor*, 74(2), 44-50.
- Song, C., Xie, H., Alizai, A., & Chatterjee, J. S. (2022). “I did not know I was gay”: Sexual identity development and fluidity among married tongzhi in China. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 24(12), 1681-1694.
- Sørensen, M. H. (2024). *"BL IS LIFE" A qualitative study exploring Norwegian boys' love readership and fan community* (Master's thesis, NTNU).
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Femininity/masculinity. *Encyclopedia of sociology*, 2, 997-1005.
- Sultana, A. (2012). Patriarchy and women's subordination: a theoretical analysis. *Arts faculty journal*, 4, 1-18.
- thequeenofsastiel. (n.d.). Why a big industry in many Asian countries for gay romance shows but none in the US, Canada, or UK? [Tumblr post]. Retrieved from <https://absolutebl.tumblr.com>
- Tian, X. (2020). Homosexualizing “boys love” in China: Reflexivity, genre transformation, and cultural interaction. *Prism: Theory and Modern Chinese Literature*, 17(1), 104-126.
- Toffoletti, K., & Mewett, P. (2012). “Oh yes, he is hot”: Female football fans and the sexual objectification of sportsmen's bodies. In *Sport and its female fans* (pp. 99-114). Routledge.

- Ueno Chizuko. (2015). *Disgust against Women (The Feeling of Disgust against Females in Japan)* (Chinese). Shanghai Sanlian Culture Publishing House.
- Ward, L. M., & Grower, P. (2020). Media and the development of gender role stereotypes. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology, 2*, 177-199.
- Welker, J. (2006). Beautiful, borrowed, and bent: “Boys’ Love” as girls’ love in Shojo manga. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 31*(3), 841-870.
- Welker, J. (2011). Flower tribes and female desire: Complicating early female consumption of male homosexuality in shōjo manga. *Mechademia, 6*(1), 211-228. In Zsila, A., & Demetrovics, Z. (2017). Redrawing the Boundaries of Gender and Sexuality: Psychological Reconceptualisation of the Boys’ Love Phenomenon. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media, 9*, 34-49.
- Welker, J. (Ed.). (2022). *Queer transfigurations: Boys love media in Asia*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Wilson, C. (2013). *Interview techniques for UX practitioners: A user-centered design method*. Newnes.
- Wong, A. K. (2020). Towards a queer affective economy of boys’ love in contemporary Chinese media. *Continuum, 34*(4), 500-513.
- Wood, A. 2006. “‘Straight’ Women, Queer Texts: Boy-Love Manga and the Rise of a Global Counterpublic.” *Women’s Studies: Quarterly, 34* (1/2): 394–414.
- Xu, Y., & Yang, L. (2013). Forbidden love: incest, generational conflict, and the erotics of power in Chinese BL fiction. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, 4*(1), 30-43.
- Yao, L. (2019, February). *Inside celebrity marketing in China: Males endorsing lipsticks* [Post] LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/inside-celebrity-marketing-china-males-endorsing-lipsticks-linda-yao>
- Zeng, (2021). Is it "misogynistic"? Three steps forward and two steps back. [耽美作品“厌女”吗？前进三步又倒退两步的迂回式探索] The Paper. https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_12276717
- Zhang, C. (2016). Loving Boys Twice as Much: Chinese Women’s Paradoxical Fandom of “Boys’ Love” Fiction. *Women’s Studies in Communication, 39*(3), 249–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2016.1190806>

- Zhou, E. L. (2017). Dongfang Bubai, online fandom, and the gender politics of a legendary queer icon in post-Mao China. *Boys' love, cosplay, and androgynous idols: Queer Fan cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*, 111-127. In Ng, E., & Li, X. (2020). A queer “socialist brotherhood”: The Guardian web series, boys’ love fandom, and the Chinese state. *Feminist Media Studies*, 20(4), 479-495.
- Zhou, Y., Paul, B., & Sherman, R. (2018). Still a hetero-gendered world: A content analysis of gender stereotypes and romantic ideals in Chinese boy love stories. *Sex Roles*, 78, 107-118.
- Zhou, Y., Liu, T., Yan, H. Y., Paul, B., & Wang, Y. (2021). A relational equality bias: Women’s narrative engagement in reading Chinese BL. *international Journal of Communication*, 15, 22.
- Zou, S., (2022) “When a Subculture Goes Pop: Platforms, Mavericks, and Capital in the Production of “Boys’ Love” Web Series in China”, *Media Industries* 9(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.471>
- Zsila, Á. (2017). The boys’ love phenomenon: A literature review. *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*.
- Zsila, A., & Demetrovics, Z. (2017). Redrawing the Boundaries of Gender and Sexuality: A Psychological Reconceptualisation of the Boys’ Love Phenomenon. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, 9, 34-49.

Appendix A: Questionnaire (English Version)

Questionnaire about Chinese Gen Z women's engagement with overseas Boys' Love (BL) dramas

Thank you for participating in this survey about Chinese Gen Z women's engagement with overseas Boys' Love (BL) dramas. Before you start, please review the following information to ensure that you understand the purpose of the study and your participation.

This study focuses on the engagement of Chinese Generation Z females with overseas BL dramas. **Please ensure that you are a Chinese Generation Z female (Age 18 to 29)** before you start. This study seeks to examine how these dramas challenge or reinforce existing gender norms, stereotypes, and issues related to misogyny within Chinese society. This survey is part of the study that aims to understand your perceptions and experiences regarding the portrayal of gender roles, identities, and the intersection of these themes within BL dramas.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will provide valuable contributions to our research.

Your responses will be anonymous, and no personally identifiable information will be collected. The data gathered will be used only for academic purposes and will contribute to a broader understanding of the research topic. Data will be securely stored and the findings will be presented in aggregate form to ensure that individual participants cannot be identified.

There are no direct benefits or significant risks associated with participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute valuable insights into the field of BL culture and gender dynamics.

By proceeding with the questionnaire, you indicate that you have read and understood the above consent information and agree to participate in this study.

I appreciate your honest and thoughtful responses.

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please feel free to contact me at shuyi-zhang.23@ucl.ac.uk.

Consent Information:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet of the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and what is expected of me.

2. I understand that all personal information will be kept confidential, and the researcher will make every effort to ensure that I am not identified. I understand that the data collected in this study will be stored in an anonymous and secure manner. I can't be identified in any publication.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.

4. I consent to the storage of my data. I understand the information will be kept safe. I understand that all data will be stored in accordance with the terms of the UCL Data Protection Office.

- I consent to the above and begin the survey.
- I do not want to participate.

Section 1: Demographics

1. Age:

- 18-20
- 21-23
- 24-26
- 27-29

2. Occupation:

- Student
- Employed
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Other (Please specify): _____

3. Education Level:

- Primary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate

- Other (Please specify): _____

Section 2: Viewing Habits

4. How often do you watch Boys' Love (BL) dramas?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Occasionally
- Rarely

5. What are your preferred platforms for watching BL dramas?

- Streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix, Iqiyi)
- Social media (e.g., YouTube, Bilibili, TikTok)
- Downloaded content (Subtitle Translation Groups)
- Other (Please specify): _____

6. Which foreign BL series do you prefer?

- Western
- Thai
- Japanese
- Korean
- Other countries or regions

7. How many BL series have you watched in the past year?

- 10 and more
- 7-9
- 4-6
- 1-3
- I did not finish the whole one

Section 3: Contents of BL Dramas

8. What are the most significant factors that attract you to watch BL dramas? (Choose a maximum of three)

- The BL culture fan enjoys the different perspectives BL brings
- The actors (Looks, acting skills, charisma)
- The characters of drama (development or fan of original works)
- The themes explored in BL dramas (e.g., love, struggle, acceptance)
- My friend recommended me to watch
- Quality of production (e.g., cinematograph, storytelling)
- The show has become a hot topic on social media such as Weibo
- Watch them for no particular reason
- Other (please specify): _____

9. How do you perceive the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas overall?

- Very positive
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Very negative
- Not sure

10. In '2gether: The Series' (2020), the character Pam is depicted as a jealous ex-girlfriend who tries to win back her ex-boyfriend, Sarawat, despite knowing he is in a relationship with another man. Do you think this portrayal of Pam shows stereotypical themes or attitudes?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, somewhat
- Neutral
- No, not much
- No, not at all



11. In 'Bad Buddy Series' (2021), Ink is a confident and ambitious character who is also strong. She consistently encourages those around her while actively pursuing her own goals and aspirations. Do you think this portrayal is positive and non-stereotypical?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, somewhat
- Neutral
- No, not much
- No, not at all



12. Have you ever heard of misogyny? Do you ever associate it with BL dramas?

- Yes, I have heard of misogyny, and I often associate it with BL dramas.
- Yes, I have heard of misogyny, and I sometimes associate it with BL dramas.
- Yes, I have heard of misogyny, but I do not associate it with BL dramas.
- No, I have never heard of misogyny.
- I'm not sure what misogyny is.

13. Have you ever noticed misogynistic attitudes or themes in BL dramas?

- Yes, frequently
- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, occasionally
- No, not much
- No, never

14. Has watching BL dramas made you more aware of issues related to gender equality?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, somewhat
- Neutral
- No, not much
- No, not at all

15. Have you heard the term 'queer' before?

- Yes
- No

16. If yes, do you view the leading actors in BL dramas as queer characters?

- Always
- Often
- Occasionally
- Not much
- Never

17. Do you think the BL dramas challenge traditional gender norms? (e.g. character design of traditional gender norms: Men are often depicted as strong leaders and problem-solvers, while women are typically shown as nurturing and supportive figures.)

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, somewhat
- Neutral

- No, not really
- No, not at all

18. How do you feel about the intersection of queer representation and the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas? (Select the one that best describes your opinion)

- It improves representation for all genders.
- It mainly focuses on male-male relationships, and there is positive room for improvement in how female characters are portrayed alongside queer.
- I don't feel strongly either way about the intersection of queer representation and the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas.
- I feel that while queer representation is generally positive, the portrayal of female characters often lacks depth or marginalises female characters further.
- I believe the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas is often overshadowed by queer representation and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes.
- It doesn't affect female representation.
- Other (please specify): _____

19. Do relationships in BL dramas influence how you define your own gender identities?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, somewhat
- Neutral
- No, not much
- Not at all

20. Can you provide examples of BL dramas that you believe reinforce traditional gender stereotypes? (e.g. one partner (typically associated with masculinity) is the protector, and the other (associated with femininity) is the protected.)

Section 4: Overall Experience and Preferences

21. Which statement best describes your opinion on the growing trend of BL dramas? (Select all the options that best apply to you.)

- They are innovative TV series themes.
- They help understand homosexuality better.

- They have an influence on the gender cognition of young viewers and provide positive role models for viewers who are exploring their own identities.
- They help to question and challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes.
- They are a form of escapism from daily life.
- They are becoming over-saturated and repetitive.
- There will be fewer female viewers.
- They exclude women and are a form of misogyny.
- They don't reflect real social issues.
- They are just for fun and entertainment.
- Other (please specify): ____

22. How would you rate BL dramas compared to other genres you watch in overall perception from 1: Much better to 5: Much worse?

23. Would you like to see more BL dramas incorporate themes of gender norms and LGBTQ+ issues?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, somewhat
- Neutral
- No, not really
- No, not at all

24. Would you be interested in more BL dramas that explore non-romantic relationships (e.g., friendships, family)?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, somewhat
- Neutral
- No, not really
- No, not at all

25. How would you rate your overall experience watching BL dramas?

- Excellent

- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very Poor

26. What improvements would you like to see in future BL dramas? (Select all that apply)

- 1 Better storytelling
- 2 More diverse characters
- 3 More positive portrayal of female characters, although not the main character
- 4 Higher production quality
- 5 More realistic portrayals of relationships
- 6 Addressing social issues
- Other (please specify): ____

Section 5: Additional Feedback

Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up interview to share more about your experiences with BL dramas?

- Yes, I'm interested!
- No, thank you.

Would you like to provide any additional comments or suggestions regarding your engagement with overseas BL dramas?

- Yes, I would like to leave my comments.
- No, thank you.

Thank you for your participation! Your answers have been recorded. Your responses and insights will be invaluable in helping us understand the impact of BL dramas on female viewers of Chinese Generation Z.

Appendix B: Example of SPSS Data Analysis

Nonparametric Correlations

			Correlations		
			Q9	Q13	Q17
Spearman's rho	Q9	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.118	.267*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.271	.011
		N	89	89	89
	Q13	Correlation Coefficient	.118	1.000	.284**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.271	.	.007
		N	89	89	89
	Q17	Correlation Coefficient	.267*	.284**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.007	.
		N	89	89	89

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix C: Interview Outline (English version)

Before we begin:

- a. Ensure confidentiality and anonymity. (Two forms of informed consent: consent form and information form for participants)
- b. Record interviews with consent (if applicable).

Overall survey:

1. How long have you been watching BL series?
2. What first attracted you to BL dramas?
3. Have you considered the new perspective of gender roles can be one of the reasons you want to watch BL episodes? (for example, the common "male gaze" in society are transformed into "female gaze" in BL dramas; Male characters in the dramas can also exhibit traits that are traditionally considered feminine; Romantic relationships in BL dramas can be based on equality and mutual respect; Normalisation of same-sex relations, etc.)
4. Do you think BL dramas reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms by providing a new female perspective?

Female characters and misogyny:

5. How do you view the portrayal of female characters in BL dramas as positive or negative? Is this consistent with or different from other types of web dramas you watch?
6. Do you think BL dramas reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms in portraying these kinds of female characters? (Can you share an example?)
7. Have you noticed any misogynistic attitudes or themes in BL? (Most definitions: 1. Will marginalise or stereotype female roles; 2. There are absolutely no female characters; considered as misogynistic in BL dramas.) Have you had similar thoughts while watching BL dramas?
8. Do you think these misogynistic attitudes make BL dramas reinforce traditional gender stereotypes? (Note: The definition of “misogynistic attitudes” varies from person to person, such as the lack of female characters, can also be understood as a way for women to “escape reality” with the help of BL dramas, which provide female viewers with a safer and more private way to explore these topics without facing social scrutiny and pressure directly. Instead, it’s a one-sided struggle against sexual stereotypes. But it is also perceived by people that BL is the product of misogyny. You can talk about your own ideas.
9. Do you think there is any overlap between these misogynistic situations and the depiction of female characters in BL? (E.g. female characters may be portrayed positively, but mostly as supporting roles to further a male-centric narrative, thereby inadvertently reinforcing attitudes of misogyny. It’s also possible that misogyny and the portrayal of female characters “go hand in hand.”)
10. If you sense misogynistic themes, are you willing to continue watching these BL dramas even if you like the actors, the quality, or other factors?
11. Is it possible that the content of BL dramas has potentially influenced your perception of gender attitudes and biases? (to better understand how misogyny is represented in media products, to understand the complexity and diversity of female characters in different contexts, or solely care more about drama and entertainment than it does about social issues)
12. What female characters would you like to see more of in BL dramas?

Queer representation

13. Do you think BL dramas accurately portray homosexual relationships and issues?
14. Do you think that watching BL dramas to learn about the representation of homosexuality has given you a clearer understanding of gender roles?

Ending and thanks again for the participants' time and insights.

Appendix D: Example of Transcript (Translated by translation software from Chinese to English)

(Speaker 0: Interviewer; Speaker 1: Interviewee)

Speaker 0:

Welcome to today's interview, and, uh, we signed the informed consent form, and please check the information sheet for the participants, and. This interview is going to be anonymous, and you're not going to say anything about yourself. Is that clear?

Speaker 1:

OK Understand

Speaker 0:

OK, so let's get started. Ok, the first question is how long have you been watching bl shows or being exposed to BL culture?

Speaker 1:

Probably BL culture should be around the fifth grade of primary school, and then there are classmates around, that was, they had introduced to me, so I probably began to know. But watching BL shows was probably 3-4 years ago.

Speaker 0:

Well. What factors do you think initially attracted you to BL shows?

Speaker 1:

In the beginning, I was recommended by a friend. She recommended me, which drama she thought was good, and then recommended me to watch it, and then it is in spare time at first, and then it was used to kill time, maybe the plot was good, or I got in touch with the culture in this area, and then. There were also familiar actors, or, in other words, my favourite CP was in the show, and then I started watching the BL dramas.

Speaker 0:

Ok, got it. Have you ever considered that the new perspective BL dramas give you is one of the reasons you want to watch BL shows? For example, the male gaze Angle commonly seen in the society is actually transformed into a female gaze Angle in the BL, and then the male characters in bl dramas can also appear these characteristics traditionally considered female, and bl dramas will also show some equal or mutual respect love relationships, or the same-sex relationship presented by bl dramas. These can be a new perspective on a gender character, so do you think this new perspective will be a reason for you to watch bl series?

Speaker 1:

I think the question is yes, but I just don't think it's possible to generalize, because I think for each audience, that's 1,000 Hamlets in 1,000 people, and I think everyone has her own favorite, which is the character, the setting of the character, or the characteristics of that character can be, not necessarily, both sides, For example, one party can show feminine characteristics, and then say that both sides have obvious masculine characteristics, in this way, for example, I have a friend around me who likes to watch bl drama, or the CP she likes, is a male with the traditional sense of feminine characteristics, such as tenderness, or if you say negative words, The quotation marks may be a little feminine, that is, he may be more delicate in this way. But my personal favorite feature is double A, that is, each other is a stronger side, that is, both sides. In this relationship, I like them because they are based on a relationship of mutual respect and equality. I think it is a healthy relationship that I look forward to. These characters are all based on the fact that both characters are in a relationship of mutual respect and absolute equality, because I think either way. Relationships, whether gay, straight or any other form of relationship, can develop into a healthy relationship if mutual respect is the premise.

Speaker 0:

I understand, because I actually like to watch it myself, it is double A, I think it is the kind, it is just like you said that. One side may be A little feminine, this I think is possible to look at that feeling, may not be as strong as double A BL feeling, you will have this feeling?

Speaker 1:

I would, because I think. It is my own personal idea, I think if you give a role, particularly strong so-called is the traditional sense of female characteristics, it is actually the core of his role. I personally think that he's still, the author is still interpreting this character in a way that is traditionally heterosexual.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, OK. Got it. Do you think bl dramas in general reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms by providing a female perspective?

Speaker 1:

I feel as if the two aspects are different plays, as if they both have the potential to strengthen or challenge, because I can think of examples of both sides, such as the plays I have seen. Wait a minute. Are you talking about male characters or female characters?

Speaker 0:

It's just that the whole thing is for your perception.

Speaker 1:

Well, as just mentioned, maybe he has a role set that one side is weak and the other is strong, as we just said, as we both agree, maybe he is still based on one kind of need. The so-called combination of strong women and weak men to interpret this role, and then, for example, marginalizing the female role, there may be some women will be shaped into a is. Miserably fall in love with the image of gay, and then he will be like the traditional sense of female characters. Although the female characters are positive, most of them will be described as silently guarding and being gentle in the plots. Females are still the weak party in the feelings, maintaining the nature of conciliation in love. BL may challenge this traditional psychological norm, for example, like the double A we just mentioned, and then it is not based on the idea that I need A side A side O to rationalize this relationship, and in terms of female roles, she may become a good friend around them, that is, she does not participate in this relationship, and then acts as a bystander. Or rather. No, no, no, no, I think about it, just as a visitor, and she probably doesn't have a lot of the qualities that are traditionally supposed to be given to women, so...

Speaker 0:

I see, for example, there may be some relationships that are divided into this, that are more distinct, and then those female characters in this show may become that there may be A competition with the thin side of the feeling that yes, but if it's double A, It seems that the female role in the bl drama set by double A is more like it can be can be the perspective of the audience to fan the couple.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, yeah, that's right, and then he could be. Not every character has long hair, and then it's very fairy, and then it's a very, very weak, what's that, what's that word? Weak, and then it's pathetic, and she may have short hair, like playing soccer with the hero.

Speaker 0:

It really is. Because the one I watched was the Thai drama Bad Buddy Series that I liked very much, and then it was this double A setting, and then the female characters in it were another one, that is, the female characters in them had their own story line, that is, it was a lesbian couple. So it has double A, the main line is a double A BL, and the secondary line is a lesbian pair. And then there would be no involvement with each other's feelings which is, yes, I think the two of them are independent of each other, and there would be no need for women to participate in men's feelings for them, and then to be assists, or supporting roles.

Speaker 1:

UH!

Speaker 0:

It does. I think it's a little bit better.

Speaker 1:

Yes, I agree.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, okay, next question. Do you think the overall portrayal of female characters in BL series is positive or negative?

Speaker 1:

On the whole, I think this is quite subjective, that is, in the works I may have seen, I think it is likely to be positive, there is, in fact, it is also related to what we just mentioned, that is, I think it will be forced on the female characters, for example, you have to play a very weak role. And

then to participate in their relationship, as you said, to give an assist, or to enhance both of them. Relationship with a character like that, and then, but I don't think he would go so far as to be misogynistic, but I think he's kind of, uh, scriptwriter. Just put a traditional shackle on the character, and leave it to me. One kind of feeling, and then, some more, is that he might describe this girl as being very jealous, and then it will be a very bad image, and then she will do whatever it takes, like she must destroy them both, break them up, and then it is also an assist role. As far as I think she seems to serve the entire role for the male role, I think this may be a little misogynistic feeling, that of course, as we just mentioned, and some screenwriters, he will give women, that is, he will make female characters more independent, she will have his own story line, rather than serving between two male protagonists.

Speaker 0:

Do you think this setting is similar to other types of web series you watch, or is it particularly prominent in BL series?

Speaker 1:

I think it seems similar, maybe because in fact, the current drama is quite diverse, maybe you are not specialized in LGBTQ, it will actually involve this LGBTQ plus role, and then like that slightly inclined, it may be more similar to the traditional sense of the kind of TV series. But it may serve different objects. Maybe he can have replaced, say, the bad girl and the supporting actress with two men.

Speaker 0:

It really is. The supporting actress seems to be born for this kind of drama.

Speaker 1:

Yes.

Speaker 0:

In fact, why do I feel that many female dramas are bad, but that kind of male is that kind of 'silly white sweet'?

Speaker 1:

I feel like it is. In the traditional sense, he has to let them say that women are more jealous. I think he does impose that trait on the female characters, and then he makes the female characters have this feeling of jealousy, and then you have the role of further recommending the two main characters.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, make sense.

Speaker 1:

There are many such examples. What should be changed is not changed, and what should not be changed must be changed.

Speaker 0:

Yes, yes. Would you actually, would you actually be okay with a single or bl show with no female characters at all?

Speaker 1:

No emmm at all? I'm fine with that, because... If it is because I watch BL dramas, maybe I am the focus, that is, on the two main males couple, I may not focus on anything else. So if it is said that there are no female characters in this complete story line of his, I think it is reasonable for female characters to participate, I think it is sure.

Speaker 0:

Because I read some articles that there were some people that he would feel if there were no female characters on the show. She's gonna think that this is, like, marginalizing women, or not taking into account women in this, what do you think in this. In the hidden society, that is, the drama may be a small society, but you do not put women into this small society at all, some people may feel that this is a more misogynistic behaviour. People who watch bl dramas do not feel this way, including myself, because before I studied this proposition, in fact, I did not think about this issue at all. I watched a lot of dramas, it may have female characters, it may not have female characters, but I feel that it is me, I will not bring that drama into such a reality. For example, I would think that it is set up like this. It is set up as a group of gangsters, and in this gang, traditionally, his gang is a group of men, so if there are no women in it, it seems not

strange, but some people will think that if there are no women, then these. It's not that complete, but I don't think so myself, so I'm just going to think about it and see if it's just me, or if it's just that everybody thinks that.

Speaker 1:

From my own point of view, I think it is actually related to the setting of his story and what kind of perspective your scriptwriter uses to describe it. If you say that you put it in a big environment, you have to involve all aspects to write it, you say that it is impossible that there will be no female characters involved. So if you want to narrow that perspective and you focus on the two of them in this story line, it is entirely possible that there are no female characters around them to participate in this matter. I want to shoot the story of 522. From the time the boys appeared, I might have that my perspective, my camera, I was focused on what was happening in this room, so there might be some, not not in the characters, but there are some factors missing, which I think is very reasonable, and then you have to say that for example, there are no female characters in a TV series. I actually think. It's a little bit politically correct, because if you say that your perspective doesn't elevate the story that high, you're putting it in a context. Write from a smaller perspective, say you're writing about a brother. Maybe the two of them are dependent on each other in this family, and maybe what you want to describe is that you want to focus on the environment in which the two of them grow up in this family, so that's the story line. Most likely there will be no female characters involved, so I think it's a very normal thing, that makes sense.

Speaker 0:

Well. I get it. So you think it's not misogynistic if there's no female character, then? The marginalization of female characters, or as we just said, the evil woman, the evil woman role is not a misogynistic attitude.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, so it's true that because I think the definition of misogyny is a very subjective one, and some people might be sensitive to the issue, they might feel that some people might be a little more tolerant, they might not feel misogyny. Right?

Speaker 1:

Yeah, right. I think that's true. It's very subjective. It's because, as I understand it, there's a lack of female characters. On the contrary, it can be understood as a feeling that women escape from reality, because what I watch is equivalent to that if there are no women in this play, I will not bring this feeling of myself as a woman into the role in the play, because you see, for example, I

see *Every Step of the Shocking*. I'll put myself in as Ruoxi, because Ruoxi is a big leading female character. And then I'm also a woman, so I get a lot of what she thinks. So yes, but, if I look at BL and there are no female characters in it, I certainly don't put myself into the male character, because I look at him and he's a male, so I'm looking at two men from a very God-like point of view.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're gonna totally pull away from the female perspective.

Speaker 1:

And then to look at this thing, this is how I understand this aspect, right.

Speaker 0:

Uh, uh, uh. And then, so I think bl shows, it actually provides a way for female audiences to explore some of the topics of homosexuality in a safe or private way, and then, so personally I think it's a kind of fight against gender stereotypes, but there are also people and there are people and there are women and women who think, for example, fan or BL, It's a misogynist.

So you'd think bl drama as a whole would be. Fighting stereotypes or actually reinforcing stereotypes that stereotype gender.

Speaker 1:

I think it's more of a struggle, and I think he himself is actually broadening the field of this aspect of the character of the person. Is, how to say, after all, he is not quite the same as the psychological cognition in the traditional sense, unless the first thing we mentioned is that he put some that must have a strong and weak, set into the role. I mean, I feel like I'm watching any other regular drama, but if I do I like to watch double A. I felt like he gave me a whole new perspective on the relationship, or the two characters.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, one thing that I find particularly interesting is when you look at double-A, for example. It just feels like these two guys he's, like, two normal guys with quotation marks. And then they're walking down the street, and maybe people will look at them from a heterosexual perspective, because they're just normal, and they're not like, for example, O's setting, which is weak, or gay in gay, which we're talking about, but if it's right, if they're both very straight in quotation marks,

But they're actually characters. But if they're gay, there's a gap, you know what I mean? There's a contrast, so I really like that contrast. It just feels like the two of them are in love with each other and it's that, like, double strength thing. Oh, I don't know.

Speaker 1:

It's what I want to see, I'm not just watching BL, I'm not trying to see two guys in a heterosexual formula.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1:

To see it be real, two men with masculine qualities to complete the relationship,

Speaker 0:

Is that they keep it up. They should have.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, men are men.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, or else, or I'm no different than I am.

Speaker 1:

Yes.

Speaker 0:

I feel the same way.

Speaker 1:

Fair enough...

Speaker 0:

Really, I think if one side is too weak, and then the guy the aggressive guy is always the top, for example he's always going to be more aggressive than the bottom one, I really think. I really I can't watch it, to be honest.

Speaker 1:

Me, either. In fact, I think that's really a little misogynistic. Like the top is portrayed as a playboy, the bottom is shy and easy to be teased.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1:

If he were the author, he could put all of his ideas about women, that is, things that he thinks are in contrast to men, on this male character, and yes, I find that boring, boring, because even if it's true, sometimes, I wonder if BL is a heterosexual work at all.

Speaker 0:

Aye. Is that I think you want to portray a, that is, for example, a diverse male is okay, for example, a male, he can also be gentle, he can also love to do housework, he can also how, but some will be too. How to say.

Speaker 1:

For him, whatever, and then there's what sexual characteristics he's going to give him.

Speaker 0:

And then he had a pregnancy.

Speaker 1:

It's the same thing, and you've gone even further.

Speaker 0:

Yes, so sometimes I read some ABO text, I really can't stand it, I think it is too advanced.

Speaker 1:

I think that when I read this kind of article, I will see it from a female perspective, and I will feel that I am affected. What's that word? It's not assault. I'm the only one who's offended.

Speaker 0:

Yes, yes, yes.

Speaker 1:

Have you ever seen Modern family?

Speaker 0:

I don't think so. Not really.

Speaker 1:

That's fine, because the two, I mean, for example, you said that the gay character in him, he might have, you know, the so-called gay feeling, which is that they would be gentle, and then maybe sometimes they would curl their fingers, and they would walk less masculine, but they

had this, you know, look up appearance, and they could go. Do something very is. How to say, I think that in fact, this role of LGBTQ+, I think that he is to let him do a human should be able to do things, should be able to do things, not to say that you impose, give a. You think that only women can do, men and women can not do, only men can do, and then put it that thing on the doll's body, I think, indeed indeed.

Speaker 0:

Is that it can't shoot so magic, so I feel right, so I watch the drama may read more than read the text, because I think some of the text is to say. He is not saying that OOC, yes, I would think that he will put a lot of women in society are actually experiencing some bad things, or more stereotypical things to write in this article, and then they are right, and then this and this author, including the fans of this article, they are carnival according to the content of this article. I'm gonna find a little bit of what you just said offensive.

Speaker 1:

Things that might make women miserable and then use it as a high point.

Speaker 0:

Right, right, right, right, right. OK, so do you think, for example, we just talked about a bad woman setting, but there are some female characters, she may be, for example, she is a very kind supporting actress. That's what a tool character is. Do you think it marginalizes the role of women to a certain extent? For example, she doesn't have her own story line, and so you watch the whole show, you don't really have a deep impression of this female character. Although she is good, she is a kind girl.

Speaker 1:

But her role is still for the feelings of the hero.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1:

In this case, I still think that she is in a position that is arranged by the scriptwriter in a tool person, as far as he does not care what the characteristics are, the characteristics he gives her are good or evil, that is, he really still regards women as one. The one you use to advance the man's feelings. Of a status. Then I do feel that there will still be a little edge, marginalization of this female character, as we just said, in fact, you don't have to put the perspective so big, you have to impose one. It doesn't work very well, or it doesn't make sense, and the role is there, and I actually think it marginalizes the role a little bit.

Speaker 0:

That is, if you don't catch this couple. Or let the female characters, I think some characters are three-dimensional.

Speaker 1:

You don't make them lively; you don't make the character. No, no, no, no, no, no.

Speaker 0:

Indeed, because in fact, I have seen some BL dramas in which he is such a tool, and the people are all male characters, you will watch it cooler. In fact, you do not have to put a woman, unless you this male master he is still a groping stage, for example, he likes a girl at the beginning, and then he found himself in love with another man, and then the girl he may certainly want to sacrifice part of himself, and then how, but in fact this girl can be portrayed more full, you said.

Speaker 1:

You go first.

Speaker 0:

You say when I'm done.

Speaker 1:

Just say something.

Speaker 0:

Which means we can replace the supporting role with a male.

Speaker 1:

Then, that is, like the situation you just said, it may be that the boy he likes the girl first, then I think his screenwriter will portray the girl what personality characteristics he has, and then let the male master like him, then you, the girl thinks he is three-dimensional. That is, if you can let the audience feel his personality, OK, that is, you can let the audience feel his personality characteristics and character traits, then I think he is not a marginal. Let the girl appear, and then let him suddenly start chasing the man, do not break them up, so it is not necessary.

Speaker 0:

Yes, yes. OK, so if you feel, for example, that a show with a particular female character stands out, even if you like the cast or the quality of the filming, would you still want to watch it?

Speaker 1:

If I really like actors doing this, I might scold the writer, then read on, and then skip this thing. I'm going to avoid that part because I don't think he's interested. If I say that the role is very flat, very single, I will feel that her story itself is unnecessary, then I seem to skip it, I can see, then I will go to see. That's all right. And then by the way to scold the scriptwriter, you also happen to be of no use, being such a role.

Speaker 0:

Yeah, yeah, got it. OK, do you think the presentation of this overall content will potentially affect your perception of gender attitudes? For example, even though the BL is mostly about male relationships, there are no shortage of female characters who are independent or complete and have a long career. And then you might have more understanding of the complexity and diversity of female characters in this LGBTQ environment. You may be watching the dramas and only care about his plot, or it is a kind of fun behaviour and not, is thinking about too much of the real gender, too much of this prejudice or cognition is possible.

Speaker 1:

I think it must be, that is, the potential to change some of your opinions, including LGBTQ, this is the cognitive and thinking mode, like me, the first mentioned is that I may be in the fifth grade by a classmate, that is, when he was reading the grave robbery notes, and then fell in love with it, and then he broke through and told me about this stuff, I just thought. It turns out that this kind of content still exists in the world, and then it just includes the time we just talked about, in fact, I think I don't care what, whether it is gay, in fact, including other such gender sexual diversity, I think he is. It's definitely going to broaden the perception of this kind of gender diversity, that you have to have a channel to understand this kind of thing, so if in some countries or regions of my country, he may not have a particularly complete education in this area, and then everyone actually has a perception of their own gender, including the right. Other ways of gender identities that exist in this world, I think we all have a process of exploration and exploration, and then maybe for people, more than one sentence will become them. Learning about it, or understanding it is kind of a key to opening the door, I think. Of course, watching BL for fun will also have, but I think that since you can already watch it fun, you will have a certain understanding of this, this culture, say I or have a certain understanding, I can go to this as a basis to achieve the purpose of seeing them, if I have never heard of the word LGBTQ+, I never knew that there were other relationships in the world such as heterosexuality, so I can't say that I see this in a more egalitarian or God-like way, I think.

Speaker 0:

It is. It is. Well, you might think so, because if you look at it, most of the shows are watched by women. Yes, and then I think I will think about a question, is not actually a lot of Chinese, Chinese straight men. Are they all a little homophobic in their bones? Because I think they all have the same feeling that very few straight Chinese men watch BL shows. I feel that they do not accept the fact that men and men will fall in love, this is my own thinking.

Speaker 1:

In fact, with the popularization of this kind of culture, including development, I think there should be gradual improvement, but it is possible. I think maybe even East Asia is probably they are what we call the traditional concept, for example, you want to give this man is what masculinity, and then you look at the so-called motherly things, they may feel. Compared to me, I think, first of all, he does not have a window to discuss with others, so that we girls can see it. I do feel like girls are more open to it, like we might talk to each other, and then. Common communication can also be found online. Like our elders, for example, men are sick because they're gay.

Speaker 0:

Emm.

Speaker 1:

And then what if. And then their kids will think, if I go to see this stuff and my parents find me, will he think I have some kind of illness?

Speaker 1:

And then he talks to other men, and other men are more likely to have fun with it, or. I don't understand, don't understand, and then coupled with immaturity, and then the development of this concept, not this concept is not enough to understand, that may be like me, for example, my classmates around me. gay could be. He was often teased by other so-called straight classmates, or amused by teasing him. As far as I am concerned, it is still the problem of popularizing different gender roles, including different ideas.

Speaker 0:

Mm-hm.

Speaker 1:

People didn't take it. Is to look at other diverse relationships with the same common perspective as heterosexuality.

Speaker 0:

It's true, it's true, it's true. Because we feel like our whole environment, it doesn't encourage these things.

Speaker 1:

Yes, yes, everyone is developing in secret.

Speaker 0:

Yes, yes. OK, so what kind of female characters would you like to see more of in BL dramas?

Speaker 1:

I think it's like what we just talked about. I hope it is. Whether it's a female character or a male character. I'd like to see more of that. More realistic, more real, not just flat, maybe like the role of women in society, female women, it has a very variety of qualities, not to say that there is no traditional sense. Those few features that you think are giving your own half of the sky, I want to see such a picture, that is, it is more close to our life, more realistic, rather than saying that I only evaluate this single, that is, only give this woman, a more contributed role.

Speaker 0:

OK,OK, Noted. Let's move on to the last part, which is about whether you think BL shows accurately portray gay relationships and some issues?

Speaker 1:

I think it's kind of subjective, because first of all I'm personally not gay, so I may not be able to, I may not be able to personally speak to them in this relationship. What is the real part, because I think you, is that you know more, in fact, it is hearsay, if you are not the person in the game, you have no way to accurately know. Is some information, this way there is always a poor information, so I can not judge whether the relationship between them is accurate or not, and then the question is what is accurate and what.

Speaker 0:

It's expressing, like a love relationship, or whether they're going to have the same problems they would have had, because for example, it might be more idealized than an LGBTQ drama. For example, there are some men in BL dramas, and the man is the main character, who may come out as gay while exploring his sexuality, or even. The path to love will be smoother than a gay party, or more like what we call a fairy tale. Yeah, so I was thinking,

Speaker 1:

Is that possible? I think it's possible. Because after all, art comes from life, I think it may be based on life to a certain extent, that is, the real materials, but you want, I think it is actually the biggest difference from LGBTQ, that is, it may be more imagination, he wants to present a sense of utopia, he wants to let the audience get the so-called fantasy and satisfaction in this play. Then other shows that are more diverse, like more realistic shows, he will compare. Cut into more reality, a realistic perspective or perspective, that is, he will write out their problems, difficult

diseases, but I am not saying is more nothing, such as they may come out of the closet will also encounter difficulties.

Speaker 1:

That is, in the face of society, they will be met with some voices, and I certainly think that some plays will also show it. There are also some, they are completely idealized, very smooth.

Speaker 0:

Good understanding,

Speaker 1:

OK.

Speaker 0:

OK, then that's all our questions. Thank you for sharing!

Appendix D: Copy of An Unsigned Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM FOR [Chinese Generation Z Females]
IN RESEARCH STUDIES**

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Exploring Gender Roles in Foreign Boys' Love Web Series: From the Perspectives of Chinese Generation Z Females

Department: UCL Institute for Global Prosperity

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):

Shuyi Zhang | ucbvs13@ucl.ac.uk / shuyi-zhang.23@ucl.ac.uk

Name and Contact Details of the Supervisor:

PR: Dr Sadeghi Givi, Fatemeh | f.givi@ucl.ac.uk

Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer:

Alexandra Potts | data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee Project ID number: Z6364106/2024/06/217

Thank you for considering taking part in this research! The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1.	*I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction <i>and would like to take part in an individual interview.</i>	

2.	*I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to <i>1 week after interview</i>	
3.	*I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information (age group, occupation, education level) used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	
4.	Use of the information for this project only Anonymity is optional for this research. Please select from the following 3 options: (a) I agree for my real name and role/affiliation to be used in connection with any words I have said or information I have passed on. (b) I request that my comments are presented anonymously but give permission to connect my role/affiliation with my comments (but not the title of my position). (c) I request that my comments are presented anonymously with no mention of my role/affiliation.	
5.	*I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes.	
6.	*I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.	
7.	I understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the research.	
8.	No promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate.	
9.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial <u>organisations</u> but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study.	
10.	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
11.	I agree that my <u>anonymised/pseudonymised</u> research data may be used by others for future research. [No one will be able to identify you when this data is shared.]	
12.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
13.	I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within <i>3 weeks after the data has been collected</i> To note: If you do not want your participation recorded you can still take part in the study.	
14.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
15.	I hereby confirm that: (a) I understand the exclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher; (b) I do not fall under the exclusion criteria.	

16.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
17.	I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.	
18.	Use of information for this project and beyond I would be happy for the data I provide to be archived at UCL Data Protection Office. I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to my <u>anonymised/</u> <u>pseudonymised</u> data.	

If you would like your contact details to be retained so that you can be contacted in the future by UCL researchers who would like to invite you to participate in follow up studies to this project, or in future studies of a similar nature, please tick the appropriate box below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, I would be happy to be contacted in this way -Via Message -Via Email -Via Other social media (e.g., <u>Wechat/Whatsapps/</u> Facebook)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, I would not like to be contacted	

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

•
•
•