

ความแตกต่างในการประกอบสร้างตัวละคร “ยูเคะ” ในละครชายรักชายของไทย

Variations in the Construction of the Main ‘uke’

Characters in Thai boy’s Love Drama

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการประกอบสร้างตัวละคร “ยูเคะ” 9 ตัวละคร จากละครประเภทชายรักชายของไทย 9 เรื่อง ที่ได้รับความนิยมสูงสุดแต่ละปีในระหว่างปี ค.ศ. 2014-2022 โดยมุ่งเน้นศึกษาความแตกต่างของการประกอบสร้างตัวละคร “ยูเคะ” เหล่านี้ เก็บข้อมูลด้วยแบบบันทึกรหัส ซึ่งประกอบด้วยบุคลิกลักษณะของตัวละคร 3 ประเภท ได้แก่ ลักษณะนิสัย ลักษณะพฤติกรรม และลักษณะทางจิตวิทยา เพื่อสำรวจการประกอบสร้างตัวละคร ใช้การวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพเพื่อวิเคราะห์ความแตกต่างของการประกอบสร้างตัวละคร “ยูเคะ” โดยพบว่า การประกอบสร้างตัวละคร “ยูเคะ” มีความแตกต่างไปจากเดิมบางประการ แต่ลักษณะตัวละครยังไม่ผิดแผกไปจากวิถีของละครประเภทชายรักชาย ตัวละคร “ยูเคะ” ยังคงถูกประกอบสร้างให้มีลักษณะภายนอกที่ขอบเขตตรงข้าม และสับสนกับเพศวิถีของตนเอง บางตัวละครตระหนักรู้ถึงรสนิยมรักเพศเดียวกันของตนเองและต้องเผชิญกับความยากลำบาก สิ่งนี้ได้สร้างความไม่ชัดเจนในละครประเภทชายรักชายของไทย ที่มีแนวโน้มความรักระหว่างผู้ชายสองคนที่ไม่ใช่เกย์ ถึงแม้ตัวละครดังกล่าวจะแสดงออกด้วยลักษณะบุคลิกของคนที่เป็นรักร่วมเพศก็ตาม

คำสำคัญ: ละครประเภทชายรักชายของไทย ตัวละคร “ยูเคะ”

Abstract

This paper examines the construction of nine *Uke* characters from the nine most popular Thai Boy’s Love (BL) dramas of each year between 2014 to 2022. The study focuses on investigating the variations in the construction of these characters. Data is collected using the coding sheets consisting of three main characteristics including Character Traits, Character Behaviors, and Psychological Features. A qualitative data analysis is employed to analyze variations in the construction of the *Uke* characters. It is found that there are some variations in the construction of *Uke* characters, while these characters have not broken the norm of Thai BL dramas. The *Uke* characters are still constructed to look straight and be confused with their sexuality. Some *Uke* characters are constructed to be more conscious of their homosexuality and thus face difficulty. This creates a blurred line in Thai BL dramas as they are usually portrayed as a romantic story of two straight men, not gay, despite the fact that they express themselves with homosexual characteristics.

Keywords: Thai Boy’s Love drama, *Uke* characters

Background and rationale

In recent years, Thai Boy's Love (BL) dramas have been phenomenally popular, especially among young people. Studies found that the viewership of Boy's Love dramas in Thailand has increased dramatically in recent years. The number of audiences has tripled since 2019, and there was a 61% increase in viewership compared to 2016. The number of Thai Boy's Love dramas has increased to more than 20 in 2020, 47 in 2021, and 70 dramas in 2022, with a big company like GMM TV being the main player in the Y¹ market (Arporn Sri, 2022; Branded Content, 2020). *Love Sick The Series* in 2014 is believed to play an important part in making this genre popular.

Originally, Boy's Love is the fictional genre originated by the Japanese female writer named Mori Mari in the 1960s. The genre describes the pure love of two straight boys who identify themselves as heterosexual (Ni, 2021). This type of Japanese homoerotic fiction which is referred to as *Yaoi* portrays the pure romantic relationship between a masculine boy called 'Seme', and a more feminine boy called 'Uke'. These male homosexual partnerships in *Yaoi* are usually attached to top-bottom roles where the top is dominant and the bottom is submissive. *Yaoi* first appeared in the 1930s to 1940s. In the 1960s, *Yaoi* adopted a kind of ideology by a female writer named Mori Mari. This is a Japanese subculture influencing popular literature in Thailand for a decade being tracked back to the 1990s in the form of novels, fan fiction, and fan art. Nowadays, BL or *Yaoi* content in Thailand is an urban subculture. The growth of BL media has expanded to mainstream media, particularly via television, film, and television adaptations from 2014 to the present (Ni, 2021; Koaysomboon, 2020; Prasannam, 2019).

It is interesting to note that the increasing popularity of this genre of media has brought about the blurred line between the 'real' Boy's Love (*Yaoi*) dramas, whose norm is a portrayal of sexual romance between two straight men as leading characters, and LGBTQ+ dramas which represents romance stories of LGBTQ, particularly gay, people. This, therefore, has misled viewers of *Yaoi* dramas as the representation of gay romance (Sukthunthong and Bunyavejchewin, 2019).

According to Sutheepattarakool (2020), male-homosexual characters portrayed in soap operas broadcasting during the prime time were different from male-homosexual in the BL series. In regular soap operas, male characters who portray themselves as homosexual tend to act in a more feminine way, be sexually open, and boy-addicted than lead male characters in BL series whose characters seem to be constructed under the influence of heteronormativity.

In addition, Somyat (2018) revealed that characteristics and representation of gay relationships in Y (*Yaoi*) dramas consisted of the characters that lived in an ideal world where there was no boundary for love. The female characters were created to be variables for the love discovery of two men characters. Moreover, the symbolism was used to show sexual role expressions, and the story usually had a good ending.

¹ Y or "Yaoi" is a Japanese term for manga that features sexual romance between straight men, specifically as created by and for women.

Although it is the case that many BL dramas still follow the norm, some series creators have tried to escape from the usual settings like high schools and universities and change to something different together with more explicit love scenes. A good example of such change can be found in *KinnPorche the Series* (Kinori, 2022). *I Told Sunset About You*, a Thai Boys' Love drama created by Nadao Bangkok Studio and released in 2020, is another good example. The series' creators tried to explore new dimensions such as having a heroine character self-discover, accept, and embrace his sexual identity. It seems, therefore, that such exploration has demonstrated that the series is trying to offer itself as part of the LGBT rights movement through a new level of character construction which seems different from the norm (Trisadikoon, 2021).

Character classification

Seme is a dominant role in a Boy's Love relationship. Besides having a top sex position, *Seme's* duty also includes making the *Uke* fall in love with him and protecting the *Uke*. The word '*Seme*' comes from the Japanese verb "*Semeru*" meaning "to attack" which is associated with the sex position of being a penetrator or attacker. On the other hand, *Uke* is a submissive role in the Boy's Love relationship. *Uke* is a more feminine boy than the *Seme* because a Boy's Love relationship is commonly constructed under the influence of heteronormativity which refers to a romantic relationship between a male and female lover. So, there is the *Seme* who plays the male role while the female role is played by the *Uke*. The word "*Uke*" is originated from the Japanese verb '*Ukeru*' meaning "to receive" which is associated with the sex position of being a receiver or the person who is penetrated. Other than being the bottom, *Uke's* duty also includes being a pretty boy or being a sensitive and vulnerable boy to catch *Seme's* attention (Ambulo and Batin, 2017; Zanghellini, 2009; Dewi and Mochtar, 2021).

However, it can be hard to know which character is *Seme* and which is *Uke* sometimes because the character can have similar appearances in some cases. In that case, the codes of emotion and action are applied to help identify the roles. Besides, the *Uke* does not usually switch the sex role with the *Seme* according to the evidence in many BL texts. It is because they were constructed under heterosexual relationships that men are the penetrator while women are the ones who are penetrated by men's penis when performing sex. Therefore, the *Uke* will only be inserted by the *Seme's* penis when they have sex. The image of the *Uke* being the penetrator will not appear in the BL context (Sihombing, 2011).

Additionally, rape was found to be common in the Boy's Love genre. Usually, the *Uke* was raped by the *Seme* showing that rape was used to be a symbol of being dominant and more powerful in the relationship. The refusal occurs before the two characters engaged in having sex, or "token resistance". Similarly, Reefpicker (2020) mentioned the romanticization of rape in Boy's Love as a common trope. Moreover, the *Uke* characters were not wiser than the *Seme* characters. The *Seme* pursued and took care of the *Uke* characters. For example, "*Sarawat*" in *2gether the Series* (2020) took care of his *Uke* "*Tine*".

Also, “Phupa” took care of “Tian” in *A Tale of a Thousand Stars* (2021). The *Ukes* also showed more hesitation toward the *Semes* by rejecting them in advance with a sexually reticent attitude.

Characteristics

The understanding of Sexual Role and Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation describes who you feel attracted to sexually, and romantically. For example, a man who is attracted to a woman and vice versa is straight or heterosexual. A man who is attracted to a man or a woman who is attracted to a woman is homosexual. Furthermore, a person who feels attracted to both men and women is bisexual (PsychologyToday, 2020). Sexual orientation is not the same as a sexual identity because sexual identity does not label your sexual desire for someone but identifies who you are like male and female (Planned Parenthood, n.d.).

Sex role is the role that a society expects an individual of each sex to behave. Biological factors and environmental factors are two factors associated with determining the sex role. In the past, sex roles were divided into two types: feminine roles and masculine roles. Later, sex roles were differentiated into four types according to Sandra Lipitz Bem as Masculine, Feminine, Androgyny, and Undifferentiated (Chittayasothorn, 2008). The sex roles of BL’s main characters can be assumed by physical appearances. Typically, the active sex role or *Seme* is the dominant role in the relationship associated with the partner who is more masculine, more confident, and stronger than their partner. Meanwhile, the passive sex role or *Uke* is associated with a partner who is more feminine, more sensitive, more emotional, and softer than the active role (Mizoguchi, 2010; Gibbs, 2012; as cited in Zsila and Demetrovics, 2017)

The understanding of homosexual subculture

According to Maki (2017), male homosexual subcultures were distinguished by physical appearances like age, height, weight, waist size, and hairiness. Many subcultures used the name of animal species to identify their group. Here were the groups of male homosexual subcultures that were commonly found in the media and the male homosexual community, following Bears, Otters, Wolves, ‘*twink*’ (a slender, gay man who is probably in his late teens, or early twenties), ‘*twunk*’ (a muscular ‘*twink*’), and Jocks.

Masculinity and Femininity of homosexual men

Male homosexuals who are top, have muscular bodies, and have deep-voiced speaking are perceived as highly masculine. In contrast, homosexual men who are bottom, have thin bodies and have high-voiced speaking manners are perceived as less masculine than the top. In other words, men who label themselves as the top may not be perceived as being masculine as much as men having muscular bodies, and speaking in a deep tone of voice. Homosexual men who self-label as the bottom are usually perceived as less masculine than the top because it is the role associated with the female sexual role (Ravenhill and De Visser, 2017). Additionally, masculinity in homosexual men is shown through their physical appearances like having body hair, being muscular and using deep voice, etc. Furthermore, it is shown through their

lifestyles like going to the gym, driving a big car or truck, having the ability to fix things, dressing, and listening to music genres favored by masculine-identified men. In contrast, homosexual men with feminine expressions are likely to behave in girly or girl-like behaviors like dressing in bright colors and tight clothing (Thepsourinthone et al., 2022).

Moreover, masculinity and femininity can also be seen through the way of speaking. The national Thai language is a gendered language that was structured under heterosexuality norms in which women and men have their own gendered words. In the context of Thai society, speech forms used by women are not used by men who are masculine identified whether they are gay or straight. Homosexual men who use effeminate speech forms are usually seen as having less masculine or female-like behavior. In private settings, a gay man may use the polite feminine first-person pronouns *dichan* or *chan*, the female sentence particle *kha*, and refer to gay friends by feminine third-person pronouns such as *lon*, *chi*, or *thoe*, all of which can be translated into English as “she/her”. Effeminate speech forms are not used with strangers or in public settings where a gay man wishes to present a masculine persona. On the contrary, homosexual males who are masculine identified usually use the language of masculinity in public in different situations. For example, the politeness particle “Krab” and the polite pronoun “Phom” (or “I” for males) used by straight men are the language that Thai homosexual men use when they want to present themselves in a masculine way to others. Also, they will use pronouns calling other homo men like “Nai” meaning “You” with a male person of the same age, “Phi” with elders, and “Nong” with younger people. When they talk with their friends in informal situations, they would refer to themselves as “Ku” meaning “I” and refer to their friends as “Meung” meaning “You” which are more impolite if used with strangers but normal with friends. So, masculinity seems to predominate over femininity in the Thai gay community and makes many homosexual men become “straight acting” to avoid discrimination against effeminacy (Duangwises and Jackson, 2021).

Framework

This study follows the study of the Boy’s Love drama carried out by Sutheepattarakool (2020) on the construction of Boy’s Love dramas’ characters in the Thai Boy’s Love series. This study used purposive sampling to choose the dramas, and the data was collected by using coding sheets to investigate the characteristics of twenty characters. It was found that the characteristics of twenty studied characters (1) place an ideal value of masculinity, (2) have a relationship with women to cover their homosexual relationship, (3) create an ideal world where the gay community is accepted or normal, and (4) have a monogamous relationship. Moreover, the stories tend to have a happy ending. In contrast, male-homosexual characters portrayed in regular soap operas broadcasting during the prime time were more feminine, sexually open, and boy-addicted than those in BL dramas. The stories’ endings were also usually sad. This difference clearly differentiates male-homosexual in BL dramas where the characters were constructed to be under the influence of heteronormativity from those in regular soap operas.

Research questions

1. How were the main *Uke* characters in Thailand’s Boys Love dramas constructed between 2014 to 2022?
2. What are the variations in the construction of the main *Uke* characters in Thailand’s Boys Love during the period of 2014 to 2022?

Research Methodology

Subject of Study

Nine “*Uke*” characters from the most popular Thai BL dramas of each year between 2014 to 2022 are selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for selection include (1) the most views each year on any streaming platform (2) the most award-winning series in the category of BL dramas (3) the leading actors with the highest number of product or brand advertisements. It is important to note that the dramas selected must be in the category of Boy’s Love dramas, not including any whose content focuses on LGBTQ+.

Table 1 The list of *Uke* characters’ names

Year	Name	<i>Uke</i> character’s name
2014	Love Sick The Series (2014)	Noh
2015	Love Sick The Series 2 (2015)	Noh
2016	SOTUS (2016)	Artit
2017	2Moons (2017)	Wayo
2018	Love by Chance (2018)	Pete
2019	TharnType (2019)	Type
2020	2gether (2020)	Tine
2021	Bad Buddy (2021)	Pran
2022	KinnPorsche (2022)	Porsche

Data Collection

The coding sheets are used to identify the information of those characters.

Data analysis

After the data is collected, the variations among the characters of “*Uke*” from 2014 to 2022 are identified and analyzed through the concepts of sexual roles, sexual orientations, homosexual subcultures, and masculinity and femininity among homosexual men.

Findings

The focus of this study is on the *Uke* characters from nine BL dramas. However, some authors of the dramas did not label the sexual roles of the main characters directly. Plus, there is no scene where the character of *Seme* inserts his penis into the *Uke*'s anus (Sihombing, 2011) explicitly making it hard to identify who is *Seme* and who is *Uke*. So, the personal observation and assumption were applied as a guide in identifying which character was *Seme* and which was *Uke* following the definitions of BL, 'shipping culture' or 'Sao-Y' (female fans of *Yaoi* literature or BL dramas) culture, and masculinity and femininity of homosexual men.

Characters and Their Characteristics

The nine *Uke* characters include (1) *Noh*, from *Love Sick The Series* and *Love Sick The Series Season 2*, who has a thin body and is not smarter than the *Seme* (*Pun*), (2) *Arthit*, from *SOTUS*, who is pursued and taken care of by the *Seme* (*Kongpop*), (3) *Wayo*, from *2Moons*, who has a thin body and is taken care of by the *Seme*, (4) *Pete*, from *Love by Chance*, who has an expression of shyness and hesitation toward the *Seme* by rejecting in advance with a sexually reticent attitude, (5) *Type*, from *TharnType*, who is raped by the *Seme* and the shipping order name following the *Seme* (*Tharn*), (6) *Tine*, from *2Gether*, who is taken care of and gets a seductive smile from the *Seme*, (7) *I*, from *Bad Buddy*, who is pursued and taken care of by the *Seme* (*Pat*), (8) *Porsche*, from *KinnPorsche*, who is indicated as having the *Uke* sexual roles by the 'shipping' order of the character's name from the title. Then the coding sheets with three main characteristics: Character traits, Character behaviors, and Psychological Features, are used to decode how the nine *Uke* characters are constructed.

Character Traits

The character traits include four characteristics: age, occupation, sexual role/orientation, and appearance according to the homosexual subculture (*twinks* and *twunks*). The age range of the nine characters identified in this study is approximately between 16 and 23 years old. The occupations of the nine identified characters do not show significant variation, as the majority of them are students. *KinnPorsche The Series* is the only drama in which a character works as a bartender and bodyguard. The identified sexual roles and orientations of the nine groups are categorized as Aa, Ab, Ac, Ba, Bb, Bc, Ca, Cb, and Cc based on the criteria designed by Theerarajanaphong (2005, as cited in Sutheepattarakool, 2020).

1. Group Aa-A male-homosexual person who looks strong on the outside as a masculine man and has a sexual role as a penetrator.
2. Group Ab-A male-homosexual person who looks strong on the outside as a masculine man and has a sexual role as both a penetrator and penetrated.
3. Group Ac-A male-homosexual person who looks strong on the outside as a masculine man but has a sexual role as a person who is penetrated only.

4. Group Ba-A male-homosexual person who looks strong on the outside, polite but not too feminine and has a sexual role as a penetrator.
5. Group Bb-A male-homosexual person who looks strong on the outside, polite but not too feminine and has a sexual role as both a penetrator and penetrated.
6. Group Bc-A male-homosexual person who looks strong on the outside, polite but not too feminine and has a sexual role as a person who is penetrated only.
7. Group Ca-A male homosexual who looks effeminate but has a sexual role as a penetrator.
8. Group Cb-A male homosexual who looks effeminate and has a sexual role as both a penetrator and penetrated.
9. Group Cc-A male homosexual who looks effeminate but has a sexual role as a person who is penetrated only.

Among them, eight dramas feature characters identified as Ac, who appear masculine on the outside but have a sexual role of being penetrated. Additionally, the only drama featuring a character identified as Bc is *Pete* from *Love by Chance*, in which the character appears strong and polite but not too feminine and has a sexual role as a person who is penetrated only. Lastly, four characters, following *Love Sick The Series*, *Love Sick The Series Season 2*, *2Moons*, and *Love by Chance*, were found to have an appearance of *twinks*; and five characters, following *SOTUS The Series*, *ThamType*, *2gether The Series*, *Bad Buddy*, and *KinnPorsche*, were found to have an appearance of *twinks*.

Character Behavior

Character behavior consists of two characteristics: speaking manner, and relationship and expression of love. Regarding the speaking manner, it was observed that eight characters predominantly used impolite language when conversing with friends, while using polite language when interacting with family or strangers. This characteristic was notably identified in eight dramas except for the character 'Pete' from *Love by Chance* that spoke politely to others, even when others used impolite language towards him. Relationships were classified into three categories: private, semi-private, and public. In terms of relationship and expression of love, five behaviors were considered including sex, kissing, hugging, holding hands, and eye contact. Intercourse as an expression of love was always conducted in private locations. Kissing was primarily conducted in private and semi-private, but mostly in private. Hugging was mostly in semi-private locations while holding hands and eye contact were mostly in public. However, there was an instance of holding hands in semi-private locations in *Love Sick The Series* and *Love Sick The Series Season 2*.

Psychological Features

The psychological features were classified into four characteristics following confusion and suffering from being gay, self-acceptance, self-exposure, and ending, respectively. There are five characters who are confused about their sexual identity and four characters who do not mention it. Two characters accept

their identity, following *Wayo* and *Pete* from *2Moons* and *Love by Chance*, respectively. In contrast, there are four characters that do not accept it at first. Only one character has an instance of a sad ending, which occurs in *Love Sick the Series Season 1*. In contrast, the remaining dramas have happy endings, with the characters ending up together.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the character traits of the *Uke* characters are found to be constructed mostly as students with the body of *twink* and *twunk* in their late teens and early twentieth. They all are bottom when performing sex acts with the *Seme*. The characters are found to use masculine speech forms. Lastly, the psychological features of the characters are constructed to be mostly confused about their sexual identities. Some of them have to encounter some kind of experiment to understand themselves. They are also found to disclose their sexual identities, who they are, and who they like sexually, to their friends mostly.

In terms of the character traits, there is little variation in the age and occupation of the characters. Most of the *Uke* characters are found to be students. Interestingly, though, only Porsche from *KinnPorsche* is depicted as a non-student character, working as both a barista and a bodyguard. This change supports Kinori's (2022) assertion that BL typically revolves around high school and university themes, with a few exceptions attempting to explore new themes. Moreover, there are not a lot of variations in appearance. The two main categories of appearances include '*twink*', a slender, gay man who is probably in his late teens, or early twenties, while '*twunk*' is used to refer to a muscular '*twink*'. The findings suggest that the *Uke* characters are found to be mostly '*twunks*'. They are also constructed to have a role associated with females in normative relationships. To maintain masculinity, the characters are then constructed to be '*twinks*' with muscular bodies so they can be perceived as masculine (Ravenhill and Visser, 2017).

Furthermore, the sex roles of all the *Uke* characters investigated still comply with the BL norm where *Uke* characters are bottom in a sexual relationship despite the fact that they might have had girlfriends before. This is confirmed by Sihombing (2011) who explains that the *Uke* do not usually switch the sex role with the *Seme* because they are constructed under heterosexual relationships, in which men are the penetrator while women are the ones who are penetrated by men's penis when having sex. This shows that heteronormativity with the assumption that everyone is 'naturally' heterosexual (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009) still has a lot of influence on BL's characters as stated in the study of Sutheepattarakool (2020).

In the character behavior part, it seems that most *Uke* characters appealed to impolite language as the findings show that eight out of nine characters commonly used swearing words and impolite language in their lives because people around them are their friends or people around their age. They use polite language with older people or strangers. Similarly, according to Duangwises and Jackson (2021), impolite language is used by masculine-identified when they want to be perceived as being masculine because being

masculine-identified tends to be attractive among the homosexual male community. It can be interpreted that the creators of the BL dramas may want to maintain the masculinity image of BL that the characters are straight men despite the fact that they are submissive characters associated with female roles in heteronormative relationships (Sihombing, 2011). Interestingly, the character of *Pete* from *Love By Chance* in 2018 is the only character that uses only polite language and never swears even once. This makes him stand out from others in the group because he acted more feminine as seen in his shy manner (Sihombing, 2011), sensitive, emotional, and soft speaking manner as an effeminate homosexual man than others that seemed to value masculinity more (Ravenhill and Visser, 2017). It is interesting to note that in the original novel version of the story, the character *Pete* is clearly identified as gay, while *Aey*, the *Seme* character, clearly states, “It doesn’t matter whether it’s a girl or a guy. I’m having a good feeling for you, and it doesn’t mean I’m gay because I have this kind of feeling just for you, not for other men,” (Doungmanee, Lerlertyuttitham and Prasannam, 2021). So, *Pete*’s behavior trait is different from other characters in traditional BL drama who are normally constructed to be straight. Yet, it is the *Seme* character that is still constructed to clearly express himself as straight.

From 2014 to 2016, the characters expressed their love by kissing, hugging, holding hands, and having eye contact both in private and public. Sex scenes have become a popular piece to include in BL dramas. Some dramas like *Love By Chance* and *KinnPorsche* depict sex scenes showing both characters having sex with consent. In contrast, some sex scenes in *TharnType* seem to be quite problematic because there are a few times that the *Uke* character, who stated clearly at the beginning that he hated gay, is attacked sexually by the *Seme*, who identified himself as gay, without consent. This could become an issue in creating a negative image that people would have toward gay people. Boonman (2021) states that Thai BL dramas still have some explicit parts containing violence, rape scenes, and sexual harassment. On the other hand, the *Uke* being raped by the *Seme* is described by Zsila and Demetrovics (2017) as normal and as a way for the *Seme* to express his love to the *Uke*. In other words, it is problematic in the real world as Boonman (2021) said, while it is acceptable in the BL fantasy world.

In the psychological features part, the findings revealed that the variations in self-acceptance as homosexual men are found to evolve from not truly accepting being a homosexual to expressing homosexuality openly. This could be because the characters are constructed to live in a world where people accept and do not discriminate against homosexuality, unlike the world in *Love Sick The Series* where people around the characters still could not fully accept homosexuality. The change in self-acceptance does not occur rapidly but moves with a little progress. Self-acceptance is one part of the coming out process that homosexual individuals may encounter. Even though it is a small progress, it still gives what many homosexual people expect to see in BL dramas. Koaysomboon (2020) asserted that a number of local LGBTQ advocates have shunned Boys Love culture, saying that it doesn’t reflect the real lives of LGBTQ individuals, and even portrays a false perception of the community, i.e. “too fantasized”.

Jerome et al. (2022) also suggest that BL dramas should portray diverse aspects of gay men's lives in the real world.

Additionally, all the eight investigated BL dramas have happy endings except for *Love Sick The series* in 2014 whose character, *Noh*, does not end up being together with his partner. However, the series' second season does present a happy ending. It could be assumed, therefore, that the construction of the *Uke* characters in the investigated BL dramas still follows the norm of BL dramas whose characters live in an ideal world where a homosexual relationship is normal (Somyat, 2018). In addition, the characters are depicted as monogamous, meaning having only one lover at a time and the end is usually happy (Sutheepattarakool, 2020). This reaffirms Koaysomboon (2020) assertion that BL dramas are too fantasized. In other words, they have not offered much variation from the norm.

Conclusion

This study revealed how the characters of *Uke* in BL dramas are constructed. The findings show the evolution of the *Uke* characters from a boy who does not truly accept the fact that he is a homosexual boy to a man who expresses his homosexuality openly. Variations appear mostly in the psychological features of the characters. Even though there are variations in how the *Ukes* are constructed, most of the dramas still follow the pattern of BL. The world where the characters come out is still the world where everyone does not discriminate against homosexual people but acts as if it was a normal thing. Additionally, the *Uke* characters in recent years are constructed to be more self-conscious of their sexual identities. They do not just progress in their self-acceptance but also how to overcome the fear of coming out to let the world know that they like men. The themes of the drama have expanded from school and university to something fresh like a mafia world. Putting the features of the characters being open about their sexuality is a good move for the BL industry in supporting the existence of homosexual people in society through media more than in the past where homosexual characters were usually portrayed as men who were obsessed with boys (Sutheepattarakool, 2020). This can be associated with Koaysomboon (2020) who suggests that BL dramas have become an important part of representing the existence of the gay community. Constructing the characters to be more openly homosexual may alter the Boy's Love's norm that the characters should be presented as straight despite the fact that they behave like homosexual people. Doing so could create a blur to the genre of traditional Boy's Love culture. It is interesting, therefore, to see what would happen in the BL's industry in the future.

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