Heterotopia in Representations of Non-normative Genders and Sexualities in Thai Series of Line TV

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Abstract

This study investigates representations of non-normative genders and sexualities in selected Thai series aired on Line TV, specifically: *Make It Right: the Series, My Dream: the Series, Diary of Tootsies,* and *Gay OK Bangkok*, categorised as Boys' Love (BL) and queer series. Utilising Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, the research examines how these series function as heterotopic spaces facilitating the construction, negotiation, and potential subversion of queer identities and prevailing power structures. *Make It Right: the Series* reconceptualises the coming-of-age narrative, depicting identity formation as an ongoing journey rather than a singular event. *My Dream: the Series* employs fantasy to envision identities liberated from restrictive societal norms. *Diary of Tootsies* engages queer linguistic strategies to reconstruct and affirm kathoey identities while simultaneously destabilising heteronormative ideologies. *Gay OK Bangkok* distinctively serves a didactic function, actively resisting and critiquing dominant social norms.

The analysis reveals that these portrayals reflect a tension between the transformative potential inherent in queer heterotopias and the reinforcement of prevailing heteronormative ideologies surrounding gender and sexuality. To elucidate this tension, the study introduces the term "liminal queer heterotopia," defined as an analytical framework for exploring transitional spaces wherein non-heteronormative identities navigate a continuum stretching from marginalisation to active subversion of dominant power structures. The liminal interplay between subversive potential and normative reinforcement within these series embodies the duality characteristic of heterotopias.

The study concludes that the portrayal of queer heterotopias in these series underscores the complexity of identity formation and power dynamics. This conceptualisation of liminality between potentiality and actuality provides fertile ground for future research into the intricate intersections of identity, representation, and power in heterotopic spaces.

Keywords: Heterotopia, Non-normative gender and sexuality, Representations, Boys' Love series, Thai queer media

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Statement

1. I have utilised Grammarly for proofreading purposes, but the content presented in this thesis is an original report resulting from my research study.

2. All transcriptions of dialogues in Thai featured in the series are exclusively my work.

3. Most dialogue translations are derived from publicly available subtitles in the series. I have undertaken the translation of specific words, expressions, or sentences to ensure accurate meaning

4. Apart from dialogues, all translations of other materials, such as interviews, articles, and chapters, in Thai are my work.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I. Introduction

In contemporary society, media acts as an omnipresent conduit, shaping individual and collective consciousness. The representations found in various mediums, from movies and television series to advertisements, exert overt and subtle influences on audiences. In the Thai cultural milieu, media spaces have been predominantly shaped by heteronormative ideologies, engendering a reductive understanding and often negative stigmatisation of non-heterosexual identities. However, a noteworthy departure from this norm is found in a subset of series made available on the Line TV streaming platform. These series, namely *Make It Right: the Series, My Dream: the Series, Diary of Tootsies,* and *Gay OK Bangkok*, transgress entrenched social and cultural expectations and provide a platform for expressing non-normative genders and sexual orientations.

To investigate this phenomenon, the current thesis adopts the concept of heterotopia, mainly focusing on the representation of characters who deviate from traditional gender and sexual norms. Relying on Michel Foucault's theoretical architecture of heterotopia as its cornerstone, this research aims to elucidate whether and, if so, how these series construct heterotopic spaces. These spaces harbour the potential for deconstructing conventional identities and dismantling prevailing heteronormative structures. In doing so, Foucault's conceptualisation of heterotopia is an analytical tool to critically examine and challenge conventional social hierarchies, allowing for a critical understanding of identity formation and power dynamics. To reinforce this framework, the study incorporates Judith Butler's notion of "performativity" as a complementary theoretical lens. The crux of this endeavour is determining whether and, if so, how these television series function as heterotopic environments, thereby facilitating the conceptualisation and negotiation of alternative identities and power structures for characters who do not conform to the heteronormative paradigm.

Television has been regarded as the most influential and most consumed medium among Thai people. Television embraces the distinct qualities of pervasiveness, invasiveness, publicness, influence and public interest, particularly in the dissemination of cultural and social ideologies and norms (Chanansara 2013, 17-18; Natee 2014, 23). Since 2010, there has been a dramatic change in Thailand's television landscape with the transformation from analogue to digital terrestrial

television and the rapid growth of online media. The rise of digital TV derives from television policy made by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Ministers Responsible for Information, in which every ASEAN member country was required to stop analogue television and change to digital terrestrial television between 2013 and 2020. The policy resulted in the rapid growth of digital terrestrial television in Thailand, which increased the number of TV channels from six free channels under the analogue system to forty-eight free digital media services (Khamyoi 2016, 1-2). However, television culture in Thailand is dominated by digital TV with online TV as an alternative platform, whereby programmes are streamed both on websites and via mobile applications in a format known as Multi-Screen (Khamyoi 2016, 5).

The emergence of online TV has profoundly impacted television culture globally. In *We Now Disrupt This Broadcast*, Amanda Lotz proposes that online TV arrives as a challenge to mainstream media, explaining that "Internet-delivered video services seemingly emerged overnight and brought with them more opportunities to watch television as well as more programming […] allowed viewers more control over what to watch and when to watch it" (2018, 113). This includes "freedom from the scarcity of an enforced schedule, combined with the developing surplus of series, [which] created a very different television environment" (Ibid.). As Lotz notes, online TV introduces viewers to a "distinctive viewing experience" (2018, 113). Similar to the qualities of Internet-delivered video services described by Lotz, in Thailand, online video platforms have been advanced by the Broadcasting Policy and Research Bureau, which has declared that online TV is an interactive, on-demand and multi-screen platform. (Broadcasting Policy and Research Bureau 2015; Khamyoi 2016). Such qualities enable online TV to serve the demand of so-called "digital natives" born in the digital age and familiar with the internet and digital devices. These digital natives are the primary group of customers in the television industry (Khamyoi 2016, 5).

Moreover, research conducted by Millward Brown found that Thai people spend 78 minutes daily watching television while spending 358 minutes watching online TV (Brandinside 2017). A significant difference in time spent on television and online TV indicates that online TV is popular among Thai people. Kasikorn Research Centre (2015) has also reported that the rapid growth of online TV is caused by increased usage of smartphones and tablets connected to the Internet and

the extending market of mainstream TV production starting to approach online video platforms such as Line TV and YouTube, which allow repeat viewing and interactive experiences for viewers.

To investigate this intricate question deeper, the study narrows its focus to characters who manifest a range of identities deviating from conventional gender and sexual norms. Subsequently, this thesis aspires to illuminate how the series, as mentioned earlier on Line TV, serves as heterotopic realms of transformation. These series challenge pre-existing societal paradigms while simultaneously providing a discursive platform for the emergence and renegotiation of non-normative identities. The transition from examining specific characters to broader societal implications reflects the multi-layered complexity of the issue at hand, highlighting the transformative potential of these media spaces.

II. My Engagement as a Queer Activist and Scholar

My lived experiences and engagements as a queer activist and scholar have influenced my academic trajectory. My research interest in queer experiences of gender and sexuality started from the building blocks of a critical awareness of ongoing heteronormative impositions and patriarchal intrusion which exists in Thai socio-cultural life. As a child growing up in rural Thailand between the 1980s and 2010s, I observed the limitations of public perception regarding non-normative gender and sexual identities. Since there was little to no recognition of sex, gender and identity in curricula or social discourse, non-normative individuals faced stigmatisation and misunderstanding. For instance, in rural communities, there were stringent social rules and discrimination against anyone who refused to accept gender norms.

Furthermore, awareness of queer identities in media was low, with examples of harmful stereotypes. As a consequence, the absence of positive representation added to the culture of silence around queer issues. Since the social system was not supportive, this challenged underlying issues of coming to terms with one's own sexuality or gender identity. Therefore, the background of my research is based on elements that have been triggered by the social situation in Thailand, which has traditionally undermined non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities through

patriarchal and military regimes. The government used state-controlled media to promote patriarchal values, with the aim of entrenching traditional gender roles.

During the period I was growing up the Thai government presented anything other than strict adherence to gender norms as a violation of the national moral code, claiming that it would endanger Thai cultural traditions. The established institutionalised patriarchy legitimises oppression by excluding non-heterosexual individuals from decision-making processes related to public discourse and policy decisions. When denied equal rights, the queer community must accept marginalised roles which strengthens social discrimination against them. The state intends this exclusion as an active tool to preserve its power relationships. Legal and cultural systems collaborate to exclude queer people from representation at both levels and weak legal safeguards make their exclusion more severe.

Historically, a practice of strategic avoidance has characterised the Thai legal system's approach toward acknowledgement of societal bigotry, resulting in the lack of significant protection for queer communities. The legalisation of same-sex marriage on January 23, 2025, is a landmark achievement, proving to the world that love conquers all. Regardless of that, as someone who got hitched in 2007, I think we also need to look at its impact on society on a larger scale. The law gives formal recognition to same-sex couples but does little to remedy the systemic refusal of services in areas such as employment, health care and education. This successful reform hinged on activists and scholars showing that marriage equality provides society an economic and social boon. I fear this reform may become merely symbolic unless advocacy continues. As deep-seated inequalities are codified into the law, the legal framework will fail to counter these inequalities embedded in everyday life without consistent pressure.

The law is a response to changing political and public sentiment, but such changes are tenuous if they do not lead to the structural change the world needs. Protecting people with non-normative identities through legal frameworks is an insufficient remedy to dismantle entrenched power. Legal frameworks alone cannot systematically include those who are excluded. At the same time, the law reflects the failure of isolated reforms to stem particular forms of exclusion, as its protective provisions do not confront the underlying causes of disenfranchisement. For real change, victories

in the courts must come hand in hand with strategies that will make sure legal gains lead directly to real progress in people's daily lives.

My research responds to these ongoing imperatives and builds on existing scholarship to consider ways that digital media contest the state-inflected heteronormative and patriarchal normalise of Thailand. My focus is on the heterotopic nature of the various digital spaces on digital platforms, which provide alternative spaces where marginalised communities can create identities as a means of resisting exclusion while doing so in more subversive ways. While their stereotypes are commonplace in traditional media, digital environments encourage self-representation and nurture community participation, thus magnifying the power of activist groups. For instance, Line TV manifests its defiance through Boys' Love (or BL) dramas which challenge standard gender perspectives. The original Japanese BL dramas were adapted to local Thai meaning through their exploration of complicated emotional same-sex relationships. Traditional media avoids showing queer experiences, but BL purports to show authentic depictions of queer love, which attract viewers and disputes misconceptions that have persisted for decades. BL fan communities create shared creative works both for and about BL content which functions to increase queer visibility and establish a sense of solidarity among members (these creative actions contribute to this social task). I continue to view this genre with suspicion because of its inherent commercial exploitation of elements of queer identity by and for outsiders to the community. Many BL productions focus on an audience of heterosexual individuals because this strategic choice risks transforming queer experiences into mass entertainment products. As with legal victories, the visible progress made through advances in media visibility becomes empty when structural changes fail to accompany it, thus making non-inclusion persist in the fundamental infrastructure of exclusion. This research analyses the dual effects of queer advocacy and queer media journalism on their advocacy power which requires continued activism beyond mere representation. The affiliative and intelligence-stimulating nature positions BL outside of the entertainment realm.

As the discussion above indicates, this visibility does not come without complications. Whether BL narratives are truly transgressing heteronormative discourses or simply in line with market demands is what makes the narratives of BL popular. Although BL expands the visibility of non-normative identities, much of its framing draws on heterosexual female-centric perceptions, where

queer identities may be reduced to consumable tropes. That commodification eclipses the best, subversive potential of BL because it emphasises sanitised romance over the reality of queer life. Thus, this study also questions the prevalence of Western-focused paradigms in queer media studies that align the representation with eventual acceptance on a horizontal line. This framework fails to account for the socio-political context of Thailand, in which state surveillance and patriarchal values remain obstacles to queer rights even after several legal victories, like the recent legalisation of same-sex marriage. Through digital platforms like Line TV, hegemonic values enshrine ritualistic notions of visibility, but at the same time, they provide spaces for modes of resistance, though occupying broader constraints where the potential for structural change remains tenuous. Therefore, this research situates Thai queer representation within this complex dynamic to point out the need for critical, context-specific approaches to queer visibility and activism.

It is, then, under the microscope provided by the interplay between queer media representation and cultural specificity that we can position this research within both global and local contexts. Inclusively, queer media studies have also expanded beyond Eurocentric approaches to include more local perspectives, both for well-known (if occasionally also Western) examples as well as less-heard voices from the Thai local context. Comparative analyses reveal the ways in which socio-political structures, cultural norms and processes of media globalisation influence non-heterosexual identities. As an example, if Western media tend to focus on individual identity and rights under the law, Thai media representations often intersect with collective identity and family expectations. That is why this thesis strives to globalise the conversation by scrutinising how digital platforms like Line TV are ambivalently negotiating transnational media flows as they confront the specific cultural particularities of Thailand. Locally, media in Thailand tries to balance tradition and modernity. Moreover, despite Thailand's acceptance of queer rights, cultural beliefs regarding gender and sex are still negatively impacted by traditional concepts, often based on Buddhism. Differing from the more politically charged queer media found in the West, Thai media utilises a much more ambivalent approach because it mixes non-heterosexual stories with established mainstream entertainment genres like BL dramas. That is why it is also necessary to analyse in this research how these cultural tensions are directed on Thai digital platforms that produce alternative representations.

The initiative provided by work on such platforms has accentuated the vital importance of digital spaces in contemporary queer activism, providing anonymity and accessibility to those who may otherwise find themselves unrepresented or unsupported in their immediate surroundings. This work allowed me to see intersectional challenges that queer people in Thailand face, particularly those tied to social class, geography as well as community and family expectations. I have also realised how important intersectional advocacy can be, working to combat the intersecting identities and layers of oppression that the queer community faces. Therefore, as a lecturer in this field, I have long made it my mission to include queer literature and media in my teaching curriculum in part so that my students can think critically about gender and sexuality concepts in contemporary cultural contexts. My classes explain literary and visual representations of experiences from an analytical point of view, which has influence on societal attitudes toward queer individuals. Queer literature and media should be analysed critically so that students engage with questions around identity formation and intersectionality and explore the socio-political implications of queer visibility. When taught core theoretical frameworks such as performativity and intersectionality, students acquire different skills with which they can analyse heteronormative structures, investigate the fluidity or diversity among queer identities. Hence, my activism combined with my scholarly work points to the political aspects in my thesis project, with the focus on the ways in which visibility, representation together with advocacy should work in tandem to engender meaningful social change. I try to add to the wider discussion of queer rights within Thailand through my research as I explore tensions between media representation and state-enforced heteronormativity and system that controls patriarchal order. Framing itself as an immanent critique, this thesis's foregrounding of alternative narratives and spaces of resistance provide this study with a strategic blueprint through which both legislative and cultural transformations could take place.

The conjunction of media and activism provides a crucial field within which to challenge systemic oppression, though its efficacy does not necessarily belong to the foregrounding of visibility. Rather, it calls for a move to media as a vector for structural change and unmaking regimes of exclusionary power. Hence, my thesis is both an academic inquiry and activist project, as I am interested to find out how media representation can be strategically used to challenge heteronormative frameworks as well as systemic inclusion. This research is not the result of

passive observation but is rather work in which an intentional risk has been taken to interrogate dominant structures, informed by my efforts to point out minuses of status quo and my research on queer rights. Through a critical engagement with the political stakes inscribed within media, I aim to support queer emancipation in Thailand, where all people, regardless of their gender or sexuality, will feel valued and recognised.

III. Heterotopia: The Sanctuary of Non-normative Genders and Sexualities

Drawing on Foucault's work, this study will employ heterotopia as a critical concept to investigate the representation of non-normative identities in Thai online series with focal queer content on the Line TV platform. The aim is to explore whether these online series can be said to function as heterotopic spaces to negotiate new identities and power structures for portrayals of non-normative genders and sexualities. To understand the overarching claim of the thesis, it is essential to briefly introduce the concept of utopia before understanding heterotopia, for the latter is identified by distinguishing it from the first concept. In his article "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault (1986) discussed both utopia and, especially, heterotopia as the conceptual framework of spaces. Foucault proposed the concept of spaces as emplacement, not meaning physical places but deeply implying politics in subjects' identity, embodiment and power. Spaces are not neutral but are always divided into hierarchical binaries, mirroring the organisation of power in society. He notes, "It was this complete hierarchy, this opposition, this intersection of places that constituted what could roughly be called medieval space: the space of emplacement" (1986, 3). To Foucault, space is deliberately structured by power relations where politics is inserted into subjects' identities. The structured hierarchical division impacts individuals' identities as it shapes the way they act and interact in their daily lives. This division of spaces operates through linguistics, culture, and history, as seen in social normative discourses.

Foucault theorised his ideas of spatial intersection by relating to utopia and heterotopia, proposing that both notions contradict each other but mirror each other. (Foucault 2006; Johnson 2012; Tompkins 2014). "Utopia" was initially coined by Sir Thomas More from collapsing Greek words meaning "good place" and "no place" (Tompkins 2014). The concept of utopia is used to imply ideal and desirable places which do not exist in reality. As Foucault described in "Of Other

Spaces," they are "sites with no real place […] the inverted analogy with the space of society […] fundamentally unreal spaces" (1986, 3). Unlike utopia, heterotopia is defined as

> places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society, which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (Ibid)

The distinction between utopia and heterotopia is ontology; the first is unreal and the latter is accurate. Based on Levinas's argument that utopia is "holistic, imaginary and future-oriented," Johnston suggested that heterotopia is "fragmentary, concrete and present/past-oriented." While utopia is "pregnant with "expectation" and promising to the future, heterotopia has always existed and offered possible practices but in external spaces" (Åsdam 1995; Johnston 2012). Nevertheless, both spaces do not contradict each other as they relate to each other and share some features of emplacement that provide the possibility to transcend subjects' identity and localisation beyond the boundaries of the discoursed normative regime.

Heterotopia counteracts conventionally hierarchical control and division in society. It establishes the non-normative space where subjects' identity and power can be redefined and negotiated under social and cultural performance codes regardless of the normative borderline. Heterotopia is used to study identity and power structures in different societies where cultural and social discourses control, manipulate and suppress subjects (Foucault 1986). In Queer Studies, heterotopias are understood as spaces where individuals are "free" to perform their gender and sexuality without fear of being qualified, marginalised, or punished" (Jones 2009). The queer heterotopic regime is used to subvert heteronormativity with hegemonic discourses on sex, gender and sexuality. Individuals can create their queer identity with their reiterated performance and express non-heterosexuality. This action mutually establishes queer heterotopia, as it subverts the power of hetero-hegemonic ideology and less impacts gender politics (Ibid). Significantly, Foucault further explains the subtleness of heterotopia that it is not entirely a space of emancipation but also embedded within a dominant hegemonic system (1986). This space provides both subversive counter-site and confined conditions to the prevailing structure. Foucault's concept of heterotopia offers a significant analytical framework for exploring the complicated nature of queer media

representation in Thailand. Heterotopias are spaces functioning as other spaces which mirror, challenge and simultaneously perpetuate the prevailing heteronormative cultural structures (Foucault 1986). Applying this concept to queer identities, heterotopic space enables them to reconstruct marginalised identities while also suppressing them under heteronormative discursive forces. Particularly in the context of queer media, the dualistic characteristic of heterotopia demonstrates how representations of non-normative identities are provided more visibility in the mediascape but under state regulatory conditions and cultural values. These spaces, therefore, are neither entirely emancipating nor stigmatising, but they instead negotiate the boundaries between acceptance and marginalisation, visibility and oppression, as well as subversion and conformity.

IV. Heterotopia in Queer Media

Exploring queer media in Thailand, where non-normative identities are marginalised, through a heterotopic framework can effectively demonstrate that Thai queer media can serve as a counter-site to Thai dominant heteronormative ideologies. Heterotopic spaces in Thai queer mediascape do not exist in isolation as they are operated on by multiple forces such as heteronormative ideologies embedded in society and culture, government regulations, including globalised transnational culture. Those factors have influenced Thai queer media and how it has been posited as a heterotopic space reconstructing representations of queer gender and sexuality while simultaneously being regulated by the factors reinforcing heteronormativity.

Notably, the heterotopic spaces with the juxtaposition of both increasing and constraining queer presentation are exemplified through the Thai Boys' Love series. Unlike other non-normative content media, the BL series predominantly targets a heterosexual female audience who fantasises about homoeroticism between male characters. The narratives in the BL series are, therefore, shaped in romanticised and sanitised representations of male homoeroticism depicted as a binary male-female relationship. The commercial orientation and success of the BL series in Thailand illustrates heterotopias' duality as they do not always serve as a subversive counter-site but can also operate within market-driven media that reinforce prevailing heteronormative norms. Most BL narratives construct an idealistic male-male romance but usually obey heterosexual relationship models, reproducing heteronormative dichotomy rather than wholly embracing non-normative diversity. The BL's portrayals of homoeroticism depicted as binary male-female (*seme-*

uke) positions show the dynamics of heterotopic space functioning as sites of inclusion yet containment, where visibility is permitted but under heteronormative prescribed conditions.

Outside the BL genre, this thesis argues that heterotopia is demonstrated differently in other queer series genres that highlight queer narratives beyond the BL narrative structures prioritising male-male relationships depicted as mirroring heterosexual romantic forms. While BL series are usually moulded by commercial imperatives and cater primarily to heterosexual female audiences, these genres neglect to explore the complicated lived realities of non-normative individuals deeply. The series, like *Diary of Tootsies* and *Gay OK Bangkok*, investigate non-normative identities further than BL's romanticised and fantasy-driven foundations. These series, instead, embrace themes of social and family acceptance, discrimination, workplace struggles, sexual health, and challenges of having non-normative identities in Thai society. DTS is a notable example of the series gaining widespread popularity while deviating from BL's typical narratives of teen homoeroticism. The series does not present non-normative identities as spectacles of desires but instead offers a candid and humorous portrayal of friendship, dating and self-discovery within Thailand's queer community. These styles resonate with a broader audience, not by following heteronormative expectations but by normalising non-normative identities through relatability. Similarly, GOB offers an alternative heterotopic space by exploring non-normative relationships, sex, and emotional struggles in an unfiltered manner. Unlike the market-driven BL, GOB addresses challenging issues for gay people, such as HIV awareness and internalised homophobia. In addition, they incorporate romantic relationships by portraying both happiness and breakup in couples, as they insert the idea that queer romances are not always forced to succeed to serve the audience's fancy. Such archived and failed romances fit the series in the counter-site heterotopic space. Thereby, DTS and GOB create alternative heterotopic spaces where non-normative gender and sexuality are examined through the characters' different expressions rather than typically conforming to the heteronormative expectations of the audience.

This study will employ Foucault's concept of heterotopia to explore how selected Thai non-normative series, particularly BL and queer series on Line TV, provide a sanctuary for non-normative identities. By analysing how these series represent non-normative gender and sexuality, this study aims to investigate the extent to which the series focusing on non-normative gender and

sexuality on Line TV function as a space of subversion, negotiation, or reinforcement of existing power structures.

V. Justification of Employing Line TV as the Object of Analysis

This study primarily examines the representation of characters with non-normative sexual and gender identities in the series of Line TV. I employ Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of heterotopia (1986) to investigate to what elements of these Line TV series serve to functions as heterotopia, creating space to renegotiate traditionally constructed identities as well as destabilising dominant heteronormative structures. Heterotopia is also utilised as a critical lens to closely investigate the dynamics of identity constructions, especially representations of non-normative genders and sexualities.–Focusing on analysing characters with non-conventional gender and sexual identities with heterotopia and performativity frameworks, I would like to explore whether and, if so, how the selected series functions as a heterotopic space that not only resists heteronormative societal norms but also creates a platform for the emergence and renegotiation of non-normative identities.

Media in today's world indeed has the power to construct both individual and societal perspectives with their representations in various platforms from movies and television series to advertisements. The disseminated ideologies and discourses conveyed via portrayals of non-normative characters in mainstream and traditional media are generally derogatory as caricatures or sinful characteristics. However, as detailed below, the oppression of queer identities was displaced by the arrival of non-traditional platforms like Line TV, whose non-discursive contents deviated from the traditional mainstream. Mainly, series available on Line TV, such as *Make It Right: the Series, My Dream: the Series, Diary of Tootsies,* and *Gay OK Bangkok*, show a remarkable divergence from previous norms. These series challenged preexisting societal norms, and offered a platform for expressing diverse genders, and sexual orientations.

Line TV, though now defunct, was a pioneering platform in Thailand. Founded in 2014 by Line Corporation in Japan, the company behind the widely used instant messaging application, Line, Line TV, was launched in Thailand on March 31, 2015. Aside from Thailand, it was also available in Japan and Taiwan, offering free video-on-demand content through its website and mobile

application. It also facilitated social interaction through commenting, liking, and sharing features linked to other social media platforms. Studies revealed the audience's high expectations and appreciation for Line TV content, particularly in terms of entertainment value (Kulthida & Patthama 2016, 7). However, it was shut down in 2021 as its advertisement-based online streaming model could not bear the costs of running it (*The Bangkok Post* 2021).

Nevertheless, between 2015 and 2021, Line TV strategically partnered with several digital TV channels, including Thai TV Channel 3, Channel 9, Channel 8, PPTV, MCOT HD, Channel One 31, and Workpoint before it ceased operations. Its collaboration with GMM Grammy Public Company Limited and through two of its channels, GMM ONE and GMM 25, also significantly boosted its popularity, delivering various programmes widely viewed by diverse audiences (Macthai 2015). With these collaborations, Line TV earned a competitive edge by rapidly uploading content from its partner channels, typically within just two hours of the original broadcast, a feature called "Exclusive Rerun" (Ueatrirat Piayura 2022, 275). This unique capability positioned Line TV ahead of its competitors, further solidifying its role as a leading platform in the Thai media industry. In addition to reruns, Line TV expanded its audience reach by producing exclusive original content. These original productions could only be viewed on the platform, creating a niche appeal for innovative storytelling. Live streams were simultaneously broadcast on its mainstream partner channels (Manager Online 2015; Kulthida and Patthama 2014).

With Thai users spending 70 out of the 234 minutes on their smartphone a day on the Line message application (Thansettakij News 2017), Line TV was introduced in Thailand to increase engagement with Line products. Since its launch, Line TV quickly gained traction, with 42 million users on its mobile application by 2018, 70% of whom were active viewers who preferred its offerings over traditional TV. *The Bangkok Post* (2019) reported that its daily viewing time averaged 2.43 hours, with a shift to an older audience, driven by the popularity of soap operas during peak viewing time from 6 pm to 11pm, with over 1.2 billion rerun views. Line Corporation (2019) reported similar numbers, 60% out of 55 million TV users were watching almost 2 hours of Line TV daily, which was higher than the world's daily average of one and a half hours. This pointed to the evolving trend and behaviour of media consumption in Thailand as viewers watched less traditional TV who were reported in the press as being dissatisfied with the air times and lack

of programme variety (*The Bangkok Post* 2019). While it lasted, Line TV enjoyed its position as a highly visible TV platform in Thailand, asserting that it was not competing with traditional TV but was rather complementing it by growing the number of viewers and collaboratively developing material with media organisations (Marketingoops 2018).

VI. Line TV vs Conventional Media

The series produced for and streamed on Line TV, as an alternative media platform, were ideal spaces for not only the portrayal of people with non-normative genders and sexualities but also a focal exploration of their issues. The platform actively presented content that not only included but was actively centred on such non-traditional identities. This innovative approach was arguably the reason behind its massive success. Conventional media in Thailand, and many other contexts, on the contrary, has primarily adhered to heteronormative frameworks, resorting to stereotypical portrayals that marginalise queer identities, if they are represented at all. Such representations often seemed an afterthought, perpetuating reductive or stigmatised notions of these identities. As I discuss in the next chapter, this was because traditional media often face stricter regulations and corporate pressures that deter non-mainstream representations.

A vivid example of these traditional and alternative portrayals can be seen in the 2007 Thai film *The Love of Siam*. Directed by Chookiat Sakveerakul, the film is an agonising depiction of non-normative sexual orientation within the confines of societal and parental expectations. In the story, two teenage boys experience a romantic and sexual attraction towards each other but deny themselves a relationship due to normative pressures. The character's poignant line, "I cannot be your boyfriend, but that does not mean I do not love you," encapsulates the dissonance between personal desires and societal norms, signifying how hegemonic structures can stifle the expression of authentic sexuality. The film became controversial for its marketing strategy, misleadingly portraying it as a heterosexual romantic narrative. This can be interpreted as a double subversion: while the film itself challenges normative gender and sexual expectations, its promotional strategy paradoxically reifies them by aligning the film with mainstream, heteronormative ideals. This raises critical questions about the role of media in representing but also in shaping and constraining narratives of sexual diversity, particularly in contexts where such representations are still fraught with cultural and societal taboos (Farmer 2015).

To help counteract the stigma that is attached to queer subcultures, Line TV took an expansive approach, deliberately choosing to portray a spectrum of non-normative identities and relationships with complexity. This not only provided a counter-narrative to dominant heteronormative paradigms but also introduced audiences to alternative ways of experiencing gender and sexuality. For example, the Boys' Love (BL) series, highlighting non-normative narratives, was the first of its kind, leading to its rise to the top in Thai media. In *Boys' Love Media in Thailand: Celebrity, Fans, and Transnational Asian Queer Popular Culture*, Baudinette (2023) highlights Line TV's uncensored digital streaming model, which disrupted the restrictive frameworks of terrestrial broadcasting, enabling creators to explore complex and authentic queer narratives, amplifying its transformative storytelling (Baudinette 2023, 44-46). Furthermore, as a mediator between conservative cultural norms and progressive representation, Line TV successfully balanced subversion with commercial interests (Baudinette 2023, 49).

One of Line TV's key strategies was adapting popular LGBTQ+ and homoerotic-themed novels into series. This approach ensured a ready-made fan base and fostered strong viewer engagement. The platform built a loyal community by staying faithful to the source material and nurturing fan enthusiasm. Unlike terrestrial television, Line TV catered to the "geeks" and "early adopters", ultimately rewarding them with loyalty. This perspective was taken from Seth Godin, a renowned author and businessman, shared in his TED Talk:

> The media should pay attention to geeks, innovators and early adopters because they are obsessed with products, leading to product loyalty and essential spreaders. (cited in Positioningmag 2017)

This strategy reinforced Line TV's role as a hub for authentic narratives, and impactful representation. It also empowered creators to explore love, identity, and resistance within these stories without the restrictions of traditional media.

Series like *Diary of Tootsies, Gay OK Bangkok, Make It Right: the Series,* and *My Dream: the Series* stand out for their thoughtful depictions of queer experiences. They go beyond surface-level portrayals often found in traditional Thai media, exploring the complexity of identity,

relationships, and societal expectations. For example, *Diary of Tootsies* combines humour and heartfelt moments to share the lives of three gay men and a lesbian, creating relatable and emotionally rich stories about acceptance and love (Baudinette 2023, 62). Similarly, *Gay OK Bangkok* tackles themes of friendship, romance, and health within gay communities, offering an honest and empathetic look at queer lives while pushing against societal norms.

More than just a source of entertainment, Line TV grew into a platform for education and inspiration. By focusing on LGBTQ+ stories, it fostered a deeper understanding of diverse genders and identities, creating a media environment that embraced diversity and challenged the norms which was not present in conventional media. In doing so, Line TV became not merely a content provider but a significant space for celebrating and negotiating queer identities in an increasingly interconnected world. At the same time, Line TV's progressive model has drawn comparisons with traditional Thai *lakhon* (a term that initially described theatre, but was applied to soap operas with the advent of television) as well, which Rebecca Townsend critiques for reinforcing patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies. In her article "Prisoner of Love: Sexual Violence on Thai Television," Townsend highlights how sexual violence is romanticised, with characters like Harit in *Jam Loey Rak* and Kawee in *Sawan Biang* embodying coercive frameworks that normalise abuse as romantic redemption (Townsend 2016, 11-13). Such narratives not only reaffirm traditional family structures, but also contribute to a media landscape where gendered violence is ingrained in popular culture (Townsend 2016, 14).

In contrast, Line TV's BL series reimagined intimacy as consensual and affirming, offering a vital alternative to these coercive depictions (Baudinette 2023, 46). Therefore, this contrast between traditional media outlets and alternative platforms like Line TV provides rich terrain for academic inquiry. This comparison underscores the imperative for further scholarly investigation into how these alternative media spaces continue to revolutionise the representation of non-normative genders and sexualities, thereby challenging and enriching collective understandings of modern identity.

VII. Line TV and Its Role in Challenging Heteronormativity

Brandishing its digital independence, Line TV was a leader for challenging heteronormativity and traditional societal norms, promoting queer representation in Thailand, and offering a space to explore heterotopia through its transformative non-heteronormative narratives (Baudinette, 2023, 54). Line TV's unique choice of series attracted a diverse audience, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, parents, and young people, both heterosexual and not. This broad appeal contributed to their phenomenal success, with over 1.2 billion views and downloads. For example, the Boys' Love (BL) series sparked conversations on queer identities, with engaging stories that resonated with audiences both locally and internationally (Baudinette 2023, 45). Similarly, series such as *TharnType* and *2gether* that became hits illustrated an interest in such subject matters, garnering millions of views, and reflecting a growing demand for narratives that resisted heteronormative conventions.

Line TV's participatory features, such as commenting and sharing, aligns with Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory media, which underscores how audience interactivity nurtures solidarity and inclusion, which I take as enhancing its role as a heterotopic medium. These features transformed passive viewers into active participants, creating a community, and validating queer voices. Moreover, Line TV was created to support local creators, ensuring its narratives authentically represented Thai non-normative experiences, moving beyond stereotypes to explore nuanced realities. Series like *Diary of Tootsies*, and *Gay OK Bangkok* exemplified this, presenting multidimensional characters within complex social terrains. These counter-narratives, in contrast to those of marginalised or stereotyped queer identities in traditional Thai media (Jirattikorn 2023, 68), appealed much more to audiences.

Through its innovative approach, Line TV created a hybrid heterotopia, blending global and local queer experiences. Aligning with Foucault's framework, this heterotopic space reimagines possibilities for gender and identity. By normalising LGBTQ+ representation, and integrating diverse narratives into mainstream consumption, it challenged the stigma and invisibility of queer individuals, highlighting its transformative potential for broader societal change (Chan 2021, 50). Ultimately, it has become a critical agent of cultural and social transformation in Thailand.

Inspired by innovative storytelling and content curation, Line TV has been crucial in increasing LGBTQ+ visibility beyond Thailand as well, simultaneously fostering greater acceptance of queer identities in the country, and bringing these narratives to global audiences. Such a feat established the country as a global leader in LGBTQ+ media. This was thanks to its programming, which blended local authenticity with universally resonating themes of love, resilience, and community, and emphasised authenticity, inclusivity, and accessibility, while breaking down stereotypes, and championing diverse perspectives. For example, *SOTUS: The Series*, a Boys' Love drama that was first hosted on Line TV, earned international acclaim and popularity in countries like China, Japan, Taiwan, and Macau. It won the Popular Vote Award at the 5th V Chart Awards, a music and entertainment award ceremony organised by YinYueTai, China's largest independent music website (ThaiPBSNews 2017), demonstrating the widespread appeal of Thai queer stories, and their ability to resonate globally (Baudinette 2023, 78). Similarly, *Make It Right: the Series* sparked cross-cultural conversations about LGBTQ+ representation, showcasing the Thai media's influence in shaping global perspectives on queer identities.

Line TV established such a transnational presence through the platform's subtitling of the BL series in multiple languages, such as English, Chinese, and Japanese. Its cultural impact was amplified by international fans' translation of episodes, and the creation of fan art, encouraging further global discussions on queer representation (Baudinette 2023, 47-48). This engagement not only enhanced queer visibility but also challenged perceptions of such narratives as niche, making it instead more appealing to the masses.

Line TV's reliance on market trends and generic tropes, however, was a double-edged sword. As discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, while the platform was able to appeal to fans of traditional Boys' Love (BL) storytelling by highlighting the Japanese-inspired "*seme/uke*" (dominant/submissive) dynamic in its stories, it also perpetuated gender binaries. The *seme* (dominant) was portrayed as masculine, while the *uke* (submissive) as feminine, which actually reflected heteronormative identities. In other words, traditional gender roles were being mirrored within the same-sex context. In doing so, it can be argued that the BL series on Line TV was actually reinforcing, rather than challenging, power and gender norms in relationships. As a result, it failed to break down the very stereotypes it claimed to, severely restricting its subversive

potential (Baudinette 2023). Within the broader sweep of Line TV's content, there was also a relative lack of broader representation of the queer community. It generally showcased male gay characters, instead disregarding the rest on the spectrum of queer identities, often excluding lesbians, transgender people, non-binaries binary people, and others. At most, as I discuss in Chapter Two below, such identities appeared only on the side-lines of these BL narratives. This was likely due to commercial strategy prioritising audience preferences for familiar tropes over intersectional inclusivity. This strategy ensured a steady viewership among fans who favoured these dynamics, but it also perpetuated a narrow portrayal of non-heteronormative experiences. In doing so, Line TV missed an opportunity to present more diverse stories that could resonate with a broader audience, highlighting the ongoing struggle for more inclusive and intersectional representation in media.

The fact that Line TV was shut down in 2021 marks it as a major pinnacle in the Thai digital media ecosystem. Its closure proves, however, that even as it had succeeded in becoming a heterotopic space for the representation of non-normative genders and sexualities within the tightly restricted boundaries of state-controlled TV, such fluid and capacious spaces are at risk, even when operating within a digital marketplace. Finally, Line TV's dependence on an advertisement-based revenue model ultimately became a liability, especially when faced with increasing pressure to stay profitable in light of other dominant global streaming players like Netflix, YouTube and Disney+ entering the Thai mediascape. The tension embedded in the heterotopias of media is that while they make spaces for resistance and transformation, they are also bound within that other system comprising regulatory economic and cultural powers that ultimately determine their longevity and influence.

The demise of Line TV highlights the limitations of heterotopias that are under the control of corporate power, which are always contingent on the representation's ability to generate revenue. While it relied on no state and corporate subsidy, unlike traditional television networks, this platform was an independent digital streaming platform that was, as such, more responsive to the demands of emerging viewers but more susceptible to financial instability as well. However, the elements that made Line TV an innovative force (i.e., that it was digital-first, circumvented the terrestrial censors and focused on niche narratives) also led to its destruction in the presence of

other international streaming companies with greater financial resources and much broader content libraries. In this case, Foucault's tables are not of those stable utopias but of shifting sites of negotiation rendered within the dominant order and not outside of it, as he qualifies. A close reading of the shutdown reveals, however, how even apparently open media is still under the reign of economic hierarchies of representation, which tend to define what "queerness" is, in what ways it is acceptable, and for how long is possible to be in a place of visibility. However, the legacy of Line TV remains and has significantly impacted the representation of non-normative gender and sexuality in the Thai mediascape.

Between 2015 and 2021, Line TV acted as a primary platform on which Thai queer media could be changed by supplying a new space offering queer narratives beyond the bounds of conditioned moral limitations instilled by the state. However, its lasting memory in contemporary Thai media production still exists, as queer narratives now get picked up on global streaming services and localised local platforms, whose format and service line have been constructed to cater to the consumer demand that the outlet of Line TV created. It proved a success that there is an excellent audience for more nuanced and intricate queer storytelling, forcing mainstream networks and producers to reconsider how it chooses to represent non-normative gender and sexual identities. In this sense, unlike might be said to happen with the downfall of other media platforms, the disappearance of Line TV as a platform has not undone the impact of its content and its challenge to Thailand's traditional media structures, which thus serves as a continuing reminder that heterotopias, when they do not exist anymore, leave a trace that changes the landscape which they once occupied.

Therefore, although it is closed, the influence of Line TV shows how digital platforms can become sites of disruption and transformation, if only momentarily. The next challenge is to guarantee that the visualisation and representational nature created here to support the work of designers do not degrade in the age of shifting media policies and commercial pressures. The next question is, can future platforms sustain and grow such an achievement, or will the constraints of mainstream media take back control over other forms of Thai non-normative representation? Whether Line TV's heterotopia has only been temporary, its legacy in Thailand's queer media landscape shows that such spaces are necessary, even if fleeting, for breaking the boundaries of representation and

affirming its right not to conform to the norms of dominant narratives in forming public perceptions.

VIII. Series Used in the Study

To explore the representation of non-normative genders and sexualities in Line TV, this study focused on four key Line TV series, including both original programmes exclusively streamed on the platform, and those produced by partner digital channels and rerun on the platform. Unlike traditional Thai TV, which often suppresses or marginalises such content, Line TV prominently featured programmes centred on non-normative genders and sexualities. Although numerous other such series, like *2gether: The Series, Love by Chance*, and *SOTUS: The Series*, could have been selected, this study applied specific criteria to guide its choice of the four series analysed.

Firstly, the selected series highlighted the lives of characters of non-normative gender and sexual identities, focusing on their experiences living outside the normative expectations of Thailand's sex-gender-sexuality framework. Secondly, these series emphasised solidarity and diversity within queer communities by featuring ensemble casts of central characters with non-normative genders and sexualities rather than limiting the narrative to an individual or a couple. This study, therefore, analysed four series that explore themes of romantic relationships, friendship, and community solidarity, as well as the struggles faced by non-normative gender and sexual communities against societal norms and expectations.

Make It Right: the Series (Seasons 1 and 2)
Make It Right: the Series was the first Thai Boys' Love (BL) series that streamed on Line TV, adapted from a novel of the same name. Season 2 marked an expansion, with Line TV producing original content for the series. The narrative revolves around teenagers in a private all-boys school, exploring their romantic relationships and friendships while dealing with family and school-related challenges. These experiences contribute to their personal growth and maturity. The series emphasises the coming-of-age journey, intertwined with coming out, as the characters navigate their paths to adulthood. Season 1 aired from May 15, 2016, to July 31, 2016, while Season 2 ran from May 7, 2017, to August 5, 2017.

My Dream: the Series

In contrast to *Make It Right: the Series*, which is categorised as a Thai BL series, *My Dream: the Series* is a fantasy and supernatural narrative. The story centres on a protagonist navigating romance and self-discovery through alternating sequences of dreams and reality, with the struggles of minor characters depicted in parallel in the narrative background. Produced by Line TV's in-house production team, and exclusively streamed on the platform, the series comprised 12 episodes, each approximately 30 minutes long. It aired from October 10, 2018 to December 19, 2018.

Diary of Tootsies (Seasons 1 and 2)

Diary of Tootsies is a comedy-drama based on real-life stories of the lives and relationships of three gay men and a lesbian who are close friends, which were originally shared on a popular Thai Facebook page. The series was produced in collaboration with production companies Gross Domestic Happiness (GDH) and Wide-screen Film. Its two seasons were broadcast simultaneously on GMM 25 and Line TV on Saturdays at 23:00 (Bangkok Standard Time), spanning 25 episodes,13 episodes in the first season, and 12 in the second, with each episode averaging 25 minutes. The series aired from January 23, 2016, to April 29, 2017.

Gay OK Bangkok (Seasons 1 and 2)

Gay OK Bangkok is a drama centred on the relationships and friendships of six gay men living in Bangkok, addressing critical gay health-related issues. It was co-produced by Trasher Bangkok, Blued, and Test BKK and streamed on Line TV on Sundays at 20:00 (Bangkok Standard Time). Consisting of seven episodes, approximately 50 minutes long each, the series began airing on March 19, 2017, and ended on April 30, 2017.

The combination of *Make It Right: the Series* (MIR), *My Dream: the Series* (MDS), *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS), and *Gay OK Bangkok* (GOB) is a perfect framework to compare BL and non-BL queer narratives, for it allows us to see the intersecting features of both and also the contrary purposes of queer narratives in Thai digital media. This selection permits a deeper analysis of how different genres may operate either within or aside from the heterotopic space of Line TV, a platform that no doubt functioned as a space for transgressive storytelling but is simultaneously

entangled in market-driven limitations. On the other hand, they offer visibility and social respect for things in the mainstream, such as the BL series, MIR, and MDS. On the one, however, they are still lodged in a commercial context that rests firmly on the heavily, sanitised portrayal of male-male romance, which is destined for a heterosexual female audience rather than an authentic presentation of a non-normative situation. Unlike other BL series that portray university characters whose queer identities are often already established, *Make It Right: the Series*(MIR) subverts conventional BL formulas by centering the perspectives of high school adolescents who remain in a state of flux, actively negotiating and contesting their sexual identities. In contrast, MDS even further develops this disruption by utilising a fantasy as a heterotopic space in which binary gender is dissolved. Queerness does not adhere to the confines of the society. Because of this, these series hold subversive elements within a genre that remains still primarily dictated by commercial aims, and thus, they are essential case studies for the representation within BL media. By contrast, DTS and GOB work outside of the confines of the BL industrial complex to tell queered and queer narratives as opposed to romanticised idealisations. These series do just that, and in turn, by rejecting BL's aestheticised and heteronormative framing of same-sex relationships, they offer alternative queer community representation that deals with several themes not often directly addressed in mainstream BL narratives: identity, discrimination, same-sex relationships and socio-political struggles. At the same time, DTS normalises queer identities through humour and relatability rather than reducing them to objects of our desire for the allure of the same. Likewise, GOB takes no tolerance for sanitised depictions and presents unadulterated HIV awareness, gay relationships, internalised homophobia, family rejection, and emotional gay relations within Thailand. In other words, these series push back not only against dominant BL frames but also against the more general heteronormative media terrain and, thus, ought to be considered key texts in terms of how digital platforms have allowed for a much more radical rethinking of queer storytelling.

This study shifts this conversation beyond the question of representation and erasure: while both queer narratives under study are included in their homosocial settings, in BL narratives, queer characters are sometimes erased (which can be viewed as symbolic in nature) and sometimes included (which is often quite liberatory), and in non-BL narratives, this binary is once again problematic with queer visibility neither resulting in liberation, nor subversion and conformity in

a constant state of negotiation. As a heterotopic space, Line TV provided an alternative media landscape in which non-normative gender and sexual identities became visible. Yet, the space was entangled with larger structures of marketability and censorship of audience expectations. In contrast, *Diary of Tootsies* and *Gay OK Bangkok* are two non-BL series that prove that digital media can give space and voice to authentic, non-normative experiences beyond the heteronormative norm. As most of these two groups are intertwined, immersed in a mass media ocean characterised by images transmitted as information and dissemination, this comparative analysis reveals that whilst holding the dualistic relevance of digital media as a site of empowerment as well as the mechanism of containment, it also points to the ongoing articulations between imaginative and commercial framing.

In conclusion, this study explores how digital platforms such as Line TV have diversified spaces for queer storytelling in Thailand, as they have provided the possibility to tell new stories. Their effects are influenced by who accesses the narrative, who is intended as an audience, and whether visibility leads to structural change. This research then highlights the need for more inclusion and intersectionality, both politically and representatively of queer identities in Thai media, by critically examining how the BL media framework, along with non-BL queer media, normalises, as well as ruptures, the acceptance of dominant queer norms.

IX. Subversions of Heteronormativity Scaffolded in Four Series' Heterotopias

Heteronormative ideologies prevail in society and culture. Televisual artefacts such as *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS) are brought to life through the physical performances of actors whose embodied gestures and confident, often flamboyant demeanour create a seductive and charismatic appeal. In contrast, *Make It Right:the Series* (MIR) exists in a more transient and affective space, capturing the fluid and uncertain emotional states of adolescence rather than relying on overt performative flair. *My Dream the Series* (MDS) offers a sense of narrative and emotional substance through its engagement with dream logic and introspective character development. Meanwhile, *Gay OK Bangkok* (GOB) draws its power from the organic coherence of the series, building intensity through its episodic structure, character arcs, and cumulative emotional weight. Though each employs narrative techniques, a thematic cohesiveness connects them, a unified counternarrative destabilising the dominant ideological frameworks that reductively dichotomise complex and

nuanced gender and sexual identities into binary terms. The constitutive threads of these series are inextricable from the concept of "queer heterotopia," a theoretical framework for describing spaces, real and metaphorical that subvert and unsettle normative gender and sexual arrangements. Within each series, heteronormative paradigms as they exist in the larger sociocultural landscape are critically interrogated, dissembled, and rebuilt as necessary to fit within a heterotopic space, an alternate microcosm.

In these heterotopic spaces, strategies are mobilised to narrate and validate non-normative subjectivities. Coming of age in MIR, the fantastical in MDS, queer linguistics in DTS, and queer didacticism in GOB collectively present complex machinery for the negotiation of transgressive identities outside of a reductive grammar of male/female. This is a subversive act that opens the door to liberation to embrace a diversity of gender fluidity and sexual diversities. The characters' evolution in these televisual narratives, however, is not simply of the individual variety. Rather, they represent liberatory journeys, in which characters move away from their original personae, stamped and confined by the mechanisms of heteronormativity, towards a true self that more completely reflects their innate complexities. These journeys as a whole resonate well outside of any one story, and have different effects on the wider queer community. From this perspective, such series foster a sense of connectedness and solidarity among individuals with non-normative identities. In short, the thematic and structural elements of these series crystallise into a heterotopic geography in which the traditional monuments of gender and sexual identities are not just resisted but are actually deconstructed and reconstructed. It allows more complex identities to emerge in opposition to dominant norms. By examining non-normative genders and sexualities in MIR, MDS, DTS, and GOB, my analysis makes an essential contribution to critical scholarship, demonstrating the various modalities of parody wherein heteronormative ideologies can be undermined and transformed.

MIR offers critical investigation of how the series functions as heterotopia with its focus on the psychosocial dimensions of "coming of age" within heterotopic space. The series serves to extend and deepen our theoretical roots, illuminating the interrelated complexity of linguistic, psychological, and spatial constructions which inform the creation and reinforcement of heteronormative structures in both virtual and material spaces. This primes the critical discussion

for examining the multidimensional processes through which media operates as heterotopia, thereby laying the conceptual groundwork for a more comprehensive and critical analysis. "Coming of age" is a critical framework of analysis that does not operate on a linear timeline. In MIR, this process is a psychosocial journey of formative experiences and life lessons that shape the characters into the sexually conscious people they are becoming. The unique context of school as a heterotopic space allowed these developments to play out in ways that undermined traditional formations of sexual identity. To elucidate this conversation, the chapter introduces "youth narratives" and draws on an analytic structure framing adolescence as a fluid transition, not a fixed destination leading to adulthood. Within this framework, the "coming out" trope undergoes a transformative repositioning. Each episode adds depth to the multidimensional quilt of the characters' identities, providing multiple "comings out" that serve as way stations in their journey instead of its endpoint. Moving on to the analysis of heterotopia, the chapter discusses how this theoretical view provides an alternative lens with which to understand dynamics in MIR. This Foucauldian framework helped reveal how the high school, a microcosm of larger society, subverts norms. Instead of canonizing dominant societal norms, such a heterotopic space can simulate society at large and offer space to question and un-learn known paths in society. This adds more layers onto the narrative of "coming of age" that approaches MIR as a trajectory takes place within a heterotopic space. This more outlaw setting heightens the characters' journeys, defying standard pathways to allow alternative sexual identities to emerge. In the same manner, the narrative of "coming out" is an alternative journey that takes shape in such a heterotopic space, and becomes an endless, complex, non-normative relationship. This extends the subversive potential of heterotopic spaces and offers new interpretative vistas combining academic insights on sexual identity formation that are not traditionally combined. In conclusion, the convergence of the dual nature of the "coming of age" narrative and the "coming out" narratives as configured by the heterotopic context of MIR play an important role in challenging heteronormative knowledge. Thus, this chapter both contributes to ongoing academic conversations around sexual and gender diversity and invites further research. It argues that sexual identities are best understood through a means of intersectional analysis, which offers a means of inquiry into the complexities of identity formation outside of heteronormative social contexts. Having focused so far on the way MIR uses the heterotopic setting of a high school to spin a complex tapestry of sexual identities and "coming out" narratives, I want to highlight that the power of heterotopia is not limited to realistic settings.

MDS provides a parallel, though opposite, way of looking at the fashioning of subversive alterity through heteronormative systems. Where MIR is grounded in psychosocial realism, MDS embraces the liberating potential of fantasy, thus extending the theoretical discussion of sex/gender performativity. The utility of the fantasy genre in MDS resides in an effective tool for the subversion of heteronormative frameworks and the establishment of queer heterotopia. MDS espouses the idea of elasticity. This indispensable theoretical tool that emphasizes the fluid and non-fixed quality of gender and sexuality. The series exists in a fantastical space, with dream sequences and magical elements, freeing identities shackled by society. In this heterotopic space, characters could be granted the freedom to achieve radical change in their gendered and sexual identities always in terms of psychological orientation and embodied practices. MDS does this through its fantastic interventions, acting as a vessel for questioning and subverting internalised gender and sexual labels. It gives a clear example of how the fantasy genre can make for a more fluid sense of identity, subverting a binary framework of gender and sexuality.

The fantasy elements also serve a double function in the narrative. On the one hand, they provide the characters with a device for overcoming emotional barriers, especially those prompted by experiences of loss or trauma. They are, on the one hand, a vehicle for the renegotiation of normatively gendered behaviour. In this context, fantasy is something other than escape; it becomes emotional and identity-based alchemy. It creates a separate space for the allurement of the normativity of structures and for the transformation of identities that disturbs the hegemony of heteronormative constructs. The theme of community and solidarity among characters with non-normative genders and sexualities is also part of the series. This sense of solidarity plays out as a crucial emotional scaffold to help characters traverse the stickiness of self and other, echoing the larger conversations within queer communities and scholarship. Thus, the nature of the weaving between fantasy and non-normative identities in this way illustrates how fantasy, as a genre, assists in creating heterotopic spaces that shake up the insidious structures of heteronormative societies. MDS therefore offers new possibilities for questioning the constraints social conventions place on sexual and gender identities. It prompts deeper scholarly exploration of the layered, shifting nature of identity construction. It calls for a more nuanced perspective that takes into account the transformative possibilities embedded within the confluence of fantasy and reality.

The phenomena witnessed in DTS, in linguistic studies, become paradigmatically representatives of linguistic creativity acting as a tool for social change. This reveals the intricate relationship between language and the formation of non-normative gender and sexual identities, as a critique of heteronormative constructs. DTS is a heterotopic space within Thai society, which functions under a socially and linguistically entrenched heteronormative regime. In this heterotopic space, characters engage in a form of linguistic resistance by enacting queer language strategies where they generate lexical connotations and play with the use of pronouns and final particles. Such forms of linguistic sabotage seep outside of the insular world of the series, impacting larger social networks as the fabricated tongue spreads outward through greater Thai society. Another essential element of this analysis is to understand language as a mechanism that can maintain or disrupt existing social systems. Rather than simply describing action DTS uses language as an active component to delineate the characters through which it is enacted and define the nature of the non-normative characters. Language is a mirror and a hammer: it reflects the reality of heteronormative constraints, but it is also the hammer being used to reshape that reality. The implication of this subversive but practical power is further extended through the fact that the invented lexical connotation has widely used in Thai society some of which even become part of dialects widely used in social media. Hence the microcosm of DTS serves as a reflection of a wider macrocosm, where linguistic innovation is viewed as a means of achieving a more expansive change in society. In dismantling the prevailing male-female structure, both of the characters are not simply forming identities but they create the conditions for an ideological transformation away from heteronormative oppression. This is why the research of linguistic creativity in DTS is so useful. This study enriches our reading of the series by illuminating the multiple ways in which language functions in the mapping of gender and sexual identities, and extends a conceptual frame which can be applied to other media and cultural artefacts. So DTS makes for an instructive case study of helpful linguistic wonders. It is proof of how other-normative bodies can borrow the frameworks of linguistics as tools to establish the power of their identities, which directly challenges the heteronormative powers that try to suppress them. The series is an apparent example of how media can act as heterotopia; providing marginalised groups the tools both to negotiate and to exceed the limits imposed on them by dominant systems.

The third salient point about the switching from how *kathoey*'s use of language interacts with DTS to how GOB can perform heteronormativity is to highlight the innumerable methods different media forms and genres can take to challenge heteronormative paradigms. If DTS employs the language to critique the heteronormative identity construction of gender and sexuality, GOB, by contrast, uses a televisual movement that situates the narrative in relation to its educational implications. The academic lens through which GOB adopts occupies a niche position in relation to other forms of media which seek to disrupt heteronormative paradigms. This is not just an incidental feature, but part of its thematic fabric. GOB is not just a pioneering televisual artefact, but also performs a dual role. It is at once a narrative exploration of non-normative identities and an educational tool. This manifold approach allows the series to become a strong contender of hegemonic heteronormativity. Starting with its narrative structure, GOB elevates characters' experiences with non-normative gender and sexual identities. GOB is active and didactic, in the manner that many series that consciously include representation are not. In particular, it provides sophisticated education about complex topics like HIV transmission and prevention and the nuances of living as a gay man in a city like Bangkok. The didacticism in GOB thus goes beyond passive education, rather to an active agitation, an agent of change. Considered more deeply in terms of its content than other more widespread media which have tended to avoid sensitive aspects of Thai culture, this series features realistic and culturally sensitive content. In this manner, GOB connects dormant information channels by serving as a portal to audiences that may not receive crucial information through appropriate networks. Noting its educational reach even further, GOB uses this didactic mode actively challenging cultural biases and assumptions that have gained hold in Thai society. Unlike other series that may tip-toe around issues of gender and sexuality, GOB embraces these issues wholeheartedly. By subverting the typical heteronormative storylines, the series encourages a critique of the sociocultural structures that maintain these narratives.

The combination of *Make It Right: the Series* (MIR), *My Dream: the Series* (MDS), *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS), and *Gay OK Bangkok* (GOB) is a useful framework to compare BL and non-BL queer narratives, for it allows us to see the implication of the intersecting purposes of queer narratives in digital Thai media. This selection permits a deeper analysis of how different genres may operate either within or aside from the heterotopic space of Line TV, a platform that no doubt functioned as a space for transgressive storytelling but is simultaneously entangled in market-driven limitations. On the other hand, they offer visibility and social respect for things in the

mainstream, such as the BL series, MIR, and MDS. MDS even further develops this disruption by utilising a fantasy as a heterotopic space in which binary gender is dissolved. Queerness does not adhere to the confines of the society. Because of this, these series hold subversive elements within a genre that remains still primarily dictated by commercial aims, and thus, they are essential case studies for the representation within BL media. Differently, DTS and GOB work outside of the confines of the BL industrial complex to tell queered and queer narratives as opposed to romanticised ideals. These series do just that, and in turn, by rejecting BL's aestheticised and heteronormative framing of same-sex relationships, they offer alternative queer community representation that deals with several themes not often directly addressed in mainstream BL narratives: identity, discrimination, same-sex relationships and socio-political struggles. At the same time, DTS normalises queer identities through humour and relatability rather than reducing them to objects of our desire for the allure of the same. Likewise, GOB takes no tolerance for sanitised depictions and presents unadulterated HIV awareness, gay relationships, internalised homophobia, family rejection, and gay emotional relations within Thailand. In other words, these series push back not only against dominant BL frames but also against the more general heteronormative media terrain and, thus, ought to be considered key texts in terms of how digital platforms have allowed for a much more radical rethinking of queer storytelling.

This study shifts this conversation beyond representation and erasure: While both queer narratives under study are included in their homosocial settings, in BL narratives, queer characters are sometimes erased (which can be viewed as a symbolic erasure) and sometimes included (which is often quite liberatory), and in non-BL narratives, this binary is once again problematic with queer visibility not resulting in liberation, nor subversion and conformity in a constant state of negotiation. As a heterotopic space, Line TV provided an alternative media landscape in which non-normative gender and sexual identities became visible. Yet, the space was entangled with larger structures of marketability and censorship of audience expectations. In contrast, *Diary of Tootsies* and *Gay OK Bangkok* are two non-BL series that prove that digital media can give space and voice to authentic, non-normative experiences beyond the heteronormative norm. As most of these two groups are intertwined, immersed in a mass media ocean characterised by images transmitted as information and dissemination, this comparative analysis reveals that whilst holding the dualistic relevance of digital media as a site of empowerment as well as the mechanism of

containment, it also points to the ongoing articulations between imaginative and commercial framing.

The study explores how digital platforms such as Line TV have diversified spaces for queer storytelling in Thailand, as they have provided the possibility to tell new stories. Their effects are influenced by who accesses the narrative, who is intended as an audience, and whether visibility leads to structural change. This research then highlights the need for more inclusion and intersectionality, both politically and representatively of queer identities in Thai media, by critically examining how the BL media framework, along with non-BL queer media, normalises, as well as ruptures, the acceptance of dominant queer norms.

X. Terminology and Definitions Used

In the circumscribed context of this research, the term "queer" is applied to categorise characters within the television series under scrutiny. The term functions as a comprehensive label for non-heterosexual identities, capturing the intricacies of non-normative gender and sexual orientations that deviate from heteronormative frameworks. Building upon Wray's theorisation, this study adopts "queer" as indicative not merely of sexual orientation but also of a broader cultural position that embodies difference, transgression, and subversion, key elements intrinsic to non-normative cultures (Wray 2009, 69). In this context, the concept of "queer" also evokes the idea of ongoing, transitional progress within a spectrum, defying categorisation into static identities. This nuanced understanding of "queer" aligns with the overarching thesis of this study, which contends that resistance to heteronormativity is an intricate, fluctuating process entailing both successful transgressions and instances of entrapment. Moreover, in my deployment of terminology within this study framework, the phrases "non-heteronormative" and "non-heterosexual identities" operate in concert with the term "queer" to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding. These terms facilitate descriptors, capturing the variances in gender expression and sexual orientation that deviate from the conventional male-female binary schema. Thus, they enrich the analytical depth of the study by providing multiple vantage points from which to investigate and comprehend the complexities of non-normative identities and orientations.

Apart from the term "queer," it is pertinent to recognise the significance of culturally specific terminology given that the analysed series are produced and disseminated within a Thai linguistic and cultural context. The indigenous Thai term *kathoey* describes male people with effeminate gender expressions and homoerotic orientations. This indigenous lexicon diverges from Anglophone conceptions of gender and sexuality, which often treat these categories as distinct. In the Thai cultural framework, these concepts are more closely interwoven, as illustrated by Morris (1994), who asserts that the Thai and Western conceptualisations of sex and gender are imbued with fundamentally different understandings of body and personhood and are, therefore not wholly translatable (Morris 1994, 23). Further, it is vital to delve into the historical and contemporary meanings of *kathoey* within the Thai cultural milieu. This term has an extensive historical precedent in Thai sexual and gender terminologies, tracing its roots to pre-modern periods. Morris explicates that *kathoey* was initially conceptualised as a hermaphroditic figure in Buddhist creation myths, representing an intermediate category in a triadic gender system (26). In contemporary Thai society, the term has shifted semantically from being a variant to being viewed as a deviant identity concerning male and female normative gender roles. Specifically, *kathoey* now serves as a counter-narrative to traditional masculinity while being more closely aligned with femininity.

Within this study's context, the term "gay" is allocated explicitly to male characters who are sexually attracted to other males but conform to masculine gender expressions. Conversely, *kathoey* designates male characters who, while sexually attracted to males, manifest feminine gender expressions. In *Diary of Tootsies*, the primary characters identify themselves as *kathoey*, whereas in *Gay OK Bangkok*, they are classified as "gay." Despite these terminological distinctions, both groups employ feminine personal pronouns when referring to themselves and their peers in non-normative communities.

To put it precisely, this study employs "queer" as an analytical framework for examining non-heteronormative and non-heterosexual identities, drawing upon its rich theoretical and cultural connotations. Additionally, the study acknowledges the importance of culturally and linguistically specific terminology such as *kathoey* and "gay" within the Thai context, thereby offering a nuanced, intersectional lens through which characters in the series are analysed.

The triadic framework of gender and sexuality is deeply interwoven in the Thai social and cultural context. My understanding centres the term *phet*, a term in Thai that has a linguistic and conceptual basis that entirely encapsulates all identities of biological sex, gender and sexuality. Unlike the Anglophone framework, where those identities are separate and detachable, *phet* unifies them into a single construct, revealing that Thai society views identity as integrally fluid and interrelated. This term embraces a wide range of meanings, not confined to the boundary of physical or social dimensions of identity, as it can express ontological realities, social construction, or even individual desires.

Jackson explores non-normative identities in Thai social and cultural contexts, focusing on queering phenomena in the Thai context in which the evolution of non-normative gender and sexual identities is seen concerning global phenomena such as global queering. Jackson's work offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how Thai social and cultural elements relate to queer dynamics. The Western framework of gender-related terminology usually separates biological sex, gender identity and sexuality as distinct and detachable domains. This is different to the indigenous Thai system of representing gender-related terminology. While the denotations of gender, sex and sexuality in English are explicitly separable, in Thai, they are integrated into the unified term *phet* (Morris 1994; Jackson 2000; Ojanen 2009). This term refers to sex, gender, and sexuality. The term's usage and connotations are interchangeable and overlap, as Jackson notes that "all Thai gender/sex categories continue to be understood in terms of the indigenous conception of *phet*, encompassing sexual difference, gender difference, and sexuality within a single formation" (Jackson 2000, 414). Such an indigenous framework resists the binary male-female terminology prevailing in the Anglophone system in which sex is ontologically confined to the biological sphere, gender to a sociocultural stimulus, and sexuality to personal preference and satisfied actions. As an alternative, *phet* unifies those three dimensions, demonstrating the knowledge and understanding of identity and its construction in Thailand, which is arguably incompatible with the Western paradigm.

The application of this framework shows a close relationship between indigenous terminology and the Thai context; terms such as male, female and non-normative identities are not used only to label individuals but are also used to invoke wider social and cultural discourses. The collaboration

between expressions and norms allows a more fluid and elastic construction of identity that undermines the severe heteronormative dichotomies of identity witnessed in the Anglophone context. This idea is reinforced by Jackson's descriptions of specific identity terms. According to Jackson, the expression *phet ying* can imply both femininity and femaleness, while *phet chai* implies masculinity and maleness. The expression *phet tee sam* is an umbrella term labelling non-heteronormativity including gender and sexuality. *Sab son tang phet* can imply the state of being confused about gender or sexuality or both while the expression *pid pokkati tang phet* contains pejorative connotation of deviation in gender, sex and sexuality (Jackson 2000, 409-416). The single term *phet* synthesises local traditions and global impacts to create a unique approach that fits the Thai context. This approach can also invite scholars to examine more of identity construction in a broader framework. Morris (1994) conducted a study of Thai discourses around gender and sexual identity centred on the concept of *phet* and pointed out that "because Thai and Western sex/gender systems comprise radically different notions of body and personhood, it is not completely translatable" (1994, 23). Even the basic terminology in Thai is so different from the contemporary Anglophone separation of sex and gender, which means that careful attention must be paid to the challenges of making the two systems legible between Thai and English.

However, Thai scholars, such as Kanchana Kaewthep (2004) and Amara Pongsapich (2005), have introduced three paradigms and terms: *phet saphawa/ phet sathana* and *phet withi*. These two groupings of the three words convey the individual meanings of gender and sexuality. "*Saphawa* and *Sathana* are loanwords from Pali and Sanskrit, which means condition and status. When combined with the morpheme *phet*, *phet saphawa* and *phet sathana*, they both indicate *phet* identity that has its state or status and its own conditional, in this case, to the sexed body namely, masculine and feminine" (Pongpanit 2011, 13). *Phet saphawa* and *phet sathana*, therefore, are interchangeable when used to accommodate terms from the Anglophone context into the regime of *phet*. *Withi* means way or method and can literally refer to path or ways of life embedding with a sense of preference and choices. Jackson's work in *Queer Bangkok: 21st Century Markets, Media, and Rights* (2011) has explained the elasticity of the term *phet withi*, showing it as a concept of diversity of gender and sexuality in Thailand. The flexibility conceptualised in the *phet* which makes this term significant in narratives of queer activism in Thailand as it brings the spectrum of expressions that subvert the binary identity. *Phet withi* is not only a linguistic expression of identity

but also a tool for social transformation in narratives of queer activism in Thailand (Jackson 2011, 5-8). Combined with *phet*, the term *phet withi* connotes sexuality, including sexual orientation, as individuals' choices. These contemporary Anglophone-influenced terms have also made their way to the country's legislation. The Constitution Drafting Committee for the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, which came into being in 2015, included the term *phet sapab*, which refers to sexual identity, including gender and sexuality, in the new constitution adopted in 2017. While the previous constitution recognised people on diverse in diverse religions, ages, and genders but not people of sexual minorities, the current constitution aims to "ensure all sexual identities were protected under the constitution and treated equally by the law" (Lefevre 2015). Hence, under the law, discrimination against sexual minorities is punishable by up to six months in prison and a fine of up to 20,000 baht (Ammon 2015). Further progressive advances include the success of the Marriage Equality Bill in the Thai parliament that legalised same-sex couples the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. Various queer advocacy individuals and groups, as well as social institutes and media organisations, supported this same-sex marriage legalisation, echoing their demands with inclusive terms used such as *phet saphawa* and *phet withi* to underline equality and diversity.

In *Boys Love Media in Thailand*, Baudinette proposes that the gender-related terminology in Thailand, especially relating to non-normative identities, is influenced by both Thai local and global cultural contexts. He states that:

> …the Thai concept of *phet*, defined by Jackson as a 'master concept' which incorporates sex, gender, and sexuality within 'legal, academic, and popular discourses,' appears more expansive than the traditional Western sex/gender binary. (2003, 7)

His argument about those gender-related terminologies implies that Thailand's socio-cultural dynamics are different from Western and East Asian frameworks. The term *phet* is used in various contexts, as Jackson defines it as a master concept, since it "incorporates sex, gender, and sexuality within legal, academic, and popular discourses" (7). The term *phet* suggests a more flexible and broader spectrum of identities than the "model common in the West where a gender binary comprising the categories of 'man' and 'woman' has been traditionally dominant" (7). *Phet*

transcends the Western dichotomous framework with it expansive categories of gender and sexuality, both heteronormative and non-normative identities, such as *kathoey* ("ladyboy"), *tut* ("sissy") and *tom* (butch lesbian). Although the inclusive categories make *phet* surpass binary confinement, this term is also used in the notion of strongly heteronormative norms whereby the queer identities are troubled. As noted by Scott Barmé (2023), modern Thai society is dominated by heteronormativity privileging cisgender identities and binary relationships, so non-normative identities are considered pejorative. The rigid patriarchal ideologies circulated in Thai society historically oppress women and marginalise non-normative identities (2023, 8). As Jackson, Baudinette, and other scholars have mentioned, *phet* is an explicit framework for understanding identity, as well as an integration of local traditions and global impacts and subversion to Western dichotomy. This concept provides a basis to study how gender and sexuality are constructed in the Thai context and to explore the evolution of queer identities and queer media in Thailand.

XI. Research Questions

Even though each of the four series studied in the following chapters embodies the representation of queer identities differently, the two series are not explorations in isolated data collection. Rather, they work towards a consistent argument regarding how digital platforms, specifically Line TV, served as a heterotopic space constrained by allowing and limiting the potential for queer representation in Thai media. Therefore, the study does not function merely as an examination of myriad individual series but also probes the more significant strains between visibility, marketability, and opposition in Thai queer media culture. To create a more coherent structural thread, the research question of the study needs to explicitly connect all four series through their workings of heterotopia, performativity, and the politicised dimensions of queer representation within digital media space. This study poses a central research question: how did Line TV work as a heterotopic space that enabled and limited the construction of non-normative genders and sexualities in contemporary Thai media, as portrayed from the narratives in *Make It Right*: *the Series*, *My Dream: the Series*, *Diary of Tootsies*, and *Gay OK Bangkok*? In asking this question, the analysis does not consider each series as a unique case study but rather as examples of connectivity with queerness leading to a more complex theorisation in relating queer representation, media production and audience reception. However, MIR and MDS indicate that BL series are increasingly including same-sex relationships for the sake of appealing to a mass

audience; DTS and GOB present unique forms of queer stories that are not mashed into the sanitised and romanticised forms typically found in BL series. The study asserts that queer media in Thailand is located on a continuum of negotiation of subversion and assimilation by placing these series in the same analytical framework.

This unified approach will be reinforced by the structure of each chapter, where this overarching argument will be developed. First, the theoretical framework will illustrate how Foucault's heterotopia and Butler's performativity will help in the analysis of digital queer spaces. The thesis will then analyse how BL narratives negotiate the creation of queer identities within the confines of popular frameworks that impair radical possibilities to determine how MIR and MDS engage with queer identity construction. While the discussion of DTS and GOB puts the focus on traditional depictions, this discussion will highlight how non-BL queer narratives achieve the realism, social critique, and community representation that are continually denied these marginalised narratives. Finally, the study will redirect to the other meanings of Line TV as a heterotopic media space for a critique of the future of queer representation in Thai media after Line TV's closure. Through the unification of the four series around this central research question and argument, the study not only improves its structural coherence but as well augments a more sophisticated understanding of how digital media platforms attempt to navigate the borders of queer representation between business necessity and cultural pushback. It has this method to break away from just a comparative discourse of individual texts. It offers instead a critical perspective on the fluidity of queer visibility in Thai media in a unique historical and industrial moment.

XII. Chapter Outline

The study critically investigates to what extent the Thai queer series streamed on LineTV, namely *Make It Right: the Series* (MIR), *My Dream the Series* (MDS), *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS), and *Gay OK Bangkok* (GOB), function as queer heterotopic spaces. These heterotopias provide sites of both subversion and suppression, allowing non-normative identity reconstruction and subversion against heteronormativity and reinforcing heteronormative hegemonic power.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter began with my engagement as a queer scholar and activist, positioning my study within the academic field and experience of queer identity. The chapter has then provided theoretical justification for using heterotopias, arguing that Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias is a suitable framework for studying the representation of non-normative gender and sexuality in the Thai queer series, particularly whether they allow resistance or conformity to heteronormativity. Moreover, the chapter has justified the selection of Line TV and its series, categorised into Boys' Love and queer series as alternative media space distinct from traditional mainstream Thai media. Moreover, the chapter explains key terminology used throughout the study, both in Anglophone and Thai terms particularly in relation to queer identities, heteronormativity and linguistic and cultural lexicons of Thai non-normative representations.

Chapter 2: The History and Representation of Queer Identities in Thai Media

The second chapter illustrates a historical outline of queer identities and their representations in Thai mediascape, drawing the evolution from the premodern period in which gender and sexuality are deeply rooted in Buddhism to the rise of queer identities era with emergence of Line TV platform and Boys Love genre. The chapter begins with an investigation of premodern Thai society influenced by Buddhism that flexibly embraced queer identities. However, Western colonisation and modernisation brought heteronormative ideologies to Thailand, and heteronormative dichotomy became prevailing in Thai gender system, leading to subsequent suppression of non-normative gender and sexuality. Then, this chapter moves to the rise of *kathoey* visibility in Thai media both publication, film and television platforms with the analysis that the visibility came with pejorative portrayals as comic relief and tragic figures. This particular period also witnessed state censorship regulating and restricting the visibility of queer identities, especially *kathoey*, in the public sphere.

Chapter3: Coming of Age in *Make It Right: the Series*

This chapter situates *Make It Right: the Series* within the Boys' Love (BL) landscape while adopting the concept of "coming of age" as an analytical framework, transcending mere chronological development to focus on the psychosocial maturation of characters This chapter explores the complex, formative experiences and life lessons that contribute to the evolving sexual

identities of the series' protagonists: Fuse, Tee, Frame, Book, Nine, and Yok. Set against the backdrop of a school environment, this unique setting functions as a heterotopic space in which these developments unfold, thereby destabilising conventional paradigms of sexual identity formation. To deepen the discussion, this chapter integrates the notion of "youth narratives," which serve as an analytical scaffold that conceptualises adolescence as a fluid transition rather than a static stage leading to adulthood. Within this framework, the "coming out" trope is repositioned not as a conclusion but as a pivotal milestone in an ongoing journey of self-discovery.

Chapter 4: Fantasy Tropes in *My Dream: the Series*

This chapter examines another BL series *My Dream: the Series* highlighting how fantasy, as the primary features, challenges social ideologies and norms surrounding gender and sexuality. MDS employs fantasy tropes, illustrated in the series as dream sequences, supernatural and magical elements, to destabilise the traditional perceptions of gender and sexuality. The characters, Runway and Dr. Good who are traumatised by death of father and girlfriend, encounter mysterious strangers that facilitate their emotional alchemy and non-normative sexuality development. The chapter proposes that the fantasy allows a subversive space where gender and sexuality can be non-normatively constructed as fluid and beyond societal expectations.

Chapter 5: The Queer Heterotopia of Language Usage in *Diary of Tootsies*

The fifth chapter explores the linguistic creativity in *Diary of Tootsies*, a queer series that diverges from the Boys' Love (BL) genre, offering a distinct narrative and representational approach. The chapter argues that language serves a dual function: as a reflection of and a tool for reshaping societal norms pertaining to non-normative gender and sexual identities. Through its diary-like narrative format, DTS employs various queer linguistic strategies. For instance, lexical connotations and the strategic use of pronouns and final particles are manipulated by the series' *kathoey* characters: Gus, Golf, and Kim, to communicate both within the *kathoey* community and to a broader audience. By acknowledging language's mutable and dynamic nature, the series leverages it as a platform for reconstructing non-normative identities. Consequently, DTS challenges hegemonic norms and offers alternative frameworks for understanding gender and sexuality.

Chapter 6: Pedagogical Narratives in *Gay OK Bangkok*

The sixth chapter shifts its focus to *Gay OK Bangkok* (GOB), a series with narrative storytelling with educational elements thereby serving as a representation of non-normative gender and sexuality and as an educational vehicle. GOB proactively disseminates detailed information on pressing issues such as HIV prevention. This function provides approach to destabilising heteronormative frameworks, transforming it from a mere storytelling platform into an instrument for societal transformation. Situating itself in the urban milieu of Bangkok, the series provides an in-depth portrayal of a group of gay men, Arm, Pom, Nut, Off, and Big. Unlike series limited to representational aims, GOB supplements traditional media channels by offering comprehensive educational content, targeting particularly gay audiences. Through this blending of narrative and education, GOB challenges existing heteronormative paradigms and invites its audience to reconsider established societal norms. The chapter posits that GOB's educational focus acts as performative resistance, contributing to broader dialogues on the fluidity and elasticity of gender and sexual identities.

Chapter7: Conclusion

The concluding chapter synthesises the distinct approaches observed in various series, each employing unique genres, settings, and narrative strategies, to create heterotopic spaces. These spaces function as enabling environments for the investigation, articulation, and, ultimately, the subversion of heteronormative paradigms, while simultaneously revealing the dual function of heterotopia, not only as a site of resistance but also as a structure that can subtly reinforce dominant norms. The chapter scrutinises the heterotopic landscapes these series construct, highlighting them as crucial spaces where the constraints imposed by a heteronormative society are interrogated, subverted, and often transcended, yet also acknowledging how these spaces can be co-opted or diluted by market-driven demands and narrative conventions. The analysis extends to explore the persistent heterocentric power dynamics revealed through the marginalisation of lesbian characters and the reinforcement of the male-female binary in homoerotic narratives, further illustrating how heterotopic spaces oscillate between radical potential and normative containment. Herein, the study introduces the concept of "liminality," a state of being between the poles of success and failure in undermining heteronormative systems. The awareness of this intricate liminality, and its strategic utilisation in the framework of queer heterotopia, provides a fertile ground for future

scholarly inquiries. Prospective studies might consider the adaptability of the queer heterotopic framework within varying sociocultural contexts, particularly within Thai media.

Having introduced the fundamental principles and theoretical framework, the next chapter will provide a historical outline of queer representation and queer media in Thai mediascape. The second chapter will trace the evolution of non-normative gender and sexuality in Thai media, foregrounding key socio-political and cultural shifts that have influenced their portrayals. By examining historical contexts, including the impact of Westernisation, nationalism, and state regulations, this chapter will set the foundation for understanding how Thai contemporary media, particularly alternative digital platforms like Line TV, have disrupted traditional heteronormative narratives. This chronicle background is essential for understanding the particular case of the series in Line TV and how they function as heterotopia, offering spaces where non-normative identities can be negotiated, represented, and redefined within the broader socio-cultural landscape of Thailand.

Chapter Two: History and Representation of Queer Identities in Thai Media

I. Introduction

The portrayal of queer identities in Thai media has significantly evolved over the past several decades, reflecting broader societal changes and the impact of global cultural influences. This chapter explores the history of queer media in Thailand, examining debates over its production and representation, and discusses the complex scholarship related to queerness and media in Thailand through the grounding of critical Asian studies. By synthesizing key academic works and analysing historical contexts, this chapter investigates the key approaches scholars have used to understand how queer identities have been depicted and negotiated within Thai media, focusing on the interplay between local and global influences.

In recent decades, the visibility of queer identities in Thai media has increased, paralleling shifts in societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality. Peter A. Jackson, a well-known scholar of gender and sexuality studies, especially queer studies and the history of queer identities in Thailand, notes, "The increasing visibility of queer identities in Thai media parallels broader societal shifts towards more progressive attitudes on gender and sexuality" (2003, 35). However, this visibility has often been accompanied by complex negotiations of cultural values, social norms, and political pressures. The media serves as a crucial site where these negotiations play out, providing a lens through which to examine the broader cultural and societal transformations in Thailand.

To gain an understanding of the historical context of queer identities and queer media in Thailand, this chapter is structured chronologically. It highlights key periods that mark significant milestones in the journey of queer identities and media in Thailand. Each section presents cultural, social, and political factors that have shaped the representation of queer identities, offering analysis of how these representations have evolved over time. Starting with early portrayals of queer identities in Thai media, the chapter traces the progression through various eras, examining pivotal moments that have influenced public perception and acceptance. By contextualizing these developments within the broader framework of global cultural exchanges and local sociopolitical dynamics, the

chapter aims to provide a holistic view of the evolution of queer media in Thailand. By examining the interplay between local and global influences, it seeks to uncover the complex and dynamic processes that have shaped the portrayal of queer identities in Thai media. To lay the groundwork for this analysis, it is essential to explore the early representations and cultural contexts that characterized the formative years of queer media in the country considering the complex historical development of the queer identities and experiences represented.

This chapter therefore offers a historical investigation of the development of queer representation in Thai media, acknowledging the role of state policy and political intervention in the evolution of queer identities and their representation. The structure of the chapter first provides an account of the historical context of the interaction between traditional Thai understandings of the sex-gender-sexuality complex and Western discourses of binary gender and sexuality as political categories, and then divides the recent narrative of these developments into three principal periods, showing the chronological transformation of media representations of non-normative gender and sexual identities in response to the socio-cultural shifts. Each period develops a critical understanding of how non-normative genders and sexualities have been constructed and how they have been depicted in the Thai mediascape. Through this historical investigation, the chapter aims to present the evolution of Thai social and media landscapes and their impact on the visibility and acceptance of queer identities in order to provide the necessary historical and media context for understanding what is new and noteworthy about the four series chosen to represent the Line TV era.

The first, historical section describes the conditions the premodern period (before the introduction of Western discourses of homosexuality in the 1960s), which was characterised by a close association between queer identities and the premodern Thai sociocultural context hugely influenced by Buddhist doctrines, and traces through relevant political and social developments through to the present day. In this premodern era, Buddhist philosophy emphasises ethical conduct over ontological sexuality and expands the boundaries of gender and sexuality in social roles. This premodern period indicates the existence of non-heteronormative identities and the fluidity of gender roles within social contexts and traditional performances. These cultural expressions indicate that premodern artistic narratives recognise a plurality of identities rather than stigmatise them. The first period of this chapter's account of media representations of non-normative genders

and sexualities is Westernisation and Cultural shifts (1980s-1990s), a time which heralded the arrival of Western heteronormativity and its dichotomous conception of gender. The changes in social practices, media, and economy, as determined by Western ideologies, have caused an adjustment to Thai conventional gender perspectives. During this era, modernisation and globalization, including through the rise of Western medical and psychological discourses about non-normative genders and sexualities, played crucial roles in shaping Thai societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality, informing the medico-legal apparatus through which censorship cemented the oppression of non-normative identities in the mainstream media. The second period is the Shift in Media Representation with Digital TV (2000s-2010s), which saw the emergence of digital television platforms and media technology. Digital platforms such as Line TV constitute an alternative space initiating the visibility of the representation of non-normative genders and sexualities. The rapid increase of digital streaming platforms brought diverse content to the audience, from niche to mass audiences. Significantly, the change consists of the fact that in these spaces, non-normative identities are presented as the focal points of the narratives and are represented through the main characters. Further, emerging social media and online communities have been able to facilitate the sharing and exchanging of non-normative content, leading to the advocacy for more queer visibility. The third and final period is the Rise of Line TV and Queer Visibility (2010s- Present) in which Line TV had a role in normalising the representation of queer identities in the Thai mediascape and, to a greater extent, in societal acceptance and appreciation. This period also witnessed the rise of Boys' Love, a phenomenon that has had such an impact on the perception of the place of representations of Thai media, and scholarship about these, that it is necessary to treat the subject both in its own subsection and at length. In this period, Line TV finalised the significant shift from traditional media confinement to the normalised flexibility of queer identities in media narratives that started in the previous period, which has eventually led to social acceptance of non-normative genders and sexualities. As an online platform, Line TV has offered a space for the emergence of original content in which the authenticity of queer characters can subvert the heteronormative stereotypes traditionally of traditional media.

II. Historical Context of Queer Identities in Thailand

The evolution of queer identities and their representations in the Thai mediascape has been determined by the complicated interplay of sociocultural, political and economic aspects, which

have progressively developed the societal perception of gender and sexuality. Historically, queer identities and media representation have been influenced by mutual heteronormative reinforcement and subversions through the transformations of the social and media landscape.

To fully understand the impact of both the Line TV platform and the four specific series within the context of Thai television in society, it is necessary to engage with the complicated history of Thai conceptions of Western conceptions of sex, gender and sexuality, which have historically been directed towards the knowledge and understanding of the self. This history reflects the semi-colonial nature of Thailand's engagements with the West. It is an ever-changing field of discussion in which both the idea of a solid traditional conception of gender and sexuality and the adoption of a "modern" Western viewpoint are and should be seen as suspect. Even a simple description of the underlying categories faces major problems when translated into English, which is complicated further by adopting local understandings of elements of the relevant Western concepts over the last fifty years. Jackson and Cook (1999, 6-7) state that among Asian countries, non-heterosexuality in Thailand is unique as a result of two characteristics: a loose structure of the social system that allows individuals' freedom in sexuality, which is a contrast to some countries where homosexuality is legally prohibited; and the fact that Thailand has never been under Western colonisation while the countries surrounding it were colonies. However, it is undeniable that Western notions toward heteronormativity and gender hierarchy have influenced Thai society. Even though the country was never directly subject to Western imperialism, the interference and circulation of Western discourses have brought a semi-colonial status to Thailand (Intamool 2011, 15).

1.Non-normative Genders and Sexualities in the Pre-modern Thai context

Non-normative gender and sexual identities have long been rooted in Thailand since the pre-modern period, with the tripartite system of sex and gender identities embedded in Thai Buddhism (Morris 1994; Intamool 2011; Pongpanit 2011; Pavadee 2016). The concepts of gender and sexuality in Thailand's premodern period were rooted in societal and cultural traditions and firmly in Buddhist doctrines, especially Theravada Buddhism. According to Jackson, Buddhist ethical and cultural values in premodern Thai society differed from those of the Western moral judgement based on individuals' sexual orientation. He states that "Thai Buddhism does not regard same-sex

eroticism between laymen or laywomen as a sin," emphasizing ethical behaviour over the moral judgment of orientation (2003 n.p.). The Buddhist ethical lens does not measure morality based on sexual desire, which naturally happens as a sexual act, but instead on actions with consequences. This was different from Christian doctrines in the Western context that were entrenched by heteronormative ontology and primarily formed the societal perception of gender and sexuality constructions. Rosalind Morris notes, for instance, that religious texts such as *Pathamamulamuli*, the oldest translation of a palm-leaf manuscript of the old Lan Na kingdom, describe the origin of humans and the world from four elements: earth, fire, water and wind. There are three sex-gender identities, female, male and hermaphrodite, and four sexualities (Morris 1994). A hermaphrodite depicted in the Buddhist genesis in such texts is not regarded as belonging to a sex that has deviated from either male or female, but as an independently existing third sex with equal materiality in the system of sexual identity (Morris 1994; Pongpanit 2011; Intamool 2011). The Buddhist concept of third sex and gender in hermaphrodites provided the basis for understanding and perception of queer sex and identities and has continued to influence tolerance of non-heteronormativity in the Thai contemporary context (Pavadee 2016). Totman (2003; cited in Saisuwan 2016) notes that the triadic structure of sex and gender identities stated in Buddhism is distinct from the Christian account of Genesis in which only male and female, named Adam and Eve, are recognised as the first humans created by God. In the Thai conception, there is a third sex and gender identity not found in Western binary thinking, deriving from Christian belief (2016, 34).

One form of representation in which the transformations of ideas about gender and sexuality from before the modern era can be seen is in traditional theatre, a form whose modern equivalents provide evidence indicating queer gender and sexual identities in Thai society. Sura Intamool (2011) studied non-normative identities in the Thai cultural context through the analysis of a Thai traditional theatre performance named *Lakhon nok* and found that male performers' actions in their performances signify non-heteronormativity combining masculine and feminine traits. Apart from *Lakhon nok*, male characters in traditional performances of both central and local regions usually embrace feminine traits. Surapone Virulrak (cited in Sura Intamool 2011) categorises traditional Thai performances named *Lakhon* into four genres: *Lakhon chatri* (drama narrating warrior stories), *Lakhon nok* (literally drama for the outside, narrating stories from Thai literature and Buddhist *jataka* tales), *Lakhon phantang* (a form of drama that developed commercially in the

nineteenth century and depicted the lives of non-Thai ethnic groups) and *Lakhon nai* (literally drama for the inside, that is, the internal drama of the palace, which narrates stories from the Thai adaptations of Hindu myths in an elegant and refined style). The first two *Lakhon* were traditionally performed by male actors only, while the last one has been performed by female actors only. *Lakhon chatri* is the oldest performance derived from Indian sources. The story relates to animistic practices, god and spirit worship, and folklore. *Lakhon chatri* was traditionally performed by only male actors, but now it can be achieved by female actors. *Lakhon nok* is developed as a refinement of *Lakon chatri*, and performed outside the palace for a public audience. Performing *Lakhon nok*, the actors improvise dialogue by themselves to entertain the audience. *Lakhon nok* was traditionally performed by male actors solely. Those male performers in both *Lakhon chatri* and Lakhon nok usually had feminine traits to perform realistic female characters. In contrast, *Lakhon nai* is regarded as the most conventional of Thai performance with embedded literature, music and dance. Since *Lakhon nai* is performed in royal palaces, the actors were ladies in the palace. Nowadays, the performances are arranged only by females. (Intamool 2011, 8-9). The prevalence of non-heteronormativity in these *Lakhon* implies that in the pre-modern period, the concepts of gender and sexuality in the Thai context did not equate to the Anglophone context.

Despite the argument that the concepts of gender and sexuality in the Thai context do not overlap with the Anglophone context, Western queer theory allows the comprehendible framework for non-heterosexuality in the Thai context (Jackson 2009; Intamool 2011). Judith Butler's (1990; 1993) notions of performativity and fluidity can be used to study non-heterosexuality in Thai traditional performances. Looking through Butler's lens, Thai traditional performances are an allusion to Buddhism, and they reproduce non-heterosexuality by reiterating the performativity of hermaphrodites, embracing non-heteronormativity with some elements: cross-dressing where female characters are performed by men, hermaphrodites or "gender neutral" where male characters have feminine traits with a delicate body, female-like faces, and feminine actions.

In pre-modern Thai society, non-heterosexual acts were considered sinful and abnormal but not legally prohibited. Romjampa's Discourse on "Gay" in Thai Society, 1965-1999 (cited in Pongpanit 2011) provides historical context regarding non-normative sexuality in Thailand. In the reign of King Rama IV (1804-1868), the king composed a poem to express his disapproval of

same-sex affairs and to warn his wives regarding such offences, which was described in the poem as infidelity to him. Nevertheless, instead of imposing a strong penalty to them, King Rama IV composed a poem to subtly warn his wives off same-sex sexual relationships. This is also supported by Jackson's argument that "sexual misconduct […] has traditionally been glossed as […] violating another person's spouse (husband or wife). Homosexual activity between laypersons has traditionally fallen outside the scope of karmically significant sexual misconduct in Thailand" (1998, 59-60). Additionally, in the poem, an instance of same-sex sexual behaviour was described as *len pheuan*, literally meaning playing with a friend. The term *len pheuan* was widely known among concubines who lived in the royal palace. It had earlier existed in the Ayutthaya period (1650-1767) when King Borommatrailokanat forbade his concubines from *len pheuan*:

> Any woman having sex with another woman like a man has sex with a woman will be punished by being whipped fifty times [and will] be tattooed on the neck and paraded around the palace. (Sinnott 2004, 49)

However, the prohibition against *len pheuan* was intended to "control the loyalty of the king's court and to maintain political alliances that were established through marriages […] not be considered statements about 'homosexuality' and were not discourses of sexual repression or sexual 'deviance'" (Loos 2005; cited in Sinnott 2004, 49).

Jackson (2003) proposes that gender roles in Thai have been and continue to be flexible since Thai society permits non-normative individuals like *kathoey* to participate in performing arts without being oppressed. *kathoey* can exist in Thai culture, embracing religious and cultural roles that value their contribution rather than criticising their deviation from social norms.

2.Westernisation and Cultural Shifts (1980s–1990s)

Heteronormativity, Hegemony, and Western Influence

The concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality were introduced from Western culture in the nineteenth century as part of a discourse of pathologising medical terms leading to the description of sexual identities. Prior to their arrival, there was no discourse of distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality as identities in traditional non-Western cultures. The discourse

of a hetero-homo binary was introduced to those cultures as a result of the impact and domination of imperialism and globalisation of Western-cultures (Leap and Boellstorff 2004; cited in Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013). Westernisation can be said to have begun in earnest in Thailand in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), who was the first Chakkri monarch to leave the country and experience Western ideologies in colonised neighbour countries. King Rama V initiated reforms to the country's political structure, judiciary and state finance. The most significant of these reforms were the abolition of slavery and the establishment of a central government with a policy of reshaping the kingdom as a nation-state. Central and local administrations were set up as part of the government system reformation to maintain the absolute power of the monarchy and the king. This also involved abolishing a tradition of subjects crouching in the presence of the king, which suggested human oppression. The reforms were aimed at raising the country's standard of living to Western standards and for Thailand to become a modern country in the world community. King Rama V's reign was regarded as "Changing to New Traditions" (Petchlertanan 2017, 29).

The notions of Westernisation and modernisation were reinforced by the national administration of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram, the Prime Minister from 1938 to 1957. Phibunsongkhram introduced the idea of nationalism, which is related to Westernisation and modernisation. In 1939, he reformed the country's name from Siam to Thailand and initiated some cultural mandates, for example, to speak the official Thai language; to wear Western attire; to salute the Thai flag, and to consume Thai products (2011, 16). Those mandates imply the idea of repressive nationalism bringing the country into a homogeneous national identity. The attempt to homogenise the nation involved introducing heteronormativity regarding gender and sexual identity. Non-heterosexuality was inevitably suppressed and excluded from the homogeneous society. For example, same-sex relationships, though legal, were socially prohibited; feminine males and masculine females needed to hide their gender identities by wearing gender-normative clothes, and female characters in traditional performances were required to be performed by females only, although these roles had always previously been played by male actors who had feminine traits.

Undeniably, the hegemonic discourse of heterosexuality, where gender, sex and sexuality are categorised into a female-male dichotomy, has stigmatised non-heterosexuality in a range of

cultural contexts for a long time. However, despite such hegemony, the middle of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of non-heterosexuality regarding the emergence of sexual minorities and movements in many countries. In 1969, a group declared their identities as sexual minorities in Greenwich Village, New York (Chan 2010, preface). The visibility of non-heterosexuality increased in public arenas (Anteby and Anderson 2014). Same-sex marriage, for example, is direct evidence of the increased visibility of non-heterosexuality, witnessed in the success of efforts to legalise same-sex marriage in more than twenty countries. The Netherlands became the first country to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001, followed by countries such as Canada and South Africa, as well as many countries in Europe (Perper 2017). In the United Kingdom, the Adoption and Children Act has allowed homosexual couples to jointly apply for adoption (Sears 2005, xxxiii). Schools in New Zealand are also urged to review policies concerning gender and sexuality, including allowing gender-neutral school uniforms and toilets (Clements 2017).

Thailand has treated non-heterosexual people as "tolerable, but unaccepted" although the country is believed to be a "gay paradise" to Western eyes (Jackson 1999, 226). In 2013, Thailand's Tourism Authority introduced a "Go Thai Be Free" campaign to promote tourism and attract foreign visitors. The campaign included a well-known promotional video created to depict "pink tourism"; a niche tourism marketed to non-heterosexual tourists. The campaign helped the country gain an international reputation as a "gay paradise" or "oasis" for sexual minorities, where people feel free to express their gender and sexuality in a tolerant country (Yongcharoenchai 2013; cited in Gray 2014, 16-17). Ironically, despite the positive view from Western visitors, scholars of Thai sexual attitudes note that people of non-normative genders and sexualities are still stigmatised by Thais and are negatively perceived and treated by the majority of Thai society (Jackson 1999, 226; Kang 2010, 169; Gray 2014, 23). According to "Being LGBT in Asia: Thailand Country Report," published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2014, non-heterosexuality is still faced with some issues: the country has not legalised same-sex marriage; transsexuality is perceived as a pathology; transgender individuals are not allowed to change their gender on identity papers; sexual orientation and gender identity issues are not included in formal sex education and are not integrated into the general national curriculum (2014, 7-8). Concerning the progressive tendency

of non-heterosexuality in Asia, Taiwan is the only country legalising same-sex marriage, while other Asian countries have still treated it as "confusingly diverse" (The Economist 2017).

Impact of Nationalism on Media Representations

The modernisation and nationalist agendas under Phibunsongkhram's administration homogenised gender and sexual identities have had a great impact on the portrayal of gender in media. Members of sexual minorities, especially homosexuals, have been negatively portrayed as exhibiting an abnormality, due to the adoption of Western medical knowledge. The arrival of HIV/AIDS in Thailand in 1987 reinforced negative attitudes toward homosexuality as it was believed that the first HIV patient was a male homosexual. Thai newspapers referred to homosexuals as HIV carriers, based on then-prevalent Western notions that HIV equated to a "gay cancer" (Terdsak Romjampa 2002; cited in Pongpanit 2011, 21).

Atkins (2011) points out the idea of how the concept of homosexuality as a fixed identity that is distinct from earlier conceptions of *phet* was first introduced to Thai society via a newspaper report of the 1965 murder of Darell Burigan, the American owner and editor of Bangkok's *World* newspaper. Burigan was killed by a man who was believed to be his lover. Thai society had not been aware to the concepts of homosexuality despite its existence throughout history, until the media initiated a discourse of homosexuality in its discussions of the murder. The term homosexuality was introduced to refer to prostitution, especially male prostitutes for Caucasian customers. The media further criticised homosexuals as having a high tendency towards criminal activity and, therefore, had become an urgent problem for Thai society. The media's reports and portrayal of homosexuality contributed to an increasing unfavourable view of Thai society towards *kathoey*, reinforcing the religious avocation that homosexuality is a source of sin and shame. In the same way, masculine women, referred to as Tom, were usually depicted in media as being over-emotional, violent and likely to commit crimes. However, some attempts have been made to present non-normative gender and sexuality in Thai media spaces. In 1976, *Games*, the first Thai movie to represent a homosexual relationship, directed by Patravadi Meechuton was launched and followed by *The Last Song*, directed by Pisarn Akarasenee in 1982. These films are perceived as the first media portrayal of gays and lesbians in Thailand (Urapong Patkacha and Surakij Prangsorn 2012). Nonetheless, the appearances of gay and lesbian characters were still limited

during this time; if they existed, they were either exaggeratedly stereotypical or associated with criminality or deviance.

Challenges in Mainstream Media

It has been broadly questioned whether the existence and issues facing people of non-normative genders and sexualities should be represented in Thai media and made more easily accessible to young people. An apprehension that young people might be misguided by a stereotypical depiction of homosexuality in media, has caused debates in the broader context of Thai media regulation and censorship which has adopted a naïve theory of one-way influence between media and consumers. On April 27, 1997, the Thai Government Public Relations Department issued a letter asking every media channel not to have non-heterosexual people on broadcast television, concerned that youth audiences may imitate them and become sexually "deviant", as a result. (Inkawat 1999; Thitiwararak 2001). The prohibition of non-heterosexual people in media has caused wide controversy over human rights violation (Ibid.).

In June 2004, the Permanent Secretary of Culture gave an interview to the newspaper *Thai Rath* about the attempt to control the presence of homosexuality in Thai society:

> The Ministry of Culture will seriously monitor homosexuality in society. Although it is impossible to catch or punish homosexuals with any laws, as with pornography, we will ask for help from people in society not to let homosexuality increase any further. In our ministry, we will not allow homosexuals to work in our office. (The script of the interview and translation are quoted from Charidaphorn Songsamphan's *The Culture of Homophobia*, quoted and translated in Pongpanit 2011, 23)

While homosexuality has been suppressed in traditional media, other media platforms, especially those available on the Internet, have been less strictly controlled by the government, both through less direct oversight from the censorship regime, and the lower level of governmental ownership of the platforms themselves compared to terrestrial television, where government entities such as MCOT and the Thai Royal Army operate the networks (Farmer 2015; Jackson 2002). This allows

alternative views towards homosexuality to be communicated more freely with the audience on platforms such as Line TV.

Gender Equality Act of 2015

Later, in 2015, with the significant milestone in movement of acquiring rights for individuals with non-normative identities was the enactment of Gender Equality Act of 2015. (Suksri 2021; Min 2023). This law was enacted to promote gender equality, extending the concept to all gender identities in Thailand including men, women and non-binary individuals. The law was also purposed to prohibit discrimination based on non-normative gender and sexuality as well as provide the mechanism for victims of discrimination to receive justice. In terms of non-normative identities, the law has brought awareness to non-normative individuals about their rights and self-protection against discrimination and victimisation (Suksri 2021, 533) However, despite the enactment of this well-intentioned piece of legislation, the Gender Equality Act of 2015 has been criticised for its inefficiency in bringing about actual and observable social change. The act still struggles with the perpetuation of discrimination in Thai heteronormative society. The enforcement of the law enforcement could reach only a limited number of government agencies and private sectors and significantly failed to reach broader Thai society. (Suksri 2021, 533). Although the law was aimed at promoting gender equality as well as protecting against discrimination based on non-normative gender and sexuality, its implementation was narrowly restricted to institutional practices and excluded small-scaled organisations and businesses which are the principal sites of discriminating attitudes and environments. Furthermore, the act could not cover all contexts of Thai society, especially in provincial areas, where the law is far from having received full acknowledgement from local officials and has received less governmental cooperation than in Bangkok. The intended mechanism of protecting and supporting gender equality remain accessible to major portion of population in Thailand. Moreover, the shortage of legal documentation of gender recognition is difficult for transgender individuals in governmental activities including accessing services such as healthcare, employment and educations (Suksri 2021, 537). These inconveniences have therefore frustrated the desired benefits non-normative individuals of enacting and enforcing the law. Suksri concludes that the enactment of this law has also failed in utilizing media as a tool in redirecting representations of queer identities as well as reshaping social perceptions and ideologies. Consequently, public opinions remain negative with

continuing discrimination and misconceptions about the nature of the law causing oppression of people with queer identities (Suksri 2021, 541).

Media Representation of Non-normative Genders and Sexualities

In the previous section, I discussed how Western homogeneity reshaped gender representation in Thailand in the nineteenth century. In this section, I will explore the notion of gender representation and how media particularly shapes social attitudes towards gender identity. Foucault (2005) defines representation as the production of knowledge and meaning received through discourse. It also relates to constructing what is believed as the truth (Jay 1994; Wetherell, Simeon and Taylor 2012). A focus on gender representation is essential for the purposes of this study of non-normative gender and sexual identities in Thai online series, as it allows the investigation of the construction of a gender system and identity, and how people perceive them. Adapting Gregory Jay's proposal of the epistemology of representation, the following questions underpin my research project: What kind of knowledge and power do authorised forms of representation produce? What kind of institutions and people have such representation? Who owns or controls the means of representation? (1994; cited in Pongpanit 2011, 5)

Media is a crucial part of individuals' everyday lives. The images presented in various forms of media like movies, television series and advertisements may both consciously and subconsciously impact individuals. Media functions as an effective tool to shape the society's attitudes: it can influence people's trends, behaviours, perspectives and, to a greater extent, identity construction (Gauntlett 2002, 1-3). Mass media, in particular, is an essential part of the discourses that contribute to the formation of heteronormative norms and ideals. As a dominant mass medium, television is a powerful tool to shape gender identity that "one of the most obvious and important characteristics of television is their gender, and one of the most important lessons is […] how gender fits into society" (Barner 1999, 551). Boelstorff and Pongpanit (cited in Pongpanit 2011) believe that this form of mass media plays an essential role in constructing gender-related identity in Southeast Asia. The dominance of heterosexuality, then, not only takes place in society but is also embedded in the media, functioning as the main dissemination of social discourse, including social and human values constructed within the discourse (Hazaea, Ibrahim and Mohd Nor 2014, 1). In mainstream media, whether in TV, radio or print media, non-heterosexuality has historically

been pejoratively portrayed as a deviance, abnormality, Buddhist sin, and pathology and aggression (Pongpanit 2011; Gray 2014).

Queer Identities in Publishing Media in the 1990s

Despite the successes of lesbian and gay activism and scholarship immediately beforhand, the 1990s was crucial for queer studies, which was introduced as an academic discipline to make up for perceived shortcomings in the conception of lesbian and gay studies. In this period, scholars like Judith Butler (1988; 1990) introduced the theory of deconstructing the notions of gender, sex, and sexuality by proposing that those identities are socially constructed rather than the result of natural inheritance. The rejection of the existential concept of naturally assigned gender and sexuality was marked as essential to the progress of queer studies as it opened greater understandings of fluidity and intersectionality (Miller 2021; Oishi and Seita 2023). Through this process, the world was introduced to a new understanding of queer identities. This new understanding later became the dominant Western framework impacting the global perception of queer identities, influencing increased activism and visibility of the queer community worldwide. The emergence of global queer scholarship greatly impacted local-scale movements of queer identities. The theoretical framework introduced by global queer scholarship broadened local understandings of gender and sexuality, which had been previously confined to traditional discourses, with the admixture of earlier encounters with Western discourses of sex and sexuality. The new knowledge acquired from Western scholarship joined forces with local areas' societal and cultural awareness and encouraged local diversity movements (Sinnott 2011).

In Asia, the 1990s were also marked as an essential era of queer studies, calling for queer individuals' rights, the end of the cold war and the rapid evolution of the Asian mediascape (Min 2023). The increase in queer identities across Asia, influenced also by globalisation, capitalism and local gender norms, is observed as a phenomenon termed by Dennis Altman as "global queering," which led Altman to claim that "whether in Indonesia or the United States, Thailand or Italy, the range of constructions of homosexuality is growing" (Altman 1997; cited in Jackson 2009, 357). Economic growth and market capitalism brought labour commodification and mobility, leading to urbanisation and economic liberalisation. The mobility and economic liberalization of the metropolis allowed individuals more financial and social independence as

dominant social discursive structures in those countries no longer confined them. There were new subcultures that challenged traditional social norms, including queer culture, where non-normative identity and community were initiated (Jackson 2009, 368-370). Moreover, the growth of technology also led to media globalisation, a key factor contributing to the spread of queer representation in Asian countries (Jackson 2009; Boellstoff 2007; Min 2023). As in other Asian countries, the 1990s was a period of economic growth in Thailand. The country's economic prosperity saw Thailand move toward globalisation and exposure to global culture (Min 2023, 34). Jackson proposes that on top of economic transformation, print capitalism also played a significant role in constructing queer identities in Thailand. The arrival of vernacular print capitalism distributed the dissemination of non-normative ideologies, resulting in the development of queer communities on a national scale. As Jackson says, "[m]odern Thai queer subjectivities can thus be seen as constituting a nation-level, 'imagined sexual community,' as facilitated by both mainstream and community-based forms of Thai print capitalism" (Jackson 2009, 363). Locally produced Thai magazines, newspapers and other print media increasingly presented queer identities, permitting individuals with non-normative gender and sexuality some limited, venue-specific control over how their identities would be represented in media. This was a starting point in creating a sense of community for queer individuals. The vivid evidence was the first commercial in a Thai gay magazine, *Mithuna Junior*, produced in 1984 by and for gay men (Jackson 2009). The magazine was exclusively focused on gay content, which it pioneered in the Thai publishing market. According to Jackson, there had been a high demand for queer media since the period before the magazine's publication, as he described the editor's vision:

> [...] there was likely a market for gay magazine content in Thailand because a friend working at *Num-Sao* had told him about the flood of letters to the magazine's editor from gay readers in appreciation of its male nude centrefolds. At the time, no other nationally distributed Thai magazine included male centrefolds, and no Western gay publication had yet been marketed in the country. (Jackson 2009, 373)

The market for gay media content in Thailand by that time contained both consumer demand and reader engagement. The massive number of letters indicates that non-normative individuals were actively expressing their desires. Such expression in the letters counters the notion that same-sex

desire in Thai media was actively suppressed before the emergence of explicit magazines focusing on gay content. The fact that no other Thai publications with gay-focused content and male centrefolds were available in the country by that time shows that queer media was not broadly accepted in society despite the existence of a ready base of consumers. In addition, the absence of Western gay magazines in Thailand was noteworthy as it suggests that the establishment of Thai gay publishing in 1990s was not driven by Western influence but by the response to domestic demand. It should be noted that even without the Western influence, the local queer media was able to help construct queer identities and communities in Thailand.

Moreover, the publication of *Mithuna Junior*, Thailand's first gay print magazine, which was introduced in response to the demand shown in the letters to *Num Sao* (Jackson 2009, 373-375) indicates that queer identity and desire were suppressed in Thai society before the economic proliferation in the 1990s. According to Jackson, this magazine provided a space for gay individuals to explore their identity and a space for forming a solid gay community. The success of this magazine encouraged more published non-normative content. Jackson describes the dramatic rise of gay-focused publishing in Thailand due to the Asian economic boom between 1987 and 1997. During that decade, the success of *Mithuna Junior* led to competition among magazines with focused gay content. He notes:

> By the mid-1990s, more than fifteen monthly and bimonthly Thai language gay magazines competed on the country's newsstands. *Mithuna Junior* subsequently changed hands several times, and the magazine ceased publication in the mid-1990s after almost one hundred issues. (Jackson 2009, 376)

The dramatic increase in queer content publishing market was influenced by both the country's economic growth and queer scholarship, which mutually happened through the 1990s. Apart from those gay magazines, non-normative content was also increasingly portrayed in mainstream newspapers and general publications in the form of advice and interview sections. The growing media representation of queer gender and sexuality also led to more visibility of *kathoey* and gay men's entertainment.

However, there was controversy over the increased visibility of *kathoey*, debating whether it could lead to gender and sexual deviance among Thai youth. This concern was sampled in a newspaper article in 1987 in which a writer blamed the growing number of openly gay and *kathoey* people, as Jackson describes:

> One of the causes of being gay, transgender or lesbian […] was wrong child-raising methods. Another reason so many homosexual people now dared to reveal themselves openly in public was because movies and television soap operas "incited" (*yua-yu*) youths to be gay. (Jackson 2002, 220)

Such condemnation confirms the pathologising ideologies of queer identities in Thailand, in which non-heterosexuality is viewed as a social deviation and failure of upbringing. The perception that non-normativity in individuals is caused by "wrong-raising methods" shows the patriarchal discursive prejudice that non-heterosexuals are abnormal and require fixing. Individuals with appropriate child nurture would conform to hetero binary gender and sexuality, while queerness reflects failures in parenting. This perspective was circulated as representing traditional cultural values. Moreover, the claim that soap operas and films can incite youth to become gay indicates the heteronormative anxiety of queer visibility (Jackson 2002 222). This suggests that non-normative identities were still stigmatised and oppressed in mainstream publishing despite the attempts to bring more visibility to them. The oppression of those queer identities conformed to the prevailing social discourses.

However, it is worth pointing out that the idea that queer identities resulted from being raise incorrectly or influenced by the media implies the undermining of existential frameworks. This ontology sees gender and sexuality as naturally assigned identities, which is a fixed construction under the male-female binary. As Jackson further argues, media representation of non-normative identities, especially *kathoey*, was regulated and controlled by the Thai government between the 1980s and the 1990s. Instead of legally segregating and criminalising non-normative identities, the government focused on regulating their visibility through the notion of public and private division. In the government's view, normative masculinity and femininity are considered morally proper (*somkhuan*) to the public space. At the same time, transgender identity and homosexuality are

viewed as should be kept private (*suan-tua*). This allocation is also applied to non-marital heterosexual relationships where concubinage (*mia noi*) and prostitution (*sopheni*) are likewise confined in the private domain (Jackson 2002, 205). Jackson argues that this allocating separation is operated in alignment with the government's concept of positive imagery (*phap-phot*), a national ideology which prioritises maintaining a positive image of the country over imposing rigid legal restrictions against queer identities (2002, 205), as witnessed in other countries. Being concerned about the country's positive image, the government also paid attention to the control of media representation to conform to normative heterosexual masculinity and femininity rather than intervening more directly and specifically in individuals' private lives. The government's treatment of non-normative identities illustrates a contradiction. While people with non-normative gender and sexual identities are tolerated in everyday life as long as those identities are kept private, their visibility in media, particularly on television, is subject to strict state control. The limitation of media representations of non-normative genders and sexualities is driven by the government's attempt to maintain the national *phap-phot* or positive image by regulating public morality. This control over non-normative identities on television is not strictly applied to print media, as noted by Jackson that:

> A contrast needs to be made between the Thai state's comparative lack of interest in press accounts of homosexuality and transgenderism, and the often-intense anxiety that has surrounded the visual imaging of cross-dressing men in the nation's television programmes. In the domains of gender and eroticism, the differential sensitivities of Thailand's print and electronic media create a bifurcated cultural space. A relatively, but not fully, unregulated autonomy for the printed word (as well as for private homosexual and transgender behaviours) contrasts with a much more intensely policed domain of electronic images (as well as considerable anxiety around public expressions of transgenderism and same-sex eroticism). (2002, 204)

The distinction between screen and print media implies the Thai government's strategic regulation of queer identities. Unlike television, which is strictly monitored, publishing media can have more freedom to expose and discuss topics related to queer gender and sexuality with less restrictions. Magazines and articles could further criticise societal norms and even discuss issues concerning non-normative genders and sexualities in neutral or positive tones without facing government intrusion. The absence of strict control suggests the government's consideration that those publishing magazines are less potent in shaping public attitudes than television programmes, which are seen as direct conduits to most consumers.

Another reason Thai television in the 1980s and 1990s was strictly controlled was because of the military-operated mainstream broadcasting networks, seen in Channel 5 and Channel 7. This also reinforces Jackson's statement that the government used mainstream television networks as a tool to cultivate the nation's positive image of morality and traditional values. Subsequently, queer representations were regulated or censored due to the concern that they potentially undermine dominant heteronormative ideals. This allowed queer representation to appear on screen but under the control and approval of the state authorities. This selective tolerance of non-normative representations on television reflects the government's heteronormative ideologies that queer individuals can exist in society as long as their visibility conforms to the traditional expectations in public areas.

Queer Media and the Television Landscape in the 1990s

Regarding the screen landscape, there were also changes in the representation of queer identities in television programmes, giving more visibility as characters moved from marginalised roles to central narratives. *Kathoey* was a queer identity that was the most frequently represented in Thai television and cinema throughout the 1980**s** and the 1990**s** (Jackson 2002; Fuhrmann 2016; Pongpanit and Murtagh 2022). Their representation on Thai television has remarkably increased since the early 1980**s** (Jackson 2002, 219) and then repeatedly appeared in Thai popular entertainment in the second half of the 20th century (Fuhrmann 2016, 124). However, rather than being advocated as individuals, the representations queer identities in screen media in the 1980**s** and 1990**s** underlined their pejorative stereotypes of caricature and comedic figures. Their depictions did not resist mainstream heteronormative narratives although through their appearance

on the screen, *kathoey* became familiar figures in Thai television during the late 1980s to 1990s, mainly appearing in soap operas (*lakhon*), sitcoms and variety shows.

> Since the 1980**s**, *kathoey* and effeminate gay characters have become increasingly common in Thai television soap operas (*lakhon* TV). These characters were extremely popular with viewers […] comical *kathoey* characters were often added to Thai soap operas to 'add flavour' (*pherm rot-chat*). (Jackson, 2002, 220-221)

Jackson's statement acknowledges the increasing visibility of *kathoey* and effeminate gay characters in Thai *lakhon* TV since the 1980**s** in the roles of comic relief. While this observation pinpoints the crucial shift of queer visibility in media representation, it also indicates concerns about the implication of such visibility even though it was much more progressive than in the 1960**s** when the articulation of the word *kathoey* was criticised as a violation **(**2002**,** 219). Despite their frequent presence in Thai media scape, kathoey characters were still represented in stereotypical ways rather than as developed characters with multiple traits in "substantive representation" (Jackson 2002, 221). The representation of *kathoey* demonstrates the objectification of queer identity as an amusing object rather than the subject of representation. In addition, the increasing visibility of *kathoey* in soap operas yet reducing the complicated representation of their identity suggests the commodification of non-normative individuals in Thai media as their representation as comical figures serves the mainstream audience rather than their own purposes or desires. This commercial strategy of media did not exhibit a deeper engagement with queer issues in Thai society. Instead, it merely reinforces the conformity to the heteronormative lens that *kathoey* can be included on screen as long as their existence remains non-threatening to heteronormative hegemony. Hence, while the increasing presence of *kathoey* in the television context can be marked as a significant shift in queer visibility, the confinement of these representations to comedic and commercial objects mutually failed in challenging the social discursive perceptions of *kathoey* identities.

According to Jackson, the more extensive visibility of *kathoey* in the popular media, especially soap operas, led to the state intervening to control media. Thailand has a complicated and

contradictory relationship with the queer visibility, particularly *kathoey*, in the media. Although the government has never criminalised queer actions, it has regularly monitored and controlled their representation in mainstream media. This regulation was not brought about by law enforcement in the country but by the heteronormative anxiety about the existence and increase of *kathoey*. This anxiety was provoked by conservative governmental sectors of Thai society, viewing the media representation of non-normative identities as possibly impacting younger generations. As Jackson states, there was growing anxiety that *kathoey* characters appeared on television could enable the normalisation of queer identities and youth's adaptation of those queer expressions, which would go against traditional gender roles. These concerns reached the highest point with former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's endeavour to ban *kathoey* from television broadcasts to respond to conservative complaints about an alleged lack of propriety in the depicted image of *kathoey*, as reported in *The Nation* in May 1999:

> The Public Relations Department circulated a directive to all television stations on April 27, asking for their 'cooperation' not to screen shows featuring transvestites and transsexuals 'to prevent innocent youngsters from imitating unfavourable examples.' The directive said the policy was introduced after members of the public had filed complaints with the Prime Minister via his Internet home page against 'television shows that promote sexual abnormalities.'
> (cited in Jackson 2002, 221)

This interference and command to eliminate *kathoey* presence exhibit the government's perception of non-normative gender expression as a threatening influence on young people. According to Jackson, the prime ministerial intention behind this television ban was to eliminate the cross-dressing expression of *kathoey*, as opposed to representations of gay men with normative gender identities (2002, 222), highlighting the prioritised concerns of national image.

This prime ministerial intervention caused controversy in public over the representation of *kathoey* on Thai television. Many sectors, including TV production, responded to the government's action. Colonel Amnuay Thonsuchote, director of military-run Channel 5, stated that the programmes'

scripts would be critically examined to ensure the limiting of *kathoey* appearances on television. Meanwhile, queer activists resisted this policy, arguing that the actual problem of the television ban was not *kathoey* visibility but the lack of positive portrayals in the medium (Jackson 2002 223). In addition to the queer activists, *The Bangkok Post*, a well-known English-language Thai publication, published an article titled "Get Real!" criticising television interference and arguing that watching *kathoey* representation on television did not influence youths' sexual orientation (Jackson 2002, 222). According to Jackson, the debate about the government's restriction of *kathoey* representation on television extensively went beyond moral and societal concerns to legal and constitutional implications.

The controversy brought about Article 40 of the new 1997 national constitution. The article designated broadcast frequencies as public property, implying that the government has no right and authority to control frequencies or media content. Instead, the regulatory body controls the broadcast frequency distribution to ensure that the media content is delivered to the public interest (Asian Legal Information Institute 1997). The debate also led to a backlash, criticising the government's intervention in *kathoey* representation as an abuse of authoritative power that contradicted democratic principles. It was done without consulting relevant stakeholders or the public. The government's action was viewed as undermining media independence, a fundamental pillar of a democratic society. (Jackson 2002, 222) Therefore, the 1999 failure to ban *kathoey* appearances on television illustrates the tension between state regulation and the social realities in Thailand and also implies the state's limited power in dominating social perceptions of gender and sexuality.

In the early 2000s, Thai media dramatically shifted from analogue to digital platforms. This transformation was a culmination of the representation of queer identities in the Thai mediascape. In 2004 the Thai cultural ministry issued a policy to freeze hiring non-normative individuals and also demanded Thai television stations to eliminate contents about non-normative gender and sexuality. These acts of discrimination and negative attitudes dominantly circulated in Thai society were disclosed in the newspaper *Thai Rath* on June 4, 2004, saying:

The cultural ministry will vigorously campaign about homosexual behaviour. Although we are not legally empowered to imprison these people (homosexuals) like the case of obscene materials, we will ask the public to join our anti-homosexual campaigns to stop the further proliferation of homosexuality. This will also include the ban of the representation of homosexuality in the media. The cultural ministry will issue the letter to all television stations for their cooperation (to enforce the ban). We will discipline our officials who have that kind of behaviour at the ministry and we will not recruit people with that behaviour to work with us. (cited in Min 2023, 41)

The announcement from the cultural ministry shows the government's serious action to decrease representations of non-normative genders and sexualities, and the government's refusal to accept of queer identities. In contrast to the country's image as queer paradise, the policies launched by cultural ministry indicate the government's reluctance to normalise queer identities as a part of Thai society. The traditional cultural values and ideologies still prevailing in Thailand shows that the country has not progressed to the acceptance stage due to the limitations of state policies.

3. Shifts in Representation and Global Influences after the 1990s

The 1990s marked a significant turning point for queer media in Thailand. Transitioning into this decade, Thai society began opening to global influences, resulting in notable shifts in the representation of queer identities in media. The impact of globalization brought new ideas and narratives that started permeating the local media landscape. This period saw the beginning of more diverse portrayals of queer characters, reflecting broader social changes and the influence of global media. Baudinette (2016) argues, "[t]he growing accessibility to international media allowed Thai audiences to encounter diverse representations of queer identities, fostering a more complex and inclusive narrative" (102). During the 1990s, several key media works emerged that played a crucial role in transforming the representation of queer identities in Thailand. One notable example is the film *Iron Ladies* (2000), directed by Yongyoot Thongkongtoon. The film tells the true story of a volleyball team composed of gay and transgender players, presenting their journey with humor and empathy. Baudinette (2016) notes, "*Iron Ladies* was groundbreaking in its positive

portrayal of queer characters, challenging stereotypes and promoting acceptance" (105). Another significant work from this period is the television drama *Silom Soi 2* (1997), which depicted the lives of queer individuals in Bangkok's vibrant nightlife scene. The series offered a more realistic and diverse portrayal of queer identities, highlighting their struggles and triumphs (Baudinette 2016, 107). These case studies illustrate how the 1990s marked a shift towards more inclusive and empathetic representations of queer characters in Thai media.

The influence of international media cannot be understated in this transformation. As globalization intensified, Thai audiences gained access to a variety of global media content, including Western films and TV shows that portrayed queer characters in more positive ways. These international portrayals provided alternative narratives that challenged local stereotypes and offered new ways of understanding queer identities. The success of international films like *Philadelphia* (1993) and TV shows like *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) played a role in shaping Thai media representations. These works introduced Thai audiences to diverse and positive portrayals of queer characters, influencing local media producers to adopt similar approaches. The concept of "glocalization" became evident as Thai media began to adapt international elements to fit local cultural sensibilities, resulting in a hybrid genre that resonated with Thai audiences while maintaining elements of its international origins. Baudinette (2016) argues, "This process of glocalization allows for the blending of global and local cultural elements, leading to unique and context-specific representations of queer identities" (110). As we move into the 2010s, it becomes clear that these shifts in representation were not isolated incidents but part of a broader transformation in the Thai media landscape. This decade marked significant changes driven by political, technological, and cultural forces, all of which profoundly influenced the visibility and portrayal of queer identities.

The representation of non-normative genders and sexualities in Thai media underwent a considerable transformation from the 1990s to the 2000s. During the 1990s, there were increasing portrayals of non-normative gender and sexuality but these were confined within mainstream-media stereotypes, of which the most common depictions included *kathoey*, deployed alternately as caricature or tragic figures. *Kathoey* were regular characters in Thai television, but portrayals of them were confined to broadly comedic or restrictively tragic roles with nothing in between, a situation that tended to reinforce heteronormative oppression. This period witnessed the

stigmatisation of non-normative individuals as either amusing or suffering figures, suggesting the perpetuation of dichotomy in Thai societal perception, whereas non-heterosexuality was suppressed (Farmer 2011, 83).

In contrast, the early 2000s is regarded as a turning point in Thai queer media with the emergence of queer representation challenging traditional portrayals. This can be witnessed in particular through Thai queer cinema. One of the earliest movies to depict non-normative characters deviating from discursive traditional portrayals was *Beautiful Boxer* (2003), a biographical movie about a famous transgender Thai boxer named Parinya Charoenphol. In the film, queer identity was humanised and presented in a more empathetic light compared with earlier portrayals and thus showed transgender identity as real life struggle rather than caricature or tragic fantasy. A crucial milestone was the arrival of *Love of Siam* (2007), regarded as a game changer of Thai queer cinema. As Brett Farmer (2011) observes movies such as *Love of Siam* exhibited a transition of non-normative individuals from caricature toward more emotionally layered depiction of same-sex relationship of Tong and Mew, two high school boys whose friendship progressively develop to romantic intimacy. This movie highlights Tong's internal conflicts between emotional intimacy and the pressure of expected conformation to heterosexual masculinity. The themes of self-discovery and homoeroticism make queer identities more profound and multidimensional in Thai queer cinema in a way that had hardly been witnessed before (Farmer 2011, 87). Moreover, *The Love of Siam* shifted the marketing of and mainstream perception toward non-normative movies. While the previous non-normative movies identified themselves as gay cinema, this film was labelled as a mainstream family drama as its trailers and advertisements underlined issues of family, love and self-discovery rather than the same-sex romance at the core of the film's narrative. Such a marketing strategy allowed the film to access a broader audience and positions its queer narratives in mainstream Thai pop culture (Farmer 2011, 95). In addition, the success of *The Love of Siam* brought an impression on Thai queer media as it showed the audience's keenness to more complicated and emotionally layered queer narratives, pioneering the fashion for later representations of same-sex relationships in the Thai mediascape. The impact of *The Love of Siam* is evident in the rise of the Boys' Love (BL) drama genre in the 2010s, which significantly increases queer visibility and homoeroticism. Also, Farmer argues that the fact that the film

reached a wider audience could help encourage other directors to create queer narratives that access the broader public without being limited to a niche audience (Farmer 2011, 98).

Farmer describes the essential facet of this period as "vernacular queerness," suggesting that Thai queer cinema did not entirely replicate Western queer narratives but instead distinctively created localised and culturally entrenched representations of non-normative identities and relationships (2011, 90). In other words, Thai queer cinema has adapted local Thai cultural discourses, traditions and Buddhism to produce its unique identity rather than simply following Western frameworks of queer identities. This concept of vernacular queerness is evident from the 2000s onward in Thai queer cinema with more flexible portrayals of non-normative gender and sexuality, distinctive from the explicit binary is usually seen in Western media. Notably, a key distinction of vernacular queerness in the Thai cinematic landscape is a rejection of the binary gay/lesbian identity division, which is common in the Western non-normative paradigm. Instead of labelling identities as absolute categories, non-normative gender and sexuality in Thai media are often depicted as being more elastic and fluid, following the Thai concept of *phet*, which is described in the previous chapter as a single term used to intersectionally and holistically identify gender, sex and sexuality. Farmer also points out that queer narratives in Western media usually highlight coming out as a crucial moment with a shift from heterosexual invisibility to openly labelling as gay or lesbian. By contrast, such explicit identity in Thai queer cinema as less focused on characters may elastically move between different expressions of gender and sexuality without having a moment of rigid coming out. This fluid and interchangeable expression reflects the broader Thai cultural perspectives, which historically embraced gender and sexual diversity. Moreover, the early 2000s witnessed the growing commercialization of queer identities in Thai media with the emergence of non-normative themed and focused movies, such as *Rainbow Boys: The Movie* (2005). This also led to growing numbers of queer- content consumers normalizing queer narratives from niche to mainstream media. These movies, along with the rise of gay magazines and online forums, implies the transformation in public ideologies that non-normative identities became more spotlighted and commercialized part of Thai pop culture, instead of being confined to the society's periphery.

If the period of the 2000s was a turning point for Thai queer cinema, queer representations were slower to be incorporated into Thai television. While Thai cinema, particularly independent

movies, began to examine more subtle portrayals and emotionally layered queer narratives, television remained traditional and was slower in moving toward broadcasting more complex queer narratives. This slow progress is witnessed in the continuing confinement of queer TV characters to exaggerated caricatures or comic relief without profound and realistically realized perceptions (Pongpanit 2011, 67). Thai soap operas comprehensively relied on narratives of traditional heterosexual romance in which relationships were portrayed as positive developments for the characters. In contrast, same-sex relationships in 2000s- Thai soap operas were treated as taboo, ending up in failure or tragedy. A significant obstruction to queer representation in Thai television during the 2000s was government censorship, which had a more significantly impact on shaping portrayals of queer identities on the small screen than the licensing regime for cinema. Thai television applied the strict morality code, which suppressed depictions of same-sex relationships, especially on prime-time family-oriented programming (Pongpanit 2011, 64). Under state censorship, the boards had the authority to review and regulate the contents before being broadcast. The rigid scrutiny focused on prime-time programming reaching large audiences, particularly families, caused networks to avoid content perceived as culturally or morally inappropriate. Subsequently, televisual portrayals of same-sex intimacy and discussion of queer individuals' rights were removed to prevent violating broadcast regulations. Heteronormative cultural values and historical perspectives on sexuality in Thai society influenced such morality codes. Television producers were commanded to conform to the state expectations or risk having their shows censored, fined or even pulled from being broadcast. Being wary of censorship and penalties, the television networks pre-emptively self- censored contents about non-normative gender and sexuality. By doing so, non-normative representations were presented in fashions that avoided rigid consideration about the appropriateness; queer characters were therefore depicted in roles that conform heteronormative expectations such as humorous or tragic figures marginalised in the stories (Pongpanit 2011, 66). Another factor of constraint for queer representations in Thai television was fear over public backlash from conservative and religious viewers. They were also distressed at the thought of losing viewership and advertisers, so they were reluctant to expand the heteronormative boundaries or challenge social norms. This was because Thailand remains under heteronormative traditional discourses with the slow progress of queer identities acceptance (Pongpanit 2011, 67). Nevertheless, Thai television began to transform queer representations with

the rise of the Boys Love genre in the late 2010s which mutually challenged heteronormative discursive traditions and increased queer visibility.

4. The Transformation of the Media Landscape and Queer Media in Thailand during the 2010s

As the media landscape continued to evolve, the 2010s marked a decade of significant transformation in Thailand's media landscape, particularly concerning the representation and production of queer media. This period saw notable shifts driven by political dynamics, technological advancements, and cultural movements, collectively influencing the visibility and portrayal of queer identities. Boonpap observes, "The political environment in Thailand during the 2010s was marked by instability and multiple military interventions, significantly impacting media freedoms" (Boonpap 2018, 45). The military government's control over media content led to widespread censorship and self-censorship among traditional media outlets. Broadcast content depicting queer intimacy or discussing sexual orientation and gender identity was often altered or removed entirely. Despite these restrictive measures, digital platforms emerged as a critical space for uncensored queer representation. Social media allowed queer individuals to share their stories and connect with others, sustaining the visibility and momentum of the queer rights movement. These digital counter-currents played a vital role in counteracting the oppressive environment imposed by the military government (Boonpap 2018, 47).

One of the most notable developments in Thai queer media during the 2010s was the rise of Boys' Love (BL) dramas, which depict romantic relationships between male characters. *Lovesick the Series*, which premiered in 2014, is often credited as a pioneering force in this genre. By challenging heteronormative narratives, it gained both domestic and international popularity, highlighting a growing demand for queer content. Baudinette (2016) elaborates, "*Lovesick the Series* adapts Japanese BL conventions to fit Thai cultural sensibilities, a process described as 'glocalization'" (Baudinette 2016, 112). This adaptation was not only a marketing strategy but also a means to introduce a new form of reading male-male romantic relationships in Thailand. The series navigates between the traditional Thai soap-opera genre called *lakhon*, which is inherently heteronormative, and the homosocial focus of Japanese BL, creating a unique narrative structure

that wavers between queer romance and heterosexual subplots. Such wavering is central to the glocalization process, making *Lovesick the Series* a significant example of how Japanese cultural products are transformed to resonate with local audiences while retaining their core elements (Baudinette 2016, 113; see also Chan 2021). The series also marked a 'watershed moment' in the representation of queer relationships in Thai media, particularly through its positive portrayal of a relationship between two cisgender boys. This broke away from the typical comedic or tragic depictions of queer characters that had dominated Thai media. Moreover, the series' strategic deployment of characters like Pang, a self-identified *fujoshi*, guides viewers to appreciate the male-male relationships through a BL lens, further normalizing these relationships within Thai popular culture (Baudinette 2016, 115).

Boys' Love (BL): the Game Changer of Queer Media in Thailand?

The emergence and dominance of Boys' Love (BL) or *series wai* in Thailand since 2014 therefore could be said to indicate a remarkable transformation in the nation's history of queer media, changing queer identity from oppressed to celebrated status (Baudinette 2023, 3). This genre was once considered niche but has later become a mainstream media phenomenon on the global stage for there are numerous Thai BL series attracting fans from countries around the world. This rapid transformation of the BL genre into a massive success internationally and globally makes Thai BL series a powerful cultural tool that can elevate queer media. Thai BL series were introduced and influenced by the culture of Japanese Boys Love, called *Yaoi*, a genre whose core content is representations of homoerotic relationships between male characters. This Japanese BL genre originally came from Japanese girls' comic called *Shōjo* manga written by female authors in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Prasannam's "The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction" (2019), the term *Yaoi* relates to "self-derogatory" and "pornographic" connotations of male homosexual partnership. In *Yaoi* texts, romantic relationships between male characters are categorised under the binary dominant and submissive tropes called seme/uke which is conventional, appeared in Japanese manga and anime but is not internationally shown in the Western mediascape (2019, 64-65; 2019, 120). *Yaoi* was initially created by and for heterosexual women as a space to explore romantic relationships outside the patriarchal systems and norms (2019, 64-65).

Baudinette (2019) identifies the principal convention of Japanese BL and contributes the fundamental understanding how these Japanese BL conventions are adapted and localised to Thai mediascape. Those conventions involve the specific concentration on male-male erotic and sexual relationships detached from reality to serve fantasies to heterosexual female audience or *fujoshi*; the depiction of beautiful and androgynous male character called *bishonen*; the explicit *seme/uke* roles within relationships; and homosocial settings where female characters are maginalised (Baudinette 2019, 120). Baudinette also notes that the narratives of Japanese BL which primarily emphasises male homoeroticism, are not considered as gay accounts (Baudinette 2019, 120). Despite the male-homoerotism as the core of Japanese BL, the exclusive focus on romantic and sexual relationships structured under the binary of masculine and feminine witnessed in rigid *seme/uke* roles of characters meant that Japanese BL cannot be counted as queer media subverting heteronormativity.

Although the portrayal of dominant and submissive male characters does not appear in Western media representations of homosexuality, the representation of non-normative identities through characters and relationships shapes fans' interpretations and approaches to the media. The depictions of male characters and homoerotic relationships in Japanese *Yaoi* influenced Thai BL media. The adaptation of Thai BL to the Thai cultural context, which itself was evolving at this time, shows the complexity in its journey. While still upholding the homoerotic relationships between male characters as highlighted, Thai BL dynamically transforms its narratives to resonate with Thai audiences. This transformation reflects the collaboration between large-scale global and local Thai cultural contexts.

Baudinette proposes the concept of glocalisation, drawing on Robertson (1995; cited in Baudinette 2019, 121), as the process of Thai BL's adapting Japanese BL media conventions to align with the Thai mediascape and create a "new genre of *lakhon*" that "represents a watershed moment in depictions of queer sexualities in Thai popular media" (2019, 116). Follwing Western and Western-based scholars like Peter Jackson (2000, 2011), Dredge Byung'chu Kang (2017), and Megan Sinnott (2012), Baudinette notes that Thai perceptions of sexuality are not merely influenced by Western discourse but also by Japanese and Korean popular culture. (Baudinette 2019, 120-121). Glocalization, according to Baudinette, means that Thai BL presents a unique

genre of narratives created to be "rendered appropriate to the Thai mediascape through its wavering narrative focus and heteronormative characterisations" (2019, 129). Through this process, the homoerotic and homosocial focus, as the essence of the Japanese conventional BL genre, is reshaped to accommodate the heteronormative norms of Thai soap operas.

Baudinette presents *Lovesick* as a key example of a series exhibiting the glocalisation of the *Yaoi* form. *Lovesick* reinterprets the homoerotic and homosocial focus that appear in Japanese BL conventions and designed the series to conform to heteronormative norms dominating Thai *lakhon*. Through glocalisation, the "wavering narrative focus and heteronormative characterisations" (2019, 129) integrate queer and heteronormative essences, assisting Thai BL to mutually negotiate sensitive issues of Thai local culture while also raising queer identities and visibility in the Thai mediascape. The reinterpretation and collaboration between global and regional scales can be witnessed in the *seme/uke* dynamic imaginatively re-depict male characters to embrace masculine traits and expression following Thai expectations of masculinity norms. The two protagonists, Noh and Pun, are portrayed to fit the masculine characteristics of *seme* roles; androgynous or effeminate traits of *uke* are rarely seen in them (2019, 120-121). Zhang and Dedman (2021) also examine the evolution of Thai BL through the socio-political lens. They propose that Thai BL adapts Korean and Japanese BL aesthetics and adjusts them to create a distinguishable Thai BL version that cooperates with Thailand's complicated social and political context. Unlike the adoption Western media representations of non-normative genders and sexualities, which merely reproduce Western cultural norms and discourse, Thai BL has been through the localisation process whereby Thai BL media adapted from Japanese BL conventions is reinterpreted and localised to Thai cultural and social values. Localisation means that the contents of Thai BL media resonate to serve Thai audiences' preferences and values. This process is done by modifying narratives, characterisation, and aesthetic themes to match Thai social norms and practices, including cultural values. For instance, the depictions of BL characters mutually maintain the trope of beautiful androgynous boys from Japanese traditional convention but highlight cuteness as the local standard of appealing masculinity for young male to Thai female audiences. In addition, the narratives of Thai BL are usually portrayed in a positive way in which the protagonists, as couples, can overcome the problems and have peaceful relationships at the end of the stories, whereas Japanese BL narratives sometimes employ tragic endings. Localisation also involves the avoidance of issues considered

sensitive in Thai conservative society, such as sexual affairs, which appears in Japanese BL manga, but are less frequent and less explicit in Thai BL. (Baudinette 2019 and 2023; Pongsapitaksanti 2023)

Impact on the Thai Mediascape

The arrival of Thai BL has marked the Thai mediascape as it challenges the heteronormativity and its dominance over narratives in Thai media. In traditional Thai television, the mainstream soap opera genre called *lakhon* primarily presents heterosexual romances under patriarchal norms. Those *lakhons'* themes and narratives have disseminated heteronormative ideologies which are taken up by the audience. The reproduction of those heteronormative discourses shaping Thai audiences', and the broader society's attitudes toward social structures. Baudinette pinpoints that "Thailand's BL media destabilises heteropatriarchal social structures […] position same-sex desire as a potential threat to Thai culture" (2023, 4). In what Baudinette describes as its glocalising hybridisation of *Yaoi* with pre-existing *lakhon* properties, the emergence of Thai BL media has done more than change the Thai mediascape's representational politics of gender and sexuality which is "naturalizing the privileging of the heteronormative *phu-chai* and *phu-ying*" (Baudinette 2023, 8). As a hybrid genre that has emerged from global and local convention, Thai BL brings a broader perception of gender and sexuality as it destabilises traditional pejorative depictions of queer characters to the roles of caricature and moral deviants. Also, Baudinette suggests a new "reparative reading" of queer potentials to "disrupt the heteronormativity of the Thai media landscape, rendering them queer in their deconstructive potential" (2023, 4, 105) though the BL context where homoeroticism and same-sex desire are normalized. This normalization of same-sex desire in narratives of Thai BL media undermine the "heteropatriarchal social structure" in which desire merely occurs between heterosexual people (2023, 4). Homoeroticism also disrupts the structure of heterosexual relationship taken from *lakhon* in which the roles of the male lead (*phra-ek*) and female lead (*nang-ek*) are portrayed as ideal figures of relationship (2023, 69). The reinforcement of heteronormative ideologies of binary *phra-ek* and *nang-ek* with happy marriage designed as the destination of plotlines, signifying the social discursive perception of steadiness and satisfaction.

As previously mentioned, Thai BL causes the significant shift to Thai mediascape by disrupting traditional and dominant heteronormative narratives of *lakhon*. Among those Thai BL series, *Lovesick: The Series* is identified as the pioneer that created "a new genre of queer media" in Thailand, known as series *wai*, which explicitly focuses on homoeroticism and attempts to incorporate queer theme and issues into the Thai prevailing media landscape (Baudinette 2019, 117). This groundbreaking series was adapted from an online fiction *LOVESICK: The Chaotic Lives of Blue Shorts Guys* by INDRYTIMES, and became the first series that was distinguishable from traditional Thai *lakhon* which historically positions queer identities as peripheral (2019, 116). Unlike conventional Thai media which marginalises queer characters and relationships, *Lovesick* centers the homoerotic relationship between Noh and Phun, cisgender male characters who are high school students. According to Baudinette, *Lovesick* does not only recruit conventional heterosexual female audience, who are consumer of Japanese BL eroticism, but also include queer individuals and young audience exploring gender and sexuality. Having evolved from Japanese BL media, the series attracted consumers of homoerotic narratives, especially increasing numbers of Japanese BL manga readers (2019, 116). For the *lakhon* audience, *Lovesick* introduces non-normative narratives, inserting in them a space for valid representation of queer identities. The series normalizes and integrates issues normally found in traditional heteronormative media familiar to Thai audiences such as school romance, friendship and coming of age but reinterpret them to explore same-sex romantic relationships. In doing so, *Lovesick* educates its viewer into a new way of "reparative reading" of the queer text; it introduces the queer reading practices of Japanese BL media while reciprocally adjusting those reading practice in Thai media context (Baudinette 2019). Baudinette explains that the series "challenged heteronormative narrative structures by positioning same-sex relationships as equal to heterosexual ones, fostering reparative reading practices in Thai audiences" (118). Further, Lovesick challenges the conventions of traditional Thai *lakhon* whereby queer characters are marginalised, caricatured or depicted as deviant figures. The series subverts those hetero-dominated depiction by centring queer characters and same-sex desire, regarded as a putative threat to Thai culture. The characters in *Lovesick* are not depicted as pejorative flat characters but as fully developed characters whose dynamic journeys are constructing sexuality, as a part of growing u Moreover, by presenting homoeroticism and same-sex desire as prevailing and complicated as heterosexual romance, *Lovesick* does not bring queer narratives to the fore but also makes them approachable and applicable for general audience.

Consequently, the success of *Lovesick* indicates that the series can provide queer representations and narratives to the mainstream. Massive viewership led the series to be renewed for the second season and to pioneer for more than 40 similar productions during the years 2015-2019 (Baudinette 2019, 116). The impact of *Lovesick* is not only limited to Thailand but is also international in scale for the series has gained fans from around the world, particularly in Asia. The series provides an active pace for transnational conversation and discussion over queer media in Asia. Baudinette also emphasises that *Lovesick* helps establish Thailand as an outstanding producer of queer media plus a crucial performer in international queer culture and economy (133). The series, hence, revolutionises the representation of queer identities in Thai media. It does not only challenge heteronormative norms or recruit a diverse audience, but its success also brings visibility to queer narratives and paves the way for later BL media.

However, BL dramas often depicted idealised relationships among affluent characters, limiting the visibility of working-class queer individuals and their unique struggles. This underscored a need for more inclusive narratives that addressed diverse socio-economic experiences. Digital platforms played a crucial role in democratising content creation, allowing individuals from various backgrounds to share their stories. These online narratives brought attention to issues such as economic disparity, healthcare access, and social services, emphasising the need for a more inclusive approach to queer advocacy. Boonpap (2018) notes, "Digital platforms have played a crucial role in democratising content creation, bringing attention to diverse socio-economic experiences" (Boonpap 2018, 49). *Lovesick* thus exemplifies how Thai media has evolved by integrating global cultural influences while adapting them to local contexts. The series' success not only highlights the potential of media to influence societal attitudes but also underscores the importance of nuanced and inclusive representation in advancing queer rights and visibility in Thailand.

In the exploration of the evolution of queer media in Thailand, Natthanai Prasannam's (2018) study "The *Yaoi* Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction" provides an understanding of how fan practices have been co-opted by the media industry. Prasannam situates the term *yaoi* within the Thai context, highlighting its dual role in describing textual qualities and reading practices that embody a spirit of parody and playful appropriation by both creators and fans

(Prasannam 2018, 86). Additionally, he expands on the localization of "shipping" within Thai culture, emphasizing its playful nature (Prasannam 2018, 88). The study also introduces the concept of "industrialization," referring to the industry's co-optation of fan practices, although not explicitly defined (Prasannam 2018, 90). Another critical term, "wavering," is used to describe narrative strategies that centralize homosexual love narratives while maintaining heteronormative plot elements (Prasannam 2018, 92).

Prasannam critiques previous research approaches which predominantly focused on textual reading, ethnographic research, and local queer politics. Instead, he suggests a more comprehensive understanding through the study of fan/industry interactions where fan-led practices are re-enacted by the industry and subsequently consumed by fans (Prasannam 2018, 95). Drawing on fan studies perspectives from Booth and focusing particularly on GMM Grammy, Prasannam's literature review laments the disconnect between literary analysis and fan-studies approaches. He proposes that the series should be read through the Japanese lens proposed by Baudinette and the aesthetic context of Y novels in Thailand, arguing that considering the role of a company like GMM Grammy can offer valuable insights (Prasannam 2018, 98).

The study provides intriguing insights into the history and dynamics of *yaoi* in Thailand. For instance, it traces how *yaoi*, initially targeted at and adopted by heterosexual girls, was viewed as indecent by authorities (Prasannam, 2018, 102). One of the central claims is that fans-initiated practices like shipping, which were later copied and facilitated by the industry, a process described as "industrializing" these practices (Prasannam, 2018, 105). The 1997 "People's Constitution" is cited as a structural factor that allowed for the liberalization of media representations of queer life (Prasannam 2018, 110). Moreover, *Lovesick the Series* is identified as a significant turning point in pluralizing representations of queer life, with a detailed exploration of its publication, adaptation, and screen representation (Prasannam 2018, 113). The study also narrates GMM Grammy's interaction with the book industry, their approach to adaptation, and their influence on the types of texts being written and adapted (Prasannam 2018, 115). Prasannam highlights how GMM Grammy began producing Official Promotional Videos (OPVs) to mimic and encourage shipping activities, remediating the grammar of fan-produced OPVs (Prasannam 2018, 118). Furthermore, the shipping elements extended to promotional activities involving actors rather than

characters, leading to the creation of new events and series that emphasized fan nostalgia through remixing aspects of previous texts and ships (Prasannam 2018, 120). The study concludes that fans' practices are adopted and transformed by companies for profit, suggesting that further research should explore connections to other countries and markets such as China and South America using the lens developed in the article (Prasannam 2018, 122).

The 2010s also saw an increased recognition of intersectionality within the queer movement in Thailand. Activists highlighted the importance of addressing multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, race, and other identities. Efforts to amplify the voices of the most marginalized within the queer community became a crucial aspect of the movement. Queer media, including BL dramas, began to reflect this intersectional approach. By portraying characters from diverse backgrounds and addressing a range of social issues, these media works contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of queer experiences. This inclusivity resonated with audiences, sparking discussions about the intersectionality of queer identities and furthering the movement for equality and inclusivity in Thailand and beyond (Boonpap 2018, 55). In addition, the international reception of Thai BL dramas highlighted the transnational influence of queer media. Fans from different cultural contexts engaged with these narratives, often reinterpreting them to resonate with their own experiences and desires. For example, Thomas Baudinette's study of Filipino fans of Thai BL reveals that these fans perceived "Thai BL" as more authentic and affirming compared to "Japanese *yaoi*," which they felt catered primarily to heterosexual women. This phenomenon of "creative misreading" underscores the role of transnational media in shaping and reflecting diverse queer identities and experiences (Baudinette 2016, 122).

The 2010s were a pivotal decade for queer media in Thailand, characterized by significant political, technological, and cultural shifts. Despite the challenges posed by political instability and media censorship, the rise of digital platforms and BL dramas provided new avenues for queer representation. This period also saw an increased emphasis on intersectionality and inclusivity within the queer movement, reflecting a more comprehensive understanding of diverse queer experiences. The transnational impact of the Thai queer media further emphasized the global resonance and significance of these narratives, marking a transformative era for queer

representation in Thailand (Boonpap 2018, 60). As we explore the broader Southeast Asian context, it becomes evident that Thailand's advancements in queer media have influenced and been influenced by regional and global trends. Understanding these dynamics provides a richer perspective on the evolving landscape of queer representation in Southeast Asia.

5.The Rise of Line TV and Queer Visibility (2010s–Present)

If it were the case that traditional media can partly determine social perception, it would have to be said that Thailand is making little progress toward accepting non-normative genders and sexualities. New online and digital TV platforms have emerged, however, as alternatives to traditional Thai media. Unlike mainstream TV channels, where the Thai bureaucracy tightly controls content, online platforms are loosely regulated and can stream heterodox content, including representations of non-normative genders and sexualities (Thansettakij News 2017; The Matter 2017). Line TV's intervention into the Thai media market with its suite of shows representing non-normative identities illustrates this shift. For example, *Diary of Tootsie* tells stories about gay men and a lesbian who are close friends, focusing on their individual lives and relationships. This type of storyline was rarely seen in traditional media. The show gained high viewership, with over six million views and downloads (Bangkokbiznews 2017; Positioningmag, 2017).

Similarly, homoerotic relationships between male characters in *Sotus the Series*, *Make It Right: the Series*, and *2Moons the Series* have been hugely admired by audiences, who often fantasise about their favourite characters continuing their romantic relationships in real life (Bangkokbiznews 2017; The Matter 2017). Since the closure of Line TV in 2021, platforms such as YouTube, WeTV, and Netflix have stepped in to offer similar content, reflecting the sustained demand for queer narratives. These platforms provide alternative spaces for non-normative identities to be represented, free from the restrictive standards of traditional Thai media. The alternative worlds represented in these TV series available via online platforms seem to create desirable and ideal spaces for non-normative genders and sexualities, even though these ideals remain far-fetched in Thai society. As explained above, Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia offers a lens through which these media spaces can be understood as desirable spaces for redefining normative power structures and identity politics. In such spaces, heterosexuality's dominance is

challenged, and non-heterosexual identities gain visibility. Even though content focusing on non-normative genders and sexualities seems aimed at specific audience groups, it has become dramatically popular. Between 2014 and 2021, Line TV's queer-focused series garnered over 600 million views and downloads (Bangkokbiznews 2017; The Matter 2017). Interestingly, the audience for these series is not limited to the LGBTQ+ community but also includes heterosexual groups, particularly women who fantasize about homoerotic relationships in the shows. Nitcharee Lertwichayaroj (2017) used subcultural studies to investigate this phenomenon, finding that homoerotic consumption forms a robust subculture in Thai media. Female heterosexual fans form strong communities to exchange information and celebrate homoeroticism. This subcultural phenomenon raises intriguing questions about why such series appeal to heterosexual audiences. It suggests that these series function as heterotopias for representing non-normative genders and sexualities, offering a desirable world for these identities to celebrate, which is rarely seen in other types of media.

As argued above, in Thailand, heteronormativity has long dominated most media spaces. Its dominance contributes to the negative perception of non-heterosexuality. The series in this study are clear examples of attempts to develop rooms where these negative perceptions are not the dominant force in representation. This has drawn me to the representation of non-heterosexuality in online and digital TV platforms, particularly in Line TV. I would like to explore the extent to which the series in Line TV can be positioned as a utopia or heterotopia for non-normative genders and sexualities, homosexual relationships and homosexual character portrayals. The research interest also primarily comes from my concerns around non-normative genders and sexualities regarding both identity and same-sex romantic relationships. From my observation, there are plenty of studies about non-normative genders and sexualities and media in the Thai context. Still, only a handful of studies explore the phenomenon of the subversion of heteronormativity that allows the discursive reconstruction of ideologies and norms concerning gender and sexuality (Jackson and Cook 1999; Pongpanit 2011; Thitiwararak 2001; Sinnott 2010; Inkawat 2009; Intramool 2011, Pavadee 2016). The concept of heterotopia for non-normative genders and sexualities portrayed in those series, as a microcosmic representation, could reflect the macrocosmic scale of the change of attitudes toward non-normative genders and sexualities in the real-life Thai context.

Within the broader ambit of this research, a dialectical relationship emerges between the TV series under scrutiny and the larger societal context. This relationship of oscillation between society at the macro level, and the microcosm of televisual representations underscores the media's role as both a catalyst for and a reflection of prevailing social trends. Specifically, the burgeoning production of Thai online series that focus on non-normative genders and sexualities, especially those available on the Line TV platform, can be correlated with a surge in the popularity of homoerotic fiction in both digital and print formats (Thansettakij News 2017; The Matter 2017). These narratives, concentrating on non-normative genders and sexualities, serve as alternative media consumption routes. In Thailand, mainstream television content has historically been circumscribed by social norms and mores, resulting in a limited and often stereotypical representation of gender and sexuality that aligns primarily with heteronormative frameworks (The Matter 2017).

Consequently, alternative media outlets, such as Line TV, are pivotal in challenging these social constructs by providing a platform for counter-narratives. Drawing on Fuchs' work on alternative media that defy mainstream ideologies and established systems (Fuchs 2010), I argue that the Line TV series incorporate content that deliberately subverts conventional Thai social and cultural norms. This subversion manifests itself in the inclusion of taboo subjects such as vulgar language, infidelity, violence, and explicit sexual content. Therefore, narratives centred on non-normative identities and experiences become an isolated yet potent force within the series, representing a formidable challenge to ingrained societal norms in contemporary Thai culture. Hence, this trend illuminates the interdependence between media representations and societal norms, capturing a web of influences shaping public perceptions and discourse on non-normative identities and sexualities in Thailand. Exploring this relationship within the current study enriches the academic discourse on the media's role in influencing and reflecting social transformations.

III. Conclusion

The history of queer media in Thailand reflects broader societal changes and the impact of global cultural influences. From early portrayals marked by marginalization and negative stereotypes to the emergence of queer cinema and digital media, the representation of queer identities has evolved significantly. Scholarship grounded in Asian studies provides valuable insights into the complex

dynamics of queer representation, highlighting the intersections of gender, sexuality, and culture (Jackson 2003; Baudinette 2023; Boonpap 2018). Integrating Foucault's concept of heterotopia and Jones' concept of queer heterotopias into the discussion of Thai queer media offers a theoretical framework for understanding the future of queer representation. Foucault's heterotopias are spaces of otherness that exist outside ordinary cultural spaces, providing a refuge for alternative identities and practices (Foucault 1986, 24). Queer heterotopias, as described by Jones, specifically offer spaces for the subversion of normative configurations of sex, gender, and sexuality, allowing for the continuous evolution and transformation of queer identities (Jones 2018, 45). The digital age offers new opportunities for the creation and expansion of these heterotopic spaces, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse media landscape (Boonpap 2018, 47).

By examining the historical and cultural contexts of queer representation in Thai media and exploring the potential of queer heterotopias, this chapter aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of queer media in Thailand. The insights gained from this analysis not only enhance our understanding of Thai media and culture but also provide valuable perspectives for the study of queer representation in non-Western contexts. The ongoing struggle for creative freedom and the push for more inclusive representations underscore the importance of continued research and advocacy in this area. As Thai media continues to evolve, it is crucial to maintain a critical focus on the ways in which queer identities are represented and negotiated, ensuring that queer media can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse cultural landscape in Thailand and beyond (Boonpap 2018, 49).

Chapter Three: Coming of Age in *Make It Right: the Series*

I. Introduction

Building upon the exploration of the historical development and shifts in representation within Thai queer media discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter shifts to analyse *Make It Right: the Series* (MIR), also known by its Thai title, *Rak Ok Doen*, a crucial televisual text within the Thai media landscape. The study and analysis of MIR begin by broadening the historical context, then shifts to focus on MIR as one of the Boy's Love (BL) series that stream on Line TV. The purpose of the examination is to explain how contemporary Thai queer narratives, especially in the BL genre, actually negotiate and oppose existing heteronormative structures. MIR is studied particularly, how it works as a heterotopic space that sustains or resists normative frameworks on sexuality and identity formation. In portraying adolescent characters as they explore sexual discovery and the path toward social acceptance, MIR helps to critically unravel media portrayal, sexuality, and identity in Thai society. As mentioned in Chapter 2, early Thai representations of queer identities were defined by a fluidity, rather than categories, informed by Buddhist doctrines. The teenage characters' explorations of fluid sexual identities continue this legacy in MIR. In addition, while Chapter 2 analysed the ways in which gender and sexuality were reconfigured under Westernisation and nationalism into strict heteronormative frameworks, this chapter asserts that MIR problematises and simultaneously reproduces such norms.

MIR is critical in the realm of queer representation in the Thai Boys' Love media landscape. MIR is one of the first BL dramas to gain mainstream attention in a much larger historical lineage of Asian BL that traces back to Japanese yaoi and shonen–ai genres. However, its asterisked sexuality, queerness, and social norm are ambivalent. First of all, MIR is set in a paradoxical space where it challenges heteronormativity but also sustains it. The presence of conflicting and supporting forces leads to creation of a heterotopia. In this way, MIR is one such heterotopia that challenges and preserves the normative patterns of sexuality and gender. As a product of the BL genre, MIR adheres to several pre-existing tropes. MIR exists within this juxtaposed space that allows its audience to pass through the strict censorship of non-normative content and comply with state controlled traditional media. Following this, MIR is expressed through teenage characters in a school setting and is situated in the coming-of-age genre, which has been used throughout queer

narratives in the West and Asia to show identity and sexual development against social challenges. Otomo (2020) analyses the BL genre in MIR and other stories in the series as the tales of relational bonds where queer relationships are not the means to self-acceptance via coming out, unlike in the Western coming of age narratives. The distinction establishes MIR as heterotopic because it depicts same-sex desire but does not constantly identify this attraction as queer, even though it shows movement across the known borders of the mainstream genre and its hidden subversive qualities.

The following section of this chapter investigates the representation of these relationships in the series to understand how it both subverts and perpetuates heteronormative structures. The purpose is to examine how the intersection of these images and school settings, alongside the strategic dual-platform release, allows the positioning of MIR to remain as part of the dominant norm and a counter to it. It approaches MIR through the lens of the dual framework, questioning the portrayals of male-male relationships in Thailand, where it is not only posed as a BL drama but a space where mainstream acceptability goes against queer subversion. This shows a broader contention regarding the representation of non-normative people in Thai media. The chapter also emphasises adolescents' narrative trajectories as they transition from normative identities, shaped and constrained by sociocultural norms, to non-normative sexual identities, which I argue are integral to their identity formation.

Being a teen series, MIR predominantly focuses on a cohort of male students aged 16 to 17 in a private all-boys school in Bangkok. These young men are in the in-between phase of transitioning from childhood to adulthood, a process significantly marked by the evolution of their sexual identities. The series portrays these journeys to maturity as fraught with tension between the emergent non-normative sexual orientations and the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity, deeply entrenched in societal ideologies, norms, and expectations. The analysis traces the contradictions evident in the adolescents' journeys in relation to non-normative sexual identities within a sociocultural milieu dominated by a heteronormative binary framework. This leads to the broader conceptualisation that MIR operates as a subversive text, challenging prevailing heteronormative paradigms. Thus, this chapter is a foundational element of my overarching thesis, which investigates the representation of non-normative genders and sexualities in Thai online

series disseminated via the Line TV platform. Specifically, I examine the extent to which such series serve as heterotopic spaces that facilitate the discursive reconstruction of gender and sexual identities, thereby subverting heteronormative norms. The digital revolution discussed in Chapter 2, particularly through platforms like Line TV, provided essential spaces for queer representation. MIR utilises this platform strategically, exemplifying how digital media has reshaped the visibility and complexity of queer narratives in Thailand.

In the historical analysis above, I identified a shift from stigmatized portrayals to more nuanced depictions of non-normative sexuality. MIR exemplifies this progression by presenting teen sexuality through relational development rather than singular events like the coming-out narratives that are common in Western teen dramas. In teen TV series, considerable emphasis has been placed on the concept of "coming out" as a pivotal narrative device. In Western teen dramas, "coming out" typically serves as a monumental act of self-disclosure wherein characters reveal their sexual orientation, either heterosexual or homosexual, to others. The act of "coming out" is usually framed as a transition from one well-defined sexual identity to another and is often depicted as the culmination of a character's self-realisation. (Davis and Dickinson 2004; Wheatley 2016; Hughes 2013). This moment is frequently articulated through characters' monologues or dialogues, which Monaghan (2019) refers to as the characters' "confession of their becoming sexual identities." Such scenes usually reside within the epistemological framework of the narrative and, as Scott (1993; cited in Dow 2012, 126) argues, function as a "reflection of the real." This predominant focus on the "coming out" narrative construct may overlook other complex and nuanced expressions of adolescent sexual identity, particularly those that challenge the hegemony of heteronormative paradigms.

Nevertheless, the trope of coming out is not a useful heuristic for understanding MIR. Rather than emphasising the characters' significant moments of confessions in a standalone episode, the multiple-episode series subtly presents the characters' ongoing processes of their formation and development of sexual identities. Teen sexuality in MIR is represented to embrace "a central feature of the genre in which characters are in the process of negotiating their self-identity" and "transition from childhood to adulthood and their sexual experiences are key in marking this development" through their experiences and interactions with other characters. (Berridge 2013, 313-315). I also agree with Berridge (2013) that the focus on the moments of the characters'

disclosure of their sexualities while neglecting to take into account of the storylines and narratives can lead to a deficient study. Hence, rather than using the concept of coming out, this chapter introduces coming of age to explore the ideas of teens' formation and development of sexual identities. It is a process of psychological growth, self-discovery and transition from childhood to adulthood acquired through experiences and lessons learned (Benyahia, Gaffney, and White, 2006). In this chapter, the coming of age is explicitly applied to MIR as the journey of teens' sexual orientation and the formation of their sexual identities. The characters are involved in the transitional periods of sexual experiences and sexuality awareness, leading to their development of sexual identities.

This chapter draws on scholars' theories of identity formation. Judith Butler proposes that identities are not ontological and fixed. Instead, they are constructed via reiterative performance "through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (1988, 523). Butler suggests that it is "social sanction and taboo" (1988, 520), leading to the belief that forces (gender) identities into a stable and unmovable assignment which is distorted from their characteristics associated with reproduction and changeability. Similar to Butler, Stuart Hall explicitly explains identity as "a production which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (1990, 222). To Hall, identity is not an already-given label but a continual journey. Following Butler and Hall, I have applied the "ongoing negotiation" framework posited by Homi K. Bhabha, a postcolonial scholar. Using Bhabha's conceptual lens of ongoing negotiation, I propose that sexual identities are not an assigned status. Still, they are continuously formed as a lasting cultural and power negotiation (1994, 2). It is the development of the formation of sexual identities in continuous performance but non-chronological moments.

In this chapter, I exclusively focus on sexualities rather than gender identities, considering that the series' characters struggle with their sexual orientations and relationships rather than their gender identities. In addition, instead of using the word "queer" which is an ambiguous and less specific term for sexual identity, I apply the time non-normative sexuality, which does not adhere to social standards and expectations under the heteronormative sexual scheme of male-female binary sexuality. However, despite the dominant uses of the term non-normative sexuality rather than

queer sexuality, it is crucial to note that the term "queer," appeared later in the literature, pinpointing what Wray has suggested, which is that the word "describes cultural position, rather than sexual orientation alone […] the word 'queer' has connotations of ideas of difference, transgressions and subversion, which are essential to gay culture" (Wray 2009, 69).

Furthermore, sexuality encompasses the spectrum of human capability for sexual feelings, identities, and activities. It is a construct shaped by many social and cultural determinants, including norms, religious beliefs, moral frameworks, and educational influences. Foucault, in his seminal work *The History of Sexuality*, contends that sexuality should not be conceived as a natural given that is regulated by power or an enigmatic realm to be elucidated by knowledge; instead, it is a "historical construct" (1979, 105-106). Sexual orientation often considered a salient component of sexuality, has been defined and sometimes conflated with sexual behaviour or desire (Sell 1997; cited in Harbart 2008). Morgan posits that sexual orientation is intricately linked with sexuality and "incorporates aspects of sexual attraction, fantasy, and behaviour, as well as romantic, emotional, and social preferences" (2013, 53). The study also indicates that individuals' sexual orientations and sexualities may intersect and sometimes even conflict with other facets of their identities. Specifically, sexual orientation has been identified as not always aligning seamlessly with sexual fantasies and behaviours (Habarth 2017). Given these complex and multi-dimensional conceptions of sexuality and sexual orientation, I argue that they should be considered integral constituents of broader identity frameworks. This perspective serves as a foundation for examining the intricate layers of sexual identification, particularly in the context of media representations, which often both reflect and influence societal attitudes and norms.

Concerning identity formation, sexuality and sexual orientation are pivotal to the analysis of MIR. The series focuses on a cohort of male characters in their teenage years, Fuse, Tee, Book, Frame, Rodtang, and Nine, who exhibit no explicit conflict concerning their gender expressions. These characters are portrayed as adhering to traditionally masculine gender performance identities, manifested in various ways, including their employment of gender-specific language such as masculine final particles and self-referential pronouns. In contrast, the character Yok presents a more nuanced representation. He is portrayed as embracing a feminine male gender identity. Intriguingly, his conflicts with his mother primarily stem from his homosexual orientation rather

than his effeminate gender expression. This differentiation is noteworthy as it suggests that gender expression and sexual orientation, while often conflated, can also be distinct axes of identity that elicit different forms of social response and familial tension.

The representation of these characters adds complexity to our understanding of adolescent sexuality and identity. The characters' experiences offer insights into the challenges and negotiations associated with adopting non-normative sexual orientations and identities within a sociocultural context that leans towards heteronormative constructs. Therefore, examining the array of identities depicted in MIR adds nuance to the scholarly discourse on the role of media in shaping and reflecting the complexities of teenage sexuality and identity formation.

II. MIR: A Counter-Narrative in Thai Media Landscape

Moving forward, within sociocultural contexts where heterosexuality is often praised, media institutions behave like agents that continue sociocultural norms. As argued above, in the past, non-heterosexual identities have routinely been considered non-normative and have been negatively caricatured by mainstream media such as television, radio, and print media as abnormalities, Buddhist sins, or even pathology (Hazaea, Ibrahim and Mohd Nor 2014; Pongpanit, 2011; Gray 2014). This process sustains these stereotypes and builds pseudo-societies that are intolerant of differences, as well as aids in the further marginalisation of non-heteronormative communities. Against this background, *Make It Right :the Series* sets forth as a narrative and representational counterflow. The series is based on a young adult novel first published on *Tunwalai*, an online writing site, which makes it unique within the Thai media platform. As a result of being a traditional communication medium, it was streamed on Sundays from 20:50 to 21:45 Bangkok Time on MCOT HD Channel. However, the series was also made available uncut on Line TV at midnight. This represents an alternative within Thailand's conventional media landscape, exemplifying a strategic dual-platform release. A layer to this analysis is provided by Line TV's late-night time slot. This can be interpreted as a tactical decision to avoid traditional, parental and regulatory oversight, giving the show more creative content. Parental controls regulate it less, therefore offering a less restricted space in which to explore, as would typically be the case, marginalised themes. The depiction of unconventional characters, explicit language, and sexual content, typically excluded from public TV channels, is freely presented. In so doing, MIR

becomes a complex site of resistance to hegemonic representation through its counter-normative programming strategy. Through traditional and online platforms, the series discusses the limits of what constitutes "acceptable" in Thai society. In other words, it liberates itself from mainstream media rigidity through the use of its broadcast strategy, which does not necessarily adhere to just being an entertainment platform but beyond that of a heterotopic space that destabilises, challenges, and yet pushes at conventions of heteronormativity.

In MIR, the story is told from the viewpoint of male high school students finding their way within the maze of self-realisation and identity formation. One can take, for example, Fuse, the central figure that embodies the existential tension between sexual and gender inclinations as well as societal norms. Alongside him, Frame also struggles with non-ordinary sexual attractions and tends to have one-night relationships with people he meets on dating apps before finally getting romantically involved with a classmate, Book. This relationship serves as a motivation for both parties to conform to non-heteronormative sexual identities. In this context, Yok, a *kathoey*, claims to be an effeminate gay man, which happens not to sit well with his mother because of sociocultural stigmas. On a more analytical note, the series can be interpreted as the critique of the characters as they attempt to move from a socially imposed heteronormative framework to a world of possibilities beyond the constraints of normative sexuality.

On another note, shifting to the storytelling technique of the series, MIR is not limited to male characters only but rather portrays a wide range of romantic and sexual relationships between male and female teenagers. The primary storyline is centred Fuse and Tee, whose friendship becomes complicated following an unintended sexual encounter. In the aftermath, the first episodes depict Fuse's emotional complexity of enjoyment, guilt, and confusion. Later, he comes to terms with his identity and sexuality, which will be explained in greater detail in the remaining section of this analysis. Other male characters, in addition to Tee, such as Prem, Book, Lukmo, Yok, Nai, and Rodtang, are also going through the same realisation of their sexual self-concept and identity as a changeable phenomenon. The series, therefore, acts as a prism through which each character's relational patterns and the processes by which they develop non-heteronormative identities are explored as integral to their self-growth and identity formation.

With existing scholarship within the realm of queer studies, scholars largely concur that traces of queerness can invariably be found in every text (Doty 2000, 2; cited in Hughes 2013, 48). However, there is a paradoxical marginalisation of queerness within these analyses. In examining queer narratives within the teen film and television genre, scholars such as Davis (2004), Monaghan (2019), and Hughes (2013) postulate that same-sex friendships are often precursors to normative heterosexual relationships, which are then valorised as milestones in adult identity formation. Monaghan contends that "homosocial intimacy and gender play are construed as normative rites of passage within the coming-of-age narrative" (2019, 100). Nevertheless, MIR subverts this dominant paradigm. Rather than framing the characters' development as culminating in heteronormative romances, the series posits the inverse. Within non-normative relationships, these characters fashion their adult sexual identities, challenging the heteronormative templates often perpetuated in mainstream media.

The narrative structure of MIR diverges markedly from many Western teen television series. MIR utilises a multi-perspectival approach, incorporating omniscient viewpoints within a single episode, thus granting the audience access to the characters' innermost memories via flashbacks. This narrative technique serves to elucidate the characters' motivations and anxieties. Adolescent characters in teen narratives are often portrayed as constrained by a range of social and psychological barriers inhibiting their maturation. Stein aptly captures this as "the sense of struggle against externally imposed limitations through the quasi-universal experiences of adolescence" (Stein 2008, 224). In the context of MIR, these adolescent characters encounter societal and ideological obstacles that stifle their emerging non-normative sexualities. The conflicts that arise and the characters' subsequent endeavours to surmount them allow audiences to vicariously participate in and learn from these transformative journeys.

Additionally, MIR is situated within the teen TV genre but distinguishes itself through its pedagogical undertones. The didacticism is manifested through the characters' narratives, monologues, and dialogues, aimed at enlightening the audience on pertinent social issues such as sexual practices and substance abuse. A unique feature of MIR, setting it apart from its counterparts, is the direct messaging to the audience after each episode. Through this mechanism, the series endeavours to illuminate viewers on the formation of their sexual identities, specifically

in terms of surmounting the societal stigmas and marginalisation often associated with non-normative identities. Moreover, it promotes the recognition and celebration of sexual diversity and fluidity. MIR does not guide the audience through the formative process of understanding gender and sexual fluidity.

III. Coming of Age: An Ongoing Process of Sexual Identity Formation

As previously mentioned, my analytical approach utilises a poststructuralist framework, conceptualising identity as a fluid construct. Within this purview, the formation of characters' sexualities is examined as a dynamic process, where the interstitial actions are as significant as the eventual conclusions. To facilitate this examination, I employ the notion of "coming of age" to analyse the characters' evolution from childhood to adulthood. Whitney Monaghan delineates "coming of age" as "a process that involves the negotiation of social boundaries that define both sex and sexuality... [it] tackles issues of identity formation while negotiating the boundary of demarcation between child and adult" (Monaghan 2019, 99). Utilising Monaghan's conceptualisation as a framework, my study of MIR contends that the adolescent characters' coming of age entails a non-linear trajectory from presumptive normative sexualities towards non-normative ones. This complex transition is influenced by and yet challenges the socially and culturally mediated discourses that shape identities. The portrayal of coming-of-age narratives in MIR is inextricably linked to societal expectations and issues such as discrimination, violence, and social integration, typical elements within the teen TV genre. This construct is markedly different from "coming out," conventionally understood as "a linear, stage-based progression from sexual repression to liberation and self-acceptance" (Cass 1979; Eliason 1996; as cited in Rosenberg 2017, 1788).

MIR ultimately manifests the queer coming-of-age framework as a heterotopic space for adolescent identity formation. In contrast to numerous Western queer media narratives that endorse the coming out as the defining moment in self-realisation, MIR resonates with Monaghan's (2019) dismissive reading of heteronormative coming-of-age trajectories, which present progress from confusion to self-awareness and subsequent incorporation into an queer identities (100). Queer coming-of-age theory, by contrast, subverts this linearity to track fluid, fragmented, non-sequential and ongoing formations of identity. MIR embodies this view by showing adolescent queerness as

a process of exploration rather than a state of being, rendering coming of age, not coming out, the more effective framework through which to understand its treatment of sexuality. Like other works in the broader Boys' Love (BL) genre, which explores queerness in ways not necessarily associated with queer identity politics (Otomo 2020, 147), MIR's depiction of adolescent relationships and identity formation allows for various possibilities of positive belonging. BL also tends to take a more relational approach to queerness, as opposed to a fixed one (Otomo 2020, 149): it focuses on discovery rather than identification, attraction rather than identity, desire rather than labelling, much like MIR also resists the impulse in the West to define a sexuality within a dogmatic frame, focusing on the experience of queer relationships ahead of the need to self-identify. In this way, the series addresses this broader cultural context and reflects a kind of fluidity of identity formation that has been explored in non-Western media contexts.

Although these narratives may not conform to the Western queer coming-of-age model, they are used to strengthen the storytelling in BL. Coming-of-age, as a genre in Western films and literature, tends to highlight introspection, individual agency, handling social pressures, qualities that may improve BL series. When so many MIR and similar BL dramas grapple with romantic attraction and relational identity, an infusion of Western-style self-exploration would allow characters with something unrelated to explore beyond romance, sex, and masculinity. By encouraging better representation in contrast to the individualistic Western values of rites of passage, mentorship, and personal autonomy, as well, pregnancy coverage in BL media could yield more protagonists who explore other cultural contexts regarding masculinity, queerness, and identity. Asian BL series, by integrating relational queerness (chronicle of romance, ubiquitous in BL) with self-explorative individualism (peculiar of Western stories), can broaden their contribution to queer identity from mere romantic engagements to a wider, holistic representation of queer adolescence. This union would allow BL storylines to intertwine both the interpersonal and internal aspects of queer experience, building deeper, more layered character journeys. Furthermore, educational and social environment emphasises this heterotopic function of MIR. Traditional schools are often institutionalised extensions of heteronormative and patriarchal structures (Kjaran 2017), however in MIR the all-boys school nonetheless paradoxically is a facilitating rather than limiting space for queer self-exploration. MIR redefines conventional male-male intimacy through its depiction of homosocial bonds as queer possibilities instead of heterosexual development paths (Monaghan

2019, 100). The show shows queerness in adolescents as a natural process that develops rather than a problem that needs fixing. The digital platform Line TV allows MIR to avoid media censorship thus actively opposing mainstream social standards. BL presents queer desire through a sexual fluidity model which avoids fixed categories (Otomo 2020, 152). The series presents queerness through relational experiences instead of fixed identities while using coming of age as a more inclusive framework than traditional coming out narratives. The BL approach to queerness emphasises relationships over categories and MIR demonstrates adolescent sexuality through an ongoing process rather than a single defining moment. The ongoing process of identity negotiation during queer coming of age serves as the central theme in MIR according to Monaghan (2019, 110). Through its exploration of fluidity and relational connections and its rejection of rigid labels MIR fights heteronormative structures in a non-Western environment. The analysis of MIR through a coming-of-age lens demonstrates how the show represents queer identity while serving as a vital queer representation platform in Thai media.

MIR aligns with traditional elements of the coming-of-age narrative, especially where teen characters challenge and transcend pre-defined sexual boundaries, manifesting the fluidity of sexual identities. Given that the majority of characters in MIR are young students, the exploration of youthful narratives concerning the journey towards the recognition and establishment of non-normative sexualities serves as a pivotal component in my analysis. Drawing inspiration from Rosenberg's concept of "coming in," it could be said that the coming-of-age narratives in MIR elucidate the non-linear development of non-heterosexual identities. This analytical perspective underscores the "complexity and fluidity in the navigation of queer sexuality and sexual experiences with others" (Rosenberg 2017, 1788), contributing to a nuanced understanding of the characters' evolving sexual identities.

In the teen drama series, adolescent characters "negotiate the transition from childhood to adulthood, and their sexual experiences are pivotal in demarcating this maturation" (Berridge 2012, 313). Teen series on Line TV primarily engage with content that traverses the intricacies of adolescent lives as they metamorphose into adulthood. The focus is usually multidimensional, covering self-discovery, physiological transformations, and psychological growth. During this volatile period, adolescent characters frequently undergo the crystallisation of their sexual

orientations, be they normative or non-normative. In this regard, MIR, targeting this specific age demographic, naturally encompasses the complex landscape of non-normative sexual identities. Intriguingly, what distinguishes MIR is its nuanced portrayal of the fluidity inherent in sexual identities. Unlike typical Western teen drama series that often reduce the formation of sexual identities to linear coming-out narratives, MIR offers a more elastic representation. It not only delves into the formation of such identities but also explores the fluid and interchangeable nature of characters' sexual orientations. This fluidity is intrinsically tied to the characters' broader journey from childhood to adulthood and their specific transition from presumed normative to non-normative sexualities.

Contrary to prevailing Western scholarly perspectives on queer narratives in teen films and television, which generally posit that same-sex friendships inevitably pave the way for heteronormative romantic affiliations as markers of adult identity, MIR subverts this trope. The series illuminates the possibility that same-sex intimacy can catalyse the formation of non-normative sexual identities, concurrently signalling the characters' multifaceted transition into subsequent adulthood, MIR provides a fertile ground for scrutinising the complexities of adolescent maturation via the dialogues and narratives of its characters. Employing the framework of performative language, this analysis posits that the characters' coming-of-age is an evolving process of sexual identity formation. Shary (2007) contends that such identities "emerge not from static categorisations but from ongoing, signifying movements that belie fixed realities" (244). The series commences with its protagonist, Fuse, engaged in a live-streaming session on social media from his house. The audience discerns from his monologue that he has gained notoriety for dressing in drag and offering reviews of cosmetic products. Significantly, his opening monologue discloses his recent emotional turmoil stemming from his girlfriend's betrayal of him, thus situating him initially within the confines of heteronormativity.

The inflexion point of his transition towards non-normative sexualities occurs under somewhat extraordinary circumstances: Fuse is hypnotised by Lukmo into contemplating the suitability of same-sex relationships. During this act, Lukmo repeats the directive to "have a boyfriend," thus planting the seed for Fuse's impending sexual evolution. Subsequently, Fuse attends a social

gathering where he encounters Tee, an old acquaintance. Intoxicated, Fuse hears the hypnotic directive resonate in his consciousness, prompting the following exchange:

> Fuse: Have you ever had sex with guys?
>
> Tee: Never. Why? Do you want to try?
>
> Fuse: Maybe. I don't know.
>
> Tee: Are you sure?
>
> Fuse: Yeah.
>
> Tee: Let's try then.

This forthright, but simple dialogue, motivated by the characters' inebriated state, catalyses the exploration and formation of non-normative sexual identities. The ensuing intimacy fortifies their relational bonds and serves as an experiential avenue for their sexual identity formation. Tee demonstrates his reflective extraordinary emotional attachment to Fuse who remains entangled in a tumultuous heterosexual relationship with Jean. This multi-layered portrayal offers the audience a nuanced understanding of the contingent nature of identity development within the context of coming-of-age narratives.

MIR provides a fertile ground for analysing adolescent "coming of age" narratives through intricate dialogical exchanges and arcs. Utilising a framework grounded in performative language theory, it becomes evident that the series characterises adolescents' journey toward sexual identity not as a reflection of pre-existing norms but as an emergent phenomenon shaped by discursive acts (Shary 2007, 244). The series initiates its narrative with Fuse, the primary protagonist, conducting a live-streaming session on social media. This opening sequence serves multiple functions: it establishes Fuse's social persona and introduces his recent emotional upheaval caused by a romantic betrayal. Initially positioned within a normative heterosexual paradigm, Fuse undergoes a significant transformation when he encounters Lukmo, who hypnotically suggests that Fuse would be more suited to a same-sex relationship. In a subsequent episode, Fuse, under the influence of alcohol, attends a social gathering where he reunites with Tee, an old acquaintance. As a result of Lukmo's hypnotic command that vibrates in his subconscious, Fuse initiates a peculiar conversation with Tee about same sex experiences. However, this casual exchange causes the

sexual encounter to turn transformative for both characters, opening possibilities for the growing of their nonnormative sexual identities and the processes of maturation for both. This initiatory sexual experience fosters a renewed emotional closeness between Fuse and Tee. The narrative structure allows the viewer to find out that Tee starts to notice the kind of the emotions that he feels towards Fuse and that they are different from the ones he has had with other people. Simultaneously, Fuse is stuck in a convoluted emotionally climate surrounding his former girlfriend Jean, serving as a metaphor for the trials and tribulations that adolescents undergo in discovering their identities. In Episode Three, Fuse and Tee have an important dialogue in Fuse's bedroom, and this is a process of experiential accumulation that slowly renegotiates their sexual identities.

> Tee: I've got something to tell you.
> Fuse: What is it?
> Tee: I have no idea what I am to you and what you are to me. But
> one thing I am sure is I feel so good being with you. Goodnight,
> Fuse.

Fuse, though verbally noncommittal, responds visually a radiant smile, eye wrinkles and a gesture of assent that is all he needs to say, reciprocating Tee's sentiment. This, however, is not the standard coming out event (where this type of interaction is often used as a crux or denouement of a character's arc within the series). Rather, it starts an incipient point of becoming that leads into a labyrinth of intermingling of normative and non-normative sexual identities in the next episodes. In the text, these characters are always negotiating through a heteronormative terrain of society that they occasionally unwittingly subscribe to. One such heteronormative pressure is a paradigmatic example of when Tee is introduced to Fuse's sister, Fink. In a rather lengthy monologue, Fink proffers cautionary advice against dabbling in same-sex relationships:

> Do you know? It's good that both of you aren't gay... [She continues
> with a long monologue that intermixes elements of tolerance with
> underlying messages of heteronormativity.]

While Fink's discourse appears progressive on the surface, it is underpinned by the heteronormative dogma. In short, her speech is the microcosm of the even more pervasive frameworks of a society that stigmatises non normative sexualities. She presents her account which is influenced by capitalist discourses, objectifies and normalises the male female binary and propagates roles for men and women in marriage as normative. In this structure, men are put into occupational spheres and women into procreation and domestic spheres. Therefore, same sex unions are marginalised and become a subject to pejorative discourses, as our protagonists face heteronormative ideologies that are omnipresent. This scene becomes much more than this cautionary dialogue and exemplifies how heteronormative discourse is able to repress and limit the performativity of non-normative sexual identities in a significantly complex way. In this case, then, it means that this episode is a turning point in the text as it illustrates how the tension and struggle from which the characters are contending to find their emergent sexual identities in the midst of a heteronormalised culture.

IV. Solidarity as a Counter-Narrative to Heteronormative Structures

Building upon this, MIR conveys a compelling narrative through the interrelations between the characters, each of whom is shown navigating personal journeys toward acceptance of their queer identities. The series depicts these paths as vital components of each character's journey and growth. The concept of solidarity intervenes both in thematic terms and in the operation of mechanisms for the development of characters. As with solidarity in MIR, it does not simply provide a background against which characters act, but it helps bring about the process of breaking apart the isolation many characters experience. This communal experience significantly counters societal oppression dictated by heteronormative norms. In essence, solidarity significantly reduces the isolation the characters experience. Such solidarity paves the way for the progression of a teen's non-normative identity construction and the coming of age, as depicted in the character Book. He is depicted as a paragon of academic excellence and epitomises the psychic turmoil caused by heteronormative structures. He grew up in a wealthy household with influential parents who motivate their children to be successful and adhere to a heteronormative structure. Book's parents will encourage him to behave in a way that is in line with heteronormative ideals. He is an

outstanding student and president and holds high esteem in the presence of the students in the school.

Due to this psychological burden, Book hides his non-normative sexuality by pretending to date a girl from another school. The narrative centres ideological confinement, which is shown to lead directly to Book's emotional crisis. A transient emotional escape is triggered by his parents' dissatisfaction with his academic performance, and Book begins searching for romance on a gay dating application. Coincidentally, he matches with Frame, his classmate. This accidental meeting inspires Book in a way that no other meeting would give him a reprieve from societal judgments. Before their emotional intimacy develops, they have a serendipitous encounter yet remain secretive to avoid public exposure. The microcosm of struggle against heteronormative expectations and social judgment in Book and Frame is the relational dynamics between them.

MIR uses heteronormative societal frameworks as a target of criticism, like many films and series that are dedicated to the issue of gender and sexual minorities. This is one of the major narrative outlines and one of the story's themes. Book, as a living image of these heteronormative standards and expectations, goes through a slow nervous breakdown due to a publicised social media video where he has covert sexual encounters with his undisclosed ex-boyfriend. This deeply painful incident culminates in intense family disappointment that psychologically shatters him. After the clip is made available for public access, Book sustains what he refers to as a psychological collapse. As a result, he becomes depressed and withdrawn. The exposé of Book's internalised shame and self-blame reflect the realm of dialogue between Book and Frame.

> Book: I didn't want it to be like this. I wish I hadn't been involved
> with same-sex sexual intercourse to not disappoint my parents. This
> is all wrong.
> Frame: It happened. You just let it go.
> Book: I can't stand people talking about the video. They're saying I
> had sex with a guy. I can't go out.
> Frame: You'll be all right. You've got me.

Book: How are you going to help me then?

The dialogue indicates that Book considers his sexuality to be non-normative, viewing it as a shortcoming, something that seems to stem from a heteronormative perspective. Book's ideological confinement takes the form of social and emotional disengagement, as he believes that society is unwilling to accept or tolerate his sexual orientation.

Further in the series, against this context of ideological and psychological confinement, the author MIR introduces the element of solidarity as a means toward self-acceptance. Frame, along with others from the community who are more openly expressive of their identities, help him in undoing the psychological locks he has set for himself. The story comes to a point where Book experiences emotional release at the moment when he openly accepts that he does not fear the world, nor does he have to hide behind anything anymore. Such acceptance, however, goes beyond a personal realisation. It also stands as a testament to the strength that can be derived from community solidarity, which is vividly displayed through Book's friends, who are proudly non-normative. Book progressively learns that recognising this form of solidarity enables him to challenge and eventually dismantle the prejudices and fears he has fostered internally. In the words of Book: "Now I know that I don't have to be afraid. I don't have to hide. This is because I have you. Thank you for always being with me and patient with my difficulties." Another form of support is shown when Book's parents recognize the strength of his bond with Frame and its positive impact on Book's psychological well-being. This moment indicates the emancipation from heteronormative norms, enabling the Book to let go of the social and familial obligations that restrain his identity. As observed, the Book's character in MIR is a reflection of the strife, fragility, and the possibility of change when one has to face the set heteronormative standards. The series adds to a larger conversation about non-prescriptive sexuality by narrating the complexity of internalised shame, social expectations, and the power of solidarity within a community. Community solidarity especially empowers Book to cope with the difficult terrain of sexual identity and helps resist the dominant heteronormative forces that first bound him. Furthermore, the narrative lets us contemplate the complex relationship between sexual identity and societal norms.

V. Subverting Heteronormativity: Parental Figures in MIR

In light of Book's parents' eventual support of their son's relationship, parental figures in MIR emerge as supporting characters and play important roles in weakening heteronormative structures. The students seem to take centre stage with the development of their sexualities, but parents also undergo a change from rejection to acceptance and, importantly, tolerant apathy. This multi-generational approach to identity negotiation towards tolerance makes the text richer, resulting in a coming-of-age family narrative that examines a heteronormative society's boundaries, which is presented in the dialogue between Wit and Yok's mother, which ostensibly concerns Lukmo (Mo):

> Wit: Well, auntie, about Mo. He's actually a good boy, you know, although he is a bit annoying to me.
>
> Yok's mother: What will everyone think of me having a gay son?
>
> Wit: You seem to have a modern mindset. Then why do you still stick to such a conservative thought? The world changes. Why do you care about other people's opinions rather than your kid's happiness?
>
> Yok's mother: I should focus on whatever makes Yok happy first, shouldn't I?
>
> Wit: That's the modern parental way.

Importantly, Yok's mother's character and perspective is very illustrative. As a productive entrepreneur and influential person, she is fully conditioned by the social expectations that underpin her position in society. Predictably, she becomes disillusioned with the thought of her son Yok's non-normative sexuality as well as concerned about the perceived social stigma, clearly showing her aversion. Her attempts to arrange relationships with girls for him illustrate her desire to redirect him towards heterosexual norms. It is also important that her transformation does not culminate in obstinacy; she gives up and eventually comes around to accepting Yok's sexual identity. Ultimately, it is Wit who serves as a catalyst and replaces these traditional structures of parental observation through the very act of his engagement with Yok's mother. Wit and Yok's mother are able to challenge some priorities of her conservative stance and prompt her to change

what truly matters to her by pushing her child's welfare ahead of societal expectations. Wit's dialogues with Yok's mother not only challenge her authoritative position but also ensure that she learns the need for acceptance and the necessity for change in parenting practices.

In addition, the series gives insights into how some romantic feelings might be developing between Wit and Yok's mother. While the text does not unequivocally state that there is a relationship, the established principles are turned upside down. It contests the idea that a younger person, particularly a child's friend, has no business being intimate with a parental figure. This additional subtext, which is more disobedient, makes the series more intricate, as it not only defies typical boundaries in terms of sexuality but also those boundaries that exist between age and society. This is accomplished by providing parents as active subjects who contest and violate heteronormative boundaries. In this way, MIR does more than simple representation; it partakes in activism. It disrupts the established order, complicates issues about fixed identities, and shifts the lens of discourse on sexualities beyond set norms to cover a broader spectrum, including older generations, therefore contributing to the interdisciplinary debate on heteronormativity and media representation.

VI. Sexual Fluidity: Disrupting the Heteronormative Binary Structure

Another significant point is that sexual identity constitutes a central narrative axis in teen television, mainly focusing on non-normative sexual and gender orientations. This emphasis typically follows a narrative arc that transitions from a "heterosexual (and confused) identity" to a more concrete, positively embraced homosexual identity, facilitated by an introduction to a broader non-normative community" (Plummer, 84, cited in Pecic, 143). Unlike Western teen television, which often isolates characters with non-normative sexualities, Thai series like DTS and MIR integrate these characters into a community characterised by intra-group solidarity. Notably, MIR spotlights adolescent characters on the path towards embracing non-normative sexualities. It suggests that they need not confine themselves to a fixed sexual identity, be it heterosexual homosexual, but rather can evolve within a continuum of possible sexual orientations.

Fluid sexual identities are essential to how adolescents transition from childhood into adulthood, as they redefine the previously held normative notions towards sexuality. In the context of the

Book, sexual fluidity arises as a critical indicator of the character's growth and maturation and how they evolve in their beliefs regarding sex. This indicates greater flexibility on the part of the characters in how they understand their own sexuality, as well as the sexuality of others, in direct opposition to the norms and ideologies that portray heterosexuality as the uncritically accepted default. This allows one to "emphasise the plurality of possibilities," which is at odds with rigid heteronormative frameworks. Temporal dynamics in social perceptions of sexual fluidity play a critical role in the discussion between Wit and Yok's mother. Wit's point of view, as a younger member of society, is far less rigid. Yok's mother is a reflection of a previous generation, immersed in heteronormative and has homophobic tendencies. This is a generational distinction that shows that society is changing in terms of non-normative sexualities. More importantly, the character of Fuse is an example of a non-linear sexual identity in MIR. First, he is identified as a heterosexual male in a traditional romantic relationship with Tee, but, when the sexual affair with Tee begins, he starts to question himself and to hinge on the ambiguity of it. It becomes even more complicated due to his intimate relationship with Frame, another male character, and his decreasing relationship with First/Wife. However, Fuse's emotional connection with Tee becomes increasingly intimate and romantically charged.

Through several episodes, Fuse's process of sexual identity formation is explored in the multi-layered relationships and interactions that attest to the fluidness and non-linearity of Fuse's process of sexual identity formation. MIR broadens the scope of first how adolescent development is shaped by sexual fluidity, and second how sexual fluidity may also shape the construction of sexual orientations. The third episode is a seminal moment in Fuse and Tee's journey in becoming who they are and dialogue between them about their sexual identities that is intimate. This is after an indecent rendezvous between the two. Fuse starts by setting a mood of emotional detachment and a lack of sexual responsiveness towards Tee who, in turn, tries to read Fuse's feelings through a string of teasing and intimate kisses.

> Fuse: Don't worry; I feel no emotional resonance from our recent
> sexual encounter. It did not affect me.
> Tee: And what about this kiss? Did it evoke anything in you?

Fuse: No, regardless of how many times we engage in such actions,
I remain indifferent.

Tee: (Kisses Fuse again, deliberately and slowly) Do you remain
untouched by this?

Fuse: Yes, Tee, I feel nothing. You are not a woman.

Tee: Very well, I accept your assertion. However, you should know
every kiss, and every touch feels significant to me. Even if you may
forget it, I never will.

This is a revelatory moment in the narration of both characters. The exchange significantly impacts Tee's self-awareness, leaving a lasting impression as Fuse's feelings shift from heteronormative to increasingly fluid. This also expands the extent of Fuse's sexual identity on the other end. Initially ambivalent toward Tee's advances, Fuse later shows gradual acceptance and reciprocal attraction and continues his relationship with his girlfriend, Jean. The series gets darker as it progresses, giving the audience a view into Fuse's wavering sexual preferences. He slowly becomes attracted to Tee, who eventually starts giving romantic gestures and slowly breaks up with Jean. Later episodes demonstrate Fuse fully moving towards a relationship with Tee and avoiding Jean's sexual advances.

Fuse's initial reluctance highlights the nascent stage of his sexual identity formation, which gradually develops throughout the series. Tee's feelings are seen to be more stable by his explicit emotional reaction to their interaction, but Fuse's feelings are marked by ambivalence. First, he seeks refuge in his emotional relationship with his girlfriend, Jean, over Tee's physical advances. However, as the story unfolds, there is also a discernible change in Fuse's sexual orientation, leading to rejection of Jean and becoming more accepting of Tee's sensual delights. This critical moment in the series, therefore, serves a dual purpose. It also represents the point of Tee's self-recognition and acceptance of the non-normative orientation. This interaction also acts as a catalyst for Fuse to consider his own sexual fluidity. In Fuse's transition from initial resistance toward finally accepting his fluid sexual orientation following a more intricate relationship with both Jean and Tee, the audience sees his change. This changing perspective results in a more nuanced connection with both Tee and Jean. Hence, the purpose of the dialogue is not solely to

communicate important elements of the narrative but to highlight the difficulties surrounding the construction and reconstruction of sexual identities, especially those that cross the boundaries of normative sexual identities. This approach presents sexuality as an identity that adds a layer and forces both the characters and the audience to see through the rich intricacies of the reality of human sexuality.

MIR uses educational illustrations as part of the core of the narrative, built around adult figures who highlight the nuances of sexuality and its evolving nature to the young teenagers of the story. An important interaction is between Tee and Pop, whereby Pop is introduced as an ostensibly gay adult who later becomes romantically involved with Tee's mother, and this relationship neatly and profoundly problematises the notion of sexual fluidity.

> Pop: I am madly in love with your mom. I want you to know.
>
> Tee: Mom doesn't know you are gay, does she?
>
> Pop: The intimacies with those guys are just for fun. I am not serious about them. But for your mom, it's different. I have fallen for her.
>
> Tee: I don't want her to be hurt.
>
> Pop: I promise I can develop to become someone who deserves her love. Please know that you don't have to always stick with certain sexualities. They are not fixed. It is okay to develop them.

This dialogue exchange is an epistemological site where the elasticity of sexual identities is highlighted. The interaction between Pop and Tee offers revelations about the characters and an educational insight to the audience while promoting the belief that sexual identities are indeed fluid and can be cultivated. The interaction posits a queer epistemology and also transgresses established heteronormative frameworks and ideologies.

The conclusion of the conversation invokes a silence that reveals the intricacies of the issue. This silence functions as a pause for contemplation, during which Tee ponders on his decision to breach the confidentiality regarding Pop's sexual history. Now that he has experienced a shift in his relationship with Fuse, Tee has to decide whether it is ethical to expose Pop's past. Ultimately,

bearing in mind that fluid sexual identities can be simultaneously formative and terminal, Tee decides that it is more sensible to protect the integrity Pop's relationship with his mother. This is in part due to his newfound perspective on sexual identity. This series uses this interjection for dialogue as a means to consider and dismantle culturally entrenched forms of heteronormativity. Thus, the narrative structure of MIR forms a complex tapestry centred on sexual fluidity and the transformation of traditional heterosexual norms.

VII. Paradoxes in Spaces: Subversion of Heteronormative Institutions

Expanding this discussion, the understanding of spatiality has consistently been one of concern in the framework of gender and sexuality studies. Schools, for instance, have often been regarded as spaces that reproduce patriarchal standards (McNeill 2013; Kjaran 2017). In this case, MIR serves as an intriguing example. The series illustrates a phenomenon called "male school" which acts as a contradictory space that challenges the existing heteronormative structures rather than upholding them. Expanding on this premise brings us to the term "queering spaces" which is thoroughly explained in Pecic's work (2013). Pecic addresses the question of how the structure of space can be redefined through Bildungsroman literature to advance "a hopeful portrayal of an all-embracing queer society" (Pecic 2013). In correlation with MIR, the male school setting acts as an enabling chronotype where individuals are facilitated to accept and formulate non-normative sexual identities.

Paradoxically, the education system, which is regarded in majorly as a patriarchal institution, serves as a fertile ground for disruption of heteronormative systems because of the existence of queer possibilities. In traditional all-male school setting, there is an effort to support and sustain patriarchal and heteronormative expectations. However, this setting also accommodates the creation of homoerotic relationships that question its fundamental ideals. This apparently patriarchal sphere has, within it, another critical counter-narrative by virtue of the existence of homoerotic relationships. These relationships challenge rigid structures and enable diverse expressions of sexual orientations. For example, the relationship between Fuse and Tee in the series is a direct contradiction to the assumed heterosexual relations that are presumed to dominate in the school. In that way, the relationship in question serves as an instrument of change, challenging the deeply rooted heteronormative beliefs in the social structure of the school. This

example brings to the fore and invites further questioning on how far schools as institutions of discipline and authority can, in fact, enable spaces of resistance and self-identity that are at odds with their intended purpose. Characters' intimate relationships can further be studied as other phenomena unique and related to the queer possibilities that the school subverts heteronormative and patriarchal norms. The development of homosexual relationships in such institutional contexts transcends the assumed bounds of sexual orientation within the structures of patriarchy. It allows room for conversations that interrogate the normative structures themselves, acting as a microcosm for larger societal discussions on sexuality, identity, and its particular relations to patriarchy. In this view, the male school system, though seemingly a place for the promotion of masculine traits including compulsory heterosexuality, has, within, its own cracks and fissures through which alternative sexual identities can emerge and blossom. It becomes an unintended but powerful site for the contestation and reworking of societal constructions of sexuality. In the study of gender and sexuality, schools are often recognised as institutions of the reproduction of patriarchy and enforcers of heteronormative practices. However, this study seeks to explain otherwise through an episode of the MIR series. The series serves as a textual space that allows exploring how "normal" and heteronormative bounds and frameworks are constructed and how they can be dismantled.

In MIR, most characters evolve in their understanding of sexuality by forming homoerotic relationships within the school environment. These relationships often emerge from initial homosocial bonds generated through shared school activities and classroom experiences. Particularly noteworthy is the relationship between the characters Nine and Rodtang, which elucidates how a male-dominated space can paradoxically become a fertile ground for developing non-normative sexualities and connections. Nine, a senior and head of the school's cheerleading club, is initially depicted as a disciplined and responsible individual. Rodtang, by contrast, is portrayed as unreliable and frequently absent. Rodtang's character arc is particularly instructive, with a quest for a heroic role model. Initially drawn to the character Fuse due to his social media fame, Rodtang undergoes significant personal growth across the second season. Interactions with Nine, who assumes a mentoring role, catalysed this transformation. Through these interactions, the series raises crucial questions about what constitutes heroism. When confronted by Nine about his newfound arrogance, Rodtang retorts by questioning the value of Nine's warning and accuses him of jealousy. Here, Rodtang's character reveals a flawed understanding of heroism, mistakenly

associating it with fame and adoration. However, as the narrative unfolds, Rodtang's perspective on heroism undergoes a reconfiguration, thanks partly to Nine's guidance and a critical incident involving the school administration:

> Nine: You've upset people around you. Your friends boycotted you.
> Rodtang: Then who cares. They're just jealous. I am a hero now. I am famous, and everyone admires me.
> Nine: You can't be inconsiderate like this. You should apologise to them.
> Rodtang: I'm too busy to please everyone. What's the point of your warning? Are you also jealous of me being a hero?
> Nine: So I can't help you.

Following this, the connection between Nine and Rodtang undergoes a significant change, moving from didactic heroism and morality towards intimacy. This change is quite notable considering the context of the school setting, which is usually the location for their encounters. Their participation in common school activities fosters the changing nature of their relationship. Eventually, it is clear that the relationship has progressed from one that is purely sage and custodial to one with sensual romance. This change can be illustrated in the following dialogue between characters:

> Rodtang: (pointing to the sky) Look at there! I see two rabbits and fish. What do you see?
> Nine: I see the stars. (Starring at Rodtang) Although they are far away, they indeed exist. You can always see them.
> Rodtang: Thank you. Whenever I come to you, I always feel happy. You are the coolest guy for me. (shouting) Yes, you are the coolest guy for me. I know you are my hero.

The romantic aspects on the part of Nine for Rodtang become clearer in the excerpted dialogue above between the two. This is further enhanced through the techniques of cinematography. The mise-en-scène plays an important role in highlighting the romance between the characters. A typical shot is one that is close up extending its focus to the eyes of Nine fixated on Rodtang. The

next shot has both characters reclining back-to-back. These shots allow for and go beyond the understanding of homosocial interaction or "bromance" between the two characters. They capture a stage in which love is beginning to blossom. At the same time, these allow the educational environment to be an important space for the development of what can be coined "bromantic" relations and non-normative sexual orientation exploration for these characters. Furthermore, making the shift from a relationship based on seniority to one of mutual intimacy has important consequences for conventional power structures.

In particular, it breaks the boundaries that are often created by seniority, which is an example of a patriarchal system. In this circumstance, the school does not serve to reify patriarchy and heteronormativity but rather emerges as a site that undermines and destabilises such social orders. To strengthen the claim of school as a subversive institution, I would note that the series also addresses heteronormativity institutions through the inclusion of characters that transgress it. Two male teachers, if we can call them that, as non-normative in gender and sexuality, play a key role in subverting the bias that comes with the authority of an educator. Two male teachers, who are assumed to have non-normative gender and sexual identities, actively participate in gendered non-compliance, which assists in subverting the educational authority bias. This is most clearly observed in Kit's character. Kit is shown to have what are considered deviant sexual practices, including being involved in threesomes through gay dating apps. This depiction undermines the traditional heterosexual masking of power that his character is intended to portray. Kit signifies a nuanced discussion about the rigidity of heteronormative structures in educational settings. Through its subtle characters, the series challenges viewers to reconsider their perceptions about identity, authority, and the limitations of traditional moral paradigms.

Therefore, the educational setting in MIR can be understood, in the words of Pecic, as "a heterogeneous community for liberating homogenous spaces" (2013). It is a battleground for challenging and subverting conventional narratives about heteronormativity and patriarchal authority. With the analysis of the depictions of Nine and Rodtang, including the teachers, we come to realisation that MIR is an illustrative case of how spaces traditionally thought to reinforce heteronormative ideologies can also serve as sites for their subversion. The series provides an alternative lens to understand the complexities of developing non-normative sexual identities within patriarchal spaces

VIII. Homonormativity and the Marginalisation of Female Non-Normative Sexual Identities in MIR

Turning now to the peripheral status of female characters, **in** discussions surrounding MIR, it is essential not to overlook the female characters relegated to the periphery. While the series seemingly foregrounds male characters' non-normative sexualities as a form of homonormative destabilisation, it tacitly marginalises and suppresses the non-normative sexual identities of its female characters. This places them within a homonormative framework that privileges male same-sex relationships while sidelining those of females. The ambiguities and paradoxes in female relationships are portrayed by the female characters Fink and Mook who display elements of non-normative sexualities. They are tertiary characters, older than the primary male characters, and are situated in a university context. Fink, in particular, is a complex character with a part-time job as a cosmetic reviewer and blogger. She encourages her younger brother Fuse to cross-dress for her reviews yet paradoxically admonishes him against embracing a non-heteronormative identity. This is a salient illustration of how Fink's character, and by extension other female characters, are used to underpin a homonormative narrative that is simultaneously destabilising and prescriptive. The relationship between Fink and Mook is portrayed as intimately ambiguous. Mook appears to have a crush on Fink, but Fink's sexual identity remains opaque, lending itself to multiple interpretations. This ambiguous intimacy reveals an unsettling paradox within the series' narrative. While it seeks to question heteronormative frameworks through its male characters, it simultaneously perpetuates them through its treatment of female characters. Thus, the complexities of Fink and Mook's relationship serve as a microcosm of the broader issues of representation and visibility for female sexual minorities within a homonormative narrative structure.

Concerning the idea of the subtext of suppression, the limited visibility and ambiguous portrayal of Fink and Mook's relationship indicate an implicit suppression of non-normative female sexualities within the series. By relegating these characters to the narrative periphery, MIR fails to comprehensively examine the complexities and challenges associated with female non-normative sexual identities. This perpetuates a form of homonormativity that is both gendered and hierarchical, prioritising male same-sex desires and experiences over those of females. The portrayal of Fink and Mook highlights a problematic aspect of the series as it implicitly endorses a homonormative framework that suppresses the complexity of female non-normative sexual identities. While the series provides a valuable platform for exploring non-normative sexual

identities among males, its treatment of female characters reflects an omission in its narrative scope.

To underline what I argue homonormativity in MIR is most discernible in the marginalisation of the girls' non-normative sexuality, I would like to apply Monaghan's proposal to the analysis of Fink's and Mook's portrayal. In the article "Not Just a Phase: Queer Girlhood and Coming of Age on Screen," Monaghan expands the framework for understanding queer girlhood beyond mere articulations of sexual identity. Monaghan posits that queer girlhood on screen has historically been portrayed through two primary tropes. The first is the narrative of "coming out" as a rite of passage to adulthood, which involves the articulation of sexualities. The second is a non-linear transition from childhood to heteronormative adulthood, informed by queer sexualities, identities, and experiences (Monaghan 2019, 99). In light of Monaghan's framework, the portrayal of the relationship between Fink and Mook in MIR can be analysed as part of what Monaghan describes as "an unruly teen phase" (2019, 100). In MIR, the girls' homosexuality is framed as homosocial intimacy that functions as a stepping stone towards a future of normative heterosexuality (Driver 2007, 7; cited in Monaghan 2019, 100). This upholds heteronormative discourses that constrain non-normative sexualities, desires, and relationships. Such constraining discourses in MIR are illustrated, for instance, in the evolution of a relationship between Fink and a male character, Fluke, in the second season. These portrayals appear to consign the girls' non-normative sexualities to the realm of the temporary or experimental, marking them as stages en route to "adult womanhood" (Monaghan 2019, 101). Hence, this treatment aligns with Monaghan's assertion that the portrayal of queer girlhood often denies the possibility of a queer future for girl characters (2019, 101). The series constructs their non-normative sexual identities as transient, to be outgrown as they transition to the conventional stage of "adult womanhood." Such narratives not only stifle the diversity of sexual identities but also undermine the complexity of experiences that girls undergo in their coming-of-age processes. The analysis of Fink and Mook through Monaghan's framework reveals the limitations in MIR's treatment of female non-normative sexualities. While the series might initially appear progressive for its depiction of non-heteronormative male sexualities, a closer look through the lens provided by Monaghan unveils a reinforcement of heteronormative paradigms, particularly in the portrayal of female characters.

A significant moment of intimacy between Fink and Mook occurs in a scene where Mook kisses a sleeping Fink while giving her a massage. The dialogue that follows is marked by tension and

ambiguity. Fink professes her love for Mook but frames it within the context of friendship, while Mook's expression reveals her internal turmoil. A momentary interruption by Tan, another character who is romantically interested in Fink, adds another layer of complexity to the relationship between the two girls:

> Fink: I've mentioned this before. I wanna have you forever. You are
> my best friend.
> Mook does not say anything, but her facial expression shows that
> she is guilty and confused. The awkward moment is interrupted by
> an arrival of Tan, a male character who also falls in love with Fink.
> Mook: How do you feel about Tan?
> Fink: …(cutting the papers silently)…
> Mook: How do you feel about him?
> Fink:…(cutting the papers quickly)…
> Mook cuts papers angrily and aggressively then it accidentally cuts
> her finger.
> Fink: (sucking blood from Mook's finger) I told you to be careful.
> Mook: (looking at Fink and her finger)
> Fink: I love you. Please don't hurt yourself.
> (The two girls kiss slowly.)
> Fink: I warn you for the last time. Don't do it anymore.
> (Fink then walks away off to upstairs, leaving Mook to her own
> guilty pleasure).

Despite the emotional weight of the scene, it fails to serve as a coming-out moment for either girl. Neither Fink nor Mook articulates their sexual identity, leaving it ambiguous. This indicates the broader treatment of their relationship within the series, mirroring Monaghan's assertion that queer girls in television often appear as transitory figures (Monaghan 2016, 50). In the second season of MIR, the series takes steps to divert the audience's attention from the earlier relationship between Fink and Mook. Fink is shown developing a relationship with a male character, Fluke, further sidelining her intimate moments with Mook. In addition, Mook's conspicuous absence from the subsequent season reiterates Monaghan's point that queer girls often serve merely as complications in a televisual narrative before disappearing (2016, 50). The handling of Fink and Mook's

relationship aligns well with Monaghan's framework. Despite their intimate moments, their queerness is portrayed as a phase or complication rather than a legitimate, long-term orientation. This approach limits the complexity and variety of queer identities portrayed, reinforcing heteronormative structures and failing to explore non-normative sexualities in their full depth.

IX. Conclusion: Concerning Identity Formation, Sexuality, and Sexual Orientation in MIR

Identity formation, sexuality, and sexual orientation are probably one of the most important factors to consider in *Make It Right: the Series*. The series depicts a group of male adolescents, particularly teenage boys like Fuse, Tee, Book, Frame, Rodtang, and Nine, who seem to possess no cognitive struggle over their gender presentations. They also appear to accept the dominant modes of masculine gender expression with their use of copula elements and self-identifying terms. Unlike those characters, Yok is more complex. While he is depicted as adopting an effeminate male identity, his clashes with his mother predominantly arise from his homosexual inclination rather than his queer gender expression. This differentiation is important because it reveals the difference between self-presentation and sexuality, which is often viewed too simply, which self-presentation does, which leads to complex family conflicts and social responses.

These characters are symbolically represented, creating a sense of conflict in our notion of adolescent sexuality and identity. These personal experiences offer an idea of the difficulties faced in the implementation of non-normative sexual orientation in a sociocultural environment that shows a leaning towards heteronormative constructs. On the contrary, MIR does not merely serve as a counter-narrative to the terms of these hegemonic norms, but MIR is a heterotopic space, resisting and reinforcing heteronormativity. MIR's heterotopic duality is revealed through the destabilisation of conventional gender and sexual norms yet at the same time relying on some of the existing tropes. On the other hand, the series also functions as a site of resistance, depicting same-sex relationships and fluid gender expressions within a normalized adolescent setting, in contrast to traditional media portrayals of queerness as deviant or tragic. This heterotopic aspect was also emphasised by the show's dual platform release strategy in which the two versions of the uncut show would be streamed simultaneously on Line TV, and the main version with content censorship would be aired on MCOT HD. It is a demonstrable expression of its heterotopic

experience. The uncut version enables the show to operate within and outside the boundaries of Thai television's censorship regime.

From another perspective, MIR does not fully escape the reinforcement of heteronormativity. Although queer relationships are portrayed positively, several characters' quests for self-acceptance tend to rely on heteronormative romance narratives, including monogamous and emotionally humiliating confrontations over one's sexual identity. The conflict concerning Fuse's desire for Tee is shown as a crisis that is parallel to a traditional heterosexual romance, where there is turmoil and guilt before a resolution or marriage. While the show does challenge conventional ideas of masculinity, it nevertheless exemplifies hyper-masculinised behavioural expectations, with characters like Fuse and Frame being portrayed as masculine and Yok, who is gender nonconforming, as more feminine. In this manner, rather than classifying MIR as purely resistant or transgressive, it is more appropriately classified as a heterotopic negotiation where different sexual and gender discourses compete for dominance. This phenomenon not only contests the strong heteronormativity within Thai popular media but also attempts to blend in the nostalgic romantic and gender constructs. The dual functioning of MIR plays a fundamental role because it does not break heteronormativity completely, and it does not allow heteronormativity to dominate entirely. The series complicates the discourse on LGBTQ+ representation by illustrating how media negotiate conflicting portrayals of identity, normativity, and resistance.

An examination of MIR using heterotopia as a dualistic space proves that the serial content works both for and against elements of heteronormative standards. The show operates as a queer-friendly refuge, but it still operates inside media outlets that need to adhere to prevalent social standards. Queer media representations serve a dual purpose, simultaneously challenging mainstream norms while strategically engaging with these norms to attain credibility within the Thai media industry. In the end, the achievement of MIR not only rely on its sheer rejection but uses its overt rejection of heteronormativity as a tool to shape the space for queer identities in mainstream storytelling. This indicates the appetite for storytelling featuring more fluid, complex, ethnically diverse non-normative lives and less conventionally signified as normative or subversive. Yet MIR mirrors the tensions of phobia, prejudice and vilification against Thai BL that still permeate much of the Thai media at this moment, and also as a blueprint for a future in which queer narratives are not just tolerated but woven into the fabric of storytelling itself.

Chapter Four: Fantasy Tropes in *My Dream: the Series*

I. Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, MIR resists heteronormativity and the effect of its dominant discourse on the lives of people with non-normative gender and sexual identities by depicting the disruption of heteronormativity through the coming-of-age experiences of its characters as they explore and develop their sexualities during the transition from childhood to adulthood. MIR exposes these characters to conflicts between their non-normative sexualities and hegemonic heteronormative society that imposes upon them norms they must confront during their journeys towards maturity. Crucially, MIR emphasises that sexual identities are not fixed but ongoing and fluid. More generally, this reflects the approaches of the other Thai series analysed in this thesis, which work together to produce a queer heterotopia through their use of language creativity, the concept of coming of age as an ongoing process of identity formation and sexual fluidity. Moving forward, this chapter will analyse how *My Dream: the Series* (MDS) employs the fantasy genre to subvert heteronormativity and create a queer heterotopia. This chapter will focus on the extent to which the fantasy in MDS serves as an ideal space for non-normative genders and sexualities, ultimately contributing to narratives of subversion. The fantasy elements in MDS create the conditions for potential queer heterotopic space, dismantling heteronormativity and challenging gender and sexual boundaries. The deployment of fantasy elements, particularly in dream sequences, is a potent technique with which to explore the queer potentiality inherent in the narrative and encapsulate a theoretical heterotopia wherein the limitations imposed by societal norms on sexual identity can be transcended. Like MIR, MDS presents a sense of community and solidarity among characters with non-normative genders and sexualities, as their bond of friendship helps them overcome conflicts and problems.

In parallel to the way this thesis has analysed the concept of sexual fluidity in MIR, the concept of elasticity in this chapter demonstrates that genders and sexualities are not static and can evolve. In the fantasy sequences of MDS, the characters are repeatedly able to transform their bodies, an aspect which is used to explore the politics of body and gender, conceptualising the idea of gender and sexual fluidity or elasticity. In focusing on this element of elasticity, this chapter argues that MDS suggests a person's sexuality is not confined or limited by their gendered body, and as such,

sexuality is free to be explored, shaped, and transitioned. The series challenges the traditional understanding of gender and sexuality as fixed categories by emphasising these concepts' dynamic and malleable nature. The idea of elasticity in MDS highlights the importance of embracing one's sexuality and suggests that individuals should be allowed to explore and transition between genders and sexual orientations as they see fit. The series offers a nuanced and dynamic perspective on gender and sexual fluidity, challenging the binary understanding of gender and sexuality. Hence, this chapter initially outlines how MDS employs fantasy elements to disrupt heteronormative constructs, establishing an analytical foundation that connects queer theoretical perspectives with the fantasy genre. The next section provides an overview of the series and sets the context for a detailed scene analysis that highlights this intersection.

II. *My Dream: the Series*

My Dream: the Series (MDS) is a one-off BL series comprising 12 episodes, directed and screenwritten by Piyawat Chaithiangthum. The series was streamed on Line TV and scheduled to air every Wednesday with an approximate duration of 40 minutes per episode, with its initial run starting on October 10, 2018 and concluding on December 26, 2018. Labelled as a BL series with homoeroticism as its focal content, MDS tackles non-normative identity construction and romantic orientations within the Thai cultural milieu through fantasy elements. The series is a work within the fantasy genre that explores the complexities of grief, identity, and non-normative sexuality through its protagonist, Runway (Cholsawas Tiewwanichkul), a high-school student aged 17-18. Runway has had recurring nightmares since the demise of his father, a pilot, in a tragic aeroplane accident. He resides with his bereaved mother. Runway's mother who struggles with her grief several after the traumatic incident of her husband's death. The narrative trajectory is transformed when Runway rediscovers a childhood memento, a dreamcatcher that possesses the ability to transmute nightmares into pleasant dreams. Subsequently, upon placing the dreamcatcher above his bed, Runway encounters a mysterious man named Dream (Pongsapat Kankam) in his slumbrous visions. Dream rescues Runway from the horrors of consistently replaying his father's catastrophic death in his mind. This enigmatic occurrence somehow replaces Runway's lost father figure. Furthermore, Dream serves a dual function, not merely as a psychological relief that assists Runway through his enduring grief but also as a catalyst that impels the formation and acceptance of Runway's non-normative sexual orientation. The series' trauma plot is intricately interwoven

with Runway's complicated romantic relationship with Dream. The argument that Dream is a catalyst for Runway's development of a non-heterosexual identity is illustrated by its juxtaposition with Runway's relationship with Tanai (Shatree Suwanvalaikor), an athletically gifted boy-next-door character. Tanai has pronounced romantic sentiments towards Runway who consistently rejects them. The end of the series offers the resolution of Runway's romantic dilemma by having him forgo the opportunity of having a corporeal relationship with Tanai and confessing to his friend that he has chosen to pursue a romantic entanglement with Dream, despite the impossibility of their love materialising in the physical world. This decision implies a broader thematic undertone: dreams serve as queer-potential spaces where non-normative sexual orientations can negotiate prevailing social ideologies and norms governing heterosexual relationships.

Citing the societal constraints stigmatising same-sex relationships, Runway contends that romantic intimacy between them is an unattainable ideal. Runway's internal conflicts make his character more complicated with the struggle to balance his emotional desires with societal norms. Even though he can surpass heteronormative constraints in his dream experience, the real-world discursive norms do not let desire shifted to reality. This incongruity between Runway's idealised homoeroticism with Dream and his actual encounters with Tanai emphasises the conflict between individual desires and social conventions. His rejection of Tanai's romantic advances illustrates what is at stake in such a conflict, with the key issue becoming what to make of the series' deliberate figuration of "acceptable" same-sex romance within the fantasy element of the narrative. The next section of the chapter therefore explores theoretical perspectives from scholars including Johnson, Jackson, and Feasey, particularly focusing on how fantasy as a genre disrupts societal norms and boundaries, thereby preparing for an in-depth exploration through Arnika Fuhrmann's Buddhist theoretical lens.

III. Fantasy: A Genre of Subversion and Queer Potentiality

Fantasy is a genre which questions reality, logic and truth. The origin of the fantasy genre is in myth and folktale in which supernatural and magical powers are principal elements of stories and narratives embrace features such as magic, supernatural beings, and alternate realms. The fantasy genre represents a world that does not adhere to the limitations of mundane quotidian reality. It plays a vital role in the world of fiction, encompassing imaginative narratives that explore

supernatural worlds, magical powers, and mythical creatures. With boundless narratives, fantasy can captivate audiences by transporting them to otherworldly realms and explore limitless possibilities, fostering a sense of astonishment and escapism. Fantasy offers opportunities outside mimetic representations of reality. The indefinite boundaries characteristic of fantasy makes the genre an accommodating platform for interrogating normativity and imagining alternative realities (Pearson 2022). Furthermore, fantasy has been regarded as a genre of "breaking the boundaries and rules" (Kenneally 2016, 15), a principal factor of identity formation as it is "employed as a road map for journeys of growth and search for identity" (Attebery 2022, 112).

The capability of televisual fantasy to transcend and challenge the normative confinements of society is proposed in the book *Telefantasy*. Johnson (2005) explores fantasy's transformative and subversive potential as a genre, particularly its manifestation on television, which she terms "telefantasy." Grounding her argument in Rosemary Jackson's seminal work, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), Johnson contends that the nature of fantasy is not an evasion of reality but rather a confrontation with it. Fantasy dislocates normative, culturally constructed conceptions of reality, creating a space for alternative worldviews and experiences. Johnson asserts that the genre's inherent quality of dislocation and subsequent reconstruction is a "subtle invitation to transgression" (Jackson 1981, 180; cited in Johnson 2005, 5). This transgressive potential is not limited to written text; it extends to visual media, specifically telefantasy, as a broad television genre encompassing "a wide and diverse range of science fiction and fantasy texts" (Johnson 2005, 2). Adding to this, Feasey (2012) notes that fantasy TV, like its literary counterpart, is not constrained by naturalistic or realistic conventions. As a result, it holds a unique position in its capability to offer alternative representations of gender and sexuality on the small screen. The genre is a fruitful platform for challenging prevailing social norms and reforming identities outside the confinement.

The fantasy genre, with its characteristics and elements, might also be considered ideal for analysis via the queer theoretical framework. Jes Battis proposes that the fantasy is "already manifestly queer" (2007, 260; cited in Kenneally 2016, 1) as the non-realistic world of fantasy can contribute to investigating non-normative identities, including genders and sexualities, constructed outside societal ideologies and norms. It can be further used as a practical lens for investigating the

dismantling of heteronormative reality formed by and embedded in society. Through the queer studies lens, the fantasy genre presents queer potentiality in the form of narratives that allow the investigation of the hegemonic notion of heteronormativity and its suppression of non-normative identities. By incorporating queer theory into the analysis of fantasy series *My Dream: the Series*, it becomes possible to explore how these narratives disrupt and challenge societal norms. In particular, MDS exemplifies how fantasy can help viewers to confront and subvert traditional ideas about gender identity and sexual orientation, ultimately fostering inclusivity and promoting social change through its presentation of queer potentiality and identity fluidity. The tropes of fantasy not only allow non-normative genders and sexualities to undermine heteronormative boundaries, hierarchy, social order and knowledge established under heteronormative discourses but also liberate sexual desires and homoeroticism suppressed by social norms.

IV. Fuhrmann's Framework of Buddhism and Fantasy Applied to MDS

Building upon the theoretical grounding in fantasy, the following section applies Arnika Fuhrmann's concept of vernacular Buddhism to MDS, analysing how Buddhist-inflected fantasy spaces allow non-normative identities to articulate within supernatural or liminal contexts. Fuhrmann's notion of vernacular, quotidian Buddhism understands Thai media as not only invoking Buddhism as a moral authority but rather as wielding it as a purifying instrument that normalises and reshapes desire. Since it does not function merely as a prohibitive doctrine, Buddhism in Thai cinematic discourses is transformed into a means by which various sexualities are expressed, not suppressed (Fuhrmann 2016, 34). Buddhist supernatural elements in Thai films and television shows appear as ghosts and spirits and liminal states which function beyond aesthetic purposes to create alternative ways of expressing identity. The Buddhist cosmological framework in MDS establishes queerness as part of an eternal cycle of change instead of viewing it as an exceptional phenomenon. According to Fuhrmann, the Buddhist-inflected fantasy space functions beyond its role as a moral platform for non-attachment education because it fundamentally transforms identity structures and desire systems. Key Buddhist concepts of *anicca* (impermanence), *samsara* (cyclical rebirth) and *anatta* (non-self) establish a temporal framework that shows identity moving in a constant state of flux. The dominant Western queer discourse focuses on stable identity categories and legal recognition, but this perspective differs from those dominant Western views. MDS takes on these same Buddhist concepts to build a localised

understanding of queerness that sees it as a transformational process through spiritual changes instead of treating it as a static social category.

Fuhrmann's broader interest in fantasy and Thai cinema reflects a consistent paradigm in which supernatural elements offer a kind of alternative space for non-normative identities but also function to police visibility on these identities. In her analysis of *Tropical Malady* (2004) and *Nang Nak* (1999) she shows how Thai supernatural media situates queerness within ghostly and otherworldly spaces, providing liminal, often distanced settings in which desires that do not conform to the heteronormative world can be explored without treading too profoundly into material reality. In *Nang Nak*, for example, the titular spirit interrupts patriarchal Buddhist social mores by refusing to abandon her husband. However, her story eventually reestablishes the boundaries of traditional gender roles by limiting her love to the past, making it so she cannot occupy the present. The same applies to the film *Tropical Malady*, a shift from a realist same-sex romance to a mythical reimagination of queer life, in which nature threatens to transform the lovers into wild animals, is replaced with an interlude set in the supernatural jungle and reimagines queerness through myth and fantasy rather than contemporary social life. To extend Fuhrmann's framework to MDS, then, we can see how the series positions queerness in relation to supernatural mediation. MDS does not precisely feature reincarnation in orthodox Buddhist-religious terms but utilises spectrality (the presence of spirits), dreamscapes, and liminal temporality about specific other Thai media. The nature of Runway's relationship with Dream plays out in varying states of being, waking life, the dream world, the world of the dead, like the Buddhist hierarchies of phenomenon and the idea of impermanence. Dream's role as a liminal figure deepens with the Buddhist understanding that what we think of ourselves is fluid and changing. His presence in the dream world indicates the role of spectral and supernatural figures in Thai cinema as not merely ghosts of the past but "vibrant and living mediators of suppressed desires and non-normative identities" (Fuhrmann 2017, 64). But while Buddhism in MDS offers the ideological basis for conceptualising queerness in terms of fluidity, its recourse to supernatural containment creates a paradox of representation. This resonates in Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, spaces that challenge, and yet still express, the dominant norms. The dream world in MDS acts as a heterotopic site wherein queerness may arise without fear of social consequence. In the supernatural realm, restrictions of time, space and heteronormativity carry less weight; same-sex intimacy is

supported. On the other hand, that same heterotopic quality is also a mechanism of containment, you can have queerness. However, it must remain outside and separate from your quotidian reality, existing in a wholly other world. MDS is a queer love story set in supernatural fantasy, a marker of non-normative identities visible through a mediated lens and made socially illegitimate, a pattern that is consistent across Thai media.

It is crucial to apply Fuhrmann's work to MDS since her perspective contextualises the series within a longer tradition of Thai media. Fuhrmann's project, in contradistinction to Western-centric models of queer representation that centre activism, legal recognition, and resistance to hegemonic ideologies, demands to know how queerness in Thai narratives is most often mobilised from within dominant spiritual and cultural modalities, not against them. MDS makes the connection by placing queerness in a Buddhist cosmology instead of treating it as an outside force that is invading and subverting tradition. Representations of the queer in Thailand are not always consistent with an increasingly globalised and homogenised queer discourse that is more likely to understand identity categories as being fixed. Instead, MDS shows that if queerness does not need to be wholly assimilated nor entirely transgressive, it can exist within settled cultural and religious structures. Fuhrmann's framework also assists in clarifying how MDS participates in and extends a longstanding tradition of Thai supernatural media, in which ghosts and spirits help to mediate unresolved emotional and social tensions. Implicit in Dream's haunting is not just a metaphorical representation of queerness. It reframes queer identity as something that takes place beyond corporeality, grounded in the cyclical and mutable structure of Buddhist cosmology. This perspective is also key to explain how Thai media negotiate the tension between queer visibility and containment. As Fuhrmann demonstrates, supernatural spaces act as enablers and limiters of queer representation, affording the opportunity to explore non-normative identities while maintaining them within fantasy as opposed to the quotidian.

Thus, MDS illustrates the twofold role of Buddhist-inflected fantasy. It validates queerness by grounding it in spiritual, as well as cultural, tradition, even as it limits its full expression through containment in supernatural space. The work of Fuhrmann sheds light on this apparent dichotomy. By placing queerness in a Buddhist-inflected dreamscape, MDS fits into a wider trend in Thai supernatural storytelling, in which fantasy functions as a way of working through non-normative

identities. Yet this negotiation often consolidates distance, and keeps queerness linked to liminal, spectral or otherworldly spaces rather than fully tethering it to material reality. In the end, MDS does more than reproduce predominant patterns of queer containment, it actively participates in reformulating dominant imaginaries of queerness in Thai spiritual and cultural traditions. By locating non-normative desire in a Buddhist-tinged fantasy, the series calls attention to both the possible avenues for a more expansive queer representation and the persistent limits that impede its full inclusion in the quotidian. This "fantasy paradox," as the framework Fuhrmann identifies makes clear, is as much a structuring principle of Thai queer media more broadly, which gives queerness room to articulate itself through fantasy, while also providing a framework of containment. MDS narrates a vision of queerness that is simultaneously visible and spectral, recognised yet removed, everlasting yet ghostly, always there but never existing fully.

In MDS, fantasy is not just an escapist mechanism; it becomes a heterotopic space in which non-normative identities can be playfully performed and, in the process, suspend hegemonic temporality. Fuhrmann (2016) claims that supernatural spaces in Thai media infused with Buddhist vernacular work as sites of both queer articulation and containment, welcome or not, accessible or not, queer is rearranged into liminal realms but kept, nonetheless, from social reality (12) The same applies to MDS, which seen from one side is a site for self-exploration, but from the other is a place where these transitions are considered a supernatural event and not woven into the fabric of daily life. According to Fuhrmann (2016), Thai supernatural media often reconfigures queer subjectivity in a Buddhist cosmology, rendering it outside Western frames of visibility and rights-based discourse (51). In MDS, this Buddhist alignment provides space for Runway and Dr. Good to investigate sexual fluidity and emotional transformation within the context of fantastical and real-life convergence. Through such exploration of diverse gendered and sexual identities, MDS materially subverts traditional representations of queerness, showing that identity is not fixed or beholden to the binary. The supernatural inner dreamscape submerges heteronormative time, syncing queerness with Buddhist-inflected circular transformation rather than Western expansionist models of the self.

Nevertheless, this heterotopic space does not fully disrupt powerful hierarchies. If MDS widens representational horizons for queerness, it also consolidates existing hegemons. Fuhrmann is critical of the ways that vernacular Buddhist supernatural spaces in Thai media render the entailing

of (female) suffering to (male) transformations (2016, 12). This structure comes into view in MDS, wherein the supernatural world allows queer male figures like Runway and Dr. Good to become transformed while also preventing female-dominated grief, like Runway's mother's depression, from entering in these heterotopic transformations. To ground the subversive potential of fantasy, MDS introduces Dream and Elle as paranormal divinities who embody Buddhist-inflected metamorphosis. As an ethereal protector, Dream steers Runway towards his queer providence and emotional self-acceptance. Spectral beings in Buddhist traditions often fulfil roles as mediators between realms, catalysing spiritual enlightenment and personal revelation. In a similar way, the function of Dream fits within Fuhrmann's argument that Buddhist supernatural characters in Thai media often give characters access to alternative ways of feeling that enable them to engage with desire and modes of being outside of strict social scripts (2016, 51).

Elle, by contrast, is an avatar of reconstitution who is at once subversive and constrained in her gender identity. A supernatural being who smoothly traverses gender in both directions, Elle embodies *anicca* (impermanence), one of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism that insists on a more fluid understanding of existence than binary categories allow. This portrayal undermines Western-centric trans stories, which commonly portray gender transition as a linear progression toward a fixed identity. Instead, MDS frames Elle's transformation with a cosmology where gender is fluid, provisional and always in flux, from a Buddhist purview. But, as Fuhrmann notes, vernacular Buddhist supernatural realms tend in practice to marginalize non-binary gender, so that gender fluidity is more likely to be considered otherworldly, rather than incorporated into social reality (2016, 51)

In the end, it is the heterotopic fantasy space that becomes present in MDS's own space, functioning both subversively and as a regulatory site. And while it allows space for queerness to be explored outside normative frameworks, at the same time, it has the effect that these expressions are always grounded in the supernatural and therefore, cannot fully contest heteronormativity, in the context of everyday life. This duality, according to Fuhrmann, replicates one broader framework of Thai supernatural media, in which queer lives, or at least their visibility, are tolerated only if they can be boxed within the fantastical (2016, 7). As such, MDS augments fantasy as a multilayered task-machine, both facilitating radical reconfigurations of identity and demonstrating the inability of heterotopic sites to fully disassemble hegemonic social formations. The series

offers a spiritual, affective, fluid yet liminal fantasy of queerness that constitutes a critical reworking of identity through Buddhism: "thinking fantasy through Buddhist activism in shanties" (alongside that of the dead souls in the afterlife). This suggests that Fuhrmann (2016) is correct that vernacular Buddhist spaces of the supernatural allow queerness but do not effectively challenge the larger systems that naturalise non-normative identities (12).

V. Dreams and the Role of Fantasy: Runway and Dream

This section offers detailed analyses of key scenes involving Runway and Dream, focusing specifically on their interactions within the dream sequences. It emphasizes how these sequences embody Fuhrmann's ideas of Buddhist-inflected fantasies as spaces for queer identity formation. The introduction of the character Dream within Runway's dream serves multiple narrative functions. It establishes Dream as a crucial figure in Runway's life, deepens the series' thematic underpinnings, and sets the stage for Dream's role as a guardian and disruptor of heteronormative boundaries. Within the narrative arc of MDS, Dream is a potent focal point for examining the negotiable space between waking reality and the realm of dreams. The notion that Dream has functioned as a guardian figure suggests that the fantasy realm is not merely an escapist venue but a constitutive part of Runway's identity and emotional well-being. Dream's protective role manifests itself at multiple junctures in Runway's life, illustrating a recurring motif of magical intervention. This perpetual guardianship becomes particularly intriguing when it is revealed that Dream's presence is contingent upon Runway's awareness of the dreamcatcher, an object imbued with mythical importance. This dreamcatcher is a talisman against nightmares and a nexus of the connection between Runway and Dream, who has been an observant guardian since the dreamcatcher was first set in place by Runway's father, years before the series' narrative present. Dream's existence is remarkably circumscribed by the dreamscape, rendering him invisible to all characters except Runway. However, Dream's supernatural faculties extend beyond the dream realm, allowing him to bear witness to events and emotions in the waking world. One explicit scene is shown when Dream guides Runway to observe his mother's hidden sorrows as she lingers over a photograph of her husband. Though Runway cannot provide human comfort to his mother due to his ethereal form within this dream sequence, he derives solace from Dream's spectral presence.

The presence of Dream within the narrative structure of MDS is deeply interwoven with the character of Runway. Notably, it occurs within the fantasy space of a dream. This space is crucial because it allows an immediate suspension of disbelief, making the supernatural encounter with Dream plausible and emotionally resonant. The series presents the porous boundaries between the real and the fantastic through dialogue and flashbacks.

> Runway: Who's there?
>
> [Seeing a mysterious man standing and turning back to him. Runway
> shows curiosity and then asks again.]
>
> Runway: Who are you? Why don't you answer me?
>
> Dream: Did you forget me, my little boy?
>
> [When Dream turns around. Seeing Dream's face, the narratives
> flashback to Runway's infancy memory when he was playing with
> Dream. He then recognises the man as "Dream"]
>
> Runway: Pi Dream.

The dialogue between Runway and Dream immediately positions Dream as a figure shrouded in mystery and evokes a sense of nostalgia. When Dream finally responds with, "Did you forget me, my little boy?", the series uses this momentous scene to engage in a narrative flashback, taking the audience back to Runway's infancy. This flashback establishes the long-standing relationship between Dream and Runway, thereby offering a nuanced layer to their interactions. It transforms Dream from a mysterious entity into a familiar figure and, in doing so, reinforces his role as a guardian that has been active since Runway's earliest years. His words show the fallibility of memory and the complexities of forgetting and remembering, especially when dealing with figures on the peripheries of the real and the fantastic. The line thus serves as a change for reorienting Runway's and, by extension, the audience's understanding of what is possible within the story's universe. Also, uttering "*Pi*", a Thai honorific used to address someone older than the speaker, but with whom the speaker is on familiar terms, when Runway finally recognises Dream as "*Pi* Dream," indicates both recognition and almost familial connection, adding further emotional depth to their relationship.

At first, the interplay between Runway and Dream is confined to the domain of Runway's nocturnal dream, facilitated by the magical conduit of the dreamcatcher. In later episodes, the audience witnesses that Dream's magic power is enhanced. He can appear in Runway's waking time and can follow Runway to different places without the dreamcatcher. The expansion of Dream's supernatural abilities throughout the series is a thematic counterpart to Runway's evolving non-normative sexuality. Both phenomena push boundaries: Dream by transcending the limitations of time and space, the symbolic dreamcatcher, and Runway by challenging societal norms about identity and sexuality. The synchronisation of these parallel developments fortifies the narrative's investment in exploring alternate realities, both magical and psychological. Dream's amplified powers, which allow him to manifest himself during waking hours and outside the specific context of the dreamcatcher, also articulate a degree of fluidity and expansion. His increasing abilities parallel Runway's personal growth and his gradual acceptance of a non-normative sexuality. In this sense, the series posits that magic and sexuality are not fixed constructs but are subject to evolution and expansion, providing a layered commentary on the fluidity of identity construction.

There is a strong interplay between magic and non-normative sexuality as evolving constructs in the series in which each serves as a rich site for the exploration of identity construction. At the outset of the narratives, Runway conforms to the presiding heteronormative social framework, rendering him unreceptive to Tanai's overt romantic overtures. At the beginning of the series, we know that Runway does not position himself in a romantic relationship with Tanai, who Dream labels as "a perfect man with a good body, good athletic and musical skills." Embraced by heteronormative norms and ideologies, Runway is intolerant of non-normative sexuality, seeing it as socially unacceptable. Even though Runway allows and, to a small extent, seems to be pleased by Tanai's generous attention to him, he does not explore the potential of romance with Tanai. He realises that he and Tanai are both male, making a romantic relationship between them is impossible, as we can witness in the dialogue between Runway and Guide:

> Guide: What are you going to do with Tanai? You know he is falling
> for you, don't you? Be honest with me. What do you feel about him?

> Runway: Come on. He is a guy. What am I supposed to feel about
> him?
> Guide: You simply tell me whether you have feelings for him or not.
> If you do, go with your gut feeling. But if you don't, stop giving him
> false hope. It's more hurtful than being rejected.

This exchange between Runway and Guide serves as a microcosm of the larger sociocultural discourse that confines Runway's understanding of his sexuality. His reluctance to engage romantically with Tanai stems from deeply internalised societal norms denigrating non-normative sexual relationships as unacceptable. The vivid sample of Runway's rejection of intimacy with Tanai can be seen in the scene where the characters ride the same bike back home together after a trip to the beach:

> Runway: Why are you parking?
> [Tanai takes off his and Runway's helmets.]
> Runway: And why did you take it off?
> [Tanai tilts Runway's head down and starts kissing him.]
> Runway: Are you insane? What the hell did you just do?
> [Runway gets off the bike and walks away furiously.]
> Tanai: I'm sorry

Runway's attitude can be theorised through Judith Butler's concept of performativity, which argues that gender and sexuality are not innate qualities but are socially constructed through repeated acts or behaviours. In this context, Runway's initial refusal to entertain a romantic relationship with Tanai is an enactment of culturally prescribed masculine roles and heteronormative expectations. The progression of magic in parallel with Runway's growing acceptance of non-normative sexuality provides a dual narrative of emancipation and self-discovery. Magic, often a symbol of untapped potential and transformative power, is a symbolic counterpart to Runway's evolving sexual identity. Both magic and sexuality become sites of fluidity and dynamism rather than static or predefined categories. By juxtaposing these two parallel developments, the series asserts identity as an ever-shifting constellation of possibilities rather than

a fixed entity. It opens space for Runway's continued growth and struggles to reconcile societal norms with his constructed sexuality. In subsequent episodes of MDS, a marked transformation occurs in Runway's emotional sentiments towards Dream.

Contrary to his initial aversion to same-sex relationships, as demonstrated through his refusal of Tanai's advances, Runway begins to welcome Dream's intimate overtures. This shift is most poignantly depicted in a scene where Dream instructs Runway in the art of piano playing. Seated adjacently, Runway rests his head on Dream's arm and a tender dialogue ensues:

> Runway: Can I stay like this just a little longer?
>
> Dream: Of course. As long as you need.
>
> Runway: Why are you so good to me, Pi Dream?
>
> Dream: Because Dream loves you, little boy.
>
> [Dream gently kisses Runway.]

The visual construction of Runway's dreams generates specific effects in their construction. MDS extends the frontiers of the fantasy genre by employing innovative cinematography, characterised by fluid camera movements and variegated angles. Rather than confining Runway and Dream to either a subjective viewpoint or the perspective of an observer, the narrative grants them agency to traverse the visually open dream landscape. This avant-garde strategy obfuscates the boundary between diegetic reality and the dreamworld, engendering disorientation and prompting viewers to partake in the characters' fantastical experiences. These sophisticated visual techniques amplify narrative suspense and form a corollary to the burgeoning romantic connection between Runway and Dream.

Dream's absence precipitates Runway's intense emotional anguish, culminating in his impassioned outburst: "You promised you would never leave me alone." This narrative arc delineates Runway's evolving sexuality, ultimately enabling him to transcend the heteronormative constraints that initially confined him. Moreover, a subsequent dialogue between Runway and Guide affirms that Runway's emotional investment in Dream is not a transient infatuation but rather, a product of genuine reflection:

> Runway: Between someone in reality and someone in a dream, who
> would you choose?
> Guide: Someone in reality. Someone in a dream will always be in a
> dream.
> Runway: What if I fell in love with someone in a dream?
> Guide: Someone in a dream, the one that you tell me about?
> [Runway nods.]

The conversation underscores the depth of Runway's introspection, emphasising that his sentiments for Dream stem from authentic emotional deliberation rather than mere whimsy. His decision to reject the advances of Tanai and pursue a romantic relationship with Dream, despite his awareness of the impossibility of their relationship existing in reality becomes important as a result of this consideration. This decisive act demonstrates Runway's determination to prioritise his non-normative desires despite societal expectations and norms.

Ultimately, the realisation of Runway's non-normative sexuality and his transcendence from ontologically assigned identity is subtly encapsulated within the narrative arc surrounding mortality. A critical moment ensues when Runway and Tanai become involved in a nocturnal motorcycle accident. This incident leaves Runway in semi-consciousness, teetering on the brink of death. During this unconscious interval, Runway encounters Dream within his own dreamscape. Dream lets Runway know about the accident and relieves his extreme fear and apprehension, calming him that "Everything will be better" before vanishing. The dreamcatcher, symbolising the realm of fantasy, disintegrates immediately following Dream's disappearance. Runway regains consciousness to discover himself hospitalised under the attentive watch of his mother. He remains conspicuously absent henceforth, leaving Runway profoundly disheartened. I would argue that the accident, which precipitates Runway's quasi-fatal condition, serves as a formative rite of passage, and is instrumental in the continuing development of his non-normative sexual identity. This near-death experience is a ritual severance of his heteronormative identity, facilitating his metamorphosis towards a non-normative sexuality. As the fantasy realm offers an avenue for escape from corporeal reality, the demise of Dream and the dreamcatcher, representing this fantasy, can be construed as aiding Runway's transition towards embracing his true identity within

the tangible world. The symbolic sacrifice of Dream enables Runway's resuscitation and subsequent re-entry into the practical realm. No longer constrained to escape the confines, Runway emerges, reinvigorated and assimilated, possessing a complete non-normative identity that he carries into his lived experience.

Additionally, MDS enables us to witness further destabilisation of the heteronormative system in the fantasy realm. Dream also helps Runway prepare for an examination in his biology class by lecturing him with all the content Runway has studied at school. His role as an academic tutor further subverts traditional epistemological frameworks by suggesting that knowledge can be imparted through supernatural means, thus challenging conventional pedagogical methods. This incursion into an educational setting, which typically represents structured, normative ways of understanding the world, becomes a significant act of destabilisation. Dream's act transcends the traditional boundaries of natural science and undermines institutional forms of knowledge dissemination, reflecting an overarching narrative strategy to challenge heteronormative constructs and established knowledge paradigms. Thus, the series leverages the trope of fantasy to blur and challenge rigid societal structures, whether they relate to identity, education, or normative understandings of reality and metaphysics. This narrative approach enriches the series by integrating these divergent elements into a unified thematic exploration of boundary-pushing and subversion of norms.

VI. Fantasy as a Subversion of Scientific Epistemology: Good and Elle
From Runway's experiences, this section extends the analysis to Dr. Good, Elle, and Kafe, analysing how their stories and bodily variations (by way of fantasy components) problem heteronormativity and scientific epistemology. Within the fantastical narratives of the series, MDS is used as a heterotopic platform to subvert conventional scientific epistemology and logic by illustrating queer. The characterisations of Dr. Good and Elle in this storey is a challenge to scientific knowledge that many believe to be a byproduct of a male centric paradigm. Dr. Good is science, rationality, Dr. Good is the rational world, while Elle is the irrational other, the fantastical. The series also explores the relationships and storylines of Dr. Good (Jiratpisit Jaravijit), Kafe (Anna Glucks), and Elle (Cherdchanin Vitapinan) in addition to main characters Runway, Dream, and Tanai.

Dr. Good represents scientific rationalism in spite of being inexplicably caught up with supernatural events. After the loss of his girlfriend, Fairy, he refuses to move on even though he is encouraged by his family and friends. Dr. Good encounters a mysterious stranger on one fateful rainy night and discovers that he has a very striking resemblance to Fairy. While bringing an unconscious stranger home, he finds out that this stranger can transmute from male to female with contact of water, giving him the opportunity to meet the multi-identities of Elle and Kafe. These are the characters that are there to represent the series' exploration into gender and sexual identity. Bodily transformation becomes the dominant theme throughout the series as a narrative means to consider how the fantasy narrative tropes meet with queer theory. Then the way that characters like Elle and Kafe are able to transform their bodies into such grotesque forms effectively destabilises staunch, heteronormative entities that would separate gender and sexuality from the body. All these things reveal how the series makes use of its fantastical framework in order to counter hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity. Elle and Kafe are characters that, concretely, represent the bodily transformation phenomenon; they symbolise the fluidity of gender and sexuality in a single being. Elle's first appearance as a female stranger on the night of a rain-soaked night, whom Dr. Good meets at the site of his girlfriend's fatal car accident makes the storey more complex. Thematic preoccupation with identity fluidity is further complicated by Good's decision to shelter this stranger, and then later discover that she had disappeared and reappeared as a male stranger the next day.

> Dr. Good: Hey, mister! Who are you? I think you got the wrong
> room.
> Elle: I am Elle.
> Dr. Good: Elle. Who is Elle? This is my room.
> Elle: Thank you for rescuing me last night.
> Dr. Good: Wait! It wasn't you. Mister, you can't sleep here. This is
> my room.

In this dialogue with Elle, Dr. Good articulates his confusion regarding the latter's identity. His scepticism, articulated in his statement "Wait! It wasn't you. Mister." further exposes the

difficulties inherent in reconciling his conventional understanding of identity with the shape-shifting realities presented by characters like Elle.

Elle, a name deriving from the French pronoun *"elle"*[1]meaning "she," is an enigmatic male character capable of bodily transformation into a female form. Despite his male physique, Elle embraces femininity manifested through his feminine behaviours. Kafe, on the other hand, is the name attributed to two physically identical female characters. Intriguingly, at first Kafe adopts this name arbitrarily, naming herself after a glass of coffee she holds (Kafe means coffee). Her actual name is Fairy, echoing the supernatural and fairy-like themes of the series. The second Kafe emerges as an incarnation within Elle's body, further complicating the identity puzzle and leaving both Dr. Good and viewers questioning whether the two Kafes are the same individual.

> Dr. Good: Oh wow. Seriously what creature are you?
>
> Kafe: Kafe.
>
> Dr. Good: No, you can't be Kafe.
>
> Kafe: But you called me Kafe last night. So, I'm Kafe.

From the conversation between Dr. Good with Kafe, the discussion of identity formation and the selfhood fluidity in the framework of fantasy narrative is raised. In this short conversation Dr. Good interrogates Kafe's ontological status: "Seriously, what creature are you?". In the query, he emphasises his desire to embrace the lines between humans and supernatural, and the consequences of this for identity. When Kafe identifies herself simply as "Kafe" in her response, these complexities regarding her character's self-conception are revealed. Elle has a name which gives her a distinct identity, but Kafe seems to be a liminal entity. Her name is not natural to her but rather a name given to her by another. Her name is named after Dr. Good's deceased girlfriend. In this manner therefore, this naming act reflects Dr. Good's emotional and psychological states as opposed to serving as an anchor for Kafe's identity.

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[1] It is standard practice for Thai nicknames to have variants or alternative languages, mostly borrowed from Anglophone words. The name "Fairy" is the English word "Fairy", naming to the mysterious character to reinforce the fantasy traits of the series, but without necessarily carrying over the connotations of queer identity that the word can have in English.

As such, the fantastical narrative that features in MDS serves to underline the theme of mutable gender identities seen in the series, as an extension of its exploration of mutable gendered identification. The series shows rather compellingly through such narrative strategies that the fantasy genre is not the slightest escapist genre, but rather a rather sophisticated medium to interrogate the inherited complexities of identity formation in a heteronormative society. The thematic discourse on identity in the series is complicated even more by the fact that these are transformations of the body, which are uncontrollable and involuntary, taking place during periods of unconsciousness (as sleep). The unpredictable and uncontrollable transformation of both Elle and Kafe in these moments represents both characters' natural being liminal. The in-betweenness of this acceptance or rejection of the character's bodily form is ambiguous. The scenes of spontaneous transformation destabilise the essentialist notions of identity by bringing in some degree of randomness or chaos into the process of self- definition. In doing so, the series implicitly questions whether identity is something fixed and innate or whether it is, in fact, a more fluid and malleable construct susceptible to external conditions, even those as arbitrary as the state of unconsciousness. As we can see, mysterious phenomena and the characters' lack of control over their transformation accentuate the tension between autonomy and determinism in identity formation, particularly within a society structured by heteronormative and other normative discourses. MDS emphasises sexual identity as an evolving construct, echoing similar character journeys, such as that of Pob in the series MIR, whose sexual identity does not fall in a fixed category but a continuum that can shift over time, extending beyond adolescence into adulthood. The result of MDS's exploration of sexual fluidity and the complexities of desire within a non-normative framework, is that it explicitly indicates the queer potentiality in fantasy tropes not only in Elle's and Kafe's bodily transformation but also Dr. Good's relationship with both characters. MDS also complicates Dr. Good's emotional landscape by implying that his dead girlfriend, Fairy, may have been reincarnated in the personas of both Elle and Kafe. His intimate feelings for Kafe necessitate a similar emotional acceptance of Elle, given that both identities inhabit the same physical body. This scenario challenges conventional, heteronormative understandings of sexuality, leading Dr. Good to embrace a spectrum of queer possibilities.

In the later episodes in the series, the motives for Elle's transformation into Kafe become clearer, especially those relating to Dr. Good's past. Dr. Good procures CCTV footage from the night of

Fairy's fatal accident to resolve the unfolding mysteries. The footage reveals Elle as the one who crossed Fairy's path, thereby causing her death. Confronted with this revelation, Dr. Good grapples with feelings of betrayal and anger and accuses Elle of causing his long-lasting grief. However, upon Elle's confession and ensuing supernatural demonstrations, the audience and Dr. Good understand the intricacies of the transformations between Elle and Kafe through his interrogation of Elle about his presence in the moment of the crash:

> Dr. Good: What the hell were you doing there? For five years, I have been drowning in grief and agony. I have been too guilty to love and take care of anyone. Do you have an idea of how much I have suffered? It's all because of you. Why did you make her die?
>
> Elle: I am really sorry.
>
> Dr. Good: Don't touch
>
> Elle: I didn't mean it. I am so sorry. I still have a persistent image of her death all the time.
>
> [The scene shifts into a flashback of Elle's memory of witnessing Fairy's death. The scene shows Fairy dying in her car with blood covering her face. Her eyes open widely while staring at Elle.]
>
> Elle: "I love you, my muffin boy" is what she wishes she could tell you. I am sorry. I am so sorry.
>
> [Uttering this sentence, Elle then falls unconscious. Dr. Good tries to wake her up and decides to carry her away.]

Elle is revealed to be a complicated medium between the corporeal and supernatural worlds. This revelation adds another layer of significance to Elle's role as a medium for Kafe (and potentially Fairy) to communicate with Dr. Good. The intersection of guilt, sorrow, and unfulfilled love adds gravitas to the narrative, culminating in Elle's unconscious moment, thereby signalling a shift in Dr. Good's feelings. Although Elle does not transform into Kafe thereafter, Dr. Good's evolving emotional intimacy with Elle signifies a continued openness to queer possibilities. This confluence of identities introduces a nuanced layer of emotional complexity, as Dr. Good must reconcile his

past love for Fairy with his burgeoning feelings for Elle and Kafe, both of whom blur traditional gender binaries. These recurring scenes contribute to a broader narrative arc that grapples with the complexities of identity in a world where fantastical elements continually disrupt conventional boundaries. By delving into the liminal experiences of characters like Elle and Kafe, the series elucidates the intricate interplay between fantasy tropes and the multifaceted issues associated with queer identity, thereby challenging and reconfiguring traditional understandings of both. The series thus employs its fantastical elements not merely as narrative devices but as sophisticated means to delve into complex questions surrounding identity, gender, and sexuality. In doing so, it investigates heteronormative paradigms and contributes to broader conversations on the fluidity and multiplicity inherent in human relationships and self-conception.

As indicated above, by serving as a realm of heterotopia, a space that exists outside the conventional norms and structures of society, the fantasy elements in the narrative operate as crucial arenas for the construction and transformation of non-normative gender and sexuality. Within this heterotopic domain, Runway and Good are freed from the social conventions and mores that dictate behavioural norms. The fantastical realm functions as a heterotopic space where traditional notions of gender and sexual identity are suspended, offering an ideal backdrop for exploring and articulating alternative identities.

VII. Fantasy as Emotional Alchemy

The previous sections illustrate the role of fantasy in identity formation and epistemological subversion. Here, the analysis will pivot to explore fantasy as a site of emotional alchemy, particularly through interactions involving trauma, grief, and identity transformation. The inclusion of Dream as a guardian-like figure in Runway's life adds complexity to the series' dissection of trauma, memory, and identity, mainly when figured through the dreamcatcher, originally belonging to Runway's father. The dreamcatcher metamorphoses from mere ornamentation to a powerful device catalysing Runway's emotional transformation. Situated within a Foucauldian heterotopic framework, the dreamscape emerges as an arena for Dream's interventions, aimed at alleviating the recurring nightmares that Runway experiences as a result of the traumatic loss of his father. In this regard, both Dream and the dreamcatcher function analogously to therapeutic interventions, engaging with the subconscious to alleviate

psychological suffering while elucidating the nuanced relationships among memory, trauma, and psychological coping mechanisms. Even more intriguing is the historical depth of Dream's guardianship of Runway, which is revealed to have originated during Runway's infancy and persisted intermittently throughout his life. Such longevity enhances the complexity of Dream's role, spanning the boundaries between the living and the spectral, the past and the present, as well as the remembered and the forgotten which all are connected through the symbolic dreamcatcher that highlight the thematic focus on fantasy in the series.

The timing of Dream's appearance is also significant as it is often coordinated with periods of acute emotional vulnerability in Runway's life, such as the revelation of his father's tragic death. These timely interventions indicate Dream as not merely a static element within the dreamscape but as a remedy for Runway's volatile emotional states. Therefore, it can explicitly be stated that Dream is an emotional alchemist within the narrative. By ushering Runway into the heterotopic arena of dreams, Dream enables a form of emotional alchemy whereby Runway's grief metamorphoses into romantic affection. Therefore, the juxtaposition between Runway's emotional transformation, facilitated by his dreamlike interactions with Dream, highlights fantasy's intricate role in emotional coping mechanisms. Through this exploration, MDS contributes to the idea of the interplay between fantasy and reality in shaping and reshaping emotional landscapes.

Apart from Dream's remedy of Runway's nightmare, the more intriguing investigation of the context of fantasy functioning as an emotional alchemy is exhibited in Dr. Good and Runway's mother who explicitly yet subtly convey the intense grief and identity formation. The parallel between Dr. Good and Runway's mother is a captivating narrative to explore the complexities of grief and sexuality, which certainly seem to be depicted as being entwined. Both characters are trapped in a labyrinth of emotions caused by the loss of loved ones, serving as distressing reflections of how grief and identities intersect and influence them. With this context, Butler's framework of gender performance can be used to analyse how characters like Dr. Good and Runway's mother perform their gender roles, especially in the context of grief and identities. Her work offers a lens through which to understand these characters' actions and experiences as not merely individuals but deeply influenced by societal norms and expectations.

According to Butler, gender is not something one is but something one does; it is a set of actions and behaviours repeated over time that become ritualized (1990). In the context of MDS, Dr. Good and Runway's mother are not merely grieving; they are performing grief in ways that align with societal expectations for their respective genders. Dr. Good's constrained emotional display can be seen as a performance of masculine grief, which society often dictates must be tolerant and restrained. Conversely, Runway's mother, steeped in societal expectations of motherhood and femininity, performs her grief through a maternal lens, opting to maintain a semblance of stability for the sake of her child. Hence, the repression of grief in both characters is not just an individual psychological act but also tied to the broader systemic issues of gender and sexuality. This repression becomes a mechanism through which traditional notions of social identities are labelled. Dr. Good and Runway's mother embody the socially constructed gender roles that define how grief should be manifested and processed within society's normative structures.

Dr. Good's emotional restraint is caused by masculine expectations that a man's sorrow should be managed quietly and privately. While masculine expectations of emotional patience often constrain Dr. Good, Runway's mother struggles with societal expectations surrounding roles of motherhood and femininity. We can see that their controlled grief is reiterated in many scenes where they keep pretending to other characters that they are not mourning anymore. The sorrows of Runway's mother are so severe that she becomes depressed and alcoholic, but she usually insists to Runway that she is fine, as can be witnessed in the beginning episode:

> Runway: If you have something in your mind, you can tell me.
> Mom: What's gotten into you? Are you trying to ask me to buy
> something? Hurry up and shower, or you will be late for school. I
> will be late now too.
> Runway: Mom, are you really alright?
> Mom: I'm alright now.

However, while Runway is shot in close-up, the audience can see his mother behind him, with sorrow in her facial expression and body language, crying, squeezing her hands and turning undecidedly. Likewise, Dr. Good repletely shows the audience his suffering alone, but he attempts

to suppress it. The scenes in which both characters pretend to be calm to others while privately struggling with their emotions reinforce Butler's concept of performativity. This act of pretending becomes a repetitive and constitutive performance that not only masks but also forms their identities. The fact that they display such anguish alone makes their grief seem a little performative because these are private moments that can be read as a break from their public performance. Therefore, through Butler's framework, both characters can be regarded as performing persistent, unresolved grief, which becomes a repetition of their gendered identities as grief captures them in loops of emotional suffering. Butler's framework discusses how grief and identities are interconnected in ways that normalise heterosexual structures. It is also possible to read Good's and Runway's mother's performances of grief as acts that reinforce their sexual identities within a heteronormative paradigmatic construction. In so far as their performances adhere to expectations of how people are understood and expected to behave in society, their performances can be understood as preserving heterosexual identities as Butler discusses gendered identities.

Therefore, based on the discussion, it is important to explain how these fantasy elements play a role in creating non normative identities that disrupt dominant societal discourses of power. The inclusion of supernatural elements fits within the narrative structure in that it provides the thematic framework, as well as the possibility for liberation from prescribed identity constructs. The character of Dr. Good in this sense epitomizes this notion of emancipation; he is able to break free from the traditionally masculine norms that generally command repression and constraint of the emotions, largely through his critique of the fantastical components of the series. The encounters Dr. Good has in the narrative with supernatural entities like Elle and Kafe who have the ability to physically transform themselves, are catalytic events that allow Dr. Good to address and verbalise his suppressed grief. The poignancy of this narrative development is most notable in a scene where Kafe wears a dress that belonged to Dr. Good's deceased girlfriend, Fairy, when Dr. Good returns home. The sight of Kafe in Fairy's attire affects him so emotionally that he hastily retreats to his private quarters, ostensibly to avoid talking about it. However, the emotional climax of the situation occurs when Dr. Good hears the word 'muffin,' a word of endearment that Kafe, as a rule, uses to refer to him. Dr. Good then turns around, and in a moment that is charged with emotional weight, he finds that Kafe has transformed himself into an image of Fairy, his dead girlfriend. Kafe's visage of Fairy is both smiling and tearful. She utters, "Muffin! Fairy is sorry. I'm sorry I'm not longer with you. I love you Muffin." During the heartfelt embrace that takes

place and is further punctuated by mutual weeping, Fairy faints and loses consciousness. This scene is an emotional release of Dr. Good and his unbridled expression of sorrow by shedding tears. It combines the fantastical and emotional aspects of the narrative so that Dr. Good can experience a catharsis induced by supernatural happenings. That moment is a tender exemplar of how the series' fantastical elements can slip through those boundaries that constrain non normative identity formation and challenge traditional masculinities, as well. It is evident that fantasy realm is not an entertaining device but a terrific instrument to break and rearrange social norms and individual identities. In this way, fantasy can be a potent narrative mechanism with which to engage Butler's theories, and thus a means of examining how grief and gender cohere and how grieving can operate in reconfiguring or challenging normative gender identities.

In addition, I would like to argue that the character Elle is an equally multifaceted representation of queerness that surpasses human abilities and transcends the normal narrative structure. She defies human capacity, having supernatural powers, and existing in a realm that surpasses Dr. Good's understanding of scientific rationale and logic. There is something otherworldly about him that Dr. Good keeps remarking with repeated inquiries to Elle on whether she an 'alien from another planet', working against traditional identity frameworks in order to break the normative epistemological boundaries. Furthermore, Elle's existence is nonlinearly temporal and this disrupts conventional narrative forms. Through flashbacks and real time sequences Elle continuously travels between past and present. Her queerness as well is something that expands far beyond sexual and gender identity. In this process, he not only challenges heteronormative interpretations of identity, but also straight line, dominant accounts of time and narrative, and provides a larger definition of queerness that includes fairly diverse measures of non-normativity and existence. Hence, Elle's supernatural powers and nonlinear existence challenges the framework of categories of identity and epistemological understandings of queerness, giving it a wider meaning of otherness than it has been usually understood within the heteronormative paradigms.

As mentioned above, both Runway and Dr. Good use the idea of fantasy as a type of "emotional alchemy," a place where emotions and psychological puzzles are allowed to emerge and to be refined. The fantastical dreamscape of Runway can be seen as a way for him to freely exist through his grief and trauma, this is in large part due to the guardian like figure of Dream. This is not just a break from reality, but it is a force that causes Runway's emotional change. His grief and

unresolved emotions towards his deceased father become romantic feelings for Dream, showing the alchemical power of the fantasy realm. Dr. Good also uses the elements in the fantastical sections as a space for self-reflection and transformation. Although the specifics may vary, the underlying fantasy fulfils the function of a platform where emotional barriers can be taken down and psychological and emotional growth can be promoted. The fantasy realm has become a heterotopic space where the norms and constraints of society are suspended, where one can express emotions and transform without any societal norms and constraints.

VIII. Traps as Emotional Alchemy in Fantastical Environments

Following the exploration of fantasy's role in emotional transformation, this part specifically investigates how supernatural interventions in MDS serve as emotional alchemy for Runway and Dr. Good but also critiques the gendered limitations evident within these fantastical interventions. The otherworldly pair ultimately serve as agents of emotional alchemy in the narrative. Dream is a dreamer and philosopher, while the fallen Elle symbolizes something more spiritual in nature, forcing the souls around them to confront the traumas and unprocessed grief that linger among them. There are characters like Runway, who grapples with the mourning of his father, and Dr. Good, who is pained by the death of his girlfriend, navigating their trauma in ways that are inextricably linked to their gendered identities. Societal norms define masculinity as emotional stoicism, so male characters must try to repress their grief or grieve in solitude, while female characters, as Runway's mother does, face maternal imperatives preventing them from expressing their grief with abandon, because they are expected to shield others from feeling sorrow. This is related to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which highlights how emotions (much like gender itself) are socially constructed through repetitive performative acts rather than intrinsic expressions of selfhood.

The arrival of Dream and Elle provides a transformative intervention, creating a space for characters outside of socially mandated emotional norms to work through their grief. Dream, in particular, allows Runway to escape his own waking terrors, which are symbolic figures for the loss and anxiety he is trying to suppress. In this, Dream functions within the Buddhist-inflected supernatural logic that Arnika Fuhrmann (2016) recognises as a tendency or motif in Thai supernatural media at large, where spectral or other-than-human figuration leads to inter-realm travel and alternative modes of encounter or specificity. Instead of just processing trauma in a

logical, real-world framework, Runway gets to enter a dream zone, coded as Buddhist, where he can arrange a release of his trauma. It is the same with Elle, she serves as a mediating character for Dr. Good to reconnect with his repressed sadness through another method of emotional expression. As Fuhrmann points out, vernacular Buddhist thought often invites supernatural figures to serve as mediators of desire and transformation, not only providing characters with a way to cope with loss but reshaping the very forms of their engagement with their own embodied identities. The interventions of Dream and Elle in this regard are much in keeping with this tradition, which sees fantasy as a site in which normative emotional settings are not simply suspended but in fact actively renegotiated. Through their presence, Runway and Dr. Good are offered an emotional catharsis that would have previously been denied them by prescriptive gendered limits on vulnerability.

However, the selective use of fantastical intervention in the narratives reveals the limits of its emotional alchemy. Runway's mother, note, is conspicuously absent from these transformative processes despite her anguish on a personal level. Their omission highlights the gendered imbalance in the accessibility of supernatural spaces, reinforcing Fuhrmann's (2016) conclusion that Thai supernatural media tends to prioritize male figures within Buddhist-inflected spaces of transcendence while female suffering is left in silence. This void highlights the paradox of fantasy's liberatory potential, although MDS undermines heteronormative masculine identity quite successfully, it offers female-coded grief no such deconstructive opportunities, thus reasserting the same gender hierarchies that it allegedly seeks to upend. The restricted use of supernatural mediation indicates that fantasy, for all of its heterotopic possibility, is still circumscribed along patriarchal lines. Foucault's understanding of heterotopias as "other space" that "is a sort of effectively enacted utopia" points to the liberating potential of heterotopias; however, the fact that only male subjects have access to such places in this narrative also refines a pervasive masculinist hegemonic structure (Foucault 1986, 3). As Fuhrmann (2016) argues, the utilization of Buddhist-inflected fantasy in Thai media is a double-edged sword, whereby it gives minoritarian identities the opportunity to be articulated within liminal supernatural realms, but one that too frequently does not present a challenge to larger structures that regulate everyday material social life (113).

The exclusion of Runway's mother from the otherworldly dream space where Dream and Elle dwell exposes the gender inequalities baked into fantasy narratives that seek to be subversive.

Although MDS works to deconstruct masculinity and heteronormativity, it misses the mark in destabilizing structural gender biases in the construction of suffering that centre male-coded suffering. The supernatural space, rather than existing as a truly inclusive heterotopia, instead perpetuates an emotional hierarchy between the characters, where a male-coded character can access transformative catharsis while female-coded grief is made invisible and/or indefinitely unresolved. Thus, MDS exemplifies both the liberatory and the constrictive possibilities for using fantasy as a way to resist normative structures. Dream and Elle's alternative ontology of emotional engagement, grounded in the Buddhist-inflected journey toward spiritual transformation, offers one pathway toward the mystic transformation central to women's transformative potential, and yet the viability of that potential is hindered by the patronising and gendered imbalance that pervades access to the supernatural, ultimately connecting the heterotopia of the apartment via women's shared experiences but is always couched in patriarchal ideologies that remain intact in the meals and rituals of the space. Fantasy does not wholly deride hegemonic constructs but reshapes them in a way revealing the limits of its own subversion.

IX. The Confinement of Non-Normative Genders and Sexualities: Guide and Tanai

Having discussed the transformative potential of fantasy, this next section critically examines its limitations, especially regarding gender biases, by analysing the constrained non-normative identities of characters like Guide and Tanai. Although the fantasy elements function as a heterotopic space enabling constructive transformation of non-normative identities, it should not be understood as completely dismantling heteronormative systems. While fantasy tropes provide a crucial challenge and offer unconventional identity formation outside the discursive paradigm, they are not without limitations, as evidenced by the narrative's insufficient address of systemic gender biases. Nevertheless, using fantasy to destabilise traditional binaries such as science and supernature and reality and fantasy manifests as a significant intervention into heteronormative frameworks, even if it does not wholly eradicate them. This intervention can be witnessed through the relationship of Tanai and Guide. Tanai's character illustrates the complexities and contradictions inherent in such narrative constructions. He initially challenges heteronormative ideologies in the series by expressing his attraction towards Runway. However, a deeper analysis of his character reveals that he is embedded within the same heteronormative frameworks that he

seemingly resists. In a dialogue between Tanai and Guide, Tanai's sentiments regarding his attraction to Runway are laid bare:

> Guide: OK, let me ask you too. Do you like my friend?
>
> [Tanai nods.]
>
> Guide: Why do you like him?
>
> Tanai: Well, I think he is kinda cute. He is like a girl.
>
> Guide: Are you sure you are into men? Seriously, have you ever had
> sex with a man?
>
> Tanai: Hell no! Never.
>
> Guide: What about kissing? Have you?
>
> Tanai: No.

This exchange provides explicit evidence of how Tanai rationalises his feelings for Runway. While Tanai does admit to finding Runway attractive, he qualifies his attraction by framing Runway as a feminine counterpart to his masculinity. This allows Tanai to situate his feelings within a conventional binary framework of male and female, maintaining his alignment with homonormative and heteronormative schemes. His firm denial shouting "Hell no!" in response to the thought of any sexual encounters with men further cements his positioning within this normative binary. Another interaction between Tanai and Dr. Good supports this argument:

> Dr. Good: Have you got a girlfriend?
>
> Tanai: I haven't got one.
>
> Dr. Good: Have you? Then what kind of women do you fancy?
>
> Tanai: I don't have a specification. Only women who understand me.
>
> Dr. Good: I see. But sometimes just understanding is not enough for
> a relationship.

Tanai explicitly talks about the "women" he is attracted to, adhering to a hetero-binary scheme. He is willing to entertain only the idea of a male partner if he can position that partner within a feminine role, further emphasising his heteronormative leanings. Ultimately, Tanai's ideologies confine him within heteronormative frameworks, preventing any genuine transgression of his non-

normative gender and sexual identity. His limited perspective results in his rejection by Runway. This reinforces the argument that without the latitude of fantasy tropes, characters like Tanai are constrained from developing non-normative gender and sexual identities that transcend the established boundaries of heteronormativity.

X. Conclusion: Fantasy as a Remedial Space or Aggravating Force

To conclude the analysis, the following section synthesizes the arguments made in this chapter emphasising how MDS's fantasy elements simultaneously subvert and reinforce heteronormative and patriarchal structures, reflecting Fuhrmann's conceptualization of Thai supernatural media. In short, to condense the arguments expressed in this chapter, it can be argued that *My Dream: the Series* adopts fantasy tropes to create its heterotopic space, inscribing opportunities for queer subversion against heteronormativity with its limited identity construction. Within this realm of heterotopia, it is permissible for characters to divide into alternate aspects of themselves in order to experience change. Using fantasy tropes allows the series to renegotiate social norms around sex, freeing up non-normative sexualities and identities. Yet as Fuhrmann notes (2016) heterotopic spaces are not radical by nature but live in a paradoxical duality as they offer a site of subversion while reaffirming the status quo.

MDS infusion magical elements serves a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, they afford the characters a way to navigate the emotional loss of loss, a space of alternative openness, where emotional unspooling, especially for men in the cast, can be temporarily unknotted. Alternatively, they offer a channel through which normatively gendered measures of behaviour can be renegotiated. My interpretative stance is that fantasy in this sense is an emotional and identity-based alchemy, a kind of space of transformation in which social identities can be changed, that are increasingly fluid and no longer even compromise normative paradigms. Yet we must not overlook the limitations of this heterotopic fantasy space. Although the plot makes great strides in deconstructing all-too-familiar labels of masculinity and allows for both male and female characters to explore sexual fluidity, it ultimately falls short in fully dismantling systemic biases regarding gender. This aligns with Fuhrmann (2016) describes as the paradox of Thai supernatural media; it allows for the articulation of minoritarian identities to be performed in liminal and supernatural spaces but often bars them from entering and gaining legitimacy within material social structures. In this way the heterotopic function of fantasy in MDS parallels my sense of its

claustrophobic description of gay sex, as it occupies a space of queer articulation but ultimately fails to contest patriarchal or heteronormative power in the larger story.

While suffused with queer potentiality, those heterotopic spaces in MDS prove, momentarily, to be legacies of patriarchal relations of power, processes that valorise male experiences and viewpoints. The absence of female-coded grief from this transformative supernatural realm, the absence of Runway's mother, for example, reaffirms the gendered imbalance of these fantasy spaces. As Fuhrmann (2016) suggests, when vernacular Buddhist-inflected supernatural spaces are evoked by Thai films, they provide avenues for transformation for male-coded actors but leave female-coded pain untransformed (51). This highlights how MDS, although it has inspired more progressive queer articulations, still exists under an overarching patriarchal regime. The supernatural becomes what the author would call liminal resistance, a place for queer expression, but then also a space of containment, wherein if said supernaturalism is expressed in their bodies that expression can be let out there, rather than in society where it would interrupt the fabric of reality. The dualistic nature of heterotopia, as tending toward the reversal of heteronormativity while simultaneously reaffirming gendered and societal hierarchies, demonstrates the double-edged sword of fantasy as a means of queer representation. MDS certainly complicates the traditional constructs around identity as much as it provides a study in limits where fantasy is concerned as a mechanism for real social transformation. In this way, alternative forms of queer articulation can exist in the mode of non-normative identities in the world of the fantastical, but do not equate to a structural reshuffle of normative modes of gender in the real world.

Having explored how *My Dream: the Series* employs fantasy as a heterotopic space to interrogate and subvert normative understandings of gender and sexuality within Thai cultural and spiritual contexts, the next chapter shifts focus towards investigation of the queer linguistics and identity formation in *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS). Specifically, it adopts perspectives from queer linguistics to examine how DTS utilises queer language strategies as tools to reconstruct non-normative identities and challenge heteronormative ideological assignment. By examining the linguistic construction of queer subjectivities within DTS, this chapter continues the overarching inquiry into how DTS, as a queer media, strategically function as heterotopia with disrupting hegemonic social frameworks, offering further insights into the complexities of queer visibility and representation in Thailand's evolving media landscape.

Chapter Five: Queer Linguistics in *Diary of Tootsies*

I. Introduction

Resuming a thread started in Chapter Two, which explores the history of queer representations in the Thai mediascape, particularly *kathoey* as comedic relief and caricature, this chapter conducts a close linguistic analysis of *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS), a Thai comedy series presenting the lives and communities of people with non-hetero gender and sexuality, highlighting the extent to which conventional Thai media portrayals have continued to reinforce pejorative heteronormative ideas of *kathoey* identities. Notably, this chapter investigates queer language used by people identifying as having non-normative gender and sexuality to reconstruct and negotiate their identities. Functioning as a linguistic strategy, queer language challenges the ideologies related to gender and sexuality that are embedded in the language and that continue to be produced and circulated in Thai society. To understand how queer language is used to subvert heteronormativity, I introduce queer linguistics as a framework for study the queer language in DTS. The chapter pays close attention to characters' lexical creativity and linguistic strategies, such as using pronouns and particles of non-normative characters in DTS to generate new meanings and construct new identities in a hetero-dominant society. Queer linguistics will allow the understanding of how such queer linguistic strategy destabilises the heteronormative discourses prevailing in Thai culture and society, particularly regarding non-normative gender and sexuality.

In DTS, non-normative gender and sexuality are represented in the major characters, consisting of three *kathoey* and one lesbian. The chapter will focus predominantly on representations of *kathoey*, as they are focal characters of the series. Unlike the *kathoey* characters, the lesbian character will also be explored. The study of queer language in DTS is primarily centred on the characters' dialogue and linguistic utterances, mainly focusing on their lexical connotations as well as pronouns and particles strategically segregated from Thai society's conventional usages. The definition of *kathoey* is multi-layered and elastic as it also includes male-to-female transgender people. *Kathoey* and gay do not equate to each other; both terms are referred to as non-normative identities (Saisuwan 2016, 152). The term *kathoey* has long appeared in Thai gender/sexual terminology since pre-modern periods. Morris posits that this word has been employed in religious contexts, referring to a hermaphrodite in Buddhist genesis as the intermediate male and female

category in the three-sex system (1994, 26). The Royal Institute Dictionary of Thai language (Ratchabanditayasathan) has definitions of *kathoey* as "a person who has both male and female genitals; a person whose mind (i.e. psychology) and behaviour are the opposite of their sex/gender." (1999; cited in Singhakowinta 2016, 25). From the queer linguistic standpoint, it should be noted that Royal Institute presupposes a binary, oppositional model in defining *kathoey* while ignoring the spectrum of non-normative identities. In the chapter studying DTS, *kathoey* is primarily defined as a gay man with feminine gender expressions and mannerisms who, sometimes but not always, dresses in the style of drag queens but are not themselves transgender people.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first is an exploration and discussion of what I would like to term "linguistic creativity" in *Diary of Tootsies,* in which the *kathoey* characters exhibit the creation of lexical connotation differentiated from the conventionally established meanings, and the second investigates the linguistic elements of the self-referential pronoun system and the final particles uttered by the characters. The analysis of linguistic creativity in the first section gives a general sense of the resistance to enforcing hegemonic norms of language articulation, shown by characters performing and reconstructing their identities outside the margins of a normative gender-and-sexuality paradigm. The second section pays attention to the unconventional linguistic strategies in the series, for example, how the characters use pronouns and final particles to distinguish their gender identities from those constructed under a normative language system. These two sections of queer language are studied through the textual analysis of the characters' verbal articulations in dialogues and narratives.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, the visual portrayal of *kathoey* in mainstream Thai media has traditionally relied on exaggerated caricatures and comedic stereotypes. The analysis here shifts to examine how DTS strategically employs visual representation to subvert these historical norms, portraying its characters as complex, multidimensional individuals. The series offers what Hall (1997) proposes as "re-representation" by challenging the stereotype of non-normative gender and sexualities usually disseminated in Thai media. Hall suggests visual images represent meanings beyond their linguistic forms (2003, 41). Visuals work with language and discourse as a representation system, providing signs created and interpreted to construct meaning. The visual representation of different characters in television can, to some extent, allow audiences to interpret

the characters' gender and sexuality and their images and actions portrayed and described in the series; for example, the characters' code of dress or body and facial expressions provide clues for the viewer. Having explained the crucial role of visual representation in dismantling conventional gender and sexuality norms in Thai media, this chapter further extends the analysis by exploring the medium of language. The chapter emphasises the queer linguistic strategies employed in DTS, investigating their capacity to reconstruct normative identities and challenge heteronormative frameworks.

To exhibit the idea that language contains different connotations and can be used to represent meaning by different groups of users, this chapter discusses the queer language used in *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS). This comedy represents the social and sexual lives of a group of gay people working and living in Bangkok. The series dramatises real-life anecdotes told by the protagonist and narrator Gus, who is *kathoey*, and his close friends, two of whom are also *kathoey* and one of whom is a lesbian. Both season 1 and 2 are studied to explore the idea of linguistic strategies to reconstruct normative gender and sexuality and to renegotiate the power of heteronormativity. The study of the representation of non-normative gender and sexuality performative contradictions can be employed to subvert heteronormativity and allow the reconstruction of the non-normative gender and sexuality. An exemplary instance of the use of performative to contradict the hetero paradigm can be observed in the queer language employed in *Diary of Tootsies*. Furthermore, in alignment with the theoretical framing of Foucault's concept of heterotopia proposed in the Chapter One, this chapter explores how DTS functions as a linguistic heterotopia. DTS constructs spaces through language, where normative gender and sexuality can be contested, subverted, and renegotiated, resonating with the heterotopic quality of disrupting conventional socio-cultural norms.

II. Language in the Subversion of Heteronormativity

> It is not the material world which conveys meaning; it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistics and other representational systems to construct

meaning to make the world meaningful and to communicate about

that world meaningfully to others. (Hall 1997, 25).

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall advocates for the concept of representation, describing it as a process whereby members of a society and culture use language to construct and exchange meaning. He argues that representation is not a mere reflection of reality but an active process that shapes how individuals and social groups are seen and understood by others. Representations are always partial and selective, as power relations and societal dominant discourses influence them. The issues of identity construction are essential and complicated as they encompass "the power relations (whether driven by economics, politics or other forms of social discrimination) which affect who is represented and how, who speaks and who is silent, what counts as culture and what does not" (Couldry 2007, 2).

To Hall, it is language that operates as a representational system. Through language, meaning does not have an intrinsically fixed status but is constructed through language, symbolism, and discourse by members of particular societies and cultures in each context. Language is not a neutral medium of expression but a tool society uses to enforce and perpetuate heteronormative norms and expectations. Heteronormativity refers to the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm and any deviation from this norm is seen as abnormal or deviant. Language, an integral part of society, is deeply embedded in this heteronormative framework. It constructs normative genders and sexualities by reinforcing certain gendered behaviours and roles while marginalising and stigmatising those who do not conform. Language also forms a paradigm for gender identities through how words label subjects under gendered discourse. Terms such as "masculine" and "feminine" are habitually used to describe certain behaviours or characteristics, further perpetuating normative gender roles. For example, the association of strength and assertiveness with masculinity and nurturing and emotional sensitivity with femininity reinforces gender stereotypes, limiting individuals' self-expression and constraining their identities.

Nevertheless, if language plays a significant role in enforcing and perpetuating heteronormativity by constructing normative genders and sexualities, queer language, on the contrary, can create non-normative genders and sexualities, providing a means of expression and identity for individuals who fall outside of traditional societal norms. Queer language is a powerful tool for

fostering inclusivity and challenging the heteronormative structures that have long dominated social perceptions of gender and sexuality. Another principal contribution of queer language is the deconstruction of binary paradigms, as such language employs an extensive vocabulary encompassing a wide range of identities beyond the rigid confines of the dichotomous male-female system, disrupting prevailing binary narratives. Queer language thus allows individuals to self-identify and assert their authentic selves. By adopting terms that resonate with their own unique experiences, people can claim and affirm their non-normative gender and sexualities. This offers visibility and validation for marginalised communities that have historically been silenced or erased.

Hence, queer linguistics is an appropriate tool for exploring the way queer language functions as heterotopia to subvert heteronormativity, as it delves into is an appropriate tool as it explores the language used by individuals who identify outside the realm of normative genders and sexualities. By examining the linguistic constructs inherent in queer language, this discipline seeks to unravel how these non-normative identities are constructed and communicated through verbal expression. Through this analysis, queer linguistics highlights the intricate relationship between language and the construction of non-normative genders and sexualities, ultimately challenging the entrenched notions of normalisation defined by heteronormative discourse. In essence, queer linguistics brings to the forefront language's vital role in constructing and reinforcing non-normative genders and sexualities.

This chapter investigates queer language used by people identifying as having non-normative genders and sexualities to reconstruct and negotiate their identities. Functioning as a linguistic strategy, queer language challenges the ideologies related to gender and sexuality that are embedded in the language and that continue to be produced and circulated in Thai society. To understand how queer language is used to subvert heteronormativity, queer linguistics is introduced as a framework to study the queer language in the series titled *Diary of Tootsies* (DTS), a Thai comedy series presenting lives and communities of people with non-hetero genders and sexualities. The chapter will continue the analysis of queer language, consisting of lexical creativity and linguistic strategies, such as using pronouns and particles of non-normative characters in DTS to generate new meanings and construct new identities in a hetero-dominant society. Queer linguistics will allow the understanding of how such queer linguistic strategy

destabilises the heteronormative discourses prevailing in Thai culture and society, particularly regarding non-normative genders and sexualities. In DTS, non-normative genders and sexualities are represented through the depictions of major characters, consisting of three *kathoey* and one lesbian. The study of queer language in DTS is primarily centred on the characters' dialogues and language articulations, mainly focusing on their lexical connotations as well as pronouns and particles strategically segregated from Thai society's conventional usages.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first is an exploration and discussion of what I would like to term "linguistic creativity" in *Diary of Tootsies*, in which the *kathoey* characters exhibit the creation of lexical connotation differentiated from the conventionally established meanings, and the second investigates the linguistic elements of the self-referential pronoun system and the final particles uttered by the characters. The analysis of linguistic creativity in the first section gives a general sense of the resistance to enforcing hegemonic norms of linguistic utterances, shown by characters performing and reconstructing their identities outside the margins of a normative gender-and-sexuality paradigm. The second section pays attention to the unconventional linguistic strategies in the series, for example, how the characters use pronouns and final particles to distinguish their gender identities from those constructed under a normative language system. These two sections of queer language are studied through the textual analysis of the characters' verbal articulations in dialogues and narratives.

The study also considers the visual representation of these characters to clearly illustrate how non-normative gender and sexualities are reconstructed and how heteronormativity is subverted. The series offers what Hall proposes as "re-representation" by challenging the stereotype of non-normative gender and sexualities disseminated in Thai media. Hall suggests visuals represent meanings beyond their linguistic forms (2003, 41). Visual images work with language and discourse as a representation system, providing signs created and interpreted to construct meaning. The visual representation of different characters in television can, to some extent, allow audiences to interpret the characters' genders and sexualities and their images and actions portrayed and described in the series; for example, the characters' code of dress or body and facial expressions provide clues for the viewer. Having explained the crucial role of visual representation in dismantling conventional gender and sexuality norms in Thai media, this chapter further extends the analysis by exploring the medium of language. The chapter emphasises the queer linguistic

strategies employed in DTS, investigating their capacity to reconstruct normative identities and challenge heteronormative frameworks.

III. Language as a Medium of Gender and Sexuality Construction

Language cannot be frozen. It does not exist in a static state. Instead, it is fluid and changeable, dynamically shifting following temporal changes. This metamorphosis of language is a phenomenon that occurs across societies and cultures. Perceived as a vehicle of communication, language allows humans to articulate their thoughts, demands and life experiences. Its diverse application hinges on its users' cultural affiliations, geographic origins, and lifestyle nuances. The fusion of identity and language is inseparable, given that language can construct and represent identity in personal, communal, and societal dimensions. Gumperz claims that social identity is in large part established and maintained through language, arguing that "linguistic alternates within the repertoire serve to symbolise the differing social identities which members may assume" (Blom and Gumperz 1972, 421). To sociolinguistic scholars, language and identity are inseparable and are interwoven with sociocultural factors. Bucholtz and Hall posit that "among the many symbolic resources available for the cultural production of identity, language is the most flexible and pervasive" (2007, 269). In communications, language is being used by its speakers for "exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (Norton 1997, 410). Interlocutors' utterances can indicate aspects of their identities as constituted by social and cultural discourses. The spoken language can also imply a particular status in a relationship as language embodies politics and power.

There has been broader sociolinguistic awareness of the subtle relationship between language and gender since the introduction of feminist investigation of the idea of gender construction in the wake of the Anglo-American second wave of feminism in the 1970s. Feminist researchers believe that gender and sexuality can be constructed through language, and power inequalities between the genders can be witnessed in linguistic differences between the genders. For example, Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* in 1975 is regarded as the inaugural work focusing on women's language use and articulation and its submissiveness within structures of patriarchal power. At this time, the prevalent approach of those sociolinguists who studied language and its relationship with gender was constructionist. This early approach focused less on challenging heteronormative

ideologies and more on the social differences between the language used by males and females. Such approaches heralded the beginning of research work that aimed to differentiate between the supposed linguistic styles of the genders. Later, the study of language and gender has become further diverse and shifted from essentialist perspectives of a male-female dichotomy to post-structuralist notions of multicultural and intersectional identities of gender, race and class. Post-structuralist scholars challenge the ontological discourse of gender identity by claiming that gender is not a biologically deterministic category but a socially and culturally constructed identities.

Sociolinguistic scholarship has not limited itself to the study of gender; it has also turned its interest to linguistic phenomena associated with sexuality. Language and sexuality have emerged as essential areas of study as they facilitate and, at the same time, are facilitated by the study of the interrelationship between language and gender. The study of sexuality through language comprises discursive formations of sexualities, sexual desires and sexual politics. Butler, for example, argues that language is involved in the construction of sexual identities as language is a way to perform and express sexual identity and reiterated utterance could lead to its construction:

> Sexuality does not follow from gender in the sense that what gender you "are" determines what kind of sexuality you will "have." We try to speak in ordinary ways about these matters, stating our gender disclosing our sexuality, but we are, quite inadvertently, caught up in ontological thickets and epistemological quandaries. Am I a gender after all? And do I "have" a sexuality? (2004, 16)

Overall, an explicitly linguistic focus on sexuality "encompasses not only questions about how people enact sexuality in their talk but also questions about how sexualities and sexualities are represented linguistically in a variety of discourse genres" (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 12). The following section will give more critical viewpoints on the extent to which language challenges heteronormative power and how people with non-normative genders and sexualities invent their language to construct their identities in order to reject being constituted by heteronormative discourse.

In *The Epistemology of the Closet*, scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick critiques the construction of non-normative genders and sexualities as "others" proposing that heteronormativity suppresses

non-normative genders and sexualities because of the lack of visibility under social norms toward masculinity and femininity. The understanding and categorising these identities as deviant or abnormal is deeply entrenched within society's normative systems. By positioning them as "other," society seeks to maintain a prevailing heteronormative and gender-binary paradigm. According to Sedgwick, the construction of "otherness" is contingent upon a dominating social order. By relegating non-normative genders and sexualities to the margins, this order reinforces and solidifies the perceived stability of the norm by creating an inherent binary divide. This systematic division maintains the illusion of a natural and predetermined order of human sexuality and gender. Sedgwick further emphasises the role of the closet in perpetuating this categorisation. The closet functions as a physical and metaphorical space where individuals with non-normative genders and sexualities are hidden and silenced. By hiding in the closet, these individuals are forced to conform to heteronormative norms and discourses, thus perpetuating the distinction between the "normal" and the "other." Sedgwick argues that the definition and relegation of non-normative genders and sexualities as "the others" is a deliberate construction perpetuated by society's adherence to a heteronormative and gender-binary paradigm. People identifying with non-normative genders and sexualities frequently feel ostracised since social and cultural norms exclude them. They develop a feeling of not fitting into mainstream society. Normative forms of gender and sexuality are readily accepted in society, while non-normative ones are questioned and defined as "the others". Cameron and Kulick (2003, 141) have further explained that identity comes through experiences felt in the social and personal environment and that suppressing such experiences is not ideal for defining gender and sexuality. The impact of heteronormativity society and social institutions is vast, and people belonging to non-heteronormative communities are traditionally marginalised and suppressed in culture. According to Sedgwick, the gender binary is the acceptance of the existence of men and women and nothing beyond that, but it is also vital to the system of heteronormativity; the creation of two opposing and separate genders helps to maintain heteronormativity. Understanding how social and cultural constructions of identities are deeply intertwined with power dynamics and hierarchies. It underscores that identities are not static or neutral but are imbued with social and political meanings. Constructing a dominant identity often relies on the subordination and marginalisation of other identities, reinforcing existing power structures. To Sedgwick, identities are defined concerning "the other". They are constructed as different or deviant, creating a sense of belonging and exclusion.

In relation to the construction of identities, Hall's theory explains that identities are not fixed or essential but are constantly negotiated, contested, and constructed through representations. Identities are not naturally fixed or predetermined but are shaped by societal and cultural norms, values, and structural hierarchies. To Hall, identities are relational, formed through interactions with others and the broader social environment. Hall's theory of representation also contributes to the understanding of the social and cultural construction of identities by emphasising the role of power, discourses, and contexts in shaping how identities are formed and understood. The recognition of the fluidity in identities subsequently leads to the challenging of the heteronormative system circulated by the inherent nature of identity formation of identity formation. Non-normativity challenges social and cultural norms. Through anti-essentialist perspectives, heteronormativity can be challenged and disempowered. Heteronormative constructions of social discourses, institutions and identities can be deconstructed. Heteronormativity becomes hegemonic because individuals in society conform to and practise a particular discursive system. Reiterated performance establishes individuals' identities, including gender and sexuality.

Heteronormativity, like gender and sexuality, is constructed as "effects of power [...]developed or grown over time based on social agreements that became conventions that became rituals and now are seen as natural[...]through the power of citation and repetition" (Koch 2008, 31). On the other hand, individuals' refusal to conform to gender discourse practices indicates their rejection of having their identity constructed within a heteronormative system. Mishna et al. (2007) state that gender is often performative, where individuals learn and enact feminine and masculine behaviours through social and political discourse that is further associated with sexuality. In this regard, masculine and feminine behaviours are linked to gender roles, and these roles are supported and encouraged by cultural and institutional discourses where society plays an essential role.

Language in everyday conversations and narratives is an institution of normative discourse. Austin (1962) developed the theory that speech and communication can create actions and construct identities. The performative utterance, according to Austin, refers to the idea that saying something is not only reporting or describing but instead is performing functions. Austin explains performative utterances:

> They do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not
> 'true or false'; and the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the

> doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as,
>
> or as 'just', saying something (1962, 5).

In certain sentences, speakers are not merely stating their actions; they are performing them. Performative utterances is self-verifying, claiming that performative utterance of the sentence is to perform illocutionary performativity, which leads to self-verifying. Additionally, a performative utterance is realised with the condition that "the discursive positioning of speakers, audience, and context to the speech act must also be satisfied in such instances" (Leap 2015, 667). Austin refers to these conditions as "felicity conditions" (ibid, 667).

Butler builds on Austin's theory of performative utterance and uses it to claim that sex and bodies are performative as they are constructed through the act of description. A statement can lead to constructing identities, namely those of gender, [biological] sex and sexuality. For example, the doctor's declaration on the birth of a baby that "It is a boy/girl" is considered a performative act that constitutes the baby's future performance and identity under social norms (Butler 1993, 232). Hence, language as performative utterance constructs identities and constitutes the discursive norms and ideologies perceived as reality. To Butler, individuals' gender is not ontological when they are born; gender is a sequence of acts that individuals have repeated all along. Performance and performativity are distinct. Butler notes that gender is not a performance which presupposes a pre-existing subject. Performative acts constitute a gendered body and subject. The gendered body and its performative acts cannot be separated from each other (Butler 1990).

Based on Butler's concept of performativity, scholars formulate queer linguistics to explore intertwined language, gender and sexualities (Koch 2008, 20). With queer linguistics, however, the aim is to subvert heteronormative discourse, providing space for non-heterosexuality in the linguistic paradigm. Performative contradiction refers to an utterance that challenges the semiotic system under heteronormativity through which identity is constituted. The performative contradiction is considered an "actual speech act," allowing the speaker to assert their own identity, regardless of the normative semiotic system (Fisher 2009). Those individuals embracing non-heterosexuality, such as gay, lesbian, or transgender, imply that their performative acts do not conform to heteronormative practices and lead instead to reconstructing their identity (Fisher 2009). Hence, the study of the representation of non-normative genders and sexualities performative contradictions can be employed to subvert heteronormativity and allow the

reconstruction of the non-normative genders and sexualities. The investigation into portrayals of non-conforming genders and sexualities yields insights into how performative contradictions can be harnessed to challenge heteronormativity, enabling fabrications of these non-typical genders and sexualities. An exemplary instance of such performative contradiction counteracting the hetero paradigm can be observed in the queer language employed in *Diary Tootsies the Series*.

IV. *Diary of Tootsies*

DTS is narrated in the form of the diary of Gus, the protagonist and narrator. The diary is based on the real-life story of Theetawit Setthachai, widely known as Cha, a nickname borrowed from a famous Thai female singer. Cha started writing stories on his Facebook page named *Bantuuk Khong Toot* or *Diary of Tootsies*, and gained 1.6 million fans, becoming massively popular in Thailand. The fame of this diary has turned Cha into a well-known *kathoey* writer. After that, stories from his Facebook page were presented in other formats, including books and TV series. The book has the same name as the Facebook page, *Diary of Tootsies*.

Three volumes of Cha's posts were published in 2014, 2015, and 2016, respectively, by the publisher Think Beyond Books. In 2016, *Diary of Tootsies* was produced by GDH 599 Company under *Diary of Tootsies*, directed by Piyachat Thong-am. Cha also collaborated as a playwright in the production team. Due to the massively enthusiastic response from viewers, the producers immediately commissioned a second season and aired it in 2017. The first season of DTS aired on Saturdays, from 11 pm-12 am, via the GMM25 and Line TV application channels. This drama series received excellent reviews. Many scenes are discussed at length on social media for being funny and entertaining. The broadcast time of 11 pm-12 am is associated with late-night television, not primetime or "family time" in traditional public television with social and parental control. Hence, the intended audience of the late-night programme, including DTS, are adults free to consume non-normative content such as vulgar language and themes focusing on homosexuality.

Toot or *tootsie* is an expression used for man with feminine mannerisms and expressions. *Tootsie* is an allusion to a romantic comedy titled *Tootsie* (1982) starring Dustin Hoffman. *Tootsie* is a story about an actor named Michael Dorsey who disguised himself as a woman named Dorothy Michaels to get into a soap opera. The movie became successful and was adapted to a stage play

in Thailand called *Tootsie*. The terms *toot* and *tootsie* became widely known and used by Thai people. In the diary, the author conveyed his life stories and events that had happened to him and his friends. The narration conveys a comical and satirical tone.

The story provides the audience with entertainment and moral and life lessons derived from the protagonist's own experiences, which the audiences are invited to share on various levels. The series also encourages people with non-normative identities to express themselves more regarding their genders, sexualities, and capabilities. There are attempts to insert the concept of intersectionality, not only the recognition and acceptance of non-normative gender and sexuality in Thai society. Hence, the pedagogical features of DTS imply the destabilisation of heteronormative stigma towards people with gender and sexual diversity. Even though similar series struggle to acquire acceptance for non-normative gender identities in a dichotomous male-female society, for example, *Chai mai jing ying tae* and *Hormones*, extending through the broader phenomenon of BL, have been prevalent in Thai society for many years[2], DTS has offered a fresh perspective on Thai queer culture. The series defies standard representational conventions on Thai TV regarding non-normative gender and sexuality and wittily challenges the social and cultural norms with humour. The refreshing message in DTS is to accept the realities and preferences of people rather than question and judge their identities. Studies concerning DTS have found that popularity and acclaim for DTS come from humour and amusement, the portrayal of the characters and the events, attention-grabbing language and thought-provoking messages (Phengphan 2016). However, a limited number of studies have focused on the representation of non-normative gender and sexuality in DTS, even though its focal theme and characters are *kathoey* and their communities.

Media plays a substantial role in the reproduction and distribution of gender discourse in Thailand. This societal framework appears to accept non-traditional gender identities and their manifestation

[2] The portrayal of non-normative gender and sexuality in Thai TV series have generally been of a pejorative nature in the past. *Chai Mai Jing Ying Tae* tells the story of a woman disguising herself as a *kathoey* to participate in a cabaret show. Her non-normative embodiment is objectified as object of watching and presented as caricature. *Hormones* presents non-normative sexualities as socially prohibited and sources of social disappointment to the extent that the non-normative characters need to conceal their sexualities and relationships.

on the surface. Yet, the media landscape fails to provide a comprehensive representation of individuals with non-normative gender and sexuality. Characters who identify as gay or lesbian are often relegated to the margins, where their portrayals tend to be derogatory and oversimplified, illustrating them primarily as caricatures rather than multifaceted individuals. However, DTS is a pioneer in the challenge against heteronormative social practices in Thailand. Its unique approach is displayed not only through the emphasis on *kathoey* and lesbian narratives and principal characters but also by being one of the first series to predominantly feature actors of diverse gender and sexual identities, even extending to the director, Piyachart Thong-Uam, who self-identifies as male-attracted. Despite traditional Thai TV largely marginalising the representation of non-normative gender and sexuality, this series managed to establish significant acclaim quickly upon its debut on digital platforms.

The unique personality traits of the characters are a crucial part of the success of DTS. They are old school- and close undergraduate-friends aged 28-29 years old and still have a strong bond of friendship. In each episode, these four characters help each other resolve relationship, family, and work conflicts. Gus represents a person with non-normative gender and sexuality struggling with the heteronormative norms of Thai society. Throughout the series, Gus encounters relationship problems. The beginning of the first episode reveals his grief and frustration when his ex-boyfriend abandons him to date a woman. He is then criticised by his father, who represents patriarchal ideologies, over his "*kathoeyness*", his revelling in male effeminacy and his homosexuality. To complicate matters, in later episodes of the first season, Gus's relationship with his boyfriend Top comes to a tragic end since Top's parents prohibit same-sex romance. The breakup with Top implies Gus's reiterated conflicts in his romantic relationships due to heteronormative norms, like the first episode in which Gus's ex-boyfriend leaves him for a new relationship with a woman.

To solve the conflict of heteronormative cultural forces in Thai society and families, the series demonstrates Gus's achievements in the struggle against the intolerance of homosexuality. The conflict between Gus and his father, who disagrees with same-sex relationships, is resolved in the final episode of the first season when his father says, "He has dumped you, meaning he is awful. Then why don't you get a new one? There are plenty of boys in the world". The juxtaposition of paradoxical notions about Gus's emotional distress over a relationship's end and his subsequent

joy at his father's endorsement of him seeking a new boyfriend denotes the significance of accepting and acknowledging non-conventional sexual identities within patriarchal systems. This situation demonstrates the triumph of divergent gender and sexuality, as embodied by the father's open-mindedness.

In addition to Gus, a trio of significant characters form his intimate friend group. One of these is Golf, a close companion of Gus, who identifies as a *kathoey*. Despite Golf's robust physique and masculine features, a deep affinity for femininity manifests in his penchant for make-up application and feminine attire. His mainline occupation is as a television producer for fiscal programmes, supplemented by ancillary roles as a dancer and cosmetologist. Golf's narrative advances the dialogue on HIV after he contracts the virus through sexual interactions. This narrative arc explores themes of HIV awareness, prevention methods, and the discourse around interacting with those affected by the disease.

Equally, there is Kim, another *kathoey* individual in the group, who is a polyglot air steward. Kim's close ties to Gus and Golf are notable. His substantial musculature, strong arms, and distinct feminine movements create a unique juxtaposition. Both Golf and Kim embody fluid notions of gender and sexuality. Their feminine presentations are distinguishable from their sexual activities, wherein they display the ability to interchange between dominant and submissive roles. This elasticity in gender portrayal and sexual orientation signifies their dismissal of commitment to the rigid dichotomy of male-female relationships. The last character in DTS is Natty. She is the only female character and is a feminine lesbian sexually attracted to masculine lesbians. Natty works as a product consultant and events MC, and the series exaggerate her traits and characters to satirise some manners in Thai society, such as the typical speaking style of product consultants with the repetition of sentences and particles uttered in an unnaturally high pitch. Natty also satirically represents Thai lesbians' attempts to adapt to Korean pop culture. She usually falls for butches imitating masculine performers in a comedic manner, for example, wearing headphones and dancing all the time, including acting cool like Korean pop idols.

Apart from the exciting characterisation of these major characters, the series also portrays other characters to insert the idea of counter-stereotypes through other characters with intersectional and

diverse identities. This is evidenced in many scenes from Gus's narratives, for example, a taxi driver and a street-food seller whose characteristics contrast with the stereotypes associated with their jobs. Besides the lessons about not making an appearance at first glance and the acceptance of widely diverse people, friendship and solidarity of people with non-normative gender and sexuality appear to be a very significant theme in the series. The bond between friends alleviates the characters' struggle against the oppression of the heteronormative system, especially concerning intolerance of gender and sexual non-normativity.

DTS became famous as the series' language usage was vibrant and attention-grabbing. As soon as the series was broadcast, some words and phrases from the characters went viral on social networks and were widely used in society. Previous studies investigating the language used in DTS found that the language in the characters' conversation and the narrative is one of the primary reasons for the series' massive popularity. Tohmilal et al. and Tupsuwan studied slang terms, particularly in DTS and found that the series has the most creative and contemporary language compared to other Thai series (2017, 101; 2018, 263). Phengphan's study about marketing communication management in DTS reinforces that language is the main factor contributing to DTS's popularity, evidenced by the capture of characters' dialogues in which words and sentences become viral and memes in social media (2016, 68-69).

V. Queer Language and Linguistic Strategies in DTS

As discussed in Chapter Two, traditional Thai media historically represented *kathoey* predominantly as sources of humour or caricature, reinforcing heteronormative views and perpetuating stigmatised identities. In contrast, DTS demonstrates how queer language serves as a subversive tool to challenge these stereotypical portrayals. The creative use of queer language has challenged the language that has held sway for so long within the heteronormative framework. DTS offers the possibility of linguistic strategies, particularly the creative deployment of lexical connotations, in which words and phrases are used in different connotative contexts, showing a healthy deviation from the staid linguistic system ordained by heteronormativity. DTS shows how etymological inventiveness can be used to build new gender and sexual identities. The series deliberately uses words created and communicated only in the characters' community, a close-knit group of *kathoey* and lesbian individuals. Most of the words are slang and are used in casual

communication. The series enhances these words by the characters' depiction of themselves. Some words have already been used in Thai non-normative communities and adopted by the series. As soon as the series was broadcast, these words became viral and widely adopted in Thai society.

Like many patriarchal languages, the Thai language is both heteronormative and hierarchical. It is used in a social context where the usage and politeness of words and phrase's structure and reflect the status of the speakers. For instance, the Thai royal language is reserved exclusively for conversations with the Thai King or members of the Royal Family. In contrast, the Pali language is used by Buddhist monasteries for chanting or communication within them. Moreover, Thai culture emphasises linguistic politeness in various aspects mainly associated with hierarchy and seniority, which are socially constructed under heteronormative discourse. Nevertheless, through the linguistic strategies of queer language, non-normative people, defined in this chapter as *kathoey* and gay people, challenge the heteronormative power. By repurposing the words of the Thai language, including the term *kathoey* itself, *kathoey* individuals actively shape the discourse surrounding their own identity and challenge normative views on gender.

In the context of linguistic strategies, *kathoey* performatively create new words and phrases specific to their community and engage in language play that modifies the conventional Thai language. This linguistic play takes the form of "*pasa loo*" or Loo language, a linguistic invention derived from Thai but adapted to suit their unique mode of communication. Loo language operates through spoonerisms, which alter and rearrange words and phrases in standard Thai patterns to create new connotations. It is exclusively used among the *kathoey* and gay communities in Thailand. The inventive lexical and syntax strategies extend to word choices and the creation of new expressions, with adjustments, additions, or changes being made to existing idioms within non-normative communities. Loo language was invented by inserting and rearranging Thai words and sentences to prevent mainstream Thai speakers from accessing the speakers' communicative messages. The receivers can only understand the messages if they know how to rearrange Loo utterances back into the ordinary Thai language (Yuttana 2004). Denizens of the community also create idioms using information from their surroundings. Their language involves metaphors, onomatopoeia, rhymes, paradoxes, and similes. At the same time, Loo language includes a sense of humour and amusement, demonstrating their linguistic abilities, so it is widely adapted and used

in society. The distinct aspect of this language play lies in the operation of Loo as a symbolic language in which the meanings of words deliberately differ from their standard definitions. Loo language implies the characteristic of queer language that is very creative and complicated (Pavadee 2016).

In validating linguistic creation, Nuntiwatwipa alludes to the film *The Iron Ladies* (2000), a fictionalised re-enactment of a real-life Thai men's volleyball squad primarily comprised of *kathoey* and gay sportspeople. The movie producers disseminated pamphlets to the audience that contained a glossary of *kathoey* and gay terms and colloquialisms highlighted in the film. The idiosyncratic dialect evident in *The Iron Ladies* is an amalgamation of words and expressions sourced from *kathoey* and gay circles and new creations specific to the series. Examples of slang in *The Iron Ladies* are as follows:

Words	Meanings
Song-u	the sarcastic label of *kathoey* sugar daddy with great attempts to attract men
Tamoy	*kathoey*'s action to court men
janab	a combination of the words *janrai* (wicked) and *appri* (unpropitious)

(Nuntiwatwipa 2004, 17)

In DTS, the ersatz language appears to be sensational and transgressive as it also includes vulgar words, taboos, slang, and sexual words, but these unrefined characteristics are subtly adjusted so that they become acceptable and more polite. The word *K*, for example, is an abbreviation of a vulgar word *kuay* meaning the male sexual organ. When referring to the male sexual organ, *K* is used as a euphemistic replacement of *kuay* to reduce discourtesy in casual conversation. Likewise, the word *ye* is created as a replacement for the word *yed,* meaning having a sexual affair. *Ye* and *yed* share similar pronunciations, so *ye* is usually used to avoid uttering the latter word, which is considered an obscene word. The linguistic creativity examples mentioned show the reluctance of

non-normative gender and sexuality to embrace a heteronormative language paradigm. Lexical connotations created and used only among *kathoey* have specific implications and cannot be generally used in society. *Kathoeys*' creation and use of new words imply their nonconformity with the Thai normative linguistic system. They instead independently exploit the already established language features to constitute their own communication space. In this space, they have the power to manipulate language so that they can create new language connotations and communicate among the members of their community and beyond.

The subversion of heteronormativity is also found in DTS, as it employs language to resist the heteronormative language paradigm. The creation and usage of vocabulary in the series show its rejection of normative language practices reinforced under the heteronormative system. The series allows audiences to investigate the idea of language creativity, a concept that signifies resistance to the heteronormative gendered-language system. Words are employed in the series via the protagonist's narration and appear in the characters' communications with each other in their community onscreen. The creation of words, as used in the male homosexual community, can be seen in Gus's narration in the beginning scene of the first episode:

> Gus: *sub tood wan ni ko saner kam wa tay(.) pen kam kariya plae*
> *wa ting(.) samat chai kab ruang lek lek yang te puan pai jon tueng*
> *ruang yai yai yang tuk phuar te(.)*
> Gus: Tood's word of the day is *tay*. *Tay* is a verb that means to dum
> It is used in every situation like *tay* (ditch) your friend or more severe
> matters like your boyfriend *tays* (dumps) you.
> Gus: *kariya tay suan yai ja mai sang kwam sia hai hai kab pu ti tay(.)*
> *tae samrab pu ti tuk tay nan mak ja mi sapap mai tang jak kaya piak*
> *namkang rue khi*
> Gus: A *tay* action (*tay*-to dump) mostly does not hurt the person who
> does it, but for the person being *tay*-ed (dumped), the feeling is not
> much different from wet trash, stagnant water or a bucket of shit.

The denotative meaning of the word *tay* is to pour a liquid of particles from or into containers, and *tay* does not literally mean to dump people. In DTS, *tay* is used to express the situation in which the *kathoey* characters are dumped. *Tay* implies the idea of an asymmetrical and power-based relationship with all individuals. The person who *tays* plays a more dominant role or possesses more power, while the one who is *tayed* has less and is submissive. In the early scenes of DTS, most characters are being *tayed* and are in a passive relationship position. They have lost their self-esteem and are sceptical about achieving long-lasting relationships and happiness. In Thailand, non-heterosexual relationships are usually regarded as marginalised from the ideologies of marriage and family institutions, partly because same-sex marriage has not yet been legalised or approved. However, instead of portraying *kathoey* characters as failures in relationships, the series allows them to learn from their failures and move forward to overcome their powerlessness and being victimised by heteronormative norms, presented in Gus's and Kim's relationships. This is evidenced in Gus's didactic narrative in the first episode:

> Gus: *kwam rak man ko kae ni(.) sud tai rao ko kae tong payayam ha*
> *tang takiak takai kuen ma eek krang(.) lang na lang ta laew chin up*
> *cherd na to pai(.) mai nae krai ja pai ru wa sak wan rao eng aat ja*
> *pan fai ti tay kao bang ko dai(.)*
> Gus: When it comes to love, in the end, we all need to flounder a bit
> before we find our way. Wash your face and keep your chin up as
> you walk forward. You never know. One day, you might be the one
> *tay*-ing someone else.

Gus's narrative in this scene occurs after his breakup with Top, propelled by Top's mother's vehement disapproval of their same-sex romance. Later in the second season, Top attempts reconciliation with Gus; however, it is Gus who eventually assumes the "*tay*-er" role. Later in the second season, Win is introduced as Gus's new partner, and their relationship is met with openness and support from Win's family. In the second season's final episode, Win's parents invite Gus over for a family dinner, an evident display of their acceptance of Gus both as Win's boyfriend and as part of their family. A stark contrast in familial reaction to same-sex relationships is drawn between the families of Gus's previous and present boyfriends. While Top's mother adamantly

rejects it, Win's parents embrace their son's relationship with Gus. The contentious issue of Gus dealing with Top's parents' disapproval of their same-sex relationship is eventually resolved. Gus no longer faces rejection from heteronormative ideals and ideology. Having found his safety zone, he firmly chooses Win and declines the possibility of rekindling the bond with To He transitions to a role where he is now the "one *tay*-ing someone else."

This scene is presented in an ironic tone. Golf mentions that he is tired and no longer wants to be in a relationship but is immediately attracted by a handsome stranger running by. The scenic depiction is exaggerated and comedic, shifting the camera between an attractive Western man and the main characters. The abrupt shift from a conversation focused on an extinguishing relationship to instant infatuation with a passing stranger contributes to comedic irony. This unexpected transition contradicts the characters' expression, embedding irony in the plot. Also, the slow-motion sequence of the handsome Western man running stuns Gus, Kim and Golf. Slow-motion cinematography and sensual, non-diegetic music emphasise the characters' strong attraction to the passing Western runner. The scene uses exaggerated sensual imagery, focusing on the runner's underpants to intensify their sudden interest in comedic, over-the-top nature. The irony is further deepened when, immediately following Kim's affirmation of his Chinese identity and preference for Chinese tradition, the trio is attracted to a Western man, indicating a clash between cultural identity and attraction. This juxtaposition provides an interesting commentary on attraction, cultural preference, and personal identity. This scene ends with wide and middle shots that depict the humorous, chaotic actions of friends playing together, and it is narrated along with Gus's voice-over to the audience "When it comes to love, in the end, we all need to flounder a bit before we find our way. Wash your face and put your chin up as you walk forward. You never know; one day, you might be the one *tay-ing* someone else." Both the narrative and the audio-visual aspects of the scene suggest that the characters will not suffer from their failure and being *tayed*; instead, their attitude toward relationships and their status is positive.

Through this language manipulation, the *kathoey* characters renegotiate understandings of gender and sexuality, affirming their freedom of expression. Using Hall's concept of re-representation as a tool, *kathoey* and other non-normative identities can deconstruct the entrenched binary perception of gender and sexuality and establish a more adaptable, inclusive structure. This

transformative process accommodates acknowledging and celebrating a broad spectrum of distinct, non-traditional gender and sexual identities. It provides values and norms of the community to which individuals can contribute to constructing individual identity. Identity is also collectively constructed using language already established and circulated in society. DTS, in contrast, does not represent the idea of an identity being constructed through conforming to heteronormative language. Instead, the series employs the construction of identity by using slang words which offers an opportunity for a reaction against a heteronormative linguistic system. The deployment of invented words, mostly slang, not only functions as communication but also helps to establish the interlocutors' identity as being non-conformist to the hegemonic, heteronormative system. The idea of heteronormative subversion is illustrated in a conversation in which the characters articulate the words *yim* (pound) and *nutyim*:

> Kim: *Mang aei(.) ru yang gni ku mai jing jang kap man tang tae raek rok(.) tor pai ni ta mi krai ma na ku ja yim yim yim yim hai kraden loey(.) laew kor te man kon tee man ja te ku*
>
> Kim: Damn it. I wouldn't have gotten so serious from the start if I had known it. From now on, if anybody comes into my life, I will pound pound pound pound him until he shatters. And I will dump them before they dump me.
>
> Kim: *oi oi oi po po po(.) lerk sao(.) mai suay loey(.) mueng kan tee puak rao sam kon okhak prom kan na(.) fa ja tong pen jai perd tang hai rao pai jerk on tee sap kwa(.) e-Gus e-Golf luk kuen(.) rao ja tong ha pua mai(.)*
>
> Kim: Enough already. Stop being sad. We look pathetic (.) Ladies, I think that all three of us getting dumped simultaneously is a sign that the heavens are allowing us to meet someone better. Gus. Golf. Get up. We've got to find new hubbies.
>
> Golf: *aw(.) mueng ja pan mia(.)*
>
> Golf: So you are willing to be the wifey.
>
> Kim: *rue mia mai samrab ku(.) tae ta sab jing ku yom pan mia hai kor dai(.) laew rao ja tong ha hai dai korn wan satjeen ni(.)*

Kim: Or find my new wifey in my case. But if he is really that hot, I'll be willing to be his wifey then. And we do have to find ones before this Chinese New Year.

Gus: *nae(.) tong ma satjeen doui na(.) Valentine kor mai ao(.)*

Gus: Come on. Chinese New Year? Is Valentine's out of the question?

Kim: *ko ku sae tung(.)*

Kim: I'm a Chink and I have Chinese surname, okay?

The Royal Institute Dictionary of Thai Language (Ratchabanditayasathan) defines the word *yim* as a smile. In *kathoey* and gay communities, both in DTS and real-life communities, to avoid the use of slang and taboo word meaning having a sexual affair, *yim* is employed as a replacement. The word *yim* is first introduced in the series in the first episode in a scene when Kim expresses his frustration at being abandoned in many relationships and is determined to be active and dominant in sexual affairs. The significance of introducing the actions of *yim* and *nutyim* in the first episode is to give the audience background information about the characters and their personalities. The audience are invited to perceive the characters' attitudes and actions about intimacy through the conversation about *yim*, particularly in the character of Kim, who we learn does not restrict his position to active or passive roles in sexual affairs. His elasticity in gender and sexuality shows his refusal to conform to the expected norms toward non-normative identities. *Yim* functions as a slang word, which has been created and used among the *kathoey* and community. This word became massively popularised from the DTS and is widely used in society (Phakkapuriwat 2017). *Yim* is usually used as a compound noun with the word *nut* which means arranging a meeting. The compound noun *nutyim* involves arranging a meeting to have sexual intercourse through social media channels. It is a kind of relationship for which commitment is not necessary.

The created connotation of *yim* is also an indicator of changed attitudes today towards relationships and sexual intercourse from a long-term to a short-term relationship or to a one-night stand without commitment. These sexual attitudes and behaviours challenge Thai society's discursive ideologies concerning intimacies and family conventions. Under Buddhist and Thai normative practice,

nutyim is considered sinful and shameful, and the actions of *yim* and *nutyim* should be prohibited. In addition, Thai normative practice expects a person to exercise carefulness around and to control sexual desire. Kim's determination to be more active in sexual activities to abandon relationships and search for new ones suggests his promiscuity and uncontrollable sexual desire. They deliberately subvert the constructed discursive normativity, which is commonly held to be one of the standards of morality.

Further, the conversation between Kim and his friend playfully hints at the subversion of hegemonic Westernised discourses, including normative heterosexuality. This is evident from Kim's refusal to assent to Valentine's Day as the deadline for his project of finding a partner. Instead, he expresses his preference for setting Chinese New Year as the deadline, which reflects his rejection of Western culture. Kim's resistance to the Westernised tradition of acquiring intimacy around Valentine's Day is further emphasised by his statement that he has a Chinese surname and therefore prefers Eastern traditions. These small clues in the conversation, coupled with his declaration that he wants to have a new partner before the New Year, suggest that Kim is not conforming to the norms dictated by Western culture and its associated holidays.

The following dialogue between Kim and Golf also showcases linguistic creativity as a means of subverting normative discourse. The use of the terms *yim* and *nutyim* is an example of this.

> Kim: *tae muar kuen ku nutyim na(.) kon nai fitness di di a(.)*
>
> Kim: But last night I had a bootie call. He was a man from a gym.
>
> So nice!
>
> Golf: meung pen *pua* rhue pen *mia*
>
> Golf: Which position did you take?
>
> Kim: *ku kor pen pua ja. tae pen mia ku kor mai tid rhork.*
>
> Kim: I was top, but I could go for bottom too.

Kim's appointment to *nutyim* raised doubts from Golf and Gus. They question Kim about his preferred role in sexual activities, specifically whether he identified as dominant (*pua*) or submissive (*mia*) which are inherently heteronormative given the non-sexual meanings of these words. These enquiries highlight a persistent dichotomy in sexual roles, even within homosexual

relationships, that often conform to the husband-wife binary paradigm. Traditionally, effeminate males like Gus and Golf have been expected to assume submissive roles in sexual relations due to societal perceptions of femininity. However, Kim defies these expectations by actively embracing dominance in his sexual relationships. Kim still identifies as *kathoey*, demonstrating that his sexual role remains flexible and adaptable based on context and personal preference. This adaptability in Kim's sexual identity underscores the concept of gender and sexual fluidity, challenging the notion of fixed gender and sexual identities. It reinforces that identities are not ontological and inherent in nature but socially and culturally constructed, as seen in Kim's flexible identities within various discursive contexts. The unconventional uses of *yim* and *nutyim* suggest the destabilisation to heteronormative power in language. It thus reinforces Hall's theory of re-representing non-normative identities through queer linguistic practices.

Ultimately, DTS presents language creativity to subvert heteronormativity and disrupt the dominant institutions of Thai society. In Thailand, religion, notably Buddhism, is considered an ultimate pillar of the nation, the monarchy and the nation itself. Buddhism is powerfully entrenched in Thai society since it shapes people's thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours. As a representative of Buddhism, monks are regarded as having higher status and are worshiped by the Thai people. Thai language in the Buddhist context is occupied with words and phrases that imply hierarchies. DTS, nonetheless, reveals itself to be undermining hierarchy in religious language. Words usually used in Buddhist contexts are applied to sexual contexts. This adaptation of sacred language into sexual slang questions and challenges the power dynamics inherent in the relationship between religion and sexuality. By utilising words with denotative religious meanings in sexual contexts, the series disrupts the hierarchical binary between these two domains. This subversion of the traditional social construct of religion, which is inherently heteronormative, highlights the series' exploration of queer language as a means of resistance. Through the creation of neologisms and the recontextualisation of religious terminology, DTS presents a counter-narrative that challenges the normative perceptions and expectations of religion and sexuality. The use of language creativity in the series serves as a form of artistic expression and functions as a tool for social critique. It opens up conversations about how language and discourse can be employed to challenge prevailing power structures and dominant ideologies. The word *tawaibua*, for example, is used in the characters' dialogue regarding sexual intercourse in an uncommitted

relationship. This word implies the act of oral sex between male homosexuals, and it is feminine males who are understood to perform oral sex on their partners usually. The word *tawaibua* appears in the following conversations:

> Gus (talking to the waiter): *…a kong pee na pee ao yam lukchin laew ko lek tomyam mai tab ko baeb ped ped baeb prik 11 med pai lei*
> Gus (talking to the waiter): Let's see. I'll have the spicy meatball salad, a bowl of spicy noodles, and no liver. I want it super spicy. 11 red chillies.
> Natty: *mae mae mae(.) tungtae mai mi pua nia kin ped rua rua lei na(.)*
> Natty: Well, well, well. Since you ended your relationship with your boyfriend, you've been eating spicy dishes.
> Gus: *kor chai si(.) ton me pua krai ja kla kin prik la(.) er jum ruang e-Kim dai mai(.) man dek som tum ped ped a laew ko pai tawaibua hai puchai(.)eu-hue puchai weed rong pro saeb nhuang ying kwa don kradad sai ber 0 kad na mueng(.)*
> Gus: Of course, you can't eat spicy food when you have a boyfriend. Do you remember what happened to Kim? He ate some spicy salad and then went down on a guy. My gosh! That guy screamed like his cock was on fire as if it was sanded by zero grit sandpaper!
> Natty: *ku songsan kao(.)*
> Natty: I feel sorry for him.

The actual meaning of *tawaibua* is a practice in Buddhist ritual. It refers to the act of offering a lotus, a sacred flower symbolising purity in Buddhism, to monks and Buddha images. *Tawaibua* is a compound word from *tawai* and *bua*. The term *tawai* means offering something to a higher hierarchy receiver. This term is used in the religious context in which a giver shows reverence to a taker with a higher status. This kind of flower is used to pay spiritual worship to the Lord Buddha. Hence, the term *tawaibua*, denotatively and connotatively, refers to religion, a hierarchical institute. Paradoxically, the word *tawaibua* is used when Gus mentions Kim practising oral sex to

a man who seems from a one-night stand. The sexual connotation of *tawaibua* undermines the grand narrative of Buddhist discourse. It blurs the boundary between the sacred-profane dichotomy regarded as a religious notion and dismantles Buddhist conventional practices of showing respect to superior hierarchical status. The juxtaposition of religious words in sexual contexts within the series creates a stark contrast between the original meanings and their newfound connotations. This linguistic creativity undermines the traditional power dynamics entrenched in the religious framework, highlighting how language can be used to resist and subvert heteronormativity.

From the analysis above, it can be seen that DTS harnesses the power of language creativity to subvert heteronormativity and challenge the dominant religious influence in Thai society. By appropriating religious words into sexual contexts, the series disrupts the hierarchical binary between religion and sexuality, ultimately deconstructing the social construction of religion as a heteronormative institution. Through its use of innovative language, the series not only entertains but also serves as a platform for societal critique and the exploration of alternative narratives.

The linguistic creativity through created lexical connotation is additionally presented at the beginning of the first episode of season two with the scene depicting a variety show, in which Gus is a guest speaker and Kim, Golf and Natty attend as studio audience members. The variety show's host, a famous *kathoey*, interviews Gus about their past year and their commitment to competing to be the first one to win a romantic relationship. Then Gus reveals Kim's and Golf's extraordinary effort to find a partner. Golf's strategy of using a gay dating application is disclosed. He has turned himself into a masculine-identified man, growing a beard and acting more masculine, and has started dating feminine males on the app. This is presented in a comedic flashback scene showing Golf dating a *kathoey* boy he found in the application. However, the boy's terrible makeup keeps annoying him, and he cannot concentrate on maintaining the masculine act so he brings out his professional cosmetic bag and fixes the boy's makeup.

In this sequence he also adopts *kathoey* vocabulary by calling the boy "daughter" and himself "mummy" (*khun mae*). This is framed as a comedic scene showing Golf's obsession with femininity. He eventually needs to admit to himself that he cannot maintain identity as masculine, but instead, he wants to date a masculine male.

> Host speaker: *laew tam mai tueng mai keep look tor la ja?*
>
> Host speaker: Why don't you pretend to be a masculine-active gay to maintain the intimacy?
>
> Golf: *mai(.) kue pen bab ni tungtae dern kao ran laew(.) kang nai nu ko bab hei rue wa ku pen bian wa(.) nuke ok mai(.) keu ku ni pen toot sueng kamlang ja ha mia toot ik ti(.)*
>
> Golf: No, I have pretended for a long while since we first dated. Inside my soul, there was an internal voice asking me if I had changed to lesbian who's sexually attracted to another *kathoey*. But I am not. Do you get it? I am *tootsie* who is supposed to be somebody's wife, but I cannot position myself as a husband having a *tootsie* wife.

This part of the analysis highlights the term *bian* uttered by Golf, referring to the intimacy between two *kathoey* Golf and the boy he is dating. The word *bian* is a term that has emerged from the realm of lesbianism in the Anglophone context. Derived from the final two syllables of the English word "lesbian," *bian* aims to capture the essence of attraction between women. It serves as a term to depict the romantic and sexual relationships shared by women who identify as lesbians. Although its usage is not as widespread as the term "lesbian" itself, *bian* offers a fresh perspective and an opportunity to explore the intricacies of same-sex relationships. The term *bian* acquires a different connotation when utilised within the context of the *kathoey* community. *Kathoey* have adopted *bian* to describe the sexual relationships between *kathoey* individuals or between a *kathoey* and a cisgender woman. In this context, *bian* encompasses the notion of lesbianism while also embracing femininity and disregarding masculinity. The *kathoey* community's adoption of the term *bian* is an attempt to identify with and embrace their own experiences of non-normative relationships within the realm of lesbianism and the non-normative gender and sexual communities as a whole.

Nonetheless, it is also important to note that Golf's refusal to position himself as a masculine gay man indicates that his gender and sexual identities are not as flexible as Kim's. Believing there

can be no romantic intimacy between *kathoey*, Golf is still trapped in a heteronormative ideological paradigm whereby the relationship requires masculine and feminine binary. Golf cannot surpass the hetero-boundary and reach the acceptance of feminine-feminine relationships which destabilise the gender and sexual hegemonic norm.

The problems in portraying the characters as challenges against heteronormativity is also exhibited in Gus's narratives of introducing Kim. Although Kim represents the fluidity and elasticity in gender and sexuality that those two identities are entirely independent, Gus's description of Kim elucidates the entrapment of the heteronormative binary as his depiction of Kim suggests the confinement in the assimilation of binary male-female relationship. In Gus's narratives, homonormativity emerges as a manifestation of these societal expectations, replicating heteronormative ideologies. The homonormativity and trap of the heteronormative assimilation reveal the constraining nature of societal expectations as Gus conforming to gender and sexual norms implies limiting the expression of non-normative genders and identities as well as hampering self-actualisation and authentic expression.

> Gus*: Kim toot lam kam pu(.) A-dit tanad rab tae patjuban pun tu-*
> *aeng ma ruk tam konkai kong talad kengkwang ti ruk priab samian*
> *'rare item'(.) a-cheep kue stuart tae chob jai tuk riak wa saji mak*
> *kwa.*
> Gus: Kim is a *kathoey* with bodybuilder arms and muscles who used
> to be sexually submissive but now has become more like dominant,
> depending on supply and demand in the gay-dating market and
> scene.

Kim is presented as a *kathoey* with muscular body who is elastically transits from a sexually submissive individual to a more dominant role. This transformation, however, is not a result of Kim's personal growth or self-discovery but is instead contingent upon supply and demand within the gay dating market and scene. While Kim's portrayal suggests an acceptance of gender and sexual fluidity, the series still places him within the homonormative dominant-submissive binary, thereby raising questions about the extent to which non-normative gender and sexuality can

achieve true emancipation from the constraints of hegemonic heteronormativity. Through Gus's narrative, which positions Kim within this dominant-submissive framework, the series reinforces the notion of homonormativity, highlighting the ways in which identities are constructed and perpetuated through societal norms and expectations. In the case of Kim, alteration into a dominant role does not imply his true identity but rather a response to the demands of the gay dating market. By examining through the lens of homonormativity, it becomes evident that some characters, such as Gus and Golf, become trapped within the binary paradigm of dominant-submissive roles. This reinforces established gender and sexual norms rather than challenging or subverting them. Despite the apparent acceptance of gender and sexual fluidity, this scene in DTS falls short in allowing non-normative gender and sexuality complete liberation from the homonormativity ingrained in hegemonic heteronormative structures. The depiction of Kim leads to essential questions about the extent to which non-normative gender and sexuality can fully emancipate themselves from the dominant-submissive binary perpetuated in homonormative frameworks. Hence, DTS exhibits queer language as an intricate web of linguistic strategies that challenge and subvert heteronormative societal norms regarding gender and sexuality. By employing linguistic creativity in lexical connotation, those *kathoey* characters can construct and assert non-normative gender and sexuality that exist beyond the limited binary frameworks imposed by heteronormativity.

In the next section, the chapter will explore the uses of pronouns and final particles as further strategies enabling *kathoey* characters in DTS to challenge the language of the heteronormative male-female binary and to construct non-normative gender and sexuality outside the assigned identities shaped by normative language. The pronoun is a substantial language element that designates individuals' identities and positions them in systems of social relations. Similar to other languages, the pronoun system of the Thai language is structured by ontological sex at birth. Individuals' gender identities, subsequently, are denoted by and aligned with the assigned normative pronoun of male-female dichotomy. The heteronormative pronoun system confines non-normative genders to identify themselves in the traditional binary gender. However, using non-traditional pronouns can reject the established identities of the normative gender paradigm. Equally, the Thai language's final particles are indicators of individuals' identities. They permit users to declare their manifestos of gender and other social identities within the smallest of utterances. Declining the traditional final particles, which traditionally reflect gendered norms and

power dynamics, DTS allows the audience to witness the *kathoey* characters modifying and using them in unconventional ways to convey a sense of queerness and to resist the traditional gender hierarchy. In DTS, pronouns and final particles are employed as linguistic strategies enabling non-normative *kathoey* and gay characters to reconstruct and renegotiate their power in a heteronormative system.

VI. The Use of Pronouns in DTS

In Chapter Two, I demonstrated how language in mainstream Thai media often reinforced comedic stereotypes of *kathoey* through exaggerated depictions. This section, however, will show how DTS deliberately employs non-normative pronouns and final particles to dismantle traditional caricatures, creating linguistic space for the authentic representation of *kathoey* identities. The pronoun system in the Thai language may seem complicated to non-Thai speakers as "Thai grammar recognises several levels of respect, politeness, and honouring, all of which are reflected in its personal pronoun system" (Phimsawat 2011, 2). Numerous linguistic works have claimed that Thai pronouns "play a significant role in marking social statuses and role relationships of communicative interlocutors" (Uckaradejdumrong 2016, 1). One of the linguistic elements in the Thai language that linguists study is the pronominal referential, which reflects the elaborate system of social relations and stances between interlocutors in communications. Cooke (1968) defined the pronominal as a linguistic term "about personal pronouns or occurring in first- or second-person contexts and with first or second person meaning in much the same way as personal pronouns do" (cited in Teglová 2012, 1). There are seven social factors governing the use of pronouns in any Thai communicative context, namely: power and status, age, kinship and family relationship, friendship, ethnic-religious groups, and occupation and genealogical distance (Palakornkul 1972; cited in Saisuwan 2016, 157). More factors than gender, sexuality or romantic relationships are applied in selecting pronouns in different situations. Various pronominal choices are divided into personal pronouns, names or nicknames, kinship, title, rank, and occupational terms. It is customary in Thai for speakers to choose between a suite of pronoun options, many of which are contextual and innovative and which often adopt a commonly spoken noun, such as the name of an occupation or a position within a relationship, including titles such as Mother (*mae*) and teacher (*ajarn*), which are adopted as first-person pronouns by speakers in those positions. This perspective extends through social interactions from the most formal to the most informal. Thai

language speakers, therefore, learn to apply the appropriate personal pronouns through the process of socialisation with members of different community contexts, such as family members, friends and colleagues, and so forth (Saisuwan 2016; Uckaradejdumrong 2016). When choosing the appropriate pronominal in each context, these social factors are considered and offer a considerable amount of space for self-reflection and play in the choices made by a speaker to refer to themselves in any given context.

By self-referential terms, particularly pronouns, we mean the first-person referential, which the speaker typically uses to refer to themselves. There are two forms of the self-referential system in the Thai language: overt and zero. "Overt" self-referential in the Thai language can be expressed in personal pronouns, kin terms, personal names, and occupational titles, while "zero forms" means to omit the use of self-referential in some contexts" (Cook 1968; Palakornkul 1972; cited in Saisuwan 2016, 156). It is one of several linguistic aspects used to explore gender in this language. The gendered pronominal system in the Thai language consists of masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral or nonbinary forms. (Saisuwan 2016, 155). It has been widely believed, in both academic and non-academic fields, that in Thai, individuals use self-referential terms that are forthrightly and directly associated with their gendered identity. Under the discursive practice of the Thai language, men use masculine pronouns while women use feminine pronouns. *Kathoey*, however, share the feminine form of pronoun usage with women as they seek to imitate femininity. Despite this, effeminate men's use of these self-referential pronouns is not static (Kongkratool 1996). It instead depends on contexts and situations (Saisuwan 2016, 155-156). Kongkratool (1996) compared first-person pronouns and polite final particles of male, female and effeminate male. He found that effeminate males use male pronouns more than female and neutral pronouns. Also, the percentage of gender-neutral pronoun usage among effeminate male speakers is higher than among male and female speakers. These practices result from Thai society's pejorative perception toward non-normative genders, so they inevitably need to hide their unstandardised identities through the language disguised by conforming to speech norms (Pavadee 2016, 21).

In DTS, various self-referential terms refer to characters in first-person, second-person or third-person terms. Apart from normative self-referential pronoun usage, there is some creation of self-referential terms articulated by *kathoey* characters. These pronouns are not used in mainstream

Thai conversations. The design and use of self-referential terms among non-normative characters demonstrate the rejection of using the normatively expected Thai language. This implies the subversion of the heteronormative and discursive practice of language constructed under a patriarchal system.

As aforementioned, DTS is narrated from the first-person point of view via Gus. Apart from first-person referential pronouns, categorised into the Thai self-referential pronoun system, the narrator uses *toot*, a shortening of the word *tootsie* as a personal pronoun, and most of his narration identifies him as being *kathoey* or an effeminate male.

> Gus: *Hmm, phua ting (.) pho da (.) tae toot mai kae ka (.) tood yang*
> *me phuen*
> Gus: Hmm, I (zero-form) was dumped by my boyfriend. Dad scolded me (zero-form). But I (*toot*) don't care as long as I (*toot*) have friends.

Using *toot* and *kathoey* as personal pronouns suggests the idea of a non-normative character's tendency to reject the identification under the gendered binary system of masculine and feminine. As referential pronouns *toot* and *kathoey* can be read as gender-neutral as they are not pronouns used for either male-female referential categories. Using *toot* and *kathoey* to create a self-referential pronoun distinct from the established normative one exhibits the rejection of embracing gender identity constructed by language's discursive practice. It also brings the idea of identity deconstruction and renegotiation of heteronormative power exercised through gendered language. Additionally, the identification with the pronoun *toot* implies the character's preference to label his own non-normative gender and sexual identity without the concern of not being accepted or opposed by gender intolerance and discrimination in Thailand.

Another first-person pronoun created and articulated in the series is *ni*, which functions similarly to the demonstrative pronoun "this" in English. *Ni* is a non-gender pronoun and is generally used in a non-gender-specific way. Unlike English demonstrative pronouns, *ni* can refer to a person and is typically used in casual conversations. The pronoun *ni* is used in the series to refer to the speaker

instead of using I like the first-person referential pronoun. Interestingly, the use of *ni* suggests the characters' non-employment of gendered and socially expected identities. The self-expression using *ni* further implies the idea of the subversion of the heteronormative linguistic archetype, which confines individuals' gender and sexualities under the male-female dichotomy.

Moreover, DTS introduces a third-person pronoun not generally used in Thai. The pronoun *nang* is created to refer to a person the speaker mentions, regardless of which gender that person is. *Nang* is a feminine title for a married woman, like Mrs. as a female English title. This word is used for formal identification, not for the third person and self-referential terms in the Thai language. In the series, the pronoun *nang* is mainly used to refer to *kathoey* friends in intimate conversations, instead of using *kao,* which is the most common third-person pronoun, as in the following example:

> Natty: *puak mueng, e-Golf pen rai nia (.) ku lap yoo nai rod nang*
> *kor ma pluk ja kor yuem bikini (.) po ku mai hai nang ko weed ja ao*
> *nguang fad ku (.) hmm, e-chang lak (.) raberd bikini ku pang mod.*
> Natty: Guys, what's got into Golf? I (*ku*) was sleeping in the car, and
> he (*nang*) woke me up to borrow my bikini. When I (*ku*) said no, he
> (*nang*) screamed like an elephant on heat. That bitch is going to ruin
> my bikini.

The example is a conversation among close friends, so the distance is intimate, and the power between interlocutors is balanced. Most of the main characters have *kathoey* gender and sexuality and present themselves openly as *kathoey* in public. They prefer to refer to their peers with feminine pronouns and align with femininity. This referential term matches Thai social expectations that kathoey or effeminate males share an exact identification with women and want to be represented as women. However, the pronoun *nang* is not only used as a third-person referential for *kathoey* characters but also to refer to heterosexual male characters.

> Gus: *doo phuchai tee the ball yoo (.) puak nang na kin makkkk (.)*
> *nang klam yai mak*

Gus: Look at those guys who are playing football. They (*puak nang*)

look very hot and yummy they (*nang*) have such huge muscles.

Those *kathoey* characters use the term *nang* in this context to refer to masculine-identified gays with muscular bodies that sexually attract *kathoey*. The term *nang* is not used within the main characters' group but is also used and communicated by the public media and society. The evidence of the publicised usage of the pronoun *nang* is shown in the scene, previously mentioned earlier in the chapter, where Gus is invited as a guest speaker on a talk show entitled *Talk ka Thoey* hosted by a famous *kathoey*. In the show, the protagonist talks about his *kathoey* friends and uses the pronoun *nang* to refer to them. The host and audience in the studio understand the term *nang*, and it is expected that the audience who watch the show via TV can understand this term as well. Therefore, using the created pronoun does not cause any problems in communication, and it seems that this term is tolerated and accepted by the public. Building upon the conceptualisation of heterotopias as spaces that contest and deconstruct normative identities outlined in chapter one, this section has investigated pronoun usage in DTS, exploring how the strategic deployment of non-normative pronouns, such as *toot, nian, nang*, embodies heterotopic linguistic practices, illustrating resistance against conventional, binary gender identifications entrenched in mainstream Thai language. Thus, these pronouns become linguistic tools for constructing alternative queer identities within the series' narrative space.

VII. Final Particles in DTS

More linguistic elements demonstrating the subversion of heteronormative power in DTS, apart from referential pronouns, are presented using final particles. The final particles are located at the end of sentences in Thai. They are not considered content words, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs; they contain no denotative meanings when functioning as final particles. Despite having different forms in terms of vowel sounds, consonant sounds, or intonation sounds, their meanings when performing as the final particles remain. Concerning semantic features, they can be defined as a unit of a word, the sense of which can be either positive or negative.

The final particle in Thai language has many functions. They are commonly used for expressing politeness, giving a statement or making the utterance firmer. Like self-referential pronouns, the

final particle in the Thai language is also a part of speech containing gender specification. Men predominantly use *krap* while women use *kha*. The gendered final particles are not attached to gendered pronouns but parallel. The male self-referential pronoun *phom* is usually paired with the final particle *krap,* while a sentence using female self-referential pronouns *nu* and *dichan* typically ends with the final particle *kha* (Klinthong and Klann 2018; Smith 2005). Since language is a hetero-discursive construction representing the power of heteronormativity, it conveys social and cultural discourses that constitute identity. Individuals express their identities by the way they articulate language. Gender and sexual identity are inevitably labelled when one communicates through gendered language. Hall's theory of representation is, therefore, employed in this section to examine the linguistic strategies of Thai language, specifically by focusing on the use of final particles. Hall asserts that representations are not simply reflections of reality but are discursive practices that create meaning and shape social identities. In the context of Thai language, final particles such as *krap* and *kha* are often used to mark gendered speech.

However, in queer language, these final particles can also serve as queer linguistic strategies to resist heteronormative linguistic traditions, construct non-normative identities, and challenge heteronormativity. Queer people in Thailand implement alternative uses of final particles to express their non-normative identities. For example, *kathoey*, mainly, use final particles to reflect their own self-expression rather than their assigned gender at birth. They habitually use *kha* which is traditionally feminine, to challenge or question the prescribed masculine norms (Brown 2018). Looking through Hall's framework of representation, this discursive practice of using final particles opposite to their assigned gender suggests rejecting heteronormative expectations through the assertion of self-identified gender identities. This linguistic strategy not only challenges the rigid binary gender system but also highlights the fluidity and diversity of gender expressions.

The employment of final particles in DTS shows that non-normative people exploit and manipulate language to negotiate heteronormative power. The final particles are part of speech in Thai linguistic systems, which are attached to gendered discourse. In DTS, the characters use three gendered final particles: masculine, feminine and gender neutral. Even though there is no *creation* of final particles, unlike what occurs with self-referential terms, as we have seen above, the characters' articulation of the final particles is not confined to gendered linguistic pragmatics. That

is to say, the characters perceived as embracing feminine language are inevitably and generally expected by the audience to have feminine final articulation in most communicative contexts because of their effeminacy. They, in contrast, alternatively use all masculine, feminine and gender-neutral particles in different situations and communicative contexts.

The gendered final particles are exploited to reinforce the notion of gender and sexual fluidity. The characters use masculine final particles when they are identifying their gender status as males regardless of their *kathoey* expression. The interchange of gendered final particles to emphasise the fluidity of individuals' identity is exemplified in the scene when Gus, Natty and Golf were trying to catch the male prostitute who had stolen Golf's necklace. The scene is set in a park where male-homosexual prostitution and sexual services illegally operate. While Gus, Natty and Golf were attempting to fight the thief, they are faced with police officers who are in the process of arresting gay prostitutes, and the officers investigate them to check if they are involved with prostitution. To avoid arrest, Golf and Gus disguise themselves as men, not *kathoey* as aforementioned in this chapter. They display their heteronormative masculinity by using male final particles in the conversation with the police officers instead of using feminine particles. This implies the subversion of the heteronormative and discursive practice of the hetero-language paradigm.

Golf: *wa ngai krap kun tumruat*
Golf: what's up (masculine particle), officer?
Police: *ma tam rai kan nia*
Police: what are you doing here?
Golf: *pom ma pakklong krap(.) ma sue dokmai(.)*
Golf: I'm (*pom*) going to Pakklong flower market to buy some flowers.
Police: *sue ror(.) mai dai ma kai a-rai taew ni chai mai(.)*
Police: Are you sure to buy? Not to sell something?
Golf: *Aw(.) kun pood yang ni mai kwam wa ngai(.) kid wa pom ma kai tua ror(.)*

Golf: What? Mind your words. Do you think I (*pom*) am offering sexual services?

Police: *man roi percent mai nia(.)*

Police: Are you hundred percent manly?

Golf: *pom man lan percent krap(.) ni mia pom(.) kao yak dai dokmai(.)*

Golf: I (*pom*) am hundred percent manly. This is my wife. She is looking for flowers(.)

Police: *kun mia kao ror(.)*

Police: Are you his wife?

Natty: *kha*

Natty: Yes (feminine particle)

Police: *laew kun a*

Police: What about you?

Gus: *pom pen puan kao krap(.)*

Gus: I'm (*pom*) his friend (masculine particle).

This is framed as a comedic scene. Golf and Gus are trying to convince the officer that they are manly and not involved with male sexual services. Golf exaggerates his manliness, speaking in a loud voice and acting macho. Whenever he says *krap*, he emphasises his utterance with thunderous and strong voice. In this scene, the particle *krap* is the main cause of convincing the police officers that they are heterosexual males because *kathoey* usually prefer to use *kha*, to express femininity. Later in this scene, the significance of the particle is further highlighted when Golf accidentally drops his expensive Chanel face powder. The powder falls and scatters right in front of everyone. Heartbroken about the ruined powder, Golf stops pretending that he is heterosexual. He tells Gus to stop saying *krap* to the police officers. To the characters, *krap* signifies a heterosexual male identity. It also shows the power in communication in terms of linguistic politeness of superior and subordinate status. Rejecting the use of *krap* implies Golf's challenging of the police's authority and superiority. The conversation in this scene can be seen as follows:

Police: *Aw tok long yang ngai(.) ma kui gnan mai si(.) kathoey chai mai rao(.)*

Police: Oh, how did that fall down? So clarify us again. Are you kathoey?

Gus: *Er..kue..kun tamruat krap*

Gus: Emm.. well..Mr. Officer, sir (masculine particle)

Golf: *krap krap tammai(.) lerk ab man(.)*

Golf: Why are you saying *krap*(.) Stop it (pretending being heterosexual).

Police: *tok long pen kathoey chai mai(.)*

Police: So are you *kathoey*?

Golf: *Er..tammai*

Golf: Yes! So what?

In addition, the omission of the particles shows the exploitation of final particles to subvert heteronormativity. The final particles when articulated, convey the relationship between interlocutors and the formality of the conversation.

However, Gus, the protagonist, is portrayed in the series as someone whose effeminacy is prohibited by his father, who disagrees with non-normative gender and sexuality. Gus's father represents the patriarchal hierarchy in the family and society. He is the most powerful and authoritative figure that everyone in the family needs to respect. However, his power and hegemony are challenged by Gus, who represents non-normative gender and sexuality. Gus intentionally omits the polite final particles when he has conversations with his father, but he articulates these polite particles when verbally interacting with his mother and with other characters with more hierarchy and seniority. This is a restatement, a subtle reinforcement that final particles, one of the linguistic elements, are being used as a great tool to challenge the power of heteronormativity. This analysis has demonstrated that the linguistic creativity in DTS itself does not conform to heteronormative linguistic norms. Collectively, the study of language usage in DTS is designed to show that language plays a crucial role in challenging heteronormativity in the series and more broadly, across Thai society. It manifests the notion of the power of language; since language does not only serve but also destabilise power. Hence, it can be said that DTS allows a space assisting people of non-normative gender and sexuality to construct their power

and identities out of heteronormative domination. At the same time, the confinement under a male-female dichotomous system is still perpetuated in society. Hence, connecting again with Chapter One's theoretical exploration of heterotopia as subversive space, this section has analysed the characters' utilisation of Thai final particles, demonstrating how the selective, unconventional use or intentional omission of final particles by characters in DTS represents an act of linguistic defiance. These practices effectively produce alternative spaces within discourse permitting heterotopic disruption to normative cultural and linguistic hierarchies.

VIII. Lesbian Invisibility in Queer Spaces

While in the earlier sections of this chapter I have highlighted how linguistic strategies in DTS effectively create heterotopic spaces to contest heteronormativity, this section critically revisits the notion, outlined in chapter one, that heterotopias can also reveal underlying tensions and limitations within subversive spaces. Focusing on the lesbian character Natty, I now turn to critique how her limited linguistic and narrative representation in DTS restricts the potential of heterotopia as fully inclusive spaces. Thus, it calls attention to how heterotopic strategies themselves may inadvertently replicate aspects of heteronormativity.

As this chapter has so far argued, *Diary of Tootsies* embraces the subversion of heteronormativity through its use of queer language in which the creation of lexical connotations, pronouns and final particles is utilised to deconstruct discursive assigned identities. The operation of language strategies enables the reconstruction of non-normative gender and sexuality as a rejection of society's assigned identities. Despite the subversive potential that these approaches enable, it is necessary to interrogate the scope and limitations of such linguistic subversions in the series as linguistic strategies do not necessarily achieve the goal of resisting the heteronormative hegemonic system. This is particularly the case concerning characters who are not afforded the same level of attention as their *kathoey* counterparts. While dismantling heteronormative language and the deconstruction of non-normative genders in relation to *kathoey* characters are pivotal in the series, the lesbian character, Natty, is still underrepresented. Unlike the way this chapter has read the series' treatment of the *kathoey* characters, this section will now explore the one lesbian character, arguing that her representation and visibility are both peripheral. Natty is featured but often

marginalised in the broader narrative and linguistic strategies that the series employs to subvert heteronormativity.

While DTS encounters heteronormative norms through its innovative use of language for the *kathoey* characters, the linguistic markers used to identify and describe Natty are more conventional and conform more closely to the normative language system, limiting any chance for the show to depict her negotiations of identity in the same way that it does for *kathoey* characters. The lexical choices associated with Natty often fall within the standard paradigms of femininity and do not venture into subversive non-normativity, unlike the queer language applied to *kathoey* characters. In DTS, Natty is depicted as a *dee,* a term for a lesbian who is exclusively sexually attracted to lesbian women with masculine gender expression called *toms*. Sinnott (2004) has proposed the use of the Thai lesbian terminology, noting that *tom* and *dee* are etymologically developed from the Anglophone words, "tomboy" and "lady" (or *lay-dee* when transliterated into Thai). Sinnott describes *tom-dee* relationships as female same-sex relationship that "share similarities with local traditions in which masculinity and female same-sex sexuality have been recognised and practiced" (47). Natty's participation in such relationships is explicitly presented in these terms in the series' first introduction of the character:

> Gus: *Natty, sa ma chik kon sud tai cha ni deaw nai klum (.) pretty*
> *ngoen muen tik am lang aw tao tai ei! tai tao pheur pai hai thueng*
> *ra dab pretty ngoen lan lae som kuan ja dai ngan presenter kluer*
> *Iodine proh kwan er kan sud(.) tanad len don tri Thai doi chapho*
> *ching chab chob featuring kab tom ha.*
>
> Gus: Natty, the last member, the only one real girl in our group. She's
> a second-rate booth babe who exploits her breasts, Oops! does her
> best to reach the level of Millionaire booth babe. She deserves to get
> a job as a presenter for iodised salt because of her extreme dumb.
> She is really good at dating and having sex, but with *toms* only.

Gus's voice-over portrays Natty in a conventional way that reflects deeply rooted patriarchal ideology. She is depicted as a superficial and intellectually lacking woman who exists within a

space marked by the objectification of the male gaze. The description of Natty perpetuates and amplifies the male-dominated discursive mindset that women exist solely for the visual and sexual consumption of men, even within the queer context of her friendship group.

Gus's narrative about Natty is consistent with patriarchal traditions that denigrate women's intelligence and value, thereby reinforcing rather than disrupting traditional gender roles and expectations. In addition, the notion of Natty as a *dee*, stemming as it does from Thai lesbian terminology, is inserted in a narrative that employs heteronormative representations of lesbian characters as confined under traditional dichotomous relationships. Although Sinnott's work suggests that the *tom-dee* terminology should ideally transcend its etymological roots to challenge heteronormative paradigms, Natty's characterisation cannot escape its confinement. Instead, it maintains a sense of normativity and conformity, even in contexts that purport to challenge them. Not only does Gus's narrative show how problematic the series' portrayals of a lesbian character is, but Kim's dialogue also reinforces the suppression of Natty.

> *Kim: nia e naed kor pueng ma kui ruang tam nom mai(.) ku da man*
> *pai a na wa hai aw ngoen tee ja tam nom nia pai sue ahan talay ma*
> *kin hai hai er kon ter(.)*
> Kim: Natty has just mentioned to me about getting a boob job, but I
> think she would be better off spending her money on seafood to give
> herself some iodine to stop her being such a retard.

Kim's words not only convey a judgment on Natty's interest in her own body but also comment on her lack of intelligence by suggesting she should focus the spending on something sensible like iodised seafood as a means to prevent the cognitive and motor consequences of iodine deficiency, denoted in Gus's speech by what is in Thai a common lightly pejorative term for such conditions. Despite the comedic tone here, Gus's and Kim's pejorative comments about Natty function as a discursive apparatus that sustains, rather than subverts, the male-centric view of women as lacking in depth or intelligence. Crucially, some of the linguistic elements that these characters play with in self-reference and self-representation show their more extended history of misogynistic deployment when coming from the mouths of these characters, with Gus using the informal and

often demeaning feminine honorific *e* to introduce Natty's name. In queer male and *kathoey* speech, this feature is commonly used to expand the lexical range of gender for the speaker, paralleling the use of such linguistic features between women, but when applied by Gus and Kim to Natty serve more to emphasise, define and ascribe qualities to her femininity. This accentuates the series' limitations in offering a counter-narrative to heteronormative and patriarchal constructions. Despite its subversive approach to linguistic strategies for its *kathoey* characters, DTS appears to remain to conventional paradigms regarding lesbian representation, thereby restricting its full disruptive potential.

IX. Conclusion: the Paradoxical Landscape of Linguistic Subversion

By drawing upon the account of stereotypical media portrayals of kathoey outlined in chapter two, in this chapter I have demonstrated how DTS actively challenges these traditional depictions. By utilising creative linguistic and visual strategies, DTS contributes significantly to a reconfiguration of societal perceptions of queer identities within contemporary Thai culture. Applying Hall's framework of language and representation shows that DTS employs queer linguistic strategies to craft complicated identities for its *kathoey* characters. These characters actively engage in identity reconstruction that diverges from traditional Thai norms through the manipulation of lexical connotations, the use of pronouns, and the strategic insertion of final particles. In doing so, they create what can be termed a "linguistic heterotopia," a space where non-normative identities are both conceivable and enactable. However, this linguistic heterotopia is partial and incomplete. The series demonstrates the imbalance of subversive representation of non-normative characters, particularly concerning its portrayal of the lesbian character, Natty. Unlike her *kathoey* counterparts, Natty is subjected to linguistic and narrative strategies perpetuating the patriarchal and heteronormative system. Her marginalisation and the pejorative language used to describe her serve to limit the series' full disruptive potential. Thus, while DTS represents an intriguing case study for the subversive power of language in challenging normative gender constructs within Thai culture, it also exposes the limitations of its linguistic strategies, which cannot be applied to all non-normative characters. *Diary of Tootsies* presents a paradoxical landscape of linguistic subversion and reinforcement of heteronormative ideologies. Connecting back explicitly to Chapter One's concept of heterotopia as sites simultaneously subversive yet paradoxical, we can

see that the analysis of linguistic heterotopias in DTS provides a critical lens for understanding broader processes of identity formation and resistance within Thai queer media.

In the forthcoming chapter, the focus will shift to examining didactic elements as a means of subverting heteronormativity in the series *Gay OK Bangkok*, focusing on the educational or instructive facets embedded within the series' narratives. This chapter will explore how *Gay OK Bangkok* utilises didactic elements not merely as informational tools but as transformative mechanisms to construct non-normative identities as well as to challenge societal norms and ideologies. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Foucault's heterotopia, like in the previous chapters, this analysis will investigate how these didactic elements of the series might contribute to the heterotopic space whereby the non-normative gender and sexuality can potentially be celebrated at both individual and community levels.

Chapter Six: Pedagogical Narratives in *Gay OK Bangkok*

I. Introduction

As shown in previous chapters, the representation of queer characters as having non-normative genders and sexualities in the studied series illustrates the subversion of heteronormativity and the power that this might display. Each series shares the common elements and functions of sabotaging the hegemonic hetero-power by representing non-normative characters and their struggles against the dichotomous male-female-dominated society. DTS is most subversive in its linguistic inventiveness via the invention of language and its connotative meanings that deviate from the traditional definitions given and used by the heteronormative system. Linguistic creativity allows the reconstruction and renegotiation of the non-normative gender and sexual identities and the rejection of identities constructed by the dichotomous male-female system. The characters in DTS deliberately and creatively expand their vocabularies to convey their meaning in their context and to communicate within their gay community. This linguistic creativity renegotiates non-normative identities and their power under heteronormative suppression and allows fluidity and flexibility in gender and sexual construction and expression. The characters in the series demonstrate to the audience that genders and sexualities are separate and independent from each other. Importantly, no masculine and feminine binary exists for relationships and sexual practice. Eradicating this specific gender and sexuality polarity explicitly shows the refusal of the heteronormative and discursive construction of identities. Second, like the subversion of heteronormative power in the series MIR is demonstrated through the representation of the characters' journeys to adulthood in which they are required to construct their gender and sexual identities. The study of MIR concludes with the development of characters' identities, which, although they have gone from normative to non-normative genders and sexualities, has not progressed in a linear and chronological fashion; they alternate back and forth from hetero-gendered and sexual identities to non-hetero. The conflicts between their suppressed ideologies, including their social and parental expectations, and their own preferences cause them to keep changing their sexualities through the story. I would consider these alternations as representing a queered progress that is non-linear and always in flux. As with the other series dealing with sexual orientation and gender identity, this chapter investigates the idea of subversion against heteronormativity and its discursive norms through the series *Gay OK Bangkok* (GOB). Based on the specific elements of the series, I propose that GOB be identified as a didactic series to educate the audience about queer cultures and issues. In

addition, the fact that all actors in GOB are gay in real life makes GOB distinct from other non-normative series in which the characters embrace both hetero- and non-hetero- sexualities.

Building on the historical trajectory of queer media in Thailand as discussed in Chapter 2, this chapter focuses on the didactic function of *Gay OK Bangkok* (GOB), a series that marks a significant shift in the representation of queer identities within digital media spaces. Unlike earlier representations that often relied on comedic caricatures, moral cautionary tales, or peripheral queer characters, GOB presents a subtle and realistic portrayal of queer lives. This change in representation brings transformation in the Thai mediascape, allowing more platforms such as YouTube and Line TV enabled content creators to undermine traditional censorship and directly engage with queer audiences. The chapter will analyse GOB's unique role in Thai queer media by examining its didactic elements, narrative structure, and impact on public discourse about queer identities and health issues. *Gay OK Bangkok* first streamed in January-March 2016, and March-April, 2017, on TestBKK Youtube Official and Line TV. There are twelve episodes in total, divided into five episodes in the first season and seven episodes in the second season. The first season consisted of episodes lasting 30 minutes, while the second aired from March 19th, 2017, to April 30th, 2017, on Sundays at 8 m. with each episode lasting 45 minutes. This series offers a realistic portrayal of the lives of a community of gay people and men who have sex with men (MSM) in Bangkok, and it does this while also weaving in content about health-related issues, including HIV testing and treatment. However, issues like non-normative genders and sexualities are still not satisfactorily accessible in Thai TV programmes. As argued above, despite an attempt to tolerate queer culture in Thai media, heteronormative TV programming has predominantly centred hetero-gendered and sexual characters and storylines while often marginalising non-normative components. Knowledge and understanding of queer cultures, including gender and sexualities, have been suppressed and distorted as traditional TV programmes primarily disseminate heteronormative discourses.

This chapter studies GOB and its elements, including the plot portraying the characters as representations and visual representations, to argue that the series, like DTS, MIR and MDS, functions as heterotopia. The chapter will pursue this argument by showing that elements contained in GOB subvert heteronormativity and allow non-normative genders and sexualities to

renegotiate their identities and powers. Even though GOB was streamed on online channels, not television broadcasting which is considered as mass media, the series has successfully gained popularity, as testified by its millions of views on YouTube Channel TestBKK Official.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Thai mainstream media has historically suppressed queer representations, due to government-imposed heteronormative norms, usually depicting queer identities through comedic stereotypes or as tragic figures. This governmental stigmatisation was perpetuated through direct censorship, restrictive broadcasting policies, and the socio-political climate regulating non-heteronormative content in traditional and mainstream media. Nevertheless, online platform like Line TV enabled GOB to bypass these traditional television restrictions, allowing for a more authentic and unfiltered portrayal of queer experiences. In addition, being streamed online as an alternative platform, the series was able to reach audiences who were previously underserved by mainstream media, providing a space for critical queer narratives that challenges heteronormative representations in Thai media. The series' success can be witnessed by the statistics of programme viewers studied by Line TV. There are three periods of primetime with the highest number of viewers respectively: the first primetime period is 3 -6 pm; the second primetime is 8-10 pm; and the third primetime is 12-2 pm. Moreover, the statistics reveal that programmes streamed on Friday, Saturday and Sunday have high numbers of viewers. Both seasons of GOB are aired on Sunday at 8 pm, which can be considered as primetime.

GOB offers insight into the sexualities and genders of a gay community in an urban area where patriarchal ideologies and norms do not suppress people with non-normative sexualities and genders. The series focuses on sexual engagement and relationships between gay people. Moreover, the didactic feature of GOB uniquely distinguishes it from other series with non-normative sexual and gender content. Chapter 2 explored how Thai media historically framed HIV/AIDS as a "gay disease," reinforcing societal stigma and deepening discrimination against individuals with non-heteronormative identities. During the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream media perpetuated the notion that HIV/AIDS inherently linked to male homosexuality, positioning gay men as disease vectors and reinforcing moral panic around same-sex intimacies. This discourse led to widespread misconceptions, institutional discrimination, and exclusion of HIV-positive individuals from workplaces and social settings. GOB actively counters these discursive

perceptions by integrating public health education within its narrative, declining earlier pathologising discourses. The series not only normalises conversations about HIV prevention and treatment but also offers positive and realistic portrayals of serodiscordant relationships, thereby working to deconstruct the stigma embedded in Thai media narratives over the past four decades. The series' extra scenes in which the characters educate the audience about HIV prevention and safe sex by using PrEP medicine (pre-exposure prophylaxis) appear at the end of every single episode. The series conveys severe social issues as messages to the audience by having individual characters face conflicts concerning their non-normative sexual and gender identities. Since the series significantly treats problems related to HIV, relationship trials, online dating and serodiscordant relationships among members in gay communities, I advocate considering GOB as a didactic series providing social education. Henderson asserts with television soap opera and education that it "television soap opera has always played a part in social education, as has been observed elsewhere (notably developing countries, where the soap opera has been used explicitly for social education purposes) […] and the British soap opera has from time to time been developed to modify public behaviour (particularly with health issues)" (2007, 12). GOB supports Henderson's assertion because of its campaign to educate and promote awareness of HIV testing and prevention by using PrEP The distinction between GOB and other series with focal non-normative genders and sexualities is that GOB was initiated as a project to educate men who have sex with men, particularly gay men, about HIV-related issues. While other gay series focuses on a single romantic relationship between coupled protagonists, GOB pays closer more attention to issues gay people detect in their lives, such as problems of work and businesses, serodiscordant intimate relationships, HIV treatment and online dating with one-night stands (Benjarong 2019, 415).

Similar to other BL series embracing characters with non-normative genders and sexualities, GOB tells stories about the lives of diverse gay people living in an urban area. However, GOB itself claims that the series is distinct because of its realistic portrayals of gay men who are faced with problems and suppressions caused by the different levels of institutions such as family, workplace and society. While other series focus on romantic relationships between characters with non-normative gender and sexual identities as their main plots, GOB subtly introduces the ideas of

relationship trials, including the pleasure, tribulations and melancholy of being gay in an urban society through characters who are friends in the gay community.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the media landscape in Thailand has historically privileged representations of cisgender gay men while marginalising other non-normative identities such as lesbian, transgender, and non-binary identities. This imbalance in representations of queer identities can be traced back to mainstream media's portrayal of queer identities as predominantly male-centred, influenced by both Western and Thai heteronormative structures that have historically defined queerness through the lens of masculinity. While *GOB* represents a breakthrough in gay male representation by centring the lived experiences of urban gay men, it continues this pattern by largely excluding other queer identities. The absence of lesbian, transgender, and non-binary characters in the series reinforces the longstanding limitations of Thai media's queer narratives, which merely pay attention to cis-male homosexuality. Despite its limitations in representing the full spectrum of queer identities, GOB remains a significant milestone in Thai queer media. Its creators, Tidakorn Pookaothong and Noppharnach Chaiwimol, contemplated the series not only as a realistic portrayal of gay men's lives but also as a didactic tool to raise awareness about crucial issues such as HIV prevention and treatment. Their approach reflects a conscious effort to challenge past misrepresentations of queer identities in Thai media, even as the series continues to prioritise cis-male narratives over broader queer inclusivity. Tidakorn Pookaothong and Noppharnach Chaiwimol, directors of GOB, have stated that the series and its plotlines were motivated by their simple desire to produce a good gay series with the didactic intention to educate the audience about HIV testing and treatment. Tidakorn and Noppharnach became determined to make GOB as a ground-breaking step for the representation of gay people in Thailand by allowing the audience to explore the real-life aspects of gay people and community, stating that:

> Previously, gay people were represented in the media as either caricature or tragedy, like the parents have an only son and arrange a heterosexual marriage for him, leading to tragedy and disappointment. In fact, the lives of gay people like us are enjoyable as they embrace both devilish and wonderful aspects. We were then drawn to the idea

> why couldn't we give a realist representation of gay lives, without judging gay people as being pathetic, doomed in love or through caricatures such as chasing after men all the time. Therefore, we were inspired to tell the society of our lives as they really are. Whether they are good or bad, we would love to tell you about them. (Benjarong 2019, 415, Thai original, English translation mine)

GOB opposes stereotypes of gay people. The series' plotlines are taken from the screenwriters' experiences and circumstances including their attempts to make the series represent social reality. We can witness this in the following interview:

> We started to compose the series' plotlines by learning about the lives of people around us. It turns out that the lives of all the gay people we talked to have various aspects and some parts are unexpected that we were surprised to know […] and some are really fantasy. Since gay lives are distinct and individual, we tried to break the stereotype of gay people and to cover all individual aspects of gay identity [ ] (Attitudethai 2016; cited in Tirapalika 2018, 414-415; Thai original, translated mine)

The interview suggests that the production team pays attention to individuality and diversity, which destabilise the stereotypical and prejudiced views toward gay identity. The concept of GOB that "everyone is a drama queen" also further reinforces that the series is created to pinpoint the idea of diversity and individuality. GOB goes viral in social media with its gimmick that the characters are introduced to the audiences with their names, ages, occupations, relationship status, preferred sex positions and level of drama queen which is compared to the celebrities. Inspired by the characters in GOB, people even labelled themselves with celebrities. This style of introducing characters in the series inspired people to describe and label themselves in social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

II. Situating *Gay OK Bangkok* in Thai Queer Media Discourse

Gay OK Bangkok can thus be viewed as a ground-breaking innovation in Thai queer media, which challenges both the mainstream heterosexual TV programming and the commercially popular Boys' Love genre. Contrary to other Thai television shows that have had limited and often stereotyped representations of queer characters, the series was accurate and diverse in its depiction of modern gay life in Bangkok. In particular, the program deals with such topics as sexual health, polyamory, queerness, and the emotional aspect of relationships, thus questioning many norms that have dominated Thai queer media representation. This work has shown that *Gay OK Bangkok* functions not only as entertainment but also has an instructive purpose. The series' HIV awareness, PrEP promotion, and references to unconventional relationship paradigms locate the series within a queer didactic television framework (Gray 2005). However, this commitment to education also calls into question the expectations placed upon queer media whether queer stories must always have a didactic purpose, or can queer media consumerism simply be pleasurable. Although BL dramas have effectively introduced queer representation into popular culture, they have only been able to do so in the ways that do not challenge the dominant heteronormative narrative (Baudinette 2023). *Gay OK Bangkok*, on the other hand, does not attempt this erasure and renegotiation of identity, instead offering a readership a raw and realistic view of queerness as asexual existence that has its moments of happiness and hardship.

The position of the series as a counterpoint to BL also raises concerns regarding the representation and commodification of Thai queer media. Although BL has corporate sponsorship, worldwide distribution, and an international fan base, *Gay OK Bangkok* has been a low-profile show because of its direct depiction of queer themes and its target market. This disparity demonstrates that economic and ideological structures are still prevalent in the construction of queer narratives in Thailand. Thus, while BL helps to normalise same-sex relationships and bring them into the spotlight, its absence of references to queer struggles, legal issues, or intersected identities proves that visibility is not enough (Sinnott 2012). GOB shows that the representation of gays and other marginalised groups in media and popular culture without critically questioning the existing paradigm sustains the oppression rather than trying to subvert it. Moreover, the themes of multiple modes of masculinity, affection, and the portrayal of polyamorous relationships place the series within discursive discussions of queer media and relations (Halberstam 2005; Freeman 2010). In

portraying queerness as fluid, constantly shifting, and highly individualistic, *Gay OK Bangkok* escapes the tyranny of narrative reductionism typical for the representation of queer experience in Thailand, which tends to categorise and package queer identities as easily digestible products. By not embracing an idealized, monogamous, and singular model of queerness, the series disrupts both heteronormativity and homonormativity prevalent in Thai media and popular culture.

Nevertheless, *Gay OK Bangkok* has its shortcomings as well. As discussed earlier here, the show is about the lives of urban and middle-class, cisgender gay men, so it can be argued that it does not represent all queer people in Thailand. The lack of lesbians, trans people, and working-class queer representation questions whose queerness is represented. This is a common trend in Thai queer media and highlights the fact that only some kinds of queer identities are allowed to be recognized and even celebrated (Jackson 2011). To fill these voids, it is necessary to not only diversify representation but also broaden the depiction of queer narratives and take into account intersectionality and dynamics of oppression within the queer communities. Looking ahead, the experiences depicted in GOB show that Thailand could benefit from a queer media that encompasses not only the commercial viability of BL but the activist work of GOB as well. As for the BL dramas, they have made queer experiences more visible but there is a desire for more diverse, progressive, and inclusive representations of gay characters. In this chapter I argue that, while GOB provides a much-needed counterpoint to BL, it also prompts significant questions about the future of Thai queer media. Conclusion discusses necessary developments and controversies in relation to GOB as a turning point for queer media representation.

GOB can consequently be viewed both as a marker of Thai queer media development and as a queer media provocation. It not only represents queer existence in all its multiplicity but also criticizes the constraints of mainstream LGBTQ+ imagery. In so doing, the series avoids the seemingly perfect world of BL and offers a more realistic portrayal of queer people's lives while showing that queer media has the potential to challenge, teach, and influence. But its lack of commercial break through and exclusion of some queer narratives makes it clear that representation is not enough; representation needs to be supported by change on the social and economic levels. These lessons of GOB are pertinent as Thai queer media keeps on growing and

developing and it will be very important in defining the future of the queer community and its representation in Thailand.

III. GOB Bringing Non-normative Gender and Sexuality Education into the Spotlight

It has been four decades since Thailand first introduced a sex education curriculum. The Thai Ministry of Education defines sexuality education as a "process of learning about sexual matters including the development of body and mind; functioning of bodily anatomy; health care and hygiene; sexual attitudes, values, relationships and behaviours; social and cultural dimensions that affect sexual lifestyle; being processes of developing knowledge, thoughts, attitudes, emotions and skills that are necessary for an individual and that assist an individual in leading a happy and safe sexual life and in developing and maintaining responsible and balanced relationships with others" (Student Protection Centre 2015a, 2). Introducing sex and gender education in Thailand involves increasing sexual and reproductive health, physical education and gender roles. The more recent curriculum primarily aims to acknowledge students' positive representation of diversity in genders and sexualities (UNESCO Bangkok 2019). Hence, improvements to the new curriculum have been aimed at reducing and preventing violence in schools and discrimination concerning sexuality and gender expression.

However, despite improvements to the sex education curriculum, there has been a lack of comprehensive sex and gender education in Thailand. This has been an ongoing subject of discourse for many years. Although providing comprehensive sex and gender education in Thailand has been a constant subject of discourse for many years, most Thai academic institutions' curricula regarding sex and gender education remain insufficient. One of the most significant obstacles that sex and gender education in Thailand faces is the insufficiency of comprehensive information available to students. Sexual orientation, including gender and the construction of gender identities, is not asserted as a part of a topic in academic provision. Hence, Thai students are discouraged from accessing sexual content as they feel uncomfortable or embarrassed discussing sex and gender. They are not provided with adequate sex and gender education, assisting them to make informed decisions about their lives and bodies.

Many schools teach about sexuality by focusing on the negative and derogatory negative consequences of sex and neglect to acknowledge positive aspects or promote students' analytic

and critical-thinking skills related to sexuality. This occurs particularly when non-normative people attempt to educate themselves about their sexual and gender identities. There is a limitation to how people with non-normative genders and sexualities can educate themselves regarding their genders and sexualities. With the social norms and doctrines, gay culture is restricted and limited in Thai society. Sexual orientation, including gender and sexual identity construction, is not a part of educational provision. Sex issues have been forbidden and considered taboo in classroom teaching. Hence, Thai students are discouraged from accessing sexual content. Topics related to teenage pregnancy prevention, sexual anatomy and development are the main focus, while issues on non-normative gender and sexual identities and culture, sexual diversity, safe sex and HIV prevention for same-sex relationships are ignored in schools' educational provisions. In addition, the traditional and mainstream media offers explicit evidence that sex and gender education is excluded from what is considered as a socially normative public topic. Due to religious doctrine and social belief, talking about sex is considered not proper for Thai people. There is a vivid boundary between private and public spaces for sex-related conversations in personal areas. Hence, the accessibility of sex and gender education is confined and limited.

It is not only from an academic perspective that sex and gender education face challenges: among the biggest is the lack of comprehensive and informative media available to teachers and students. There is a limited number of television programs offering educational contents on non-normative genders and sexualities. The traditional and mainstream media is explicit evidence showing that sex and gender education is excluded from what is considered as a socially acceptable public topic. There is a vivid boundary between private and public spaces for sex-related conversations that they are kept in private space. Hence, the accessibility of sex and gender education is confined and limited. Most people are left to rely on outdated or biased sources, which can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misconceptions.

Since there have been no direct channels for more information about gender and sexualities, sexual orientation and identities due to the conservative suppression in Thai ideologies, people with non-normative gender and sexual identities in Thailand have had to educate themselves. Their education and knowledge about their sexual orientation and identities have been limited. To reinforce the idea about the suppression of non-normative gender and sexual education, I would

like to share my own experience that I myself was educated on my sexual orientation and gender identity on my own. Living in a conservative culture, it was barely possible to find a channel to learn about gender and sex education. Hence, I had to sort out how to express my non-normative gender and sexual identities by researching minimal sources available. This is because sex and gender education sources are restricted by conservative social ideologies and religious doctrine. There have subsequently been demands for more media channels covering subjects regarding non-normative sex and gender education and serving as a potent tool for informing and enlightening audiences in Thailand.

Like the other series analysed in this thesis, GOB indicates the idea of the subversion of heteronormative discourses. This subversion and destabilisation of hegemonic heteronormativity operate by representing the series' protagonists and their no-normative lives and identities. The characters face conflicts of social norms and expectations, marginalising and suppressing their non-normative identities. However, the significant distinction between other series and GOB is that the latter is produced for educational purposes, functioning as a didactic series. GOB does not only educate the audience about HIV transmission and prevention but also issues concerning living gay lives in an urban area like Bangkok. The fact that the educational purpose of GOB is such an important element of its production confirms Henderson's statement that television "has always played a part in social education […] to modify public behaviour particularly concerning health issues" Henderson 2007, 12).

GOB shows the potential for queer TV programs to play a role in educating audiences about non-normative genders and sexualities in Thailand. Furthermore, embracing didactic content as the principal feature of GOB, the series provides educational content by presenting accurate and inclusive information about health issues and HIV prevention. GOB helps to increase awareness and understanding among viewers who may not have access to traditional television channels or streaming services. GOB provides education regarding gender and sexuality, whereas other series have hidden the gender and sexuality issues considered taboo in Thai culture and society due to social prejudices. These prejudices urge us to challenge the interpretations of non-binary sexual implications. They also stimulate us to search for the sources that affect such ways of thought in Thai society. I argue that GOB functions as a heterotopia by explicitly educating the audience on

issues about same-sex relationships, gay cultures and rejection of heteronormative assigned ideologies and norms. GOB presents subversive potential through elasticity and flexibility of gender and sexuality expression and roles. The characters reject stereotypical and normalised ideas about homosexual lives and practices, represented through Thai society's heteronormative and discursive lens. The series reconstructs the representation of gay people in Bangkok, as not conforming to the systems established by heteronormativity, such as capitalism, hierarchy and masculine-feminine dichotomy.

There are two key reasons why GOB might be considered a pioneering televisual artefact. As well as being a narrative exploration of non-normative identities, it also becomes an educational platform to call attention to the hegemonic heteronormativity and challenge it. Whereas many series simply represent GOB as an active, didactic part of the conversation, dedicates lots of time to education on topics like how HIV is passed and prevented and how to live life as a gay person in a city like Bangkok. Through this multifaceted approach, GOB puts up a great challenge to heteronormativity. Rather than being an indifferent teaching tool, this didacticism is an instrumental agent for the change of society. The transition of GOB's didacticism to its educational attributes is depicted through a comprehensive approach to health, especially HIV prevention. The series differs from mainstream media in the sense that it provides scientifically accurate, culturally sensitive information on topics of Thai culture that would otherwise be taboo. With that, GOB becomes a central component of a supplement to traditional information channels that gives audiences that would otherwise be separated from the knowledge access to it. GOB is an educational platform and a narrative depiction of non-normative identities. However, it is different from a series that only represents it because it covers all the complex issues, such as HIV prevention. Moreover, it concentrates on health education and complements other health information channels, especially for marginalised audiences.

GOB disrupts heteronormative norms through its narrative and educational content and invites the viewers to rethink the established norms. It uses education as performative resistance in broader discussions involving the fluidity and elasticity of gender and sexual identities. This series proactively disseminates fact-based and accurate information on urgent issues such as HIV prevention. It functions as a dual instrument, distinguishing it as a progressive way of destabilising

heteronormative frameworks, moving it from a platform that tells stories to an instrument that changes society. Sited in the urban context of Bangkok, the series is a detailed account of a group of gay men: Arm, Pom, Nut, Aof, and Big. Unlike series limited to representational aims, GOB is a supplement to traditional media channels that provide comprehensive educational content to audiences who are particularly marginalised. By successfully blurring the lines between narrative and educational content, GOB makes an effort to confront heteronormative paradigms and endeavours to re-evaluate the status quo of societal norms. The chapter posits that GOB's educational focus acts as performative resistance, contributing to broader dialogues on the fluidity and elasticity of gender and sexual identities.

IV. Queer Didactic TV

I would like to begin this section by reinforcing what scholars have proposed about TV programmes, for instance, the genres of soap opera and reality TV, to present the audience with knowledgeable and informative content. (Henderson 2007; Hill 2005). In "The Soap as Social Education," Henderson explains that television soap opera is a tool to educate the audience about serious social issues. Henderson's most instructive example of a television programme doing this is an African soap opera, Soul City, which was created to explore prevalent social problems such as HIV and AIDS. (Henderson 2007, 18). Similarly, in Hill's chapter "The Idea of Learning," he discusses reality TV embracing didactic elements that allow the audience "learning opportunities […] to learn from the advice given in the programmes but may choose not to take up or act on such advice" (Hill 2005, 79). Both Hill and Henderson note that TV programmes can significantly educate the audience.

Nevertheless, didactic queer TV programmes in Thailand and worldwide have made significant strides in subverting heteronormativity. Such queer didactic shows challenge traditional gender and sexual norms and enlighten queer cultures by fostering discussions about diversity in non-normative identities and relationships. Embracing didactic elements, queer TV programs offer to normalise non-heteronormative identities and relationships subjugated by hetero media. The audience, in addition, is given accessibility to reflect on themselves; they acknowledge the diversity and can construct their own identities. Queer TV programmes with didactic qualities and

elements usually allow the audience to learn and acquire information about queer lives and communities that would otherwise be inaccessible.

The inclusion of didactic elements in GOB can be said to challenge and subvert heteronormativity. By educating audiences about the realities and struggles gay people and communities have faced, GOB contributes to a significant shift towards acceptance, understanding, and even celebrating queer cultures. The audience assimilates queer cultures with diverse identities into their perception. Not only do these audiences become more aware of the visibility and existence of non-normative contents and characters, but they also attain a better understanding of the problems facing them and the potential of community to solve them. Furthermore, GOB is purposefully produced to educate the audience on issues of non-heterosexuality, especially sexual practices. By presenting didactic elements, GOB prompts the audience to engage in perceiving themselves in the content-based issues of the series. This is because the series deliberately delivers the messages to male gay people, who are the series' targeted audience. The instruction is explicitly not delivered to heterosexual audience but to the gay people and community, whereby sexual trial and tribulations, including serodiscordant relationships, potentially occur.

The following sections will closely investigate *Gay Ok Bangkok*'s subversion of heteronormativity and its power. The focal analysis is how the GOB has didactic characteristics as crucial elements to function as heteronormative destabilisation. The analysis of the didactics of the series is divided into three significant subversions. The first didactic subversion is illustrated through the direct communication from the actors of the cities to the audience. The actors practise this communication in educating the audience about HIV issues and prevention. Including didactic elements in GOB can be said to challenge and subvert the dominant discourse of heteronormativity in which societal ideologies and prejudices stigmatise non-normative genders and sexualities. In most queer series, an effective way of educating the audience about the queer subculture, non-normative genders, and sexualities are the invisibility queer characters presented in the stories. By contrast, GOB offers the audience more insight and substantial knowledge via the didactic elements, which are a dedicated part of the series.

In most episodes, there are small sections unrelated to the story in which actors communicate directly with the audience. Those actors share their own personal stories related to their sexual

practices and offer instructions and advice about preventing HIV and other infectious diseases. The 5 to 10-minute sections in each episode are dedicated to providing knowledge about how gay people can have safe sexual practices and HIV prevention. The education sections are detached from the storylines. The actors who play the characters reveal their non-normative gender and sexual identities as gay people. They also share information about preventing HIV in sexual activity, including encouraging the audience to conduct safe sex and prevent HIV. The distinction in the form of didacticism engaged in by GOB and other series is that GOB not only inserts non-normative, gender and sex education in the series portrayals and character representations, but it also delivers a direct message to the audience about the health issues of gay people.

While heterosexual or non-heterosexual actors can be cast as queer characters in other non-normative series, the characters in the GOB series are purposefully played by gay people. As the series was produced as a collaboration between the production company and TestBKK, an organisation working for gay people, and aimed to acknowledge and create awareness of HIV issues in the gay male community, it specifically sought gay actors to play the gay characters. The actors can relate themselves as embracing the characters' experiences and problems. They then educated the audience the HIV issues and prevention based on their own real-life experience: The following offers a sample of didactic messages the actors convey to educate the audience:

> Have you heard of PrEP? Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis is a single pill taken once a day that you can take to protect yourself from HIV infection. Get tested and get PrEP-it works. Find out more about PrEP by visiting www.TestBKK.org

> Did you know that one in four gay men living in Bangkok has HIV and many don't know their status which means they cannot get access to treatment to say strong and healthy? (Season 1, episode 5)

> The first step to protect yourselves from HIV infections is to use condoms every time you have sex. For extra confidence, you should consider taking PrE PrEP is now more widely available. (Season 2, episode 2)

One thing I learned from performing in this series is that an HIV test is not just about the results but also active health planning. It does not matter if the results are positive or negative. Especially for new couples, an HIV test will help you plan your future together. Have an HIV test for yourself and your loved ones. For more information, please visit TestBKK.org. (Season 2, episode 3)

Have you ever got up in the morning and found that you forgot to use condom or used torn, broken condoms? Don't worry! We have a solution to reduce the risk of HIV infections: taking PrEP within 7 hours after having sex. Take it as soon as possible. (Season 2, episode 4)

Condoms are the first step, and the best way to protect you from HIV infections. For extra level of confidence, you should consider taking PrEP medication. Taking PrEP can double your confidence and safety. PrEP is now easy to find. (Season 2, episode 5)

The extra scenes in the series in which the characters educate the audience about HIV prevention and safe sex by taking PrEP medicine appear at the end of many episodes. The messages conveyed to the audience are presented in an informative and advisory tone. Even though the content, which is presented conversationally, is vitally important, as the messages concern the issue of HIV infection, the messages are not presented as mandatory for the audience, who are addressed as possessing the power to choose whether they would like to follow the instructions. The series' endeavours to alert its gay audience about the issues of their MSM-sexual practices presents solidarity within gay communities whereby stakeholders like gay organisations are firmly committed to serving an excellent quality of life to the gay. Highlighting subjects concerning gay people equates the undermining heteronormative power, which habitually marginalises non-heterosexuality. No heterosexual health issues are concerned and informed in GOB, meaning that the series completely overpowers heteronormativity, relocating it to the peripheral blind spot.

HIV and related issues, including serodiscordant relationships and living with HIV-positive people, are didactically repeated throughout the series. Nat (Kanist Piyapaphakornkoon) is the

main character who represents an HIV-positive gay person. He is a perfectly good-looking man who works as a pastry chef and instructor at a cookery school. Nat is infected with HIV from his past sexual practices he is too ignorant and careless to understand HIV prevention. Nat is dating Kamin (Kittidech Phukittiwarangkul), a worker at an MSM sexual health clinic, whom he meets in Season 2. Living with HIV, Nat is judged by society as a disgusting person who is to be avoided. He is forced to resign from his teaching job at the pastry school. The school principal explains why, saying that parents feel uncomfortable and uneasy about having their kids practice cooking with an HIV-positive teacher, and the school needs Nat's resignation. To society, Nat is a HIV-positive person who should not be contacted with but to the gay community; it is very normal to be around HIV-positive people. Kamin, for example, does not feel unsafe having a relationship and living with Nat if he knows how to prevent HIV, as we can see from the dialogue below:

> Nat's brother: Do you know that Nat has health issues?
>
> Kamin: You mean HIV? Of course, I know it, and I am happy to be with him.
>
> Nat's brother: Are you afraid that HIV someday will infect you? I mean, HIV is a very critically infectious disease among gay people.
>
> Kamin: As long as you know how to protect yourself. I don't see it as a problem in the relationship or life. Society or people outside might judge him, but I know him better than them. He can function in his career better than most people I know.

The conversation between Kamin and Nat's brother indicates Kamin's rejection of the social judgement of HIV issues. While society attempts to avoid and exile gay people with HIV, GOB offers positive perspectives towards HIV and the embrace of HIV-positive people among young gay men. Not only does Kamin not see HIV as a problematic issue, but this perspective extends to the character named Arm (Tosatid Darnkhuntod), one of protagonists who is 28 years old and works as a freelancer. He dates different people. In GOB, Arm is depicted as a character who challenges heteronormativity and its discursive practices. He does not conform to the social norms and systems. He is also not concerned about being with a HIV-positive person:

Pom: You know Nat has HIV?

Arm: I know he has. Then what?

Pom: Aren't you afraid of being infected when you have a night out with him?

Arm: Don't be over-terrified. I know Nat always protects people around him, and it is very ordinary for gay people to live with HIV. If we have enough knowledge about HIV and its prevention, we can be with HIV-positive people happily.

From the conversation above, Arm is reinforcing HIV knowledge and prevention for gay people. The characters instruct each other, and in doing so inform the audience. Refusing to conform to patriarchal ideologies, GOB does not allow gay characters to be stigmatised and suppressed by the male-dominated society. Even though Nat is perceived by society as an HIV-positive person, he should not be regarded as shameful and in jeopardy. The series criticises the patriarchal social norms as causing harsh punishment for HIV-infected gay people. Nat's workplace ignores his attempt to express the fact that HIV is merely spread by sexual contact with infected partners and by contact with a body fluid such as blood and decides to fire him, giving the reason of parental concerns about having an HIV-infected instructor in baking school. Nat blames the principal of the baking school for accessing his personal health and HIV infection information and mentions that the school should have respected his privacy Nat's arguments imply how society has prejudices toward non-normative people, especially gay people with HIV. Although Nat is expelled from a baking school because of HIV records, he is not defeated and refuses to allow society to exile him. Instead, he opens his baking school, his own space where male-dominated norms do not torture him.

V. Didactic Elements as Markers of Flexibility and Fluidity in Sexuality and Polyamory

Like the other series studied in previous chapters, GOB explores the fluidity between gender expression and sexual identities. The series' characters often discuss the disparity between their genders and sexualities. Kamin, for instance, is an obvious representation of gender and sexual flexibility. His feminine look always frustrates him when it causes other people label him a bottom. Despite his feminine appearance, Kamin does not identify as a bottom regarding sexual practices.

He even expresses his desire to be the top with his partner, Nut, when they are on the verge of sexual intercourse. Kamin feels that society judges and discriminates against him and that he cannot perform at the top in sexual practices with his tiny body and feminine look. As in DTS, the concept of gender and sexual elasticity is inserted in GOB as the series allows the characters to express their attitudes toward their preference and desire in sexual activities, including the top and bottom positions. Characters with feminine gender expression, like Pom and Nut, represent gender and sexual fluidity.

The fruit of Thailand's patriarchal binary male-female ideology has been cultivated in the attitudes and beliefs of people in Thai society. These attitudes, concealed and reserved for dominant male power, stem the gender inequality, discriminating against non-normative gendered and sexual identities for a long time. As a result of Thailand's religiously motivated lack of sexual education, the majority of Thai people determine their views on sex between than two or more people by seeing it as immoral and should not be done. The judgement that a relationship must be based on two people only is made within the framework of the male system. It discourages other forms of relationships, making them forms of relationships that have no space in Thai society. As can be seen from various media that reproduce religious and moral ideas, by often presenting those relationships in the form of many people or sex, the message is clear that sex with more than one person is unreasonable and forbidden. Therefore, this series focuses on educating about things that were formerly prohibited in Thai society, such as group sex. This perception and understanding resists and reduces the power of those privileged by the male system that dominates Thai society through education and religion. This series is an alternative medium that is not mainstream. Instead, it provides accurate knowledge and understanding and is a knowledge not distorted or suppressed in the dichotomous male-female system. This allows the gay series to subvert the dominant power-based understanding of group sex which is seen as prohibited in Buddhism.

GOB provides education regarding gender and sexuality, whereas the other series in this study have hidden the gender and sexuality issues considered taboo in Thai culture and society due to social prejudices. These prejudices urge us to challenge the interpretations of non-binary sexual implications. They also stimulate us to search for the sources that affect such ways of thought in Thai society. I argue that GOB functions as a heterotopia by explicitly educating the audience on

issues about same-sex relationships, gay cultures and rejection of assigned heteronormative ideologies and norms. GOB presents subversive potential through the elasticity and flexibility of gender and sexuality expression and roles. The characters reject the stereotypical and normalised practices of gay people, which have previously been represented through Thai society's heteronormative and discursive lens. The series reconstructs the representation of gay people in Bangkok as not conforming to the systems established by heteronormativity, such as capitalism, hierarchy and the masculine-feminine dichotomy.

Both characters represent the idea of gender and sexual elasticity. In one scene depicting them having sexual intercourse, we can see that Kamin has a passive role while Nat has an active role.

> Kamin: Nat. Sometimes I want to switch to be on to
>
> Nat: Why?
>
> Kamin: Why not. I just want to be a top sometimes. Am I born to be a bottom?
>
> Nat: I just don't know. I thought you enjoyed the way we did it. Who would have thought that you wanted to try being on to
>
> Kamin: Why? A small guy like me is destined to be a bottom?
>
> Nat: Min. You're overthinking it.
>
> Kamin: No, I'm not. Most people look at me that way. Who are they to judge? It's none of their business. They assumed that the more girly ones are always a bottom. They will call me girly once they find out that I'm a bottom. I don't want them to treat me that way.
>
> Nat: I've never treated you that way. You can't force people to think a certain way about you, but it's good to speak out what's on your mind.
>
> Kamin: I just did.
>
> Nat: Huh, it took us over a year to know... that you want to to
>
> Kamin: Being a bottom is also exhausting, not just lying there waiting. I have to be prepared. Let's switch positions.

This conversation between Nat and Min indicates gender and sexual elasticity. Despite being perceived as feminine Kamin does not embrace the implication that he is a bottom. In the same way, he does not see himself being bottom permanently even though his body is smaller and more delicate compared to Nat. Kamin suggests queerer possibilities through transgression beyond the limitations of agency in bodily practices under heteronormative discourse. For certain individuals, non-monogamy is a viable relationship style preference. This entails engaging in simultaneous sexual or romantic relationships while upholding ethical and consensual practices. Although non-monogamy may deviate from conventional societal norms, respecting each individual's right to their own relationship preferences is crucial. Consensual non-monogamy, previously and generally perceived as immoral sexual behaviours and relationship practices, is presented in a cheerful light. Despite his self-identification as a gay person who enjoys casual sexual relationships and encounters such as one-night stands, Arm's disapproval of threesomes indicates the way in which his views are constrained by heteronormative ideas that devalue threesomes, seeing them not as sexual pleasure-and-erotic seeking activities, but as immoral sexual practices. Rowman and Littlefield propose that sexual practices are normalised through monogamous intimacy:

> Sex is constructed as occurring only between two people in a private, monogamous relationship. Threesome, group sex, outdoor sex, sex in clubs and non-monogamous relationships are considered immoral, deviant, distinguishing and shameful. (Rowman and Littlefield 2020, 175)

A fundamental component of non-monogamous relationships is maintaining an open-minded approach and demonstrating consideration for all parties involved. Successful navigation of non-monogamy can be attained through education and effective communication, as is modelled in a conversation between Nut and Arm:

> Nut: How long is your longest relationship?
> Arm: A year. But I don't believe in this stuff. I FEEL STRANGE whenever I'm in a long-term relationship and it slows down. So, I always find a new guy, new drama.
> Nut: You're a psychopath.

Arm: Why? I'm serious. How long is your longest relationship?

Nut: 7 Years.

Arm: Such a long time. Why did you break up?

Nut: Why do you wanna know?

Arm: Do you believe in gay love? I saw my friends who are in relationships. When they have problems, they solve it by having a threesome. I don't think it's right. I just sleep around. So nobody gets hurt.

Nut: It's not like that. It doesn't mean that's the right solution for everyone. I mean, how can I explain it? This what I believe that everyone, despite their sexual preference, has the right to have a good love. Wait. Don't argue.

Arm: I don't know.

Nut: I get it that for gay men, sex is easy. Right? But I don't know how to put it. It won't work if you don't think it will work from the start.

From their conversation, Nut is trying to exterminate Arm's philophobia and prejudice toward gay long-term relationships. The repeated didactic scenes between gay characters in which they educate each other scaffold the illustration of how GOB celebrate the bonding among the gay community by having the characters' didactic conversations.

Arm is trapped by the heteronormative notion of dyadic relationships which informs the way he rejects the idea of the threesome. However, later in Season 2, Arm is depicted as someone keen on performing threesomes. The first episode of GOB season 2 begins with nightclub scene in which he undergoes a non-monogamous seduction. As a third party, he is invited to participate in a polyamorous sexual practice by joining a gay couple's lovemaking and intervening in the middle of a gay couple hugging and cuddling. The three of them hug and one of the lovers begins to kiss him while the other embraces him from behind. Arm displays a satisfied expression and feels no guilt about the three-way contact. The sexual intimacy scene flows along with the music and dim light. Arm's flirtation with his lover in Season 2 proves his change in attitude. Even though it's a

one-night stand, it shows that Arm no longer has the same negative attitude and denies having a triple relationship that he once considered invalid. In addition, Arm's view that consensual polyamory is immoral, and degrading is similar to that of most Thai society. In the second season the audience has seen Arm change in that he is more open to and flexible in polygamous relationships, which he initiates in the seduction. This shows that Arm no longer subscribes to the concept of a monogamous relationship as most people in Thai society do. Thai heteronormative society adopts societal standards to govern the relationship model as being monogamous and being different from it is unacceptable.

The narrative arc involving Aof (Kun Mookdasanit), Big (Paween Naliang), and Chet is a complex counterpoint to the relationships between characters like Arm, Pom, and Nat. While the former set of relationships unveils the fissures in what is often perceived to be a homogenous gay community, the latter brings forth more nuanced understandings of relational dynamics, introducing the concept of non-monogamy and challenging the heteronormative binary roles often ascribed to gay relationships.

> Big: They look happy.
>
> Aof: What's on your mind?
>
> Big: Nothing. I just think that this throuple looks lovely.
>
> Aof: Are you okay with a three-person relationship?
>
> Big: I don't know. Whatever floats their boats. They might want something exciting in their lives.
>
> Aof: Not a good kind of excitement. I don't think it's gonna work. They'll soon have problems. He wants it, he doesn't want it. He loves him more; he loves him less. How could someone love two persons equally?
>
> Big: Just because you can't doesn't mean they can't either.
>
> Aof: I think I might be too conservative. I can't wrap my head around things like these.
>
> Big: How could you know if it's good or not? You are the one who told me that things we never try aren't things we couldn't do.

The initial conversation between Aof and Big about the notion of a "throuple," in a prescient example of foreshadowing, opens a dialogue about the complexities and possibilities inherent in non-monogamous relationships. Aof's scepticism about the feasibility of a three-person relationship contrasts sharply with Big's more open-minded approach. This exchange suggests that even within a long-term gay relationship, there can be significant divergence in attitudes toward alternative relationship structures, reflecting a broader heterogeneity in perspectives within the non-normative community.

Chet is a destabilising but a gripping force that not only enters the lives of Aof and Big, but also challenges their relational norms that were already in place before he came. Chet is interesting because that doesn't fit into the traditional gay male/female pole of the gay relationship, even gay relationships can perpetuate that. Therefore, his sexual fluidity is a vehicle of the heteronormative expectations subversion, presenting a more complex representation of queer relationships. The dynamic between his dominance and fascination with Big's musculature is interesting, as it is constantly negotiating and redefining traditional gender roles. Nonetheless, this non-monogamy experimentation also shows the innate vulnerabilities, and the problems one can face in such relationships. Though the initial excitement and developing affection between Aof and Chet is intense, the relationship eventually breaks down, and Big realises that this dynamic does not work for him. Of course, this dissolution should also remind us of some of the complexities of subversive relational structures while remaining potential pitfalls. Although the storyline between Aof, Big, and Chet calls into question the heteronormative paradigms, the narrative also highlights the challenges of keeping such alternative structures, finally confirming that the gay community, like any, is entirely of its problems of compatibility, jealousy, and different relationship goals. However, adding this narrative to the series allows for expanding the discourse around gay relationships, featuring less explored combinations and attitudes, thus further challenging the conventional and adding more complexity to the representation of non-normative experiences.

This point is also complemented by the character of Pom (Theepisit Mahaneeranon), who embodies the complexities and paradoxes of today's gay communities. He is professionally successful but has many problems in his romantic life. The fact that he has failed repeatedly to do so makes one question the normative expectations concerning relationships in the gay community.

Not only are these issues to do with compatibility and mutual affection, but the heteronormative ideals persistently affect same-sex relationships. In the series finale, Pom's interaction with Nat gives a poignant representation of how people are constantly being judged by unattainable criteria regarding desirability and suitability in intimate relationships. The fact that Nat, having recognised Pom's good qualities, insists on not dating him is an example of how attraction is not arbitrary and runs riot against any quantifiable measure of worth. It is a dynamic that repeats the message that gays are not above being judged by society on how attractive they are, how compatible they are, and other qualities which are subjectively measured.

However, the series also complicates things further by showing how Pom is also prejudiced towards femininity within the gay community. The conversation he has with the stranger from the dating application reveals the internalised stigma against more effeminate expressions in gay spaces. It is indicative of a self-propagating cycle whereby the people within particular marginalised communities reflect themselves, stratifying themselves on a continuum of the ''acceptable'' features as dictated by broader heteronormative standards. The cycle is not limited to Pom only. The series complicates the simplistic dichotomies that are typically assigned to same-sex relationships by demonstrating various characters that have different perspectives on femininity and masculinity. It is meant to emphasise that within the community, often thought to be the antithesis of heteronormative structures, there remains a residual influence of such systems on interpersonal relationships and self-perception.

> A man: Seriously, you think I am too camp for you? You've been
> staring at me the whole time.
> Pom: No. I just think we don't match.
> A man: In what way? Pom: We are too alike.
> A man: And?
> Pom: And...too...alike...and...
> A man: Never mind. Someone has just messaged me on the app. I'm
> leaving now. So that you know: you're just as camp as me.

The dialogue between Pom and the stranger raises essential questions regarding the intersectionality of gay identities, revealing how much the heteronormative binaries seep even in

the communities that are against this binary. Pom rejects a potential partner because he and his partner are too "camp," showing the limitations of seeing gay relationships as inherently subversive. It also points out that even as far as the gay community goes, it challenges heteronormativity to a certain extent. However, it replicates the same gendered norms and biases within its social spaces. Therefore, the narrative around them acts as a microcosm of more significant non-normative questions, notably on how one negotiates, internalises, and enacts norms of masculinity and femininity in queer relationships. The series can open a complicated discourse on identity, desirability, and the folly of perceiving any community as a monolithic entity, impervious to the influence of the societies that surround them by doing so.

VI. Characters as Self-Educators

This section of the analysis will consider the representation of self-education in *Gay OK Bangkok*. In this analysis of the series, the multiple problems that Bangkok urban landscape's characters must deal with are explored. It offers a thoughtful take on the portrayal of how these people fight and succeed against differing levels of ingrained social norms and expectations of these people in a world where their identities meet with their choices. Arm, one of the central characters, takes up a freelance career and is thus, going on a journey of self-discovery. On making this decision he is inspired to be hopeful, but his family doubts him. Such a career path is not only about financial stability, these people are also worried about what people will say. The combination of these narrative threads is able to create a synthesis of the themes of individual autonomy and societal conformity to highlight the broader issue of autonomy in the gay community. Furthermore, GOB intelligently illustrates the difference between urban and provincial spaces wherein urban spaces embrace non normative identities.

However, provincial spaces are still heteronormative. This is reflected in the hometown of Arm because his parents are part of this resistance to non-normative genders and sexualities. This stark contrast is one of his father's direct questioning to his sexuality, juxtaposing with the acceptance experience in the urban environment, which shows the tension between these two spatial contexts:

> Father: May I ask you something? Are you gay?
> Arm: Dad! What a question!
> Father: I want to know. We haven't talked much recently. Are you?

Arm: Dad.

Father: I had a gay friend when I was in university. He was brilliant student. He got a good job and had a boyfriend. They were together for a short while. His boyfriend cheated on him and took away all his savings. My friend didn't live a happy life. Last I heard he committed suicide, what a poor life!

Arm: I have yet to hear this kind of story. Did you make it up?

Father: It's just popped into my mind. Just want to share with you. So, are you gay?

Arm: Dad. I'm not gay.

Moreover, it is worth observing the dynamic between Arm and his mother, which highlights the tensions arising from their differing perspectives on employment and identity. Arm's mother, a once financially independent woman who pursued a singing career, now finds herself confined to the traditional roles of a wife and mother, emphasising the societal pressures placed upon women in domestic spheres. The below conversation shows Arm's mother's restrictive ideology:

Mother: Do you usually get up this late in Bangkok?

Arm: I'm a freelancer. I can get up anytime.

Mother: Why don't you find a proper job for once or become a civil servant?

Arm: I don't want to be a civil servant. It's a tedious job.

Mother: Boring? But it's a steady income.

Arm: Dad is a teacher. Does he have significant savings?

This exchange exemplifies the clash of generational perspectives on employment and financial stability. Arm's mother represents the traditional view of secure, steady employment, as evident in her suggestion of becoming a civil servant. Arm, however, rejects this path, echoing a desire for autonomy and fulfilment beyond the confines of a routine job. The conversation continues, touching upon sartorial choices:

Mother: Why do you like wearing shorts?

Arm: The weather is hot.

Mother: It's a gay outfit.

Arm: Mom, everybody wears shorts these days, especially in Bangkok.

Mother: Gays in Bangkok wear them.

In turn, Arm's mother infers that Arm's choice of clothing is stereotypical gay fashion and therefore related to his sexuality. Arm is frustrated by the assumption: He refuses to see his outfit as a sign of his sexuality; he insists that shorts have dominated the style of the day. This is a perfect dialogue for the theme of societal standards and gender stereotypes. Her words remind how most people tend to categorise people through the looks and should be true to themselves and accepted for who they are. In addition, the discussion reflects the ongoing battle between traditional and non-normative gender and sexual identities in the scene of the series. However, the death of Arm's father in a car accident is a turning point in the series. This becomes a symbolic event in the sense that it is the relinquishment of patriarchal and heteronormative power dynamics. This relinquishment puts in place the conditions for the surfacing of non-normative sexuality in the provincial setting. During this period, Arm's mother transforms as she learns to tolerate and love her son's non-normative identity. This is important in the series as it shows that personal sacrifices can catalyse acceptance in conservative settings.

VII. Entrapment: The Hurtful Yet Untold Truth in GOB's Didacticism

The didacticism of *Gay OK Bangkok* is a powerful weapon against heteronormativity. However, at the same time, it reveals an unfortunate truth of gay society in terms of discrimination, which is still present, especially when viewed through the critical lens of patriarchy and the exploitation of seniors towards gay characters. Non-normative narratives are explored with deliberate and instructive addresses of the series' didactic approach that disrupts the very heteronormative constructs found in the text. It is commendable and necessary work to confront societal norms by educating the audience on non-normative experiences. However, with this comes the unveiling of discrimination within the community. Even the portrayal of patriarchy (power imbalances based on gender) and exploitation of seniority (using one's position for personal gain) are instances of

internal struggles. Patriarchy in the gay community is another example of how disgusting it is that even in marginalised groups, some people will continue to institutionalise gender hierarchies. This can take many different forms, such as prioritising so-called masculine rather than feminine attributes or affirming traditional gender roles at the expense of the upholding of an inclusive and egalitarian community.

In the case of Arm under the watch of Beer, one can see the tragic state of affairs: even in the gay world, you can be manipulated and exploited. In this case, Beer cunningly entices Arm into taking up more work by promising he will join him on a field trip to America. Driven by ambition and trust in Beer, Arm dutifully completes the tasks assigned by Beer. But when it's time for the promised rewards, Beer uses Arm's hard work to his advantage and now claims he has to go to America in Arm's stead. Arm has no choice but resign from the company after seeing this egregious betrayal, and a lasting lesson is put in place that even in the tight knit gay community, acts of treachery and deceit can be levelled. In this troubled dynamic between these characters who all identify as part of the gay community, there is a problem with the fragility of relationships under capitalism. As a result, a patriarchal system that puts individual success over collective solidarity, and which prompts the characters to prey on one another for the sake of professional ambition is corroded. It highlights how capitalism can erode community bonds. Hence, the depiction of seniority exploitation underscores the vulnerability of less established or experienced individuals within the community. Those in positions of power may exploit their influence to the detriment of their peers, mirroring broader societal issues related to the abuse of authority. In this light, GOB educates and challenges viewers to confront these uncomfortable truths within the gay community. It encourages critical reflection on how discrimination, even within a community that seeks acceptance and liberation, can persist and harm those it should protect. Thus, the series serves as a multifaceted exploration of experiences, simultaneously dismantling heteronormativity and shedding light on the complex and often painful dynamics within the community, even among marginalised groups, and exacerbate the power imbalances inherent in a patriarchal society. Not only the hierarchical exploitation, but most of the non-normative series also romanticise the camaraderie in gay communities by presenting the idea that all gay people support each other, and such solidarity will path to heterotopias where non-normative people can overcome the normative overpowering. Unlike these series, GOB does not present the strong bonding of gay communities

but also reveal negative aspects of relationship among gay people through the discrimination and betrayal among the characters in the series. Arm and Pom are depicted as best friends who constantly support each other in the series.

The series' narrative that features the complex dynamics between Arm and Pom serves as an illustrative counter-narrative to the ostensible image of gay solidarity often celebrated in queer discourse. It shows the internal hierarchies and discriminations that are still to be found in what is supposed to be a queer, non-hierarchical society. Pom's experience of Arm sabotaging his romantic interests is a microcosm of all the bigger betrayals happening within marginalised communities. It is, quite plainly, a betrayal of an ally and a friend or of a member of a marginalised community; this is what it is and shows the pitfalls of being too quick to assume unconditional solidarity on the basis of shared sexual orientation. Furthermore, the debate on the stratification of the gay community based on the factor of beauty and gender expression provides an alternative means of looking at the patriarchal beauty standard as corrosive. However, the series is making characters like Arm, and Pom internalises attitudes regarding discrimination, leaving this dilemma centre stage and thereby subverting both the unity and the inclusiveness that have come to be associated with gay communities. The series does this in order to question the adoption of patriarchal systems of valuation based on aesthetics as a way to divide within the gay community. In this way, the series critiques how patriarchal systems of valuation based on aesthetics have been co-opted within the gay community to create divisions.

> Satang: Did Neung like you to surprise him? Or did he pretend to
> enjoy it?
> Arm: He liked it. He's a romantic guy, so I have to be one too.
> Satang: Hello. That's not you. Oh, he is on Pom's team. I know Pom
> is romantic. What if he falls for Pom someday?
> Arm: Falling for Pom? You can't compare apples to oranges.
> Satang: Hello, Miss Thailand universe! Where is your diamond
> crown? Come on! Cheers to your beauty!

Underlining the element of this troubling dynamic is the dialogue between Sunang and Arm. The exclamation "Miss Thailand universe!" by Satang is one of these sarcastic comments. "Where is

your diamond crown?" Moreover, they are meant to criticise Arm's discriminatory attitudes towards Pom. In addition, this exchange also reveals the deeply embedded social conditioning into which all of the characters have been forced, revealing just how pervasive the patriarchal values of even subordinate communities that reject such normative systems completely can be. This is further supported by Arm's claim that Pom is not "comparable" in terms of attractiveness and/or romantic potential, which suggests that only those gay men who are closest to the patriarchal ideal of masculinity are deserving of love or respect. It is a salient critique of the idea that the gay community serves as heterotopias (places where the social roles and hierarchy are reversed). Instead, the series illustrates that these are usually simply regurgitations of the hierarchies they hope to protest against. By showing that there are multiple levels of different types of intersectional inequality that still exist within, the series thus problematises the gay community as a haven of non-normativity. The above series forces its viewers to think about the shortcomings of gay communities in being theorised as a space which subverts heteronormative power dynamics. For the most part, what kind of internal work is still needed within these communities to construct genuinely inclusive and equitable spaces?

VIII. Conclusion: Didacticism as a Thought-provoking Heterotopia

GOB, with its deliberate incorporation of didactic elements, stands as a formidable challenge to prevailing stereotypes that often depict gay communities as unwavering bastions of camaraderie. Instead of conforming to these idealised portrayals, the series boldly delves into the intricate and multifaceted nature of relationships among gay individuals. Even within the ostensibly supportive friendship between Arm and Pom, GOB serves as a revealing lens through which the limitations of solidarity within the gay community come into sharp focus. The series embarks on a profound exploration of the concept of entrapment within the gay community, anchoring itself in the intersection of identity, social dynamics, and deeply entrenched stereotypes. The series courageously interrogates the complexities of individual identity and the enduring power structures that persist, even within marginalised communities. While it effectively subverts heteronormativity and challenges societal norms, GOB refrains from offering a heterotopic vision where non-normativity completely upends heteronormative power structures. Instead, it operates as a reflection of the persistent sociocultural entanglements that continue to shape the lives and interactions of non-normative individuals within the broader societal context.

The series does not merely present an idealised heterotopia where non-normativity completely destabilises heteronormative power. Instead, it portrays a more nuanced version of heterotopia, one that acknowledges the enduring entanglements and heteronormative hierarchies that persist within marginalised communities, even as they strive for acceptance and liberation. In this way, didacticism becomes a vehicle for illustrating the tension between the idealised vision of a heterotopia and the lived reality of navigating heteronormative power structures. It highlights the need for critical reflection and examination of these spaces, even within communities that are themselves marginalised. GOB, thus, develops as a thought-provoking portrayal of the internal complexities of the gay community. It is a powerful commentary on the broader socio-cultural entrapments and hierarchies that persist within marginalised communities. Above all, the series invites its viewers to critically examine the intricate dynamics of power, identity, and discrimination, ultimately challenging and reshaping prevailing stereotypes and assumptions regarding unity within the non-normative community.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This study has focused on heterotopia as a site of subversion and the reinforcement of heteronormativity particularly as they are represented via queer characters in the Line TV series, namely, *Make It Right: the Series*, *My Dream: the Series*, *Diary of Tootsie*, and *Gay OK Bangkok*. I have explored how these series operate as heterotopic spaces which are sites of resistance to heteronormative structures, and spaces in which elements of normative gender and sexuality endure. The study has theorised the series as what Michel Foucault (1986) calls heterotopias, that is, counter-sites that juxtapose the category with others exerting a force in their relation that cues us to re-think non-normative identity.

However, if heterotopias permit alternative articulations of gender and sexuality, they do not automatically overthrow heteronormativity altogether. Rather, these spaces vacillate between facilitating new modes of identity manifestation and further inscribing normative hierarchies. Judith Butler's concept of performativity builds on this rubric, revealing how characters' repeated acts of gendered and sexual self-performance both subvert and reproduce hegemonic discourses. Similarly, Angela Jones' concept of "queer heterotopias" (2009) builds on this analysis by showing how certain media spaces reproduce non-heteronormative identities, but within already established socio-cultural limitations and thereby expands the analytical framework. In her text "Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness," Jones describes queer heterotopias as actual sites that allow people to perform their gender and sexuality freely and with neither the prospect of marginalisation nor punitive reaction (2009). By including Jones' framework, we gain a fuller understanding of how gender and sexual identities can be seen as complex systems of social and cultural forms shaped by powerful social and cultural constructions. This study has laid a broader analytical framework to study the queer heterotopic regimes at work in these series, by combining Foucault and Jones' theories and Butler's account on performativity.

A queer heterotopic regime provides an analytic lens that allows us to study the series' attempts to subvert heteronormative discourses that underpin heterosexist frameworks of gender and sexuality found in mainstream representations of non-normative people. Each of those lives, those characters, diverging from normative identities, generate their distinct selves through repeated performative acts, a reiterative articulation of non-heteronormative gender and sexuality. These performatively articulative heterotopias mutually instantiate queer heterotopias, defusing the

energies of hetero-hegemonic ideologies without significantly altering the status quo of conventional gender politics. The account this thesis has given of queer heterotopia across these series consists primarily in how their main protagonists are affect by and through their non-normative identities. This can be seen through differences in gender expression and sexual orientation outside of heteronormative norms.

Queer heterotopia thus allows for the re-envisioning of characters' identities and power dynamics. In turn, within this newly formed arrangement, heterosexuality, inasmuch as it replicates the male-female binary, forfeits its hegemony, making non-heterosexuality an ordinary aspect of the inherited gender schema. The series capture queer subjectivity and make palpable the renegotiation of normative power relations and identity politics. Having placed the concept of "queering heterotopia" within a theoretical framework, I would like to illustrate it in a more practical sense. In the section below, I discuss queer heterotopia, as being performatively realised in the series analysed individually through this thesis.

To underscore the practical ramifications more effectively, it can be argued that the portrayal of queer heterotopia within the series serves as a localised reflection, on a small scale, of more expansive, systemic changes in the perception of non-heteronormative identities in contemporary Thai society. These Line TV series are particularly noteworthy for their contravention of entrenched Thai social and cultural norms by offering platforms for articulating non-normative genders and sexuality. My analysis reveals that these series operate within what I term "liminal queer heterotopia", a transitional space wherein non-heteronormative identities shift from subjugation under heteronormative power structures to active subversion of those structures. The portrayal of non-heteronormative characters and relationships in these series suggests incremental progress towards a fuller realisation of queer heterotopia, where stigmatisation of non-heteronormative identities is increasingly mitigated. In sum, heterotopia emerges as an alternative conceptual realm that nurtures and accommodates queer subcultures.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this progress is neither linear nor complete, leading us to examine the limitations of queer heterotopia as represented in these series. In my analysis I have found that how those series deploy queer heterotopia to function as a space for the subversion of heteronormativity is still in a transitional phase and needs to be completed, especially perhaps in light of the closure of Line TV. I propose that series representing non-normative identities

regarding gender and sexuality do not bring a complete queer heterotopia into being. Although we, the audience, are introduced to the idea that heterotopia exists, this only occurs in a liminal stage of crossing the boundaries between becoming a desirable space for an ultimate subversion of heteronormativity and illusive entrapment within patriarchal hegemonic power. The conflicts between success and failure pinpoint the liminal state of queer heterotopia, seen as an attempt of queer identities to be liberated from heteronormative suppression and thereby destabilising its power. For the audience, the introduction to the concept of heterotopia transpires exclusively within a liminal phase, oscillating between the promise of an ultimate space for subverting heteronormativity and the peril of illusionary entrapment within a patriarchal, hegemonic framework. This tension between potential and actualisation encapsulates the liminal essence of queer heterotopia. It signifies a nascent attempt by non-heteronormative identities to extricate themselves from the oppressive grip of heteronormative structures while concurrently unsettling those very power dynamics. In summary, the investigation reveals a complicated dynamic that oscillates between potential and limitation, suggesting avenues for future research.

I. The Subversion of Heteronormativity: An Achievement and yet an Entrapment

If the series' versions of queer heterotopia are necessarily incomplete, then, their subversion of heteronormative structures must be seen only as partial. This partial subversion is characterised in a failure to extricate themselves from hegemonic ideologies fully. Notably, the series provide a platform for non-normative male characters to challenge heteronormative confines whilst largely sidelining non-normative female characters. The spotlight is thus disproportionately cast upon *kathoey* and gay male characters, whereas lesbian characters remain marginalised and are further stigmatised and objectified by the male gaze. The series not only marginalise lesbian characters but also entrenches heteronormatively assigned identities, falling back into the male-female binary construct.

MIR, for instance, propagates a nuanced form of homonormativity in its representation of adolescent non-normative sexual identities, ostensibly challenging heteronormative frameworks. While the series affords male characters considerable latitude to explore and articulate their non-normative sexual identities and relational dynamics, it concurrently oppresses their female counterparts. This restriction manifests most conspicuously in the female characters' inability to

attain meaningful romantic intimacy. Such a gendered discrepancy not only problematises the series' ostensible stance as a subversive force against heteronormativity but also underscores the limitations of its representational strategies. The disparate treatment of male and female characters thereby complicates MIR's contribution to the discourse on the subversion of sexual normativity, revealing implicit biases that attenuate its disruptive potential.

Similarly, in MDS, it can be seen that the fantasy tropes in the series function as a form of emotional alchemy, facilitating the development of non-normative sexual identities for male characters, their accessibility is notably restricted. Nonetheless, female characters are marginalised and compelled to enact emotional narratives of grief firmly situated within their societally prescribed gender roles. This disparate treatment between male and female characters curtails the series' capacity for broader subversive impact and perpetuates existing systemic gender biases. Thus, the series raises questions concerning the equitable representation of non-normative identities and calls for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to narrative construction.

In the context of DTS, it becomes evident that the heterotopic linguistic strategies deployed within the series are distinctly partial and incomplete. The series manifests an asymmetrical representation of subversion, particularly discernible in its treatment of non-normative characters such as the lesbian figure, Natty. Subjected to specific linguistic manoeuvres and narrative frameworks that reinforce patriarchal and heteronormative paradigms, Natty experiences a pronounced marginalisation. Furthermore, the utilisation of derogatory linguistic constructs serves to delineate and constrain the full extent of the series' subversive potential. This linguistic and representational incongruity problematises DTS's purported role as a provocative artefact, thereby calling its efficacy in challenging overarching normative structures into question.

Finally, GOB illuminates the constraints inherent in the attempt to dismantle deeply entrenched heteronormative ideologies within society. In contrast to the other series, which depict an idealised form of solidarity within gay communities as a conduit to heterotopic liberation, GOB provides a more nuanced portrayal. Specifically, the series foregrounds the negative relational dynamics within gay communities, as evidenced through depictions of discrimination and betrayal among the characters. This complexity problematises the notion that gay communities are monolithic bastions of support introducing criticality into the discourse on heterotopic spaces and their role in

challenging heteronormative paradigms. Consequently, GOB's contribution to academic discourse lies in its ability to expose the multi-dimensionality of lived experiences within non-normative communities, highlighting the limitations and complexities of such environments as spaces for subversive action.

Although these series collectively contribute to the deconstruction of conventional paradigms surrounding non-normative gender and sexual identities and create environments that ostensibly encourage the exploration of gender and sexual fluidity, they fail to fully dismantle deeply rooted systemic gender inequalities. Despite their seeming potential for queer disruption, these heterotopic spaces paradoxically act to reinforce patriarchal norms. This reinforcement results in an inordinate privileging of male perspectives and experiences whilst concurrently marginalising and suppressing those of females. These limitations undermine these series' capacity to function as entirely subversive platforms and spotlight the imperative for more nuanced, inclusive, and intersectional representational strategies.

Exploring queer heterotopia in the series enhances our understanding of the precarious nature of these queer spaces. They present opportunities for non-normative identities to be reconstructed, allowing them a greater resistance and lesser confinement within patriarchal systems. However, it must be noted that attempts to challenge the traditional male-female binary can paradoxically perpetuate heterocentric power dynamics. Awareness of this intricate liminality, and the strategic use of queer heterotopia to undercut heteronormative hegemony, offers a fertile ground for future scholarly inquiries. These future studies could focus on the framework of queer heterotopia in varied sociocultural contexts within Thai media.

II. Liminality: Queering the Queer Journey to Queer Heterotopia

While this research contributes significantly to the academic dialogue on the subversion of heteronormative ideologies, it also concurrently unveils the intrinsic limitations and complexities inherent in such subversive efforts. I argue that these limitations can be understood through the lens of "liminality," which encapsulates the ambiguities and fluctuations intrinsic to queer identity formation and the struggle against heteronormative norms. Within this liminal domain, a nuanced interplay unfolds between successful instances of subversion and unfortunate instances of becoming trapped within existing norms. Furthermore, liminality is an invaluable analytical tool,

offering a multifaceted lens to interpret queer experiences of fluidity, diversity, and unboundedness. This theoretical construct accounts for the contingent and non-linear nature of identity formation. It exposes the tension between such dynamic processes and the regulatory mechanisms that aim to establish stability or closure. Consequently, the lens of liminality enables a more comprehensive understanding of the limitations and potentials of challenging deeply ingrained normative frameworks.

The journey towards constructing and affirming non-normative identities follows a more straightforward path. Instead, it meanders within this liminal space, alternating between exhilarating peaks of triumph and confining valleys of entrapment. I argue that the journey towards constructing and affirming non-normative queer identities emerges as intrinsically non-linear. This journey fluctuates between triumph and entrapment, undermining any simplistic notions of complete subversive success. This subtleness suggests a "queering" of the journey itself, encompassing not only non-normative gender and sexuality but also an acknowledgement of non-linear progressions.

In the final stretch of this exploration, I would like to converge with Homi K. Bhabha's (1992) concept of the aesthetic as a "moment of transit". His notion finds deep resonance with the idea of queer heterotopias as transformative spaces, arenas where normative social constructs are subjected to rigorous scrutiny, subversion, and redefinition:

> The present that informs the aesthetic process is not a transcendental passage but a moment of transit, a form of temporality that is open to disjunction and discontinuity and sees the process of history engaged, rather like art, in a negotiation of the framing and naming of social reality-not what lies inside or outside reality, but where to draw (or inscribe) the "meaningful" line between them. (Bhabha, 1992 144)

Echoing Bhabha's insight, the aesthetic experience is permeated by disjunctions and discontinuities, which, in turn, sustain the framing and naming of social realities in an ongoing negotiation state. Henceforward, liminality should not be viewed merely as a space of inherent transgression or disruption. It is a persistent lived condition characterised by dynamic processes of

becoming and transformation. This complicates our understanding of liminal spaces as inherently destabilising or subversive. Instead, it invites a reconsideration, urging us to refocus on the foregrounded question of normativity within these lived experiences. As a theoretical construct, liminality harmonises queer epistemologies of unboundedness, fluidity, diversity, and contingent, non-linear becoming. Simultaneously, it exposes the regulatory powers that seek to impose stability or closure on these fluid states. Thus, the concept serves as a multidimensional lens, enabling a nuanced interrogation of the limits and possibilities of challenging entrenched normative frameworks.

With the context of the study, this investigation reveals that how series on Line TV utilise the concept of heterotopia to serve as a space for undermining heteronormative constructs is still a work in progress. Specifically, I posit that television series portraying non-normative identities across gender and sexual orientation spectrums fall short of fully actualising a queer heterotopia. For the audience, the introduction to heterotopia is confined to a liminal phase. This liminality manifests in the oscillation between heterotopia as a space with transformative potential against heteronormative systems and its converse potential to ensnare individuals within the existing structures of patriarchal hegemony. The tensions between successful subversion and unsuccessful entrapment elucidate the ambivalent nature of queer heterotopia, framing it as an ongoing struggle for liberation from heteronormative constraints and a challenge to the power structures that uphold these constraints.

III. Contribution of the Study

Upon scrutinising the series *Make It Right: the Series, My Dream: the Series, Diary of Tootsies,* and *Gay OK Bangkok,* this study has ascertained that they do not merely engage in a superficial challenge to heteronormative paradigms. Instead, they craft an intricate, compelling, and impactful representation of diverse gender and sexual identities. In so doing, they transcend mere theoretical postulations and have the potential to enact meaningful shifts in the societal understanding of diverse gender and sexual identities.

Beyond mere surface-level gender expressions and sexual orientations, the centrality of non-normative characters is pivotal in forging queer solidarity and communal alliances. This dimension extends the discourse from a mere subversive challenge to heteronormative paradigms into an

impactful praxis in the representation of gender and sexual plurality. In addition, the role of media as a potent manifesto for societal ideologies and cultural narratives holds profound implications for how society views and engages with various identities and issues, including gender and sexuality. Media reflects and shapes public opinion, making its role in such discourses indubitably influential. The study takes this understanding further by exploring queer heterotopias as liberating spaces for characters and as instrumental frameworks for scrutinising broader sociocultural dynamics. By doing so, it extends the reach of its impact from the academic sphere to the more general domain of public discourse and action. Specifically, this research is a critical intervention that challenges and questions society's prevailing attitudes towards heteronormative constructs. It interrogates the rigidity of these constructs while offering a great understanding of gender and sexual identities, thereby creating a more inclusive societal narrative. Through this lens, the study extends actionable insights that could inform policies, social justice initiatives, and inclusivity efforts.

In essence, the study has aimed to advance beyond the academic sphere to provide the basis for engaging the public in a more significant dialogue concerning the complexities of heteronormativity, providing a comprehensive understanding that could lead to societal change. This multifaceted impact emphasises the study's broader social relevance, reaffirming its contribution to the discourse on gender, sexuality, and identity within the Thai media landscape. It is also worth noting that the portrayal of non-normative identities in these television series is still a work in progress. My study posits that these portrayals oscillate between the potential for transformative subversion against heteronormative structures and the risk of entrapment within existing patriarchal systems. This tension uncovers the ambivalent nature of queer heterotopias, framing them as a continuous struggle for liberation and an ongoing challenge to existing power structures. Therefore, the study paves the way for future scholarly investigations by exposing the intricate liminality of queer heterotopias as subversive and entrapping forces.

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