

**“Life becomes more magical when there’s yaoi to
come home to at the end of the day”**

Boys’ Love fan culture as a source of enchantment

Roosa Määttä

Master’s thesis

Study of Religion

School of History, Culture and Arts Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Turku

May 2026

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Master's thesis

Degree Programme in Study of Cultures, Study of Religion

Roosa Määttä

”Life becomes more magical when there’s yaoi to come home to at the end of the day.”

Boys’ Love fan culture as a source of enchantment

Number of pages: 84 pages, 6 appendix pages

This master's thesis explores the fan culture around *boys' love* (BL) or *yaoi* content, as a source of enchantment, and consequently re-enchantment, observed in the fans' direct portrayals of the fandom experience on the social media application TikTok. The study has been conducted as an online ethnographic observation mainly on TikTok, known for short-form video content. 60 videos were combined into a collection of primary source material, to analyze individual fan-experiences more closely using qualitative content analysis.

Enchantment is the theoretical core of the study, and conceptualized as a way to seriously consider and value fans' empirical accounts on the personal enjoyment and imaginative and playful elements that are specific for the fan culture. Guided by theory, this study observes how enchantment is experienced and described by BL fans participating in the fan culture in three main ways: 1. As spontaneous, “automatic” or generally without fans' own creative contribution by simply consuming BL content. 2. As a result of intentional and creative production namely via ritual framing. And 3. Enchantment of the BL fan culture portrayed or articulated as religious or similar to that.

The analysis of BL fans' intentionally produced enchantment builds in particular on Terhi Utriainen's (2016; 2020) theories on ritual framing. To consider what kind of meaningful role BL fan culture can have in the fans' lives and how enchantment is articulated and conceptualized within fandom, I utilize Matt Hills' (2002) theory on fan cultures as a form of neo-religiosity. Finally, to conclude findings and tentatively situate BL (re)enchantment on a wider cultural scale, I apply Christopher Partridge's (2004) theory on re-enchantment as a major factor in contemporary Western cultural and religious environment.

Enchantment through, and within BL fan culture is found a subversive, whimsical and pleasant force that is enriching fans' lives, and altering and elevating and the ordinary, “disenchanted” reality and life. Notable opportunities for future research were found in BL fan works like art and written fiction as tangible products of, and mediators of re-enchantment, and how BL fandom cultivates solidarity and sense of community among those who share the mutual enchantments.

Keywords: enchantment, re-enchantment, fan religiosity, imagination, play, fan pilgrimage

Table of contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Background of the study, and BL as a research topic	5
1.2	Research questions and approach	7
1.3	BL, yaoi and shipping culture	8
1.3.1	Genre history and vocabulary	8
1.3.2	The "BL problematics"	12
1.4	Previous research about BL culture	14
2	Theoretical framework and key-concepts	18
2.1	(Re)enchantment	18
2.2	Ritual framing and imagination	20
2.3	Fan cultures and religiosity	24
3	Methods and source material	28
3.1	Online ethnography	28
3.1.1	TikTok as a site of fieldwork and TikTok videos as the primary source	29
3.1.2	Content analysis	32
3.2	Research ethics	33
4	(Re)enchantment sourced from and experienced in BL fan culture	36
4.1	"Touch of magic" in everyday life	36
4.1.1	Soothing for the soul	36
4.1.2	Joy in the unreal	40
4.2	The BL gaze and ritual framing	42
4.2.1	Opening BL possibilities and contact with the object of fandom	43
4.2.2	(Re)enchanted narratives	48
4.3	BL fan culture as akin to religiosity	53
4.3.1	Sacred texts, idols and communities of followers	54
4.3.2	The BL paradise of Thailand and other fan pilgrimage	60
5	Conclusions	66
5.1	Findings about fan enchantment	66
5.2	BL fan culture as occulture	68

5.3	Future research prospects	71
Bibliography		73
5.4	TikTok material in order of appearance	73
5.5	Literature	80
Attachments		85
Attachment 1. Summary in Finnish		85
Attachment 2. Link to the TikTok collection of primary source material		90

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study, and BL as a research topic

At the time of writing, the most intense wave of hype around the global pop-culture phenomenon *Heated Rivalry* (2025) seems to just begin to pass. The massively popular television series, with over 10 million views per episode in U.S. alone (Hailu 2026), brought a lot of attention to a fandom of a genre of fictional works that usually tends to stay somewhat hidden from the mainstream, and even goes against it. This genre is *boys' love*, or BL, also known as *yaoi*.

Detailed specifics aside for now, BL is a genre of texts centering around homosexual relationships between men. It has a large fan community with its own customs, shared knowledge, history and artistic traditions. The stories center around queer men, but the fanbase most prominently consists of women – making it quite a cause for discourse. BL covers a wide range of different types of commercial and non-commercial texts, and ties closely to the fan practice of shipping¹, which is not limited to BL fandom. (Prasannam 2019, 65–66.) I emphasize manner of consumption and engagement as the defining factor that unites BL fans of different texts. Through personal experience, I know BL fans do not need a specifically BL object of fandom, either. They can bring the BL into fandom by their ways of engaging. Moreover, they can bring BL or possibilities of it into many other cultural and everyday contexts.

If you are one of those people who are like “can’t two men be just friends anymore?” please don’t become friends with me. Because the answer is no. Simply, they cannot. And I don’t wanna live in a world where they can be. [...] Every piece of media I consume, I can find two men and I can go ‘I want them to kiss’. In fact, it’s most media. It could be a drama, a documentary, historical nonfiction [...] (@blckbrdquitter 17.4.2025)

This quote above is transcribed from a video on the social media application TikTok, by user @blckbrdquitter (17.4.2025). This person is just one of the numerous to state something along these lines on TikTok. For another example: “omg can’t two boys be just friends anymore?” no. ❤️ not in my world” while the person in the video wags their finger to the camera for

¹ Shipping as in ‘relationshiping’, means fans (creatively) imagining fictional characters or real people together romantically, especially when the romantic relationship is not canon in the original work or happening in real life.

emphasized denial (@fujoshiqueen 7.4.2025). These videos are both made humorously, for an audience that shares in the joke. Both of these videos also have in common the separation of their own, preferred or imagined world (where two men cannot be simply friends when they could be lovers), and the world of other people. But why and how is this “BL world” constructed, even if playfully? What makes even big masses like that around Heated Rivalry intrigued by BL content? Is it enjoyable, and simply fun? That has not always been enough for an answer, and BL fandom’s reasons for consuming of BL content has been studied plenty to somehow explain it “reasonably”. (Neville 2018a.)

Rather than focusing on BL fans’ personal experiences, enjoyment and concrete ways of practicing the fan culture, academic research has tended to focus on the psychological and sociological reasons for consuming BL in particular socio-cultural contexts, and identified different motivations. (Pagliassotti 2010; Neville 2018a; Baudinette 2023.) As a fan myself, not just of BL but someone who has participated in many fandoms since teen, per my experience even though fans certainly are capable of critically inspecting their own fandom and fan behavior, what is personally important and meaningful about fandom rather becomes evident and is felt in its practical presence and functionality in the fans’ lives. I wanted to observe and study the experiences of BL fans with an approach that takes seriously, and conceptualizes meaningfully the creative playfulness and fun evident in the quoted TikTok videos, too. I argue, that the “world of BL” can bring meaningful joy, sense of whimsy, and personal enjoyment that enriches and elevates the ordinary reality for fans. To study this I use the concept of *enchantment*.

As a term enchantment has been used to look into people’s experiences of, for example, magic, wonder and the extraordinary (Utriainen 2016, 50), both on an individual and societal level. Enchantment does not have to be religious or spiritual, but as it is often related to experiences of supernatural or divine power, it is associated with spirituality. Religious and spiritual vocabulary are therefore also often how people feel they can accurately describe their experiences of enchantment. Finding and producing enchantment, especially in a world and society celebrating “rationality” and science can be intentional act of bringing a sense of magic and whimsy back to one’s life, *re-enchantment*. (Bennet 2016, 12; Jenkins 2000, 12–13.) I argue that BL fan culture is a source of, and a space where enchantment takes place, and in this study I look into the ways it appears and is achieved.

1.2 Research questions and approach

The goal of this research is to explore enchantment within, and through BL fan culture, as a way to take seriously and meaningfully understand the personal and playful enjoyment that BL fans derive from the fandom. I explore BL fan accounts in the form of videos on the online platform and social media application TikTok. On TikTok users can consume, create and share short-video content, and it has over one billion users worldwide (Schellewald 2023, 1568). Currently it is also where many fandoms have their own space, and BL fandom is very active on the platform as well. Fan videos on the app are approached with, and analyzed through a theoretical framework and three research questions which center the concept of enchantment, as the determining element of the research approach.

1. How is BL fan culture and the consumption of BL content spontaneously (re)enchanting the fans' lives?
2. What kind of intentional ways to produce and ritually frame enchantment do fans express on TikTok?
3. How is the enchantment of BL fan culture portrayed as similar to religiosity by fans?

The three research questions also order the structure of the analysis chapters, and have been formed to analyze the phenomenon of enchantment from different angles: the spontaneous, the intentionally produced, and finally related to “familiarily” religious enchantment. I have been conducting online ethnography in the BL fan spaces, primarily on TikTok, which as a form of social media is a vivid and diverse. As a fan myself I conducted the online ethnography in the position of an insider. The theoretical framework this study builds on are in particular studies of (re)enchantment, and how to produce/achieve it intentionally via ritual framing (Utraiainen 2016; 2020), fan cultures considered as a form of neo-religiosity (Hills 2002), and finally to conclude the findings and to tentatively situate BL fan culture's (re)enchantment on a wider scale I apply Partridge (2004) theory on re-enchantment in the contemporary Western culture and society. I also supply the theory and my analysis with previous research on BL fan culture and its impact.

In the next two sections of this introductory chapter, I will firstly explain in more detail what BL is, as well as related terms and concepts for a sound foundation for the rest of the thesis paper, before giving a brief account on previous research and how this study is situated among it.

1.3 BL, yaoi and shipping culture

1.3.1 Genre history and vocabulary

Under the umbrella of popular culture, numerous genres have been formed to categorize and define its products. Ones such as horror, romance or historical fiction are well-known and widely applied to media, for example. Genres determine common elements stylistically and content-wise, though often they overlap, and more specific subgenres have also been identified. Sometimes people who generally enjoy certain elements or themes in media express being a fan of a whole genre, such as a “horror fan” or “romance fan”. Often there are more particular personal preferences, however, such as liking supernatural horror over slashers, or liking historical fiction set in a certain time period. Just as wider genres can, specific products of popular culture might build communities of engaged, active consumers – or fans – around them. The general public mostly has an image of fans as enthusiastic supporters and consumers, with a lot of knowledge about and passion for their object of fandom, sometimes seen as crossing the line to obsession (Hills 2002, viii). This is applicable to the BL fandom as well. BL is just one genre that is used to categorize media. There is a large fan community built around BL content, but BL also works as an umbrella term that includes various sub-categories, and has a fandom consisting of fans with varying personal preferences.

Like mentioned in the beginning, the abbreviation BL comes from the term *boys' love*. Simply put, BL is a broad genre of fiction depicting homosexual relationships between men. However, many subgenres, types of fictional texts and media appear under the umbrella of BL, and clear definitions on what it includes are debated by fans. I include within BL both commercial and fan works. *Yaoi* and BL could technically be separated into two different categories, with *yaoi* usually signifying more explicit content (Neville 2018a, 8). These days the terms are used rather interchangeably, though, as specific categorical distinctions are in some cases outdated and not enforced so strictly anymore. As a broad term, BL designates not just the characteristics of a text but also ways to read (it), leaning towards parody or “playful appropriation” from both creators and fans. (Prasannam 2019, 65.)

The origins of BL as a recognized genre are in Japan, and since the beginning it was this playful appropriation and parody that formed it. In the 1980s Japanese women took popular texts' male characters and reimagined them with added homoerotic tone in their anime and

manga parody creations (Neville 2018a, 8). This eventually formed a whole specific type of media called *dōjinshi*, self-published by fans in fanzines², sold at fan conventions and circulated among the community. Similarly, in Thailand where a large amount of BL media is currently produced, early form of BL culture was characterized by female readers “appreciating the intimacy between male characters in *cartoon phuchai* [Japanese shōnen manga/boys’ comics]”. (Prasannam 2019, 65.)

In its early stages the whole genre of BL was indeed thought as a “parodic genre of mainstream works” (Baudinette 2023, 12). Before its commercialization BL then was, and still is, very much powered by fan activity. In 1980s the term *yaoi* emerged for *dōjinshi* in Japan, a kind of humoristic or self-derogatory word formed from the phrase *yama nashi*, *ochi nashi*, *imi nashi* (no climax, no point, no meaning). Later the term *fujōshi* then emerged for *yaoi* fans, literally meaning “rotten girls” (there is also a male equivalent, *fudanshi*). Nowadays it is used by many BL fans worldwide when referring to themselves and to describe a part of their identity, the pejorative term proudly (re)claimed. (Prasannam 2019, 64–66.)

Though BL as a genre originated and was commercialized in Japan, and first became noticeably popular in Asia, the concept of “appreciating the intimacy” or imagining more than is canon between two male characters – *shipping* – is not a new concept in the West either. Fans often delight in the close relationships and interaction of fictional characters, and imagine further (homoerotic) intimacy, tension and romance between them, resulting in creative activity such as writing fan fiction. Pairings, or *ships*, such as Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek*, or Sherlock Holmes and John Watson are very well acknowledged in fan studies. When it comes to shipping male fictional characters, common sentiments on social media include, for example, that female characters are not as well written as their male counterparts and therefore do not invite fans to form any deeper connection, and that the hetero romances portrayed are not interesting or good enough, or pale in comparison to male friendships when it comes to depictions of love, chemistry and loyalty. This then leads to fans engaging with and building connection to the male characters and their relationships. Put into words by a TikTok user: “If you want your characters to stop being gay, you have to learn how to write women. You can’t just have a clearly gay person romancing his boyfriend” (@koreanbeef27

² The term ‘fanzine’ combines words ‘fan’ and ‘magazine’ and generally means magazine-formatted, self-published collections of fan works (The Encyclopedia of Science-Fiction, SFE 2026).

18.10.2024) Sometimes (interesting, developed) female characters are also quite literally absent, or do not interact with each other, especially when the work of media is not aimed towards female audiences (Neville 2018a, 84).

Shipping is not limited to fictional characters, either. Real people, like actors, members of popular bands or content creators are equally being shipped. A large part of early published Thai BL fiction, for example, was originally fan fiction about K-pop idols that got revised. Some works were later even adapted to television series but are still being recognized by their origins in fan fiction. (Baudinette 2023, 44.) Shipping of real people is a big source of discourse, however. For example, a well-known fan fiction site, *Fanfiction.net* has even banned stories featuring real people. It is seen as somewhat morally gray area, and often condemned for portraying real people in a way they might not agree or feel comfortable with, and dehumanizing them. However, in defense of real people shipping, Neville (2018a) writes that fans as well as scholars (e.g. Thrupkaew 2003; Busse 2005; Romano 2012) have expressed that as celebrities often portray a curated persona in public anyway, it is then imagining and playing with this persona rather than the real person. Fans of popular culture play with and appropriate celebrities into their own imaginations and fantasies all the time. Imaginations such as being friends with celebrities, or with them romantically and/or sexually, or what it would be like to be the celebrity – shipping could be seen as just one branch of that. (Neville 2018a, 108–109.) Often it is expressed that as long as the celebrity is not forced to directly see anything inappropriate, or importantly, expected to *comply* to any fan imaginations which after all are not real – it is okay.

The common Western perspective regarding real people ships should not be universally applied, either. In Thailand, for example, the commodification of these real people ships is more the norm than an exception. Popular actor couples from BL series often work together in multiple productions, they are promoting and advertising together, they have concerts and fan meetings as a “couple”, and production companies invest a lot in these real people pairings – not just the fictional ones they portray. They truly work as a unit, and part of that work is often to encourage shipping, since that is the object around which the fandom has formed. These days a well-known production company GMMTV, for example, even has mascot characters for their promoted BL pairings. These mascots have become the child-like embodiments or representatives of the ships who appear in merch and alongside them at events. Still, the difference between reality and fiction is maintained. These couples are often

even called *khu-jin*, meaning “imaginary couples” from the verb *jintana* for “imagine”. (Kang-Nguyễn 2022, 197–198.)

There is the question of how to draw a line between BL and queer media. These genres, or categories, definitely overlap. Some think of BL as a primarily Asian genre and industry, following its Japanese roots and where the majority of genre-typical popular BL is produced. These days, as Baudinette (2023, 6) argues, the position of most influential producer of queer media across Asia has arguably shifted from Japan to Thailand, with Thai BL currently enjoying growing global popularity. However, there are recent Western productions such as *Heartstopper* (2022), *Red, White and Royal Blue* (2023), and *Heated Rivalry* (2025) which definitely do have elements of a “typical” BL, or at the very least are consumed in the same manner. The BL fandom researched here is mostly Western, and they consume/create varying forms of BL media. I argue that the core of how and why BL is consumed stays the same regardless of the form (television series, written word, commercial or fan made, whether marketed as BL or queer media, and so on).

BL texts often include certain common elements and tropes which are reused and reinvented, and often the works acknowledge their audience as insiders to the community in a playful way. To be able to read BL, consumers generally develop specific literacies to decode the texts’ meanings, and these literacies are born from the genre’s history (Baudinette 2023, 13). When describing BL, it is usually first brought up how the fictional couples follow certain, even strict sexual dynamics, or have specific appearance and characteristics as a couple, usually in an “opposites attract and balance each other out” -way. Often one of the pair is more “masculine” and the other more “feminine”, which translate to their sexual preferences. This is certainly common within the genre. However, more and more these expectations are challenged, and norms broken even in commercial BL media. BL does not offer the most realistic portrayal of gay men and their relationships. What it is, is a sub-genre of romance. Therefore, the relationships and characters are not just depicted in their idealistic forms, the stories portray fantasies and dreams, and provide room for liberating exploration and entertainment – sometimes in “unconventional” or complex ways – and specifically for a female and queer gaze. However, just as romance as a genre has been accused of lacking substance so has BL, leading it to be separated from “more serious” queer media.

The most prominent consumer group of BL is women, and therefore there is a large amount of research looking into the genre’s possible empowering and feminist qualities, but also BL

fiction's impact on real queer men. I will discuss these in the overview of previous research. Within the fandom, too, the fans discuss their reasons for consuming BL, the ethics of it, and exchange information and opinions. The genre has, especially in the past, been boiled down to stories made by (heterosexual) women for (heterosexual) women – this notion has been challenged – but researchers have been curious about women being attracted to stories which, after all, center on men so strongly.

1.3.2 The "BL problematics"

Before taking a look at previous research, it is necessary to briefly address what I could describe as the "BL problematics". These are lifted from the most common topics of discourse among and about the BL fandom, which I have personally come across as a participant in various fandoms since 2014. Additionally, these "problematics" are if not directly discussed, at least a background theme or factor in many videos included in the primary research material, which is why addressing them here is important. In short, the most commonly expressed issues regarding BL are: 1. Unrealistic representations of queer men and their relationships. 2. Fetishization, voyeurism and objectifying of real homosexual relationships and queer male individuals. 3. Being male-centric and anti-feminist for not supporting or asking for good representation of women (and women loving women) instead. These arguments could all be discussed in much more depth, which my scale and focus of research does not really support, but addressing them is crucial to also understand the videos analyzed in this study.

First, BL is primarily a sub-genre of romance, or (additionally) a sub-category of erotica, and it is not supposed to be realistic. It is not factual representation. Themes, elements and plot lines might not even be desirable in real life, it is entertainment first and foremost. That does not mean that as a genre it would be shallow or void of meaning, or that it should not be criticized, but historically it has not been intended as realistic gay representation. Considering the environment in which, and the purposes that BL as a genre formed for, its common fictional elements are understood as unrealistic by fans, too. Though, increasingly queer men are consuming and involved in the production of commercial BL media. This has led to more realistic representations of queer lived experience and a kind of "maturing" of especially commercial BL. (Baudinette 2023.) Especially queer men who identify as more "masculine" have criticized genre-typical BL media and BL fans specifically for their "feminization" of gay men and relationships, this has been observed in the contexts of Thailand and Japan, for

example. The rising popularity of commercial BL media, and the increasing involvement of queer people has had positive influence, however. “Though masculine gay men actively resist BL imagery, the popularity of BL is likely increasing tolerance for actual homosexuality in Thai society. This, in turn, is proliferating queer representations that are consumed by both *sao-wai*³ and gays.” (Kang-Nguyễn 2022, 203.)

Second, there have been instances of insensitive, inappropriate and misplaced actions directed towards the (male) queer community by BL fans who are (heterosexual) women. Like with any other fandom, there are the worst-case scenarios and horror stories about going “too far”. Queer men as real individuals, their identity, sexuality or relationships are not there to be consumed for BL fans’ entertainment. There are boundaries which people who do not belong to the queer community should not cross. There are also simply personal boundaries that should not be crossed, especially with people you do not know. Who are affected and how by certain media representations, for what kind of audience is something aimed for, maintaining the separation of real and fictional while allowing the fictive its purposes – these are all factors in navigating the BL scene. Openly queer director of the hit-show *Heated Rivalry* (2025), Jacob Tierney, gave his personal comment on whether women are “allowed” to write stories about homosexual love between men: “The things that we decide women can or can’t do can be really exhausting. Women are allowed to write about men. They’re allowed to write about gay men. The question should be, *how* are they writing about us? Is it with empathy? Is it with allyship? Is it with kindness? Why are we looking for enemies here instead of looking for allies?” (Abramowitch 2025) This is a very warmly expressed piece of insight, but it is also his personal opinion, which does not represent all queer men. Nor can I “defend” the fandom and claim all BL media, or all the BL fans’ activities as always empathetic, kind or expressing allyship towards queer men.

Third, there certainly is wide media representation of women and heterosexual relationships. There is also good representation of queer relationships between women, and increasingly so. For example, in Thailand which has become the center of BL production, companies are now producing increasing amounts of “GL”, *girls’ love*, series using methods proven to work within BL industry (Le 2024). And most of the women who do consume BL also enjoy stories and erotica with heterosexual relationships, or queer female relationships – provided that the

³ Sao-wai meaning *y-girls*, a Thai term very similar in meaning to *fujōshi*, with the initial ‘y’ coming from *yaoi* (Kang-Nguyễn 2022, 198)

female characters are compelling (Neville 2018a, 86). But even women identifying as queer often gravitate towards male characters.

The concept of two men forsaking all others in the name of whatever goal they mutually seek is central to our literary consciousness. Often this connection is portrayed as so strong, and so intense, that these two men would give their lives for each other. A romantic, heterosexual entanglement could never hope to compete with such a bond. As one participant comments, ‘sexist or wrongheaded or a product of patriarchy though it might be, I totally get off on an idealized male friendship. It is extremely unusual for any depiction of women to have that same vibe because our culture just doesn’t see female friendship the same way. Even when it is valued, it’s treated more realistically and less some over-the-top Greek myth about swearing eternal brotherhood’. (Neville 2018a, 89.)

Additionally, when identifying as a woman, focusing on male characters can allow liberation from one’s own body (image) and sexuality, and possible struggles with them, as well as social realities for, and assumptions about women. But at some point it really just comes down to personal likes and preferences. Of course, though this is just observation based on sentiments that are recognized within BL fandom spaces, these likes and preferences are likely affected by the surrounding (heteropatriarchal) society. In the West, even gender-neutral often gravitates towards masculinity, because femininity is more, and more strictly, socially gendered and also socially punished, in a sense. When femininity is celebrated, it is distinctly portrayed as special or something unattainable for “mere men”. When traditional masculinity is so far removed from what is perceived as feminine, and not *allowed* to be feminine, BL as a genre of text and media that is able to imagine even masculine males being comfortable with femininity can be gratifying, and in that sense also feel “gender free”.

1.4 Previous research about BL culture

When it comes to studies about BL culture, or topics related to it, there is a wide range of academic research that can be applicable. Western studies are mainly about shipping or slash fiction⁴ as a sub-topic of fan studies, while the studies on commercial BL and its influence are often from Asian context. What unites this wide range of research is findings about BL, and BL-adjacent fiction, offering a channel for female and queer individuals to express, explore and represent themselves and ideas and dreams of their own, which have in mainstream media

⁴ ‘Slash’ is “a genre of fan fiction that focuses on interpersonal attraction and sexual relationships between fictional characters of the same sex” (Neville 2018b, 385).

often been overlooked. BL fiction has been looked at as a political, revolutionary arena which already by existing resists heteropatriarchal social and cultural norms. (Baudinette 2023.)

Often BL fiction, and the fans who enjoy and produce it, are in academic research somehow attempted to be theoretically “explained” in a way that justifies the existence of socially controversial, or what is even seen as a morally dubious genre of fiction. What has been mostly overlooked previously, though, is empirical research on the practical presence and personal meaningfulness that BL has in the fans’ lives. Building on observations by Thorn (2004) and Pagliassotti (2010) Neville (2018a, 10) states that: “...While the theoretical work is rich and complex, there has been far less empirical research done asking creators and consumers of BL, what they like about the genre, and what, if any impact it has on their everyday lives and politics”. As fandom is happening increasingly in online spaces, there is no shortage of material where fans directly express and discuss these things exactly, which is why online ethnography came to be the most natural choice for me to conduct a study. Previous research, however, helps to illustrate the realities from which the BL enchantments that I study spring up, and what is transformed through them, and I continue and build on these studies with my own.

The online slash fiction communities have in research been described as “queer female space” where identity and sexuality can be explored (Neville 2018a, 9). Some researchers equate slash to BL (Chang & Tian 2021, 605), but often there is a kind of difference maintained between it and commercial BL and queer media. Western queer media about men is not usually categorized as BL, either, which leads to the fans’ activities to be seen as something different or separate from the activities of the “proper” BL fandom. However, the enjoyment of BL content is often much the same whether text portraying homosexual relationship between men is officially marketed as a BL or not. Movies like Thai blockbuster film *Love of Siam* (2007), or American *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) were massive successes among BL fans while certainly not marketed so (Prasannam 2019, 68; Neville 2018a, 2).

Most of the commercial BL media, like comics or television series, are produced in East- and Southeast Asia but have growing global fanbases. Especially Thai BL industry and its influence abroad has in recent years been studied plenty, as Thailand has become the “hub for BL series production” (Bunyavejchewin et al. 2024, 16). Thomas Baudinette has notably published the first book-length study on Thai BL in English (2023), where he details the history of the genre in Thailand and looks into its queer potential within constrained realities.

According to Jirattikorn (2022) Thai BL has become increasingly popular across Asia, namely Vietnam, Indonesia and China, in particular because of its abilities to portray a utopian imaginary world not available in local media, as well as for the community it fosters. Commercial BL might not give an exactly accurate description of the realities for queer individuals and challenges they face, but as a form of media it has been studied to offer a message of hope (Bunyavejchewin et al. 2024, 16). Many scholars, such as Liang (2022) Chang & Tian (2020) and Kang-Nguyễn (2022) have had similar findings, highlighting the utopian imaginary in BL, and its political, revolutionary potential and empowering qualities in different contexts and for specific audiences – mainly among women and queer people.

For female consumers BL can present an escape from gender-normative expectations, excludes the need to forcibly identify with a female character who is often a victim of heteropatriarchy themselves and/or not relatable, and functions as a space to explore emotional and sexual fantasies in a “safe” way through the male characters. Ideal romance and love between equals (at least more so than the heteronormative male/female), or even what was described as “gender-free love” in the form of two men is also one of the main attractors in BL comics according to the fan survey by Bunyavejchewin. (2022, 185-186.) It is not even just BL media, but fan practice of homoerotic shipping regardless of fandom can be seen to have similar effects. For example, the practice of shipping K-pop band members has been described as a “feminist act” (Kwon 2019) as “young female consumers who have been denied sexual agency by the hetero-patriarchal logics of Korean society can safely explore and express their sexual attraction to handsome male celebrities” (Baudinette 2023, 88).

As the most prominent consumers of BL, the female audiences and their motivations have understandably been the focus of much of the research. However, it is good to clarify that though BL is seen as a genre for heterosexual women in particular, this view is not exactly supported by research, at least anymore. According to a 2024 published study about socio-demographics of local Thai BL series consumers by Poowin Bunyavejchewin et al., among the questionnaire participants only 38.5% identified as heterosexual, and 63.5% identified as female (Bunyavejchewin et al. 2024, 13). Though (heterosexual) women were the ones to create the BL genre, they are not the only ones enjoying it or finding it meaningful. BL has been academically explained as a form of escapism, but also been acknowledged as a political arena for *all* those confined in the strictly hetero-patriarchal society (Neville 2018a, 9).

Already cited here multiple times, Lucy Neville has published a book about women who consume gay male erotica and pornography, *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys* (2018a), in which she brings together previous theoretical work from many areas, such as fan studies, porn studies and gender studies. Discussing slash fandom she states: “In both recent academic work and within fandom communities there has been resistance to attempts by scholars to overtheorize slash fandom. Women write and read slash because it’s *fun*. They do it because they like it, and because it brings them pleasure.” (Neville 2018a, 82-83.) Indeed, the everyday impact of BL as a source of pleasure and meaning, and by extension enchantment, as I will consider is something that has not gotten the attention it deserves. And while previous research has gained insight about female audiences in particular, that can be limiting. To comprehend the global BL – and BL adjacent – fan audience and the culture they partake in, incorporating more diverse and inclusive perspective is necessary (Bunyavejchewin et al. 2024, 16). This study seeks to fill the gap in empirical research by exploring fan accounts, without limiting the research to any particular sub-category of fans. From the theoretical perspective of enchantment, I look into the practical “fun” and personal enjoyment experienced by fans, rather than focusing on why.

2 Theoretical framework and key-concepts

2.1 (Re)enchantment

The concept of *enchantment* is the center which the rest of this study's theoretical framework is constructed around. Enchantment, and the ideas of disenchantment and re-enchantment which follow it – all of which I will explain next – have also become ways to conceptualize (Western) religiosity, its stages and how it is experienced. The idea of enchantment is in this study utilized as a way to seriously, and with gravitas to conceptualize and analyze the fun, the creatively imaginative and extraordinary that BL fans experience. Theory on ritual framing of enchantment (Utriainen 2016; 2020) and imagination are applied, and form key-concepts to analyze how enchantment is intentionally produced among the fandom. Then, finally, I utilize theory on fan cultures as similar to religiosity (Hills 2002), specifically in the way enchantment is experienced, conceptualized and valued, and to place BL fan culture among the wider, contemporary Western spiritual field which is strongly characterized by re-enchantment (Partridge 2004). The concept of enchantment therefore ties the theoretical framework together, and defines the other key-concepts of re-enchantment, ritual framing and imagination, and through which we can consider how fan cultures such as the BL fandom can factor in the current Western religious field.

Enchantment can be defined, for example, simply by its affective and physical effect as Bennett (2016, 4–5) does, describing the experience of enchantment as "being struck and shaken by the extraordinary" and being transfixed and spellbound. Or as Stainova (2019, 1) put it: "To be enchanted is to experience wonder, to let oneself be moved." Depending on the individual's personal worldview and everyday life experience, enchantment can be found through various sources. Utriainen (2016) illustrates very well the flexible idea of enchantment that I utilize in this study, describing it as a power that brings a "touch of magic" into different social and cultural fields and contexts, in which she includes everyday life: "...An often volatile power (perhaps of imagination, emotion, surprise, wonder and the dream-world) that touches many things such as religion, art, play, entertainment, politics and certainly commerce and commodification" (Utriainen 2016, 50). Enchantment is not something only found within "proper" religion, even though it is often discussed in religious context, such as supernatural experiences and contact with the sacred. Enchantment does not depend on some kind of divine power, but it does signify something that goes beyond the ordinary (Bennett 2016, 12).

Max Weber (1917) famously expressed the idea of “disenchantment of the world”, one of the most prominent secularization theories (Stainova 2019, 218). In Weber’s view, the modernization and rationalization of the Western society especially after the Reformation, and the development of science had led to the loss of everyday magic. Secularization has later, and generally speaking, been observed in the regress of institutional and traditional religion in our society. However, Western secularization is not a universal phenomenon, and rather than secularization theories predicting a future they observe trends. (Partridge 2004, 11–12.) This idea of secularized, disenchanted Western world still led to a responding theory about re-enchantment – enchantment being rediscovered, in different ways and from different sources than before. Sense of disenchantment then is in a way necessary, or prerequisite for re-enchantment to follow it. (Kirby 2014, 12; Partridge 2004, 43.)

In contemporary Western society, individuals have much more authority about their religiosity than in the past. Rather than society defining the religion to follow and having commonly shared beliefs, practices and worldview, people develop personally meaningful spiritualities that incorporate aspects from multiple sources. Many hold a very pluralist worldview that may include elements all the way from Christianity to UFO-beliefs and environmental activism, all depending on their personal interests. (Partridge 2004, 47–48, 58–59.) These ideas and new forms of spirituality which are not included with the traditional, established, institutionalized religiosity *nor* rational, secular way of thinking and social norms, are enriching life in new ways. This enrichment can be conceptualized as re-enchantment, in the sense that people are rediscovering and reimagining enchantment.

[...] Rather than the death of religion foretold by earlier theorists, the current state of religion is rather one of relocation. Essentially, the construction points towards an active desire for enchantment in the face of Western modernity with its attendant materialist and rationalist bent, and the deliberate imbuing of the world with abundant meanings which reincorporate the intangible into the world. (Kirby 2014, 12.)

This “active desire for enchantment” is notable, as it is what leads to re-enchantment more broadly, but also drives to intentionally produce enchantment. Partridge (2004) argues specifically that the current religious and spiritual scene in the West is that of re-enchantment, and he uses the term *occulture* to encompass these new ways of finding enchantment, and how they challenge the traditional, normative, secular and scientific assumptions and definitions of our reality. Regressing and disintegrating Christian culture in Western countries is according to him being replaced with the sphere of occulture, and to understand the kind of role religion still has in our contemporary society, occultural communities and sub-cultures

need to be taken into account seriously. (Partridge 2004, 40–41.) For the people who draw enchantment from occulture, and those who belong to communities and collectives connected to it, the world *is* enchanted. Though this could be in contrast to, or hidden from the surrounding “disenchanted” world.

Utriainen (2016, 50) states that: “It is possible to conceive of enchantment as a kind of a subjunctive mode of relating to the world as a reservoir or promise of possibilities, openings and new beginnings.” Following this notion, enchantment can be a matter of personal attitude and approach, and intentional by seeing it as this “reservoir of possibilities”. One can choose to enchant their everyday life experience, and we can expand that to encompass what re-enchantment as a whole is. Kirby (2014) sites Hume and Phillips (2006): “Re-enchantment brings back the imagination and possibility of magic into our everyday lives” (Kirby 2014, 12). Imagination as a concept is often considered closely related to enchantment, as it can be a way to visualize, dream and play with even (or especially) unrealistic ideas and possibilities, and therefore work as an intentional way to produce enchantment. In this study as well, I connect imagination and imaginative practices to the intentional search of (re)enchantment, which I will discuss in more detail further.

Enchantment and re-enchantment can occur in one’s life simultaneously, and in many cases of enchantment I discuss it could also be conceptualized as re-enchantment, hence often written as (re)enchantment in this paper. However, I use the term *enchantment* to specifically describe the kind of tangible occurrence, experience and production of whimsy, dreamy, the extraordinary, joy and wonder in the fans’ lives. *Re-enchantment* as a concept is in turn used to consider the broader sense of finding enchantment again or in a novel way within the rational, serious and ordinary everyday world that can occur through BL fan culture, and how BL can re-enchant areas of life, tradition and culture.

2.2 Ritual framing and imagination

Understanding enchantment as an affective experience, a kind of reservoir of possibilities (Utriainen 2016), and a source of inspiration and meaning, it can be assumed that the intentional pursuit of it is not only possible, but something one can become skilled at and utilize willingly. For the purposes of this study, I will be focusing on the practice of *ritual framing* (Utriainen 2016; 2020), and as related to it, imagination. The concept of ritual framing will be implemented in this study more concretely, while imagination functions as a

more vague, background key-concept referring to the playful and dreamy dimensions of producing/achieving enchantment.

In relation to the pursuit of enchantment, the creative and altering effect of imagination is notable. Mahlamäki (2020), for example writes about imagination as a technique, which can be utilized and practiced when wanting to contact the otherworldly, such as supernatural beings or the afterlife (Mahlamäki 2020, 200). Viholainen (2020) describes imagination as “future oriented” and a “possibility for change” (Viholainen 2020, 38). Imagination is often used and discussed in a manner that emphasizes its power for change and transformation, the ability to visualize, come up and play with possibilities and wishes. Then if enchantment is also conceptualized as a reservoir of possibilities and a force that transforms the ordinary to extraordinary, imagination is intimately connected to it and can be seen as part of what produces enchantment.

Imagination as such is very powerful, we can “travel” with it, we can play with it, we create and dream with it, we supply and complete our perception of the world and our knowledge with it. Imagination is a radical, creative power, through which people can loosen the boundaries set by empirical experience. (Viholainen 2020.) Stainova (2019) considers the power of imagination, and indulging in it, as a resistant act against structural injustice and violence. Daydreaming, playing with imagination and letting oneself be moved – this produces enchantment, which is a force that allows us to imagine things otherwise than they are and resist the limiting, constraining realities, even subvert them. Stainova (2019, 221) writes: “By emphasizing the constraining context within which enchantments take place, critique also has the potential to cast light on the radical and subversive nature of certain flights of the imagination.”

Using ways of critical thinking enchantment can be assessed more precisely, so that we can understand how enchantment is restrained or “tempered” due to society and world’s structural realities. Imagination is not just escapism as Stainova (2019) emphasizes. Citing Arjun Appadurai (2000) Stainova (2019) states that imagination affects and informs people’s everyday life in many ways. Imagination affects how we experience the world, our social relationships and also creates and builds our reality. Enchantment achieved through imagination is not forgetting the (unpleasant) realities, but more so a conscious moment of fighting against them, resisting by imagining the world and ourselves in a different way. (Stainova 2019, 221–224.)

Ritual and imagination are also connected as they are both of the *subjunctive realm*, so as modes of thinking open possibilities. Subjunctive is all about the “as if” realm of wishes, possibilities and the hypothetical. (Utriainen & Vesala 2020, 147–148.) Building on Seligman (2010) and Turner (1987), Utriainen and Vesala (2020) state that especially rituals’ power to produce change or transformation leans heavily on the subjunctive, and this is why ritual can be approached as a kind of “possibility-work”. Ritual and imagination are also tightly connected, for example in the sense that ritual can enforce or produce imagination. (Utriainen & Vesala 2020, 148.)

Ritual framing is by Utriainen (2016, 51) studied specifically in the context of enchantment, and as she states: “ritual and ritualizing are powerful ways of inviting and cultivating the extraordinary and its effects”. Ritual can be understood as an action that achieves transformation and changes perspective. By ritually framing, things can be seen or done how we wish, or how should be done, or how things could be – all the while conscious of the reality that is altered with and through the ritual frame. Citing Seligman (2010), Utriainen specifies that ritual can be seen as a kind of executed illusion: “Ritual presents and assumes a *subjunctive ‘as if’ mode* over life, and ritual is thus above all about potentialities, possibilities and creative illusion”. (Utriainen 2016, 46–47.)

Additionally, as Utriainen (2020, 197) states: “From the perspective of the art of ritual framing, one can see the intimate, yet also sometimes tense relations of the lived ‘religious’ and the lived ‘secular’ (or ‘enchanted’ and ‘disenchanted’).” According to Utriainen (2020, 196), people in the contemporary West often live in very secular societies, where strong expressions of enchantment can be frowned upon. This leads to those experiencing enchantments to learn both the art of ritual framing and *de-framing*. People are finding re-enchantment from variety of sources, such as new forms of spirituality, but they might still feel the pressure to hide or not express the enchantments they experience in the secular socio-cultural climate (Partridge 2004; Utriainen 2020). Ritual framing works to produce enchantments, but de-framing helps to manage them, or limit them to certain company or environment, for example.

With ritual framing the extraordinary or otherworldly is brought to be part of everyday life and to be interacted with, even though the contact is often subtle and personal. Still, ritual framing is used to achieve new perspective, or alteration. Ritual frame is not strictly bound, more so it is flexible, permeable and often momentary. The outside and inside of the frame

are connected, and the ritual subjunctive may come and go and bring very subtle changes to everyday life. (Utriainen 2016, 50-51, 54.) Understanding ritual frame as flexible like this, and connected to the outside world is important. Inside the ritual frame there can exist a reality of its own, with its own ontology, logics and rules. Things that would not be possible or (importantly) desirable outside the ritual frame may be so within it. Therefore, when ritual frame's inside and outside are connected to each other "things can be both possible and impossible almost simultaneously". (Utriainen 2016, 54.)

Utriainen (2016) studied communities of angel spirituality, which combines elements from Christianity, esoteric and alternative spirituality, and is linked to popular culture, too. Among these communities contact experienced with angels were often small moments of enchantment, like a feather found on a street that would be then interpreted, so ritually framed, in a certain way. Sometimes angels were seen as figures that carry through difficult life situations and opened possibilities for future. (Utriainen 2016, 50–51.) Members in the communities such as that around angel spirituality are often practiced in the art of ritual framing of enchantment, which requires skill and knowledge (Utriainen 2016; 2020), but also in other ways are intentionally playing with the boundaries of possible and impossible, imagined and real. *Play*, just like ritual, is about subjunctive as if -mode, and separating ritual and play can be difficult (Seligman et al. 2008, 71). Looking into ritual framing is then only one of the ways we can study intentional and practical enchantment, and it overlaps with concepts of play and imagination as well.

Imagination and play -powered (re)enchantment of one's environment and reality has also been studied for example in the context of "fan pilgrimage". Will Brooker (2007) wrote about the city of Vancouver in Canada which has become, as the filming location of many popular series and movies, a fan pilgrimage site for reminiscing and experiencing the fictional. Vancouver has become a richly layered site, a massive "playground" that encourages creative imagination, and where numerous worlds meet and exist together. Brooker argues that fan pilgrims through imaginative, creative investment make the otherwise unremarkable sites of the city special, and turn them into "sites of play and carnival, poetry and magic". (Brooker 2007, 429.) Hills (2002) states that at places such as filming sites that are strongly connected to the object of fandom, when fans visit them they can experience the fictional world physically, live in there for a moment (even if in a limited or imagined manner) and that strengthens the connection to the object of fandom as well as devotion to it. The reality and the fantasy/imagined cannot fully merge, but the boundary between them is blurred and partly

permeable, and fans can walk along the boundary and deliberately play with it. (Hills 2002, 112.)

These descriptions about fan pilgrimage and fans' skills and imaginative techniques to have contact with the object of fandom, and the "magical" fictional world, can be combined with Utriainen's (2016; 2020) descriptions about ritual framing of enchantment and ritual subjunctive. This imaginative, playful approach and "creative investment" that makes otherwise ordinary special (Brooker 2007, 429) and deliberately playing with the boundary of real and fantasy/imagined to have contact with the object of fandom (Hills 2002, 112), could be conceptualized as ritually framing enchantment (Utriainen 2016; 2020) to produce change, transformation, and to have contact with the angels and to transcend the ordinary.

In this study I apply in particular theory on ritual framing by Utriainen (2016; 2020), but maintain an emphasis on the role of imagination and playfulness in the process of framing, to look into BL fans' specific, intentional ways of producing enchantment.

2.3 Fan cultures and religiosity

As mentioned earlier, nowadays alternative, re-enchanting spirituality in the West operates in the same areas as traditional or institutional religion used to, with individuals reconstructing, deregulating and relocating religion and based on where they find (re)enchantment, and to fit their own desires. Popular culture has been recognized as a significant source and mediator of (re)enchantment. (Partridge 2004.) Considering fandoms built around products of popular culture as religiosity/spirituality, or similar to them, helps to understand the ways (re)enchantment manifests, and the gravity and power it has in the contemporary Western religious scene. Fans also often describe and conceptualize their experiences of enchantment within and via fandom, and the fandom itself, through religious vocabulary and sentiments to express them adequately (Hills 2002).

Matt Hills (2002) defines fan cultures as *neo-religiosity*, not directly comparable to religion. Fan cultures with their (re)enchantment, like established religions or new religious movements, often differ from the mainstream in the contemporary, secular Western society, and are in some ways stigmatized for it. Being a fan is often thought as a more "out there" way of consuming, even obsessive devotion, though according to recent studies it is increasingly common to identify as a fan and participate in fan activities. (Booth 2015, 1.) However, fandoms still get treated in different ways based on how socially acceptable or

normalized they are, and how “rational” they are viewed as. Due to being anti-normative, some fandoms are or have been sub-cultures which operate outside of, or even hidden from the mainstream society. This has certainly been the case of BL fandom (Baudinette 2023).

There are also practical similarities between fan- and religious practice. Fan communities themselves often utilize religious vocabulary when describing and explaining being a fan, and the gravity of its personal meaning to them. Hills (2002) defines especially enduring and active fan cultures, and who use this religious vocabulary as *fan cults*. This can feel confusing considering that “cult” as a term comes with quite negative associations these days. Hills, however, justifies and explains using the term specifically because it is not neutral. Fans who partake in cult discourse, so religious discourse, and use religious vocabulary (such as “cult film”, call their fandom a cult, or a book a sacred text – even if in a humoristic manner) acknowledge what kind of connotations there are. Therefore, using terms like this is conscious, and partaking in religious discourses and associating the fan culture with religion is conscious. (Hills 2002, 117–122.) It is not, though, that fandom would be just simply filling some religion-shaped hole left when Western society became secularized, or that religion would have just relocated to fandom as such. Directly equating fan cults to religion is not the most suitable way to study them, as besides the practical similarities there are also differences in these communities and how they are understood, but the type of neo-religiosity of fans should still be taken seriously. (Hills 2002.) Importantly for this study, fandoms usually bring up specific and curated (re)enchantment for the participants.

Hills (2002), like Partridge (2004) emphasizes that on an individual level people are still finding and freely adopting themes and ideas of the “sacred”, even though the surrounding society would (on the surface) be secularized. Popular culture, the object of fandom and fan practice can be a source of these themes and ideas. At the very least the (re)enchantment experienced through fandom can become more understandable, and easier expressed, from the perspective of religiosity, and with familiar religious language where the meaning and gravity is assumed or “by default”. Cult as a term, or other spiritual terminology has not lost its religious meaning or power, either, even if fans use them in a humoristic manner (Hills 2002, 120).

Fleeson (2024) brings up the argument that fandoms understood as religiosity is problematic because fans do not fulfill the central criteria of *belief* in supernatural powers and beings. Therefore, if fandoms are discussed as religiosity based on the similarities in practice, a

functionalist understanding of religion is needed, which allows for a broader application of the concept. Fleeson states, however, that the emphasis on the importance of belief in the center of religion/religiosity is a very Western and protestant notion, not a universal criteria for what religion is. (Fleeson 2024, 31.) Additionally, Bornet and Burger (2012) underline in their preface for the book *Religions in Play: Games, Rituals and Virtual World* that studying *play* leads towards those dimensions of religion which encompass practice (instead of belief), fun and levity (instead of seriousness) and visual and material objects (instead of texts). These aspects have been overlooked as Western, specifically Christianity based definitions and patterns have structured previous research. (Bornet & Burger 2012, 8.) Within fan cultures, certainly within BL fan culture, it is the playful and fun aspects that often bring meaning and value. "This definition acknowledges a mystery of religion that cannot be reduced to rationalistic expectations of belief, but something that is intuitively recognized and affirmed in an individual's life." (Fleeson 2024, 31–32.) This so called "mystery of religion" sounds quite like enchantment.

Even though usually there is a strict divide and differentiation made between mainstream religions and pop-culture inspired spiritualities, Porter (2010) wonders if fandom is just similar to religion, if it looks like religion and acts like religion. Within fan studies fandoms are often seen as "a means of accommodation and resistance to dominant social and political structures" and fandoms' personally meaningful power is acknowledged. (Porter 2010, 271–272.) This connects us to the radical, empowering and healing powers that enchantment can have, and which can be observed in BL fandom, too. Additionally, even though fans do not necessarily believe in fictional characters, there is still value in fans' active relationships to the them, fictional worlds and stories. According to Fleeson (2024) fans create meaning and relationships to fictional, which helps them understand and develop themselves, which is then how fandom can "take a religious role" in their lives, though often as part of broader religiosity. Here then, Partridge's (2004) descriptions of individual worldviews and spiritualities being constructed based on people's own desires and interests, often at least partly derived from popular culture, is reaffirmed.

Many products of popular culture especially within genres like fantasy use elements of religious and cultural tradition, and these elements of course on their own right are reimagined, reinterpreted and then re-enchanted. The ideas, representations and values presented in products of popular culture can influence one's worldview, there are even new forms of spirituality (described with terms such as "invented religion", "quasi-religion" and

“fiction-based religion”) fully credited to or based on (re)enchanted popular culture, like “Jediism” based on *Star Wars*, for example (Olsen 2021, 100). Blom (2013) cites Sean McCloud (2010, 335): “Both religion and popular culture help people create and infuse their lives with meaning, identity, community, memory, tradition, and power through the use of various cultural items” (Blom 2013, 9-10). Still, the enchantment within fan cultures could perhaps be inspected in a more concrete way, by focusing on its experience and power, and how it is achieved.

Fans’ intensive connection and devotion to their object of fandom is often questioned and even judged, just as devotedly religious are questioned and judged in secular society that celebrates supposed rationality. This leads to many fans feeling like they need to accommodate to social norms, and how much they show of their fan-self and -enchantments in public, or to restrict them to certain spaces and company, such as fan conventions. (Hills 2002, 120–122.) On the other hand, for fans their environment can be enchanting and meaningful in a specific way, but for an outsider this enchantment might not come across or be accessible at all. This notion is useful when studying fans’ practices of ritual framing as a way to produce enchantment. I apply Hills’ (2002) theory of fan cultures as neo-religiosity to look into the way BL fans conceptualize and portray their fandom (re)enchantment as something similar to religion or religiosity. Later I will utilize Partridge’s (2004) theory of current Western spiritual scene being that of re-enchantment, to tentatively consider how BL (re)enchantment can be situated on that wider cultural scale.

3 Methods and source material

3.1 Online ethnography

Online ethnography is quite a broad term, but covers the way I conducted research in the online environment of the BL fandom, primarily the social media application TikTok. A defining factor of all ethnographical research is a period of field work, conducted to study people or a community in the natural environment they operate in (Isomäki, Lappi and Silvennoinen 2013, 151). For about a year (2025-2026) I took a decidedly academic, theory guided perspective to observing the BL fan culture, which I already engaged in, as it is portrayed and happens on TikTok. I observed how the other fans were showing, talking about, and simply *being* BL fans in their TikTok videos. Rather than actively participating, I conducted my research more as a passive observer within the inner circle of fandom – the manner in which many BL fans engage with fandom in their everyday life.

The type of content and posts on TikTok are mainly short-form videos, and as a popular application it has been at the forefront in forming new trends, for example in online marketing and popular content. What happens on the digital space of TikTok is not limited to online sphere, however. What is represented and talked about there is the non-online, physical and real life, and the online happens within it and also affects it. The online cannot be separated from the physical, as Frömming et. al describe in the introduction chapter of *Digital Environments: Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces* (2017, 13):

(Digital environments) have fostered new expressions of identity, new forms of collaborative working, new commercial and political strategies, new modes of producing and distributing art, and new configurations of sociality, exchange and intimacy. Digital environments are so closely entangled with the physical world that any opposition between the “virtual” and the “real” is fundamentally misleading almost the same manner as a distinction between the “digital” and the “nondigital” (or “analog”) is untenable.

The digital is an indispensable part of our contemporary world, and human culture is increasingly shaped by digital technology. Citing Pink et al. (2015), Frömming et al. (2017, 15) state that digital ethnography “does not necessarily have to engage with digital technology in both its methodology and its research focus”. In online spaces that are very networked, ethnography is networked, too. Researchers might have to reconsider concepts like “fieldsite” and “research participant”, as these roles blur and informants can collaborate in the

production of meaning. Additionally, almost by default auto-ethnographic dimension is brought into the research in digital environments, as “social media demands a certain kind of reciprocity of their users: if one wishes to connect with and receive information from other users, one is also required to reveal something about themselves.” (Frömming et al. 2017, 13–16.)

Even though I have never posted videos in the fandom spaces on TikTok myself, and did not choose to do that now, either, I have been an active participant for years. I am already part of the network, and as I observe the others I also reflect on myself. In multiple fandoms I have found myself in the sub-groups around BL shipping, and considered how in practically every fandom there are BL fans within – even if they are not always visible for everyone. And these fans are connected through certain ways of consuming, creating and playing. BL fans are networked and widespread in the undergrowth of popular culture fandoms. I could call myself an “intimate insider” as Neville (2018a, 26) describes herself, following Jodie Taylor (2011): “a researcher who is not just part of the community under investigation, but is working, at the deepest level, within their own backyard”. Of course, being an insider is both an advantage and a possible cause for hindrance. There could arise concerns about lack of objectivity or reflexivity, but on the other hand being an insider like this brings “methodologically relevant empathy” – personal care about the subject and topic of study. (Devereux 1967, 160 as cited by Neville 2018a, 26.)

TikTok is not only a very contemporary online (fandom) space but offers a particularly vivid audiovisual online experience through videos, and fans’ direct accounts. The BL fandom on TikTok is also considerably diverse, and online even large, physically scattered collectives of people are accessible. This allows me to study a wider group of fans instead of limiting the research to just female audiences from a certain area or age group, for example. Additionally, I wanted for the study to have a scope of BL fandom that includes slash fandom (in this case m/m shippers), the fans of commercial BL such as Thai BL series or Japanese manga, as well as the audiences of popular queer media not categorized/marketed as BL but consumed in the same manner, and this was achievable by conducting the research on TikTok.

3.1.1 TikTok as a site of fieldwork and TikTok videos as the primary source

Fandoms happen largely online. That is where fans meet, converse, share thoughts and fan works such as fan fiction and fan videos, and simply exist as fans. (Zubernis and Larsen 2018,

146.) TikTok is an online space where the BL fan culture happens, where it forms, where it is mediated and represented. Rather than posts set in the virtual world as something separate from the real, the videos on TikTok often have people directly filming or relating their real-life experiences, though often that happens in stylized ways or formats that the platform encourages, or which are trendy. TikTok also hosts fan art; a popular and well-received form is media being edited to tell a certain story or to showcase a particular “vibe”. There are many videos where the appearance or voice of the video’s creator is not revealed, but most of the content is still very much tied to real experiences.

For online ethnography TikTok provides a rich, layered space. Besides entertainment, on TikTok people also consume news and stay updated, it is where a lot of marketing happens, communities form and connections are made, and it provides a platform for (fan) creativity. There was no shortage of content as BL fandom is very active on TikTok, and the bigger problem was actually limiting the amount of videos I collected to analyze in more depth and return to, to a manageably sized and coherent set of primary research material. TikTok is also a constantly changing and evolving environment. Videos are uploaded and deleted, they are reused by others, and popular creators and trends rapidly change. Content itself as well as its relevance on TikTok is ephemeral. This also means that what I have observed there, and material I recorded is not fully accessible anymore, and that is an aspect of the contemporary online fan culture that needs to be accepted and taken into account.

I conducted online ethnography in kind of “moments of field work”, when I would enter the online space internally positioned as a researcher who is guided by the theoretical perspective focused on enchantment. Considering my own interests and participation in the BL fandom, I could, in a sense, trust that videos I would want to inspect would come my way. And so, when I predictably came across videos by BL fans, I would take note on the content and themes and how, or if, I could approach them with the theoretical perspective of enchantment and my research questions. Over a period of longer time I observed changing trends, common and widely shared sentiments or activities, and attempted to identify and record how (re)enchantment as a defining aspect of the BL fan culture is experienced, produced, and how it is put into words and characterized by fans on TikTok. Using theory and research questions to guide my choices, I then set up collection of videos to use as primary research material.

I did have to limit the amount of videos and make the primary source material coherent to answer my research problem, which was not an easy task simply for the wide range and

massive amount of videos. I ended up mostly leaving out fan art as such, to prioritize fans and their experiences as they themselves described. This, however, is gray area as sometimes fan art incorporates or well-describes fans' personal experiences. In a more decided manner, I chose to not analyze the comment sections of the videos, and focused just on the TikToks themselves.

I set up a collection of videos on the TikTok app for the primary source material I could reference and return to, within the limits of their permanence. The videos I put in the collection could be analyzed to portray enchantment in at least one of three ways: 1. As spontaneous, automatic or generally without fans' own creative contribution by just consuming BL and partaking in the fan culture, 2. As a result of intentional and creative production, or ritual framing, and 3. Enchantment of BL fandom portrayed as religious or similar to that. Large amount of videos fulfilled this criteria, which is why I additionally filtered the videos with other requirements not related to the content.

On the initial phases of the ethnographic observation and collection process, I would bookmark practically every video that somehow related to my topic of interest (so enchantment), and at the highest I had approximately 300 videos. To make the amount of videos manageable I filtered through the videos in multiple rounds based on publicity, and as the theoretical framework became more defined I only kept in the collection the ones that could distinctly be analyzed through it and answered the research questions. Additionally, in cases when during the analysis process I decided I wanted to highlight something more, or add a very recent trend I noticed, I would add videos I came across to the collection. If I had in my initial collection multiple videos with very similar content (of fans going to a certain location, for example), I would only keep up to four of the same topic.

In the end I collected 60 videos. All of them are publicly available, have a minimum of 15 000 likes (and therefore at least the same amount of views), and were posted between 2024 and 2026. This was to have a base assumption that the creator of the video is comfortable with considerable publicity (both for their account and the video), they will not mind their videos spreading outside of the fandom "bubble", as well as to ensure topicality. Many of the videos additionally hold over 100 000 likes, and have therefore been positively engaged with by an even larger number of (assumed) fans. In terms of duration of the TikToks, they vary from just a few seconds to slightly under two minutes, but the majority of the videos are less than a minute long. All the chosen videos are in English. The videos are all by different creators –

with the one exception (@fujoshiqueen) from whom I reference two videos. This makes it a coherent system to discuss and refer to the individual videos by the creators' username in this thesis paper.

Finally, TikToks are a very layered form of media. There is the main, or primary content of the video so what happens on the screen (sometimes it is just pictures and/or text, even though the format is technically a video), then there is the text caption for the video, a comment section, and very importantly the background sound. These audio bits, or *sounds*, are often from trending products of popular culture (songs, clips from movies/series/games etc.), or just original audios from other TikToks that have started spreading and been reinvented and repurposed. Often specific TikTok sounds also become particularly meaningful to certain communities. Additionally, besides sounds there are generally popular and trendy topics, jokes and challenges that people partake in. Sometimes fully understanding a TikTok video demands understanding multiple layers of popular culture references, and explaining the ways different layers of a TikTok contribute to the interpretation also proposes a challenge.

3.1.2 Content analysis

Qualitative content analysis focuses on what kind of themes, topics and things the source material is telling about, what the interviewees or research participants are talking about, or what is discussed in a text (Vuori 2021). I already conducted surface-level content analysis on the videos I observed on TikTok when I determined if a video I came across should be included in the collection of primary source material. Essentially what I did was using the research questions and theory as a guide, as I scrolled and kept an eye for content in the videos that reflected their themes. 1. Enchantment as spontaneous, automatic or generally without fans' own creative/productive contribution just by consuming BL content and partaking in fan culture, 2. Enchantment as a result of intentional and creative production, specifically ritual framing, and 3. Enchantment of BL fandom portrayed or articulated as religious to encapsulate its meaning. These became the main themes, according to which I also grouped the videos for more in-depth analysis in this thesis paper.

Qualitative content analysis is usually divided into two main categories, deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive is theory-driven, so theoretical frame-work dictates what is looked from the data, and is usually used for testing existing theories. Inductive is data-driven, so what emerges from the data dictates analytical framework and categories. (Elo and

Kyngäs 2008, 109). The approach to content analysis can, however, be a combination of the two. The qualitative content analysis conducted for this study is guided by theory, as I had pre-existing theoretical knowledge and a certain theoretical approach to limit and roughly define the primary research material, based on how the videos reflected themes dictated by key-concepts and research questions. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 109) Like in this study, theory can be understood as a kind of tool that directs and organizes the research. In ethnographic research the is to combine inductive and deductive, by both emphasizing the specialness of the object of study bottom-up, and being able to reflect on it top-down with theory to give a descriptively broad account of the studied community or a certain phenomenon within it. (Isomäki, Lappi and Silvennoinen 2013, 152–153.)

I divided the videos in the final collection into the earlier mentioned three main thematical groups, which are based on my research questions and key-concepts. Within those I found and specified sub-categories and themes according to what emerged from the videos. I further structured the analysis chapters in this paper according to those sub-categories and themes. However, the categories are relatively loose and also overlap, to maintain the certain openness and flexibility in descriptions of the phenomenon of enchantment. I am using examples and citations from the TikTok videos to illustrate the individual, empirical accounts throughout the analysis, and reflect and expand on them with theory.

3.2 Research ethics

Conducting ethnography in fan spaces brings some particular matters to consider in terms of research ethics and integrity, especially when it comes to studying digital/online environments. It is important to note in what kind of context and setting potential research material has been created in, for what kind of audience, and know the customs of the online environment you are studying. Additionally, it is important to understand how public, intimate or sensitive the creators consider their content to be. The same ethical concerns cannot be applied to all research in online environments, but depend on the academic perspective, and how a topic, environment or an online community is researched. (Turtiainen & Östman 2013, 64, 51.) In this chapter I will give an overview of this study's research ethical perspective when studying the BL fan community on TikTok. First on the use of public online material by fans, then the possibility of private and/or sensitive information being discussed or revealed, and lastly the reliability of the fan content as data.

The TikTok videos I analyze are publicly available and accessible for anyone. Using public videos like this for research purposes does not necessarily propose research ethical problems. Still, fans often view their online spaces as somewhat private or closed off from “outsiders”. Additionally, BL fans have faced stigmatization, and have been hesitant to participate in academic research that is not conducted by insiders of the community in fear of judgment or distorted deductions (Neville 2018a, 26–27). A certain delicacy and understanding is then extremely important, and it is also personal importance of mine to represent BL fans in a way that does not shame them or enforce negative stereotypes. This does not mean one cannot look at BL media or the fan community critically, but just the basic notion that BL fans are not unnatural, or inherently reprehensible.

On a platform like TikTok, an algorithm dictates the content you see, based on your likes and interests. Therefore, your TikTok feed is often somewhat less based on general trends than popular topics within your personal, or particular community’s TikTok “bubble”. Fans might not expect those outside the target audience to see their TikToks, even when they have not posted them privately, or to a limited audience. However, to counter this, I have chosen to only lift examples that meet certain criteria of publicity already described. None of the videos are posted for private audience, or demand an account to watch them, or have restricted sharing. The collection I compiled for the primary research material is public as well, and exists only on TikTok – none of the videos have been downloaded. This ensures fans’ credit and ownership over their content. Additionally, TikTok as a platform and with its features encourages discussion among the users, and interacting with and borrowing from others. It presumes sharing, public conversation and jumping on trends’ and others’ ideas. Content from TikTok is nowadays also frequently lifted for wider audiences outside of the platform via online newspapers, for example.

I have conducted this research as just an observer. In this sense, I did not have to avoid generating of certain kind of information or results via online discussions, for example. Though, quiet observing on its own without announcing my research purposes could also be viewed as problematic (Turtiainen & Östman 2013, 60). In this particular case where the videos are created to be public and have enjoyed considerable viewership on a platform known by its users, it cannot really be equated to material lifted from more closed online communities, for example.

Though I analyze themes reflected and the way certain elements appear, I do not conduct analysis on the creators as persons, discuss their personal information or speculate what kind of personal motivations they may have for enjoying BL in terms of their cultural background or gender, for example. Of course, topics such as religiosity or sexuality are present in the research and the fan descriptions, and they can in some cases be very private topics and individuals may view them as sensitive. However, they are not speculated or focused in a way that would lead to discussing potentially sensitive information of particular individuals. The video creators or their accounts may be recognized based on the descriptions and quotes of videos, as well as from their usernames. That is a potential cause for concern when conducting research online and about online communities (Turtiainen and Östman 2013). I trust the fans themselves have determined what kind of information they feel comfortable sharing on their TikTok accounts publicly, and to have determined their privacy settings based on their preferences.

In online spaces, people might of course also exaggerate, joke, or even tell lies. I have chosen to observe the online fan culture as it comes across, trusting in the fans sincerity. Even if something is exaggerated, or said as a joke (which, very often in the videos I observed is indeed the case), that does not automatically mean some kind of loss of credibility or that they are being less earnest. Jokes, exaggeration or stories which may not be completely true are all part of fan culture and how it is experienced, enjoyed and practiced. Therefore, these aspects do not make the online spaces less worthy of studying seriously – on the contrary these aspects have to be taken seriously as what they are and part of what produces enchantment.

4 (Re)enchantment sourced from and experienced in BL fan culture

4.1 “Touch of magic” in everyday life

In this chapter I look into the kind of spontaneous, or automatic/expected (re)enchantment that BL fans experience simply by consuming BL content and partaking in the fan culture. Instead of being intentionally produced, this type of enchantment is while perhaps not easily derived, less a result of creative production. What is explored here is the type of enchantment that BL as a genre both makes possible and naturally offers, an enriching “touch of magic” that makes everyday life more (re)enchanted without fans necessarily personally producing it. I have divided this part of the analysis into two sub-chapters based on what emerged from the videos, where 4.1.1 discusses the more practical, even physical healing and joy described by fans. In sub-chapter 4.1.2, I then take a closer look at BL genre described as (re)enchancing in the way it evokes and imagines extraordinary and unreal in contrast to (disenchanted, rational) reality.

4.1.1 Soothing for the soul

*On days I'm feeling way down on my luck
the only way to soothe my soul
is with some yaoi
Hot groovy yaoi watching*

*I stay up
all night, a watching
I never get sleepy*

*Yaoi
is all that I watch
No one can stop fujoshis*

These lyrics are copied here from a TikTok video of a song, made on the game *Tomodachi life* on a Nintendo 3DS console, titled *Original Robodachi* starring *YaoiLovers* by the TikTok user @ltnmcqueer. Described in their words as “the only song I ever created when I was a kid addicted to bl” (@ltnmcqueer 1.4.2025).

More than just a fetching start for this chapter, these lyrics illustrate very well the common sentiment of a fan finding comfort, joy or a moment of relaxation via BL. It also shows the

kind of devotion that is all too familiar to many fans (certainly to me) regardless of fandom, the urge to stay up “all night” just to keep watching, or reading – to be in the enchanting world of the object of fandom longer. And in the last line the creator ties themselves to other “yaoi lovers” and the collective of fellow fujōshis. This song is quite humoristic, and the creator explains (maybe justifies) their younger self and the lyrics by saying they were “a kid addicted to bl”, so maybe they deem their past actions and dedication to fandom as immature and too intense. Still, that does not mean it was not sincere when they were stating that yaoi soothes their soul. Someone’s soul could be soothed via meditation, gardening or maybe a prayer – this kid’s soul is soothed by watching BL, and that is no less noteworthy.

The everyday entertainment and personal relaxation factor here is notable, and appears in multiple TikToks. Some examples by fans include: “could be at home reading yaoi 💔” (@littleherobrinexx 20.11.2024) while filming through the window of a moving train as sentimental music plays on the background. Or: “at the clerb but kinda thinkin of yaoi rn” (@heartboa 26.1.2025) filmed on what appears to be a busy night club’s dance floor. Even though proclaimed in a humoristic way, BL really is portrayed as a “top priority” and something important and valuable in their everyday life. Like one fan put it: “Life becomes more magical when you realize there’s always yaoi to come home to at the end of the day.” (@wolfstaryuri 28.3.2025) This person describes BL quite literally as a little touch of magic, enrichment to their everyday life – or (re)enchantment.

BL might be casual entertainment most of the time, but it clearly has much potential for cheering one’s mood, and engaging with fandom could at times be something that brings meaning and that could carry through difficult (or perhaps, disenchanting) times in life. At the very least, many fans portray their fandom in such way. Illustrated in one video, for example: “motivating yourself to work by thinking of the gay ship you’ll get back into right after” as looped sound of a voice going “You can do this, girl!” plays in the background, and a cartoon character is painstakingly working on a laptop (@0grimlin0 14.3.2025). Or even more strongly expressed example, performed in the form of a serious monologue by @djs3npai (15.4.2025):

I know that it may be a joke to you, but it damn sure isn’t one to me. Yaoi is literally the only thing keeping me going. Yuri⁵, too. If I don’t read it for, like, one day, I feel this awful giant pit start to form in my chest, and it’s. It’s like this black hole that just

⁵ Yuri is a Japanese term for GL

sucks all the life force and all that is good out of me. And I'm left to be nothing but a sinister spirit. And I'm not that sinister spirit. I'm not a shell. I'm a person – that likes BL.

What this fan is describing is enjoying life more, finding life more fulfilling and magical, and something that makes themselves also a more functional, pleasant person. It is seriously expressed humor, but that does not lessen or diminish the enchantment derived (Partridge 2004). Another example: “I started reading BL yesterday, and I mean genuine omegaverse⁶ red flag BL and I had the best sleep of my life. I woke up at 6am, I aced a quiz, I did my hair, I did a workout – I think I actually found the cure. So um. Yeah 😊” (@therosettasun 23.9.2025).

Following Utriainen (2016, 2020) and conceiving enchantment as a kind of subjunctive power and promise of possibilities, here through BL there is a promise of something that will in the future, too, bring fulfillment and moments of joy to everyday life. “These possibilities sometimes become an important element in opening up new perspectives and coping with hardships and suffering, and may thus have healing power” (Utriainen 2016, 50). It could feel a stretch to say that consuming BL as such would bring up new perspectives or as itself heal depression, for example. However, I would argue it is rather that consuming BL can bring about moments of enchantment, which then have this “healing power”. Utriainen (2016) connects this to the concept of *momentary religiosity*, enchanted moments as type of religiosity that happens in passing moments and specific situations. She illustrates this using her own research regarding angel practices as an example, but also mentions Stringer's (2008) research on consulting horoscopes. Just entertainment most of the time, but could become “seriously religious” at times, especially at times of crisis. (Utriainen 2016, 51.)

In a TikTok by @w0nderhoy.com (11.11.2025) the creator is lip-syncing to a sound that goes *All I know is that I was depressed before, and now I've found meaning./ I didn't know you were depressed?/ Neither did I!*, and the video has a text “me after accidentally discovering yaoi at the ripe age of 11”. There are multiple of practically identical videos using the same sound, for example by @drinkmelonsoda (12.11.2025) which is in terms of content the same. Similar sentiments were expressed by multiple BL fans in their TikToks, describing the

⁶ Omegaverse is a common trope in BL fiction, and it imagines a world where humans are divided into three secondary genders/sexes: alpha, beta and omega. Because omegaverse imagines more animalistic tendencies and qualities for humans this trope is often combined with werewolf characters etc. Society in these stories is often portrayed as very hierarchical based on the gender politics, and there are common invented customs and a fictional culture that these stories share, recycle and reinvent.

kind of monumental event of “discovering yaoi” or “discovering men can kiss each other”, usually in early teens. Usually, the memory of the experience is portrayed through humor, but the words, TikTok-sounds and gestures that the fans use still emphasize a genuinely life-changing experience. One fan states: “how I genuinely describe discovering yaoi for the first time” in the text of their video, which is a clip of a person saying “...the only time in my 26 years of life that something in me just settled. I can’t describe that feeling to you” (@faintyongi 18.4.2026). BL fans describe a kind of newfound energy and joy they found after becoming fans, that made their life more exciting and enjoyable.

[...] Themes of joy and pure, unadulterated pleasure are incredibly common when respondents speak about both reading and writing slash fic (as well as creating and looking at both fan art and vids). As one woman explains, ‘there is this wonderful visceral gut-wrench I get – sort of like a reader’s orgasm, I suppose – when I read a story that hits all my buttons at once’. (Neville 2018a, 82-83.)

One of the fans participating in Neville’s (2018a) research gives here a description of the very affective experience of joy and wonder some fans get when they consume BL. Baudinette (2023) and Bunyavejchewin (2022), for example have highlighted the affective response called *fin* among Thai BL fandom. Fin can be described as adoration, fascination, sexual excitement as well, but all in all a recognizable, even physical response to media. Based on Baudinette’s (2023) research among BL fandom, fin is linked to fan narratives about “experiences of madness, delusion and being overcome with emotion.” (2023, 35.) Fin can be hard for fans to explain, it has been described as imagination running wild, and feeling overcome with happiness and/or other emotions. Japanese concept of *moe* has similar connotations (Bunyavejchewin 2022, 184). Considering that enchantment can be characterized by its physical dimensions and effects, fin could be seen as a recognized, articulated manifestation of enchantment achievable within BL fandom. The kind of enchantment that “hits”, rather than is being produced.

BL among the fandom has been, and still is, often described as stress-relief and a way to relax by immersing oneself in the series, a text, or to just imagining one’s ship, for example. What is a very large part of fan practice is just daydreaming and thinking about the object of fandom. Quite literally. And that brings enjoyment to everyday life, moments of wonder, and even functions as way to find and create more meaning or extraordinary within the ordinary reality. Sometimes these imaginations are developed further, and shared forward to other fans in the forms of fan fiction, video edits, text posts and so forth. The dreams and imaginations are then shared by multiple people and become connecting factors and something they can

experience and develop together, which leads to enchantments becoming mutual (Stainova 2019).

4.1.2 Joy in the unreal

*“yaoi is so unrealistic”
that’s how it should be. why would I want to read about real men?*

The quote above is from a TikTok by @fujoshiiqueen (23.7.2025), and it describes the kind of joy in the unreal imaginings that BL provides. A humorous take, though it illustrates the normalized idea within society of men as “lacking” romantic partners who, simply for being typical men, could not be what one really wants in a relationship and/or has to “settle for” essentially. Sometimes BL is portrayed as a kind of compensation, or a way to fix or improve (temporarily, and in the fictional realm) the non-ideal reality. “Realised yaoi was a gift sent from god as an apology for creating men, and life has been beautiful lately” (@fujomaxing 13.1.2025).

Similar sentiment more seriously expressed, one fan in the context of watching the show *Heated Rivalry* (2025) writes: “imagine finally witnessing the most perfect embodiment of what you’ve always pictured love and passion to be – and then having to open bumble⁷” (@stellabr8 5.1.2026). Watching this show, the fan witnessed in their words “the most perfect embodiment” of love and passion, of what they have imagined them like. And then opening a dating application, where the prospects of finding that seem slim. Here then, BL has given a representation of something previously experienced only in dreams, which perhaps inspired and encouraged the fan to challenge what they “have to” settle for – and what is considered normal – even though they still acknowledge the reality and are aware of it.

Stainova (2019, 216-217) names as one of her main arguments that “with music and stories people create selves and worlds against the forces of structural violence in which their lives are suspended”. What kind of fantasies and dreams are cultivated can be inspected to find out what kind of value the (re)enchantment derived from them holds for people within constricting realities. There are popular and well-known tropes within BL such as *omegaverse* or male pregnancy (often combined) which are seen as quite outlandish. Removed from the ordinary reality in the way something like *omegaverse*-setting is, however, it allows

⁷ Bumble is a dating application.

reconsideration of gender and social expectations and norms, or can challenge them. One TikTok by a fan pictures a man eating enthusiastically, and the text “reading an omegaverse fic then it suddenly turns into a sociopolitical economic commentary on misogyny, domestic abuse and the healthcare system” (@kurapeep 1.3.2026). TikToks like this express how fans are aware of the limitations of reality which BL works address and subvert. Something like omegaverse is, in reality, impossible. But the very act of imagining it and falling into the fictional world creates certain magic. It is whimsy, it is intentional resistance of the “boring”, disenchanted reality that works scientifically and rationally (Bennett 2016), and upholds these constricting realities (Stainova 2019). Everything can be beautiful and magical, and you can be one with nature and “open your eyes to real beauty” (pictured with glittering lakes and flowers in bloom and sunshine and rainbows and friendly animals) if you see it like one fan helpfully illustrates in their video: “the world once I embraced mpreg” (@theyaigorl 19.9.2024). These two examples present different perspectives from fans for enjoying BL content. The other one emphasizes the kind of “rational” explanation with reasons that “justify” the enjoyment of something like omegaverse, and the other one focuses on the enchantment and whimsical joy as such.

Let women be fujoshis 2024 and beyond I'm so serious. Women are losing rights in the US, have you heard? Losing bodily autonomy and you're telling me, chronically online people wanna tell women that they can't watch two men kissing as a treat? What has society come to. “But it's wrong it's fetishizing” - And the whole time the fujōshi in question is a lesbian involved in the community. Bigger fish to fry, people. (@bertubble 15.11.2024)

Like in the quote above, BL fans themselves often describe their fan practices as something they do as “a treat”. Something they know can be controversial, but still brings personal joy and enjoyment, which is valuable and meaningful especially at certain times. We are instructed to not indulge in treats too much, or it is frowned upon, and sometimes one feels the need to hide eating them. A treat is then a playful way to articulate and describe a little gift or reward for oneself, a deserved and needed enrichment to everyday life even though it could to some people seem unhealthy or unnecessary. Simultaneously, and in contrast, BL fans also explain and defend their fandom with “rationalistic” explanations regarding BL’s feminist and radically escapist qualities. Usually knowledgeable about the history of their fandom and studies regarding it, they can articulate well the “objectively” defensible aspects of BL, the rationally qualified reasons for consuming and producing it, such as appears in the above quoted TikTok video. Sometimes, however, certain self-absence is craved. This is perhaps to avoid explaining why BL is enjoyable and how they became fans. Perhaps because

fans do not even know or find it hard to articulate themselves. Or perhaps to simply avoid “dimming” the enchantment, enjoyment and fun of consuming and creating BL with outside pressure to explain it. BL fans then navigate between these two ways of explaining their fandom, self-aware and self-absent, which I will discuss some more further.

The type of (re)enchantment explored in this chapter is the kind that comes naturally or automatically with BL content and its consumption. However, (re)enchantment sourced from BL and happening within the sphere of the fan culture is also often very intentional, and fans are skilled in (creatively) producing and managing their enchantments. Study of enchantment, and the theoretical perspective of it can be seen as an addition or extension of the study of ritual and magic (Utriainen 2018, 119), and theory on ritual framing (Utriainen 2016; 2020) in particular opens up opportunities to understand fans’ empirical accounts of what I perceive as intentionally produced enchantment.

4.2 The BL gaze and ritual framing

The previous chapter looked into enchantments as something happening to the fans automatically, spontaneously and without particular creative contribution. In this chapter I will inspect BL fans’ intentional and tactical ways of producing enchantment. What could be characterized as the “BL gaze” encompasses the imaginative play and the ways of ritual framing and ritual subjunctive (Utriainen 2016; 2020) that fans practice to (re)enchant their surroundings, lived reality and other media and cultural products. Truly almost anything; sport games, literature, documentaries, two certain colors next to each other anywhere, fine art, parliament meetings – one can actually apply the BL gaze to many things and as they wish. BL gaze, “fujo goggles” – this skill, or art has been described in many ways in fandom spaces. When applied to real surroundings it could also be related to concepts like *mind’s eye* or *faith’s eye* known in religious studies, combining memory and knowledge and creative imagination, and bringing that to supply the lived reality at pilgrimage sites, for example (Frank 2000, 102-103).

Based on my observation of the source material, fans are imagining and playing with possibilities and dreams, and conducting them *as if* within the ritual frame they apply (which then produces enchantment), all the while conscious of the reality that is altered or challenged. (Utriainen 2016.) With the “goggles on”, so utilizing the ritual frame, one can play with and imagine even rationally unfeasible possibilities and create narratives which

enchant, and the frame is often personal or “customized” to fit individual desires and wishes. I will inspect some of the ways fans apply the ritual frame that creates BL enchantment, in two sub-categories: 4.2.1. Opening BL possibilities and having contact with the object of fandom, and 4.2.2. (Re)enchanting narratives.

4.2.1 Opening BL possibilities and contact with the object of fandom

There is a TikTok by a fan with the text “I’m crying why do they all look so similar 🗿💔” captioned “The BL effect”, and showing a slideshow of pictures of the main pairs in *Heartstopper* (2022), *Heated Rivalry* (2025), *Red White and Royal Blue* (2023), and *Young Royals* (2021) (@sharkielvr4evr 4.1.2026). The similarities in question are one dark-haired and darker complexioned person, and one blond-haired, lighter complexioned person. Especially within Western BL fiction that generally shuns portraying definite sexual roles, or at least expresses them more discreetly, there are other ways of portraying characteristics and a kind of balance and compatibility between partners besides size difference and obvious dominant and submissive -dynamics. There are kind of “grumpy and sunshine” and “introverted and extroverted” and “sporty and nerdy” dynamics and visuals, which have become popular. They work as signs of almost divine compatibility, and symbolize the way the partners fulfill and bring out the best in each other. Contrasting partners make a balanced relationship, comparable to something like ying and yang as extraordinary forces. When these elements are next to each other a romance is expected, or at least the possibility of it is easily established and pursued by the (BL) audience. Producers of commercial BL, and media that may attract BL fans, may intentionally use symbolism, references and other elements like this which can be “easily” ritually framed by fans, too.

And let me just confess, that everytime there’s a duo that’s like, one of them is super serious and perfectionist, and the other one is cocky and crazy, I will eat it up every single time. Like it is very Superman/Batman, it is very Poison Ivy/Harley Quinn, it is very Deadpool and Spider man. Like that kind of duo. Oh, oh, yum yum yum! [...] (@lovesickmisfit 12.2.2026)

This sentiment of balancing compatibility can be expressed in more simple ways as well, color pairings like red and blue, or black and white, for example. Often these symbols come to be in relation to specific pairings or stories that fans have a connection to, and which are meaningful for them personally. Fans can actively bring the fictional to be played with and have contact with the object of fandom, to enchant the reality through these symbols which in the case of BL fandom often appear in pairs. Rather than being somehow mindlessly

conditioned, I argue it is fans intentionally enriching their surroundings and life by looking for these symbols that they can then feel enchantment through when ritually framed. Building on Smith (1987), Utriainen (2020, 200) suggests that ritual frame can be viewed as a kind of “focusing lenses that communicate the kind of reality and knowledge that is dealt with in the ritual setting.” Then, through the ritual frame and by it, desired effects are made possible and plausible, they are communicated and enacted. (Utriainen 2020, 200.) “The kind of reality and knowledge” which communicate and make possible the BL prospects and imaginations, seem to be based on not just the “common” tradition of BL fan culture, but also fans’ specific interests. Besides clearly framed rituals, there is more fluid ritualization in everyday, which Utriainen (2020) observed, for example, in research participants’ way of “stopping for a moment in the quotidian flow of life to consider a sudden pleasant physical sensation as the ‘touch of an angel’ or to take a quick look at an angel card before beginning a new task that demands concentration.” (Utriainen 2020, 200.) In the source material similar everyday ritualization for enchantment is described in various ways.

Without even naming any one particular ship beyond the hashtags, one TikTok by a fan shows a slideshow of pictures in blue and red colors, such as a blue hand holding onto red one, as a version of the song *Hopelessly Devoted To You* plays in the background, and attached to pictures there is a text: “girls and that one red and blue ship that infects every part of their life” (probablypoopingidk 26.4.2026). One fan (@meeowjor) uses a sound of someone yelling in excitement in their video, which they are lip-syncing to, with the text: “me genuinely tweaking out every time I see my favorite ship’s colors next to each other”. In the caption they write: “red...blue..cough” which, specified with the hashtags as well, refers to the show *Voltron* (2016) and the BL ship of its characters Keith and Lance (klance). (@meeowjor 25.1.2025.)

These are just two examples from a vast number of similar videos that I have encountered. What is expressed in these videos is ritually framing something which outside the frame would be ordinary. Red and blue, or others popping up such as green and orange, or black and white, they are just color pairings. However, they become something more, something extraordinary when ritually framed as if they are a sign or a representation of the object of fandom. These BL pairings are important and meaningful for the fans personally, and something they have a connection to. Ritual framing brings moments of contact with the object of fandom (the personally important, meaningful BL couple), and the fun, extraordinary world that they represent. And like the TikToks emphasize, the colors seem to

become something they frequently encounter, that are “with them” in a sense. Similarly, Utriainen (2016) when studying women in the communities of angel practices, stated that “the women emphasize that they do things and make things happen *together with* angels” (Utriainen 2016, 51). The enchantment produced through ritual framing is not just fun, or exciting, but can also be genuinely encouraging, uplifting, or offer a source of support. Though the contact is subtle, and it does not need to be dramatic, or it would only last a short moment. Everyday life and its ordinary surroundings are transformed or lifted to something more and something to look forward to. And like a research participant describes for Utriainen (2016): “that’s the funniest thing here, that life becomes so extremely exciting.” (Utriainen 2016, 51.)

However, ritual framing does not demand that there is some specific pairing or text to derive from, build on or reference. Part of the art of it is to be able to imagine and produce enchantment even when there is not much to play with. For example, previous president of the USA, Barack Obama has been shipped with the singer Harry Styles. This has become quite a BL fandom joke that is still referenced across fandom spaces. There certainly is not much to build on in this case. It is nonsensical, but fans would make video- and picture edits about the ship, framing their words at separate events, for example to sound as if their statements are connected and have significance for their relationship. It is a skill to have a spark of BL fun like this, when it is not even really rooted in any reality. Sometimes people put on their BL goggles just because they can. One fan has made a TikTok video which portrays their “shopshipping”, quite literally shown as two shop chains being (humorously) given personalities and sexualities: Tesco (clubcard gay, pronouns he/it) and Asda (gay, chronically fatigued, pronouns he/him) without actually portraying them as humanized otherwise. The video is edited to match music, and shows decorated pictures of store locations. (@mito3633, 26.6.2025). Interestingly here, Tesco and Asda are also given contrasting characterizations, to make them follow the kind of “typical” BL format. The video provides a quite literal frame, within which the possibility of Tesco and Asda in love is played with and the fun of the unrealistic idea is enjoyed.

“You don’t have to ship every two male characters, they can just be friends.” Not on my watch. Not while I’m here. Two men in a room? I’ve already imagined them kissing. I’ve already read 13 fanfictions and drawn fanart of them [...] (@zensiart 30.8.2025.)

Joking about being able to imagine *any* two male characters as lovers is, of course, a joke but it is rooted in the real experience of BL fans being able to utilize the ritual frame in a very arbitrary way. Additionally, this common format of presenting the joke or statement like it is an outsider commenting something, to which the fan then replies, illustrates the kind of difference drawn between reality and the reality/as if -existence within the ritual frame. Or, the disenchanted versus enchanted (Utriainen 2020, 197). What is desirable within the BL ritual frame, what are the rules there, or the kind of logic and knowledge it is built on vary by individual and community. The ritual frame may, as Utriainen (2016) writes create a subjunctive, often momentary reality of its own that is still connected to the outside world. However, something within the ritual frame might not be possible or even desirable outside of it. (Utriainen 2016, 50–54.)

There is a quite popular TikTok sound of a person saying “Computer! Make these guys super gay and horny. Make these guys, super gay, and horny” which has been used by many BL fans to illustrate their act of ritual framing in different contexts. One fan even literally applied it to glasses. They took a pair of sunglasses and used beads with letters to decorate them, so the frames now form the sentence “Computer make these guys super gay and horny” around their eyes (@abithacreator 30.3.2026). The “computer” is, of course, often by fans used to point to themselves, and their skill in the art of ritual framing.

A fan shows the classic book *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky: “being someone who reads both fanfiction and classic literature is so funny bc why am I lowkey shipping raskolnikov and razumikhin” (@lunitcat 27.5.2025). Or another TikTok, which shows pictures of art depicting Jesus and Judas, edited to a popular sound and trend originating from Heated Rivalry, where any two rivals with (or as if with) a complicated but still close relationship are portrayed as “Canada’s Shane Hollander, and Russia’s Ilya Rozanov” – and the TikTok is captioned “Heated biblery” (@ellablablu2 11.2.2026). Jesus and Judas have of course been reimagined and interpreted as lovers many times before, and this is again one form of (personally) re-enchanting Christianity and Christian tradition.

This analysis and conceptualization of ritual framing of fictional works is similar to just “actual” queer-coding in media and audiences’ queer interpretations – and they overlap. However, the BL-gaze and the type of ritual framing common for BL fandom is often portrayed as a distinctive way of approaching media in a playful manner, by both the fans and (BL) media industry. This playful approach or mindset is visible in many of the TikToks

referenced, for example, with humorous wording or fans stating they can ritually frame any media. Like mentioned early on in this paper, what is common for BL is this playful appropriation from both the fans and the industry (Prasannam 2019). Some non-BL media productions which are still expected, or seek to attract an audience of BL fans⁸, do also acknowledge the BL fandom and their practices. This appears often in Thai series featuring known BL actors, or Korean dramas with idol-actors, for example.

In a recent Korean television series *Absolute Value of Romance* (2026), the main character is a young woman who is secretly an unsuccessful BL web-novelist and a fujōshi. Her school gets four new teachers, all male and handsome, and who are friends with each other. They become a source of inspiration for her. The men's ordinary interactions are portrayed through the main character's eyes, and she frames them as distinctly romantic, playing with her imagination to produce BL enchantment. The audience is still made aware how unrealistic her imaginations are. These are not actually queer male characters, but it is the main character's imagination and framing that makes the show become BL momentarily. One BL fan posted a clip of the show – where the main character is watching the men and quite literally framing them with flower petals and romantic music, and hearing their words as if they are spoken between lovers – and added a text “She’s literally me and I’m literally her 🌸🌸🌸” and a caption: “girl just seeing and hearing exactly what she wants to see, I can’t even blame her 😂😂” (@peakunstabledrama2 18.4.2026). The drama then quite literally portrays the ritual framing (which fans recognize) in action, but in a manner that is emphasized as humorous.

Baudinette (2019) has argued how a pioneering Thai BL series *Love Sick: the series* (2014) utilizes a fujōshi female side-character, Pang, to frame what is happening for the viewer as well: “...It is via Pang’s cinematographic framing within these scenes – depicted most prominently in episodes two through five of Lovesick – that viewers are intended to learn to also position themselves as fujōshi” (Baudinette 2019, 126). For a more recent example, another Thai series *Peaceful Property* (2024) features the fujōshi character of Pangpang, who on screen frames the two main male characters’⁹ actions to produce BL enchantment for the

⁸ In the cases of Thailand and Japan, for example, it has been noted that ‘queer affective advertising’ and BL content generally is profitable and responded well to among young women audiences in particular (Baudinette and Svetanant 2023).

⁹ These male characters are played by popular BL actors Tay and New, who are also an officially promoted actor pairing, and may thus already encourage their fans’ to direct attention and ritually frame enchantment

viewer as well. In a TikTok edit a fan posted of the show, they have added the text “representing us” on Pangpang when she is excited about the guys’ interaction (@primluvrrr 13.11.2024). The framing done in the show through Pangpang is by fans being added/incorporated to the ritual framing they themselves apply when watching the series.

It is perhaps that especially when BL fans categorize themselves as BL fans, or call themselves fujōshi/fudanshi, or when they use terms like yaoi about queer media or their own queer interpretations and imaginations, that is how the playfulness is articulated. It is continuation on parodying fandom tradition, and the humorous association comes with the terminology, too.¹⁰ Queer coding and audiences’ queer interpretations when called such are often perceived, even though not necessarily serious, as something that is based in “truth” or evidence that can be presented. In turn, BL fans’ ability to put on their “fujo-goggles” and ritually frame media, art, or objects, for example does not have to base in any “evidence”. However, BL fans’ ritual framing and queer interpretations overlap often, and cannot be strictly separated. Regardless, enchantment is produced by applying the frame, and within it playing with and imagining possibilities which might even drastically differ from the “disenchanted”, boring, or ordinary.

4.2.2 (Re)enchanting narratives

Some time ago (peaking around 2021) there was a whole TikTok trend, or popular meme of two Dutch politicians, Rob Jetten and Jesse Klaver being shipped. They got a ship-name as well, “resse”. People would, for example, make edits of the parliament meetings and other times the two appeared on TV. The two are friends in reality, but putting on their BL-goggles, the BL fandom had a great time imagining them in love and gushing over their “moments” together. It was all in good humor, and Jetten and Klaver also commented on the ship. They even posted a video of their own, titling it “a Resse Story” with the narrative picturing them secretly organizing a date, through which they encouraged “Resse-fans” to vote in the then upcoming European election (@jesse.klaver 3.6.2024). This video in turn created more fan activity.

A psychologist commented for *Business Insider* in 2021 that fans could be fascinated to see “men in a position of power behave affectionately towards each other” in current political

¹⁰ As earlier mentioned, fujōshi means “rotten girls”, and yaoi is an acronym of a phrase which translates to “no climax, no point, no meaning”.

climate. Especially, because Klaver is a gay man, and Jetten who is a heterosexual still publicly displays “affectionate and respectful bromance” with him. (Dogson 2021.) Regardless, where there is a will there is a way, and fans delight in playing with their lived reality and enriching even something serious and “rational” like politics. Even if it is for reasons like having a gay ship of two politicians, it made some people more interested and engaged in politics, and like mentioned they even utilized fans’ interest in Jetten and Klaver to encourage voting activity.

A TikTok by a fan uses the song *right where you left me* by Taylor Swift for an edited video that frames Resse as a doomed love story, following the lyrics of the song (@ressevs 3.5.2025). The clip of the song that is used is part of a wider trend on TikTok. As the lyrics of the most reutilized part start with the words “help, I’m still at the restaurant”, it has on social media become a phrase to express still being mentally stuck on something/somewhere, still dreaming of something or missing it. This fan uses the phrase as a caption as well to describe their own feelings, but in general the lyrics together with carefully chosen Resse-clips create a story. The creator ritually frames the two’s interactions as if they are in love, as if their story was doomed, and though “sad” in nature this is still enchantments that fans gladly indulge in and produce, though they are conscious of the reality being subverted.

Using music and song lyrics (or other sounds) to ritually frame something, and in that way enforcing imagination and producing (re)enchanted narratives is very common in the BL fan culture (on TikTok). Like Stainova (2019) describes, stories and music can become ways of enchantment as they are used to create other selves and worlds against the structurally limiting, and I would add, disenchanting/boring reality. Of course, this appears a lot in the case of fan art, on TikTok in the form of edits, for example, such as the above referenced Resse-edit. Fans take media and (fictional) characters, and frame it for other people as well, to share the enchantment of imagining two characters in love, or to imagine a certain scenario, for example. This sort of fan art would be a plentiful source to study not just ritual framing, but also re-enchantment more broadly, as often fan art quite literally re-enchants music or the object of fandom or older products of popular culture, for example. To be sufficiently analyzed something like TikTok-edits they would demand a research of their own. This study focuses more so on the fans’ personal descriptions of being a fan on TikTok, but as such a major form of ritual framing within BL fandom that occasionally also describes fans’ experiences directly, I could not completely leave it out.

Recently a common trend, in the spirit of Heated Rivalry, is fans documenting going to see hockey games and ritually framing them. In one TikTok, people behind the camera are going “Oh my God, are they gonna kiss? Please kiss” and other comments along that line, while filming the TV, which shows a hockey game in progress. Specifically, a moment of two players from opposite teams holding each other by the shoulder and talking with their faces close to each other. On the video there is a text: “ugh was hoping for an enemies to lovers plot twist.” (@sashgetscash 3.5.2025.) What could have played out as just a close encounter between opposite team members was framed to entice imagination. With the knowledge of BL culture, or specifically Heated Rivalry as a story, the kind of “rules” and ontology provided by that knowledge then makes possible to play with the subjunctive, as if possibilities, illusions and create narratives. Another creator posted a video of two players from the opposite teams talking to each other on the bench on the side of the rink, with the text: “do you guys think they’re exchanging room numbers?” while on the background the song *All The Things She Said* by t.A.T.u is playing (@baekkkkey_ 14.1.2026). This whole TikTok is framed like Heated Rivalry. There is a scene in the show where the main characters exchange hotel room numbers in a similar setting, and the song *All the Things She Said* is part of the series’ soundtrack and rose to renewed popularity due to the fan activity. Or, using the sound clip of “Computer! Make these guys super gay and horny” to lip-sync, two fans filmed a TikTok at some kind of sports game, and on the video they added a text: “Us at every sporting event since heated rivalry” (@bdogtrapmaster03 3.4.2026).

Fans know that (most likely) no BL is in reality going to happen at hockey games, but they play with the idea anyway and can entertain themselves (and others) by making up scenarios and imagining something between the players, within and provided by the ritual frame that makes it possible. Heated Rivalry certainly did not start the phenomenon of shipping hockey players, either. That has been something hockey fans who are also BL fans have practiced for a long time, with a lot of fan fiction to show, but now due to the popularity of Heated Rivalry has become more common or visible practice (online). Traditionally masculine sports, generally anything where women and those “more feminine” (often queer people) are in some way ostracized, tends to get reimagined and framed in ways that enchant the BL fandom. “Typical” enjoyment of fandom aside, such as liking and admiring celebrities and enjoying and following the sport itself, what BL fans tend to do is explore ideas and dreams via the male characters/celebrities, and challenge the heteropatriarchal reality via stories and imaginations. And they also do it because it is fun, or somehow personally meaningful, and it

creates imaginations and worlds outside of the everyday reality – so what I conceptualize as (re)enchantment. However, that does not mean enchantment is always purely positive or “happy” in a sense. Yes it is extraordinary, it is wondrous and enriching, but it could be enjoyably melancholic or sad, or spooky, too.

Bad Buddy, the Series, so BBS (2021) is a Thai BL series that became a huge success among the fandom, and also won numerous awards. The plot is a forbidden love, Romeo and Juliet¹¹ style reimagining, where the main couple are rivals in many ways but end up becoming close with each other and fall in love. They then have to hide their relationship, however, which leads to conflict. Already then *Bad Buddy* re-enchants an older, influential product of popular culture via a modern queer reimagining. The main actors, Ohm Pawat and Nanon Korapat, were passionate about their roles and the casting appeared extraordinarily fitting, and they quickly grew a large and active fandom of shippers. The two appeared very close until a somewhat public falling-out and eventually officially ceasing activities together. When in 2024 the two finally interacted in public again, even though it was just playing soccer in opposite teams at a sports event, the fans who ship them framed their interaction as a kind of another universe -imagining of *Bad Buddy*, where Ohm and Nanon are lovers going through similar things as the fictional characters they played. “it’s 2021 and you’re watching bbs, but the lamp suddenly looks weird” (@cirrusloveslemonade 21.12.2024). This TikTok presents a scene from the show playing in the upper half of the screen, and a video filmed of the actors at the soccer game on the lower-half of the screen.

Firstly, there are parallels between the real-life sports event, and the scene from the series that the above referenced TikTok shows. The scene of BBS that is used is a moment where the characters encounter each other for the first time in years with conflicting feelings, and though they were forced to partake in a fight that started between their friend groups, they quickly have a secret understanding between them. In the clip from the sporting event, Ohm and Nanon, who had not (publicly) interacted in a long while, encountered each other in opposite teams at the soccer field and seemed to share “a moment”. Secondly, this TikTok utilizes a trend of the time, “the lamp looks weird” which originates from a Reddit post and refers to something that is experienced like a “glitch in the Matrix” or something that is not actually real, but a dream, for example (Sobhan 2024). This emphasizes the “out of this world”,

¹¹ Specifically a Thai story with very similar idea and often described Thai Romeo and Juliet, about Kwan and Riam, known commonly as *Plae Kao*.

dreamy enchantment produced. The sound on the background is a song very recognizable from the series itself, and triggers imagination or aids in framing. Fans do know the reality of things, which is that Ohm and Nanon do not publicly interact or appear close like they once did. But that does not stop the fans from dreaming that Ohm and Nanon would still be close to each other, and framing the (few) interactions the two have in an as if, BL-way, to play with the imaginations that alter the unfortunate or even sad reality. This same sports event with an audience of fans spurred various TikToks where the actors' interactions, other than Ohm and Nanon, too, were ritually framed to produce BL enchantment.

As a final example of fans' art of ritual framing, one fan filmed a video of themselves walking around the Colosseum, in Rome, with an added text "They don't know I'm here because I'm writing a Hannigram Roman Empire AU" (@thechesapeakekitchen 17.5.2025). As the sound there is a viral clip *Nobody's gonna know /They're gonna know! / How would they know?* used often for videos like this, where the creator is doing something in secrecy, or somewhat hidden, or it is something meaningful or affective for them only. This fan is walking around a famous, culturally and historically valuable site with the other tourists. They, however, see something more. They can creatively add another layer there and imagine another world, a Roman historical alternative universe (AU) inhabited by Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham (hannigram). The fan is not just walking around Colosseum of our world and understanding, but creatively imagining it as the setting of fictional past where Hannigram's love story happens – but in a way within the real history and our "regular" world. They are (re)enchanted the site and the history, and they are playing with the border of real and fictional consciousness.

In this chapter about ritual framing, through two sub-categories identified I explore firstly the theme of fans applying the ritual frame to open up BL possibilities that can be played with, and to have contact with their personal object of fandom. The ritual frame comes with its own rules and logics. These make possible and mediate the desired effect of (BL specific) enchantment, and it can be used to lift ordinary reality, objects or art to something more and special in a personal way, and to have contact with the object of fandom, and the fictional and otherworldly. Secondly, the sub-chapter about "(re)enchanted narratives" explores fans' ability to produce (re)enchantment by applying the ritual frame, within which they can then develop narratives that bring enchantment, or re-enchanted a place or situation, for example by applying a kind of reimagined narrative over it.

4.3 BL fan culture as akin to religiosity

In this final, third analysis chapter I will explore some of the ways fans conceptualize the enchantment of fan culture by relating it to religiosity, keeping in mind the flexible, multifaceted characterization and view of (re)enchantment. It might “hit” spontaneously and be experienced affectively, it signifies and is experienced as a kind of extraordinary and dreamy or exciting, and it can intentionally be sought and produced (via ritual frame) to make a difference from disenchanted, ordinary reality. Additionally, enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment are used to characterize (Western) spirituality/religiosity on a societal but also individual level, its stages and how it is experienced. (Re)enchantment is not dependent on a “divine power” or supernatural per se (Bennett 2016), but often related to experiences of those forces or realms, and religious language might be felt the most adequate to describe experiences of (re)enchantment. Here then, though related to and somewhat overlapping with the themes and findings in previous analysis chapters, I explore how BL fans express and conceptualize their experiences of (re)enchantment as akin to religiosity.

When conceptualizing as what counts as “similar to religion”, I follow Hills (2002) in that we cannot exactly try to identify some “essence” of religion (which would first require exactly determining what religion is). However, fandom and religiosity “may share a similarity in experience” which the religious, or “cult discourse” (that is familiar to fans) can capture, and which sociology of religion can help to understand. (Hills 2002, 118.) “Fan culture’s neoreligiosity occurs as an *effect* of fan discourses and practices, rather than relying on preceding *essence/*’ontology’ of religion and its supposed function in society.” (Hills 2002, 119). According to Hills, fan cultures are between cult and culture. Fans’ relationship to a famous person, or to a fictional text, and the practiced fandom does not simply and as such replace some assumed role of traditional religion. But “religious sentiment”, and I add here (re)enchantment (Partridge 2004), has as Hills acknowledges migrated or been newly found in novel places and religiosity appears in more varied dimensions, which fandom can factor in. (Hills 2002, 119.)

According to Hills (2002) religious discourse importantly preserves a space for “self-absence” so fans do not have to present a “rational” explanation for their fandom, and consequently I add, fandom enchantment. This is something that BL fans, as seen in some referenced TikToks already, too, have felt the need to present.

Religious discourses therefore allow for a particular relaxation of ‘rationalisations’ and ‘justifications’ which fans may otherwise be called upon to produce, converting the fans’ lack of response to the ‘why?’ [why this text, why are they fans] question into a positive expression of faith and attachment rather than a lack of fan rationality. (Hills 2002, 122.)

However, religious discourse is not void of meaning, or lose those connotations when used by fans, but are “dialogically linked to ‘cult’ discourses in religion-proper” (Hills 2002, 124). Therefore, while religious discourse allows room for self-absence and lessens the need to justify their fandom, it also makes possible that fans are associated with connotations like “religious fanaticism” or “detachment from reality”. (Hills 2002, 130.)

In this chapter, I will explore how fans use religious discourse to describe their fan enchantments and the enchanting fandom itself. Additionally, as Hills (2002) suggests that sociology of religion may help understand the similarities of experience between religion/religiosity and being a fan, and how fandoms’ neo-religiosity should be taken seriously. He argues, building on Durkheimian sociology of religion, that “the media cult’s ‘sacredness’ for its fans may well be arbitrarily produced out of the everydayness and ready availability of media texts”. (Hills 2002, 130.) This means that “seeds of the sacred” are found within the mundane everyday “profane”, and it is the rituals that separate these two and allow transition between them, and which protect the sacred from “collapsing back” into the profane. “This arbitrary nature of the ‘sacred’ allows for the possibility that, historically, new sacred forms may emerge from new sociohistorical contexts and objects.” (Hills 2002, 128). I might not exactly follow along in this suggestion that what fandom finds “sacred” forms simply based on what is readily available. However, I emphasize the role of ritual, ritualizing, and the ritual frame (Utriainen 2016; 2020) as something that fans use to produce the enchantment within and from the ordinary, and to mark the difference from “disenchanted”.

I will first look into how fans utilize this religious discourse in the sub-chapter 4.3.1. Then I take a specific look at fan accounts of “pilgrimage” in sub-chapter 4.3.2, in which religious discourse is utilized, but from which we can also find more descriptions of ritual framing.

4.3.1 Sacred texts, idols and communities of followers

In this first sub-chapter, following the title I will look into the main ways this “religious discourse” manifests in fan accounts of enchantment, and in how fans describe and value the fandom experience. Commonly how this religious discourse appears is 1) fans talking about

BL works (or something which has been reimagined and re-enchanted into BL, by finding characters to ship, for example) as a sacred or somehow devotional text, 2) relating BL actors to gods/deities, and 3) relating the fandom into a cult or other religious community of followers. I will go through some fan examples of these in order.

Hills (2002) states: “the ‘cult’ status of texts and icons hinges both on audience distinctions/valorizations and upon textual and iconic characteristics.” Hills goes on to determine these shared textual characteristics, using Wittgenstein’s (1988) concept *family resemblances*, of cult texts as auteurism, hyperdiegesis and endlessly deferred narrative. (Hills 2002, 98.) These three characteristics do manifest in many cult-status gained BL texts as well. These works’ authors/creators are appreciated and honored, the fictional worlds get multiple adaptations/interpretations and ways to explore and broaden them, and the narratives stay (or are kept) intriguing and endlessly engaging – which is especially notable in the case of BL content, as it is strongly tied with reinterpretation and reimagining (and re-enchantment). Hills (2002) considerably discusses these family resemblances of cult texts, however I will focus here specifically on the “audience distinctions/valorizations”.

Somewhat depending on the “branch” of BL fandom (live action series, written word, slash fandom and so on), there are numerous iconic texts. Earlier popular Japanese BL works such as *Junjo Romantica* (manga started releasing in 2002), or even non-BL stories like *Naruto* (manga started 1999) which generated lot of shipping activity, are often named as such. No matter what criticism early commercial BL works especially have faced, they are acknowledged as foundational. The early works are important, reminisced parts of BL fans’ cultural tradition, and still their contribution exists in the “typical” BL ritual frame, and its logics or norms. There is certainly a difference made between older works and newer stories like *Heated Rivalry*, which lot of people are experiencing as their first piece of BL media, instead of getting “initiated” through one of the older works (or ships) that hold a certain status within the fandom.

“Heated rivalry? I was there when the scriptures were written” states one fan in a TikTok, as they hold up an athletic jacket to the camera, instantly for a fan recognizable as a merch for the anime *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club* (2013), which is where the background sound used also originates from. (@t0ny.m0ly 30.12.2025.) Commonly referred as just *Free!*, this anime is about a group of friends all practicing competitive swimming. While not BL, it utilized easily ritually frameable elements, and had a large shipping activity around it. Or: “when someone

asks you if Heated Rivalry is your first bl but you've been in the trenches. You were there when the old scriptures were written" as the theme song of Junjo Romantica's anime adaptation plays in the background, and the creator turns to face the camera (@inosukeslefttusk 15.1.2026). And: "when my friends said I haven't seen peak bc I haven't seen heated rivalry BUT I WAS THERE WHEN THE ANCIENT TEXTS WERE WRITTEN" referring to *Yuri!!! on Ice* (2016), another sports anime but with canon BL relationship, from which the theme song also plays as the TikTok's sound (@camitaloupe 31.1.2026). The value and status these works hold in the BL fan culture is emphasized by calling these works "scriptures" and "ancient texts", even though they are not literally speaking very old. But they are *special*, this very act of emphasizing them as such gives them that value and status among fandom, and re-enchants them.

While the "elder", seasoned BL fans are preaching the cultural tradition, new fans are expressing their enchantments and "revelations" after discovering Heated Rivalry. In one TikTok a creator is holding a novel, *the Long Game* in their hands. This book is what Heated Rivalry's (already announced) second season will be based on, while the first season was based on the book with the same name. On the video there is a text: "plans for 2026: knock on people's doors and promote this book as the New Testament." (@miraslauuu 17.1.2026.) Rather than the Long Game necessarily (yet) fulfilling Hill's (2002) criteria or assessment of cult texts' family resemblances, it is definitely being valorized by the fan, and being described by religious vocabulary that professes the "sacredness" of it. Another very similar example, once again about Heated Rivalry: "spreading the gospel" states the caption while the camera shows a group of people watching the show adaptation in a living room (@_isabellaboyd_ 18.1.2026). The value of Heated Rivalry for these BL fans is emphasized with the (familiar) Christian, religious vocabulary, and they are really promoting the story as something with equally monumental and transformative power. They are, then, in their way spreading the "gospel". The fans are not saying "this is my religion" but absolutely play with connotations like that.

Of course, Heated Rivalry has gained absolutely massive momentum, and might just as well come to fulfill Hill's (2002) full definition of an enduring cult text. Certainly, it has had a great impact in popular culture, and therefore features heavily in this thesis paper as well. Not only has the fandom grown quickly but it has had serious influence, and very quickly the show has been acknowledged as a work of media that taps into a very large, global group of active, devoted fans – and also into a large purchasing power. What has recently featured

heavily in the online fan spaces like TikTok is the “Heated Rivalry club night”, originating from an event by a Los Angeles-based nightclub *Club 90s* on January 2, 2026, and now the event has gone nationwide in the US and similar ones are getting organized in Europe, too. One of the event’s main attractions is popular video edits from TikTok being played on big screen, and the songs they feature being mixed by DJ to dance to. (Foster 2026.)

”Went to church and saw god” (@samlivez 17.1.2026), “back at church for the second time in a row” (@totheworldmiranda 01.1.2026) both of these TikToks are about Heated Rivalry club night. Specifically, they feature a video edit of one of the show’s main actors, Connor Storie, dancing and lip-syncing to Madonna’s *Like a Prayer*. The song itself could warrant a whole analysis on its religious connotations, but this video specifically has become a phenomenon among the fandom and is played on the big screen at these club nights. There are countless TikToks of fans enjoying this 34-second-long video, originally released by Interview Magazine (27.12.2025). Connor Storie is being equated to a god or deity in many videos, that the “devoted congregation” will go worship at the club nights. Another TikTok of the event has a text “am I part of a cult?” featuring the club filled with fans loudly enjoying the night (@tpwk.stef 11.1.2026). This fan is not directly calling the fandom a cult, however, they are stating it is *like* one. It is something separate of “regular consuming” or a level-up from it, they are doing and experiencing more, to the level that “cult” feels adequate to describe or make sense of it – even if it is with a humorous note.

Excuse me sir, excuse me? Do you have a moment to talk about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Hey, don't run from the Lord! Where are you going? goes the sound in the background on a TikTok, while the fan lip-syncs it to the camera with the text: “How it feels to tell your friends about Heated Rivalry because the fandom feels like a cult in collective psychosis at this point” (@egeborki 20.12.2025). This fan account utilizes, interestingly, both religious discourse to kind of go past explaining why exactly Heated Rivalry is so compelling, why fans enjoy it – they just do, and they are able to put into words by using religious vocabulary – but the fan also already acknowledges the stigma that may come with cult discourse, the obsessive, delusional, irrational connotations. It is once again a humoristic expression from the BL fan, it is playful, but playfulness does not lessen or diminish meaning or gravity. (Partridge 2004, Hills 2002).

Fans have the enchantment from BL and the object of fandom, that those who are not “initiated in” the community and live a “secular life” do not have first-hand experience of.

This religious discourse works perhaps to understandably articulate their own experiences of intense affective, personally meaningful fandom and fictional story. When the general idea of enchanted community in the West is of ones that are perceived spiritual or religious (usually Christian), or even intense cults recognizable from dramatized documentary films for instance, the vocabulary related to them naturally gets utilized. But it also makes fans acknowledge the similarities in their own intense fandom experience and religiosity, and how that might seem to an outsider.

It is common to idolize celebrities and artists one likes. In Asia a specific type of celebrities (such as K-pop and J-pop artists, or BL stars in Thailand) are fittingly called *idols*. Stereotypically their public images are ideal and highly produced, they are figures that inspire and motivate, and fans are encouraged to utilize them for imaginations and to build “close” relationships with the idols they support. (Baudinette 2023.) BL idols, or the ship and love they share (in the fans’ minds) – so them as a unit – often become deity-like or fortune bringing. Fans have connection to these idols and the dreamy image of them as a couple, and like already discussed in previous section they can open up these possibilities and moments of contact/interaction, and enchantment through ritual framing. Sometimes the process of ritual framing is by fans directly conceptualized by using religious discourse.

For example, Thai actors Sky Wongravee and Nani Hirunkit and their ship (“skynani) have become a centre of a whole “mantra” in the manner of Buddhist chants, that is supposed to bring forth more SkyNani content. There has also been reports of the two “blessing” a lottery win for a fan who chose lottery numbers which referred to the SkyNani -ship. What is interesting about Sky and Nani is that though their management company GMMTV which is known for BL shows and has set up numerous “official” BL actor pairings, Sky and Nani have not been made BL work-partners. They are marketed, and act in series as individuals who are friends instead of lovers, but in a manner that distinctly utilizes elements and framings that call, or are accessible, specifically for the fans who ship them – the BL fans. Sky and Nani are known specifically for the ship, and their success in a way relies on the fans’ skills for creative, imaginative investment, play and ritual framing. And, importantly fans’ enjoyment of that *process* specifically without anything being made “official” by the company, and in that way stays engaging.

The mantra mentioned is formatted like a Buddhist prayer/chant, built around the phrase “imina SkyNani”, which essentially means “manifesting SkyNani”. The word *imina* is a core

part of Buddhist prayer. Borrowing from “religion-proper” like this, but reimagining it for their own purposes, BL fans are also re-enchanting elements of it for themselves. And of course, again partaking in religious discourse. The two have been also likened to the Sanrio characters, *My Melody* (as Nani) and *Kuromi* (as Sky), and now these two widely popular characters (who often appear in merchandise together) have an added layer of meaning, kind of symbolism associated to them that is accessible for BL fans (more specifically SkyNani shippers) only by ritual framing. The fans can frame Kuromi and My Melody in any context to fit their own interests, and that way produce enchantment. For example, there is a TikTok where a fan goes to “pray” at a display table of Kuromi merchandise in a store, complete with the mantra playing on the background, and text “IMINA SKYNANI 🙏👤👤” on the video, as the fan solemnly and respectfully faces the altar (@sincoztan 2.2.2025).

Another Thai actor, Keng Harit acted a role of a powerful shaman in a BL show *Khemjira* (2025). On TikTok there have been numerous videos and pictures of fans gathering to worship pictures of him for encouragement, as a song/mantra that appears in the show to signify a religious ceremony plays in the background. In one of these videos, there is a group of fans kneeling on blankets on the ground, heads bowed and hands raised in (an imitation of) a respectful *wai*¹², to worship the picture of Keng’s character that one fan is holding, standing up above them (@bl_newyorkcity 6.9.2025). The caption of the video is written like a letter: “Dear Shaman, thank you for blessing the community. We promise to only do great things from now on! Sa thu 🙏🙏”. The word *sathu* is a Thai expression similar in meaning to “amen”. Again, this does not mean the fans think of Keng Harit and/or the Shaman character as a deity they *believe* in. However, they did make a scene of worship to receive blessings, they address him respectfully, and follow a seemingly religious format. It is an activity that, while conducted with humor, addresses and acknowledges the spiritual characteristics and value in the story and figure of the Shaman. BL fans are playing with and blurring the line of real and fictional here, and humorously gathering to worship the Shaman in the real world, which brings (re)enchantment. This was something conducted as a group, too. A whole group of fans gathered for a meeting, and decided to hold a “sermon”, and the gained “result” of that is precisely in the act of playful ritual and bringing this kind of intentional fun, whimsical (re)enchantment to their lives.

¹² ‘Wai’ is a respectful gesture/greeting in Thailand, with palms pressed against each other and fingers pointing up. How high hands are placed depends on whether someone is interacting with a peer, older person/teacher or other superior, or a religious figure like monk or statue of buddha/deity.

4.3.2 The BL paradise of Thailand and other fan pilgrimage

Ritual framing is also implemented for the purposes of fan tourism, and the (re)enchantment at destinations is often emphasized through religious discourse, and therefore I conceptualize it as “fan pilgrimage”. Some locations have been born purely from and for the object of fandom, but fans still often need imaginative investment, and ritual framing skills to experience the fictional or extraordinary. Filming locations, for example, often need imaginative play and ritual framing to make connection with the fictional characters and worlds. These are what I discuss in this final part of the third analysis chapter.

In the past year TikTok saw an influx of videos of people descending to the “yaoi dungeon”. The yaoi dungeon in question is the basement floor that hosts the BL (merch) section, of a book store K-BOOKS, the Ikebukuro Otome Pavilion location in Tokyo, Japan. It has become a phenomenon online, and BL fans traveling to Tokyo have put it on their list of must-see destinations. This store is not special in the way that it would be the only one, or one of a few bookstores selling BL by any means. It has been made into this special, clandestine and intriguing spot specifically through the collective action of portraying it as a “secret dungeon” and “sacred place”, which gained traction on TikTok. The fans essentially created this image for the place; they imagined and ritually framed it as if special and extraordinary, and it became such. Only a few of the videos actually film the basement any further than the descent down the staircase, so the store itself stays mysterious. The entrance to the stairs is located outside and accessible from the street-level, and it is the staircase specifically that gathers attention, it is the transformative, liminal space before entering down to the store. The staircase is also lavishly decorated floor to ceiling, all in standees and posters of popular BL characters and couples.

Fans really treat the place like a temple and portray their trips like it is a pilgrimage. One creator states in a video: “Finally I have made it to the holy land” (@kapisun_kidd 21.9.2025). Another goes “Entering a sacred space” (@bonznuttermasher 26.10.2025) while the Christian hymn *Ave Maria* plays in the background, emphasizing the statement. Another one also uses *Ave Maria* in the background, and has written “how it sounded entering the gates of yaoi heaven” to accompany the video of them descending the stairs (@eemmajune 16.3.2026). Or a common wording with various iterations: “First in my bloodline to descend to the yaoi dungeon” (@iwishiwasmikasgf 12.10.2025) describing the place like it is centuries old cultural site. All of these four videos depict the fan walking down the stairs, going through

the entryway to the “holy land of yaoi”. It might not even be that impressive all the way in, but the entrance/staircase is what matters the most here. It is like a decorated, ready-made and “easy” gateway, and it physically signifies the border between the enchanting/enchanted (fictional) BL world, and disenchanting/reality/everyday world. It has become meaningful and popular site among fans, but as BL fan pilgrimage sites come this is one of the easier ones, so to say. It does not need much work from the fan to let themselves enter the fictional, enchanted environment or moment.

“Regular” places need more active work. Thailand’s capital city Bangkok is a great example of urban scenery that has become a large pilgrimage site or “playground” for fans, not unlike how Brooker (2007) describes Canada’s Vancouver. Many Thai BL stories of course are set in Bangkok; it then exists as both a real and fictional location. It is also where the heart of BL production is, with well-known companies’ businesses located there and celebrities living in the city. Bangkok is by foreign tourists favored for things like delicious food, night life, opportunities to improve health holistically and practice wellness, the shopping malls, and of course the city’s culture-historical sites such as the Wat Arun -temple and the palace. However, media tourism is becoming a considerable attraction, and BL fans are eager to see filming locations, to meet their idols and simply to experience Bangkok as the setting of the fictional that has become meaningful for them. It is not even just Bangkok, as after being featured in series Pattaya, Phuket and Chiang Mai among others also hold a fair share of interest specifically for a BL fan in Thailand. Sometimes already very significant (culturally and as tourist destinations) places get an added layer of enchantment that BL fans can access, such as when temples are featured in shows (like Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, in Chiang Mai featured in the show *We Are* [2024]).

With BL becoming more popular and more mainstream in Thailand, and the fans being acknowledged for their large purchasing power, a lot of advertising also targets BL fans (Baudinette & Svetanant 2023). Pictures and billboards of BL actors are all around in Bangkok, advertising everything from snacks and drinks to cars, cat food and cosmetics, which is pictured in multiple TikToks. To foreign fans this abundance of familiar faces is like a BL paradise. It is like a game of spotting one’s idols, and products, for example, which have become familiar from being advertised in BL media. They are enchantments on their own, especially for fans who do not get to experience fandom outside of the online spaces, and for whom BL idols are not a normal sight in advertisements around town. This is already for the

sheer unusuality, and pleasant surprise foreign fans may feel as tourists witnessing the abundance of “BL symbols”.

One TikTok has a text “pov: it’s your first day in Bangkok” while a sound used by Thai BL fandom plays in the background, highlighting the enchantments accessible for BL fandom specifically, and clips filmed by the creator of multiple advertisements that feature BL actors around Bangkok are edited together (@rujisatur 22.10.2024). While in Bangkok, I also personally had fun spotting BL idols’ pictures around the city, and it made touring more special. As Bangkok really is the center of the industry and the setting of most of Thai BL stories, there are many layers that a BL fan can enjoy and play with there, and I experienced it firsthand.

One of the main attractors in Thailand is right in the central Sukhumvit -area of Bangkok, where the production and artist management company GMMTV’s office is located. The GMM Grammy Place has become a pilgrimage site for foreign fans especially. It is not even just that the office is the “home” or birthplace of many shows the fans love, but the building itself attracts visitors by selling merchandise at a designated shop area, displaying posters of the shows, organizing birthday events for the company artists and by having areas where fans can meet up, conduct their own projects and do activities. On top of this, at the building which is ultimately also the workplace of the company staff and artists, one can even meet their idols in person. Occasionally people wait at designated areas to say hi to the idols who are passing by. I have visited the building myself in 2023, and saw the actor and singer Krist Perawat while I was at the shop area choosing merchandise – whether that was a completely random encounter remains mystery. The company benefits from supporting the fans’ activities and trips to the office by having monetized it, and centering and inviting the practice of the fan culture there. GMM Building is functioning as a place for commemoration and encountering/connecting to the “venerated” object of fandom, and it has become such through the combined actions of the company and fans.

There are multiple TikToks by foreign fans showing their visit to GMM Building. In just one example a fan (@j_inchina 10.2.2025) shows very well the “customs” and typical order of a visit. The fan walks up to the building, where already outside there are many posters and signs to admire, inviting fans in. The fan secures a visitor tag/identity card for their visit, to gain access to go up to the office’s 30th floor where shop is located. On the way they film birthday posters for Pond Naravit which decorate the sides of the wall next to the elevators (these are

usually paid for by fans of the idols), on the shop floor there are more posters of currently airing GMMTV shows, and merchandise to buy to commemorate the trip and have “proof” of a pilgrimage. As the sound the fan uses a soundtrack piece from a GMMTV BL show. Especially for first time visitors, things like the in-between, in a way liminal state of the elevator-trip to the upstairs to the restricted area, it is very much an exciting, special journey. For international Thai BL fans, it is an accessible center of the fan culture, tangible outside of the online space, and a potentially transformative experience.

Not just in many ways constructed places such as GMM Building, completely ordinary places like universities and campus areas which have functioned as filming sites are also very popular. For example, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University campus, within metropolitan Bangkok area has been used as one of the filming locations for the massively popular BL show *2gether* (2020). One TikTok by a fan uses the series’ theme song as the background sound, and pictures multiple places familiar from the fictional world, and even products like certain brand of soy milk which was advertised in the series. The caption on the video states “I still miss Sarawat and Tine 🇹🇭” who are the main characters of *2gether*. (@hiroryuta 30.4.2025.) The fictional is brought to be experienced within the tangible reality, it is reminisced, and the reality is enchanted by it. Going to see the fictional also strengthens the connection to it (Hills 2002), when it is brought to be interacted with or one travels to the enchanting fictional, within the limits of ritually framing it as such. It is separating the fictional from the ordinary disenchanted reality, by constructing it as an “as if” illusion within the ritual frame. (Utriainen 2016.)

Another popular destination is Rangsit University campus, which functioned as a filming site for many Thai BL shows like *Bad Buddy*, and *SOTUS* (2016), *Until We Meet Again* (2019) and *Fish Upon the Sky* (2021). One fan uses music from *Until We Meet Again* as the TikTok sound, as they show areas at the campus that BL fans will recognize, stating “not my school but I know my way around” (@marveeee_ 16.1.2026) which is a common sentiment in fan videos like this. The fictional map overlaps with the real, though their border is recognized and purposely toyed with, and ritual frame and imagination become ways to access the fictional world. Fans have the ability to open the “doorways” to the fictional, and in this sense the surroundings become a “playground” for them (Brooker 2007).

At the architecture building of Rangsit University, there is also a set of stairs where an important confession scene of *Bad Buddy* was filmed. User @skulltoki12 (26.3.2025) is one

of the many fans who have visited the staircase, and made a TikTok of that visit. They use a sound that is edited from dialogue of the exact confession scene, mixed with a melancholic piano version of Bad Buddy's soundtrack to evoke a certain "sadness". They are not just framing the staircase as the fictional site where the confession happened, they are also adding on the emotional impact of it. Fans are not dependent on *just* the show's scene and content of it when they go see the filming sites/sites of the fictional events. With the knowledge of the whole fictional story, or narratives related to it (such as about the actors) or made up by (other) fans, there is even more to incorporate in or use for their imaginations, and which add on the emotional impact. The staircase is not shown just simply as if it is the fictional one, there can be even more complicated or layered elements which add on the enchantment at the site.

All in all, however, fans commonly mimic the fictional character's actions at these places, or "follow in their footsteps" or simply exist at the place where their favorite characters/actors did and/or where something important happened. Many TikToks illustrate well the practice of going to experience these meaningful places as the fictional. For non-fans these examples are just "typical" campus areas. However, BL fans (of certain shows) reminisce and play with memories and their imagination to see and experience these places as the locations of fictional stories. Fans get to stand where the fictional characters, and/or the actors did, and where "the magic happened", and feel emotions related to the fictional. Ritually framed "as if" and therefore enchanting, even while being aware of the perceivable, ordinary reality. This is an intentional act of uplifting, enriching the reality to extraordinary.

And this is not limited to Bangkok or even Thailand, of course. For example, one fan shows in a video a picture of themselves standing at a seemingly regular street in Quebec, Canada with the text "🤔: it's just a normal place, why will you take a picture there????". The video then turns to a picture of the characters/actors from *Your Name Engraved Herein* (2020) at that exact spot, with a text: "the normal place in question" (@ju4.nito 17.2.2026.) In this example there is again the format of a critical statement supposedly coming from outside (portraying the disenchanting), and which is then answered by the fan ([re]enchanted). The place is implied to be special by explicitly denying its normalness, but only because the fan can access that specialness, or form it by ritual framing.

In another example: "wdym the real Gusu from MDZS is actually near Shanghai?!" (@theculturalsatanist 20.2.2026) referring to the novel *Mo Dao Zu Shi* or *Grandmaster of*

Demonic Cultivation (GDC) (2016) and a home of the fictional characters in it, the area of Gusu, which used to be the name of the real area of Suzhou in China. In the TikTok the fan shows first themselves traveling on the train towards their destination, and then the beautiful places in fictional “Gusu” (Suzhou). The video also shows how this very popular BL fiction’s characters appear around the town in posters and decorations, and themed souvenirs. This makes the fictional easier to access even for those who do not really know how, or do not have enough knowledge to practice ritual framing. The fictional is more apparent and incorporated to the world perceived, instead of being accessible only by skillful framing. The place has been constructed by and for fan tourists/pilgrims, and has become a bigger, more extensive or comprehensive experience in a way. The enchantment being more accessible and visible, and therefore also creating more to play with, makes it also more profitable and allows many kinds of actors to innovate and boost businesses for example, by partaking in and constructing (re)enchantment related to GDC. This kind of growing construction of, and around the pilgrimage experience by different operators is very much common for “traditional” pilgrimage sites as well (Utriainen and Vesala 2020).

And finally, the enchantment of these fan pilgrimage sites is not limited to what happens physically on-site. The fans posting TikTok videos of their trips to these meaningful places also set it up “as if” for the other fans. This way the fans who are not physically there can also *join* in the imaginative play and share the wonder, mediated by the TikTok videos. They hear the soundtrack songs, or other recognizable audios (that the video’s creator specifically chose to ritually frame these sites) while visually seeing a place they recognize, and they allow themselves to get enchanted along the person who posted the video. This enforces the connections that fans not only have with the object of fandom, but with the other fans. In my personal case as well, I could imagine what the fans are feeling, and I could for my own part partake in the experience of enchantment. Though of course there are limits to that, when not physically at these sites. However, the way fan works, in this case the fans’ videos on TikTok, facilitate mutual (re)enchantment and in that way contribute to the sense of community within fandom would be a plentiful source for future research.

In this final section of the analysis, I have explored fan accounts and discussed fan tourism specifically through the lens of fan pilgrimage. This perspective helps understand the significance of fans’ tendency to describe these meaningful sites with religious vocabulary, as well as their portrayals of ritual framing at these sites to produce enchantment, and to mark the difference between enchanted and disenchanting/ordinary.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Findings about fan enchantment

In this study I have looked into BL fans' accounts of their enjoyment and practice of the fan culture specifically from the perspective of enchantment. I have used the key-concept of (re)enchantment to build a theoretical perspective that takes seriously the meaning that exists and is derived simply from enjoying BL content, and the playful and imaginative fan practises within BL fandom. Previous research on BL fan culture has tended to theorise and try to explain why fans enjoy BL content, as well as been mostly limited to female audiences of specific socio-cultural contexts, for instance. There has been an acknowledged lack of empirical research and attention to BL fans' descriptions of their personal, practical enjoyment of the fandom, which this study takes into focus to increase understanding of the BL fan culture.

When formulating the research questions and theoretical framework, I was aided by my existing knowledge and personal experience of the fandom. I conducted online ethnography in the fan spaces mainly on the social media application TikTok, where I observed the fan culture from the position of an insider. Guided by the theory and research questions, on TikTok I combined a collection of videos for primary source material to reference and analyse in more depth. The resulting collection offers kind of glimpses into the fan culture, which by nature are also tied to trends, movements and topical issues within the community during the times of observation. In analysing the fan accounts, I attempt to build a descriptive understanding on the phenomenon of enchantment within, and via BL fan culture, by reflecting on it with theory and previous research about BL culture.

The videos were roughly thematically categorised following three research questions, within which I identified a some thematical sub-categories during analysis process. First question: How is BL fan culture and the consumption of BL content spontaneously (re)enchanting the fans' lives? In this section I explored the spontaneous (re)enchantment that fans describe, which rather than a product of creative investment or intentionally produced is felt by fans "simply" through consuming BL content. BL is by fans described as enjoyable, enriching time for themselves in everyday life, that can bring healing or lift one's mood, and offers a way to enjoy the fantastical and whimsical and fall into daydreaming. This partly stems from the way BL as a genre subverts and challenges the ordinary, disenchanting or even unpleasant

or unjust reality, a matter which fans might acknowledge or even use as a way to “justify” and rationalise their enjoyment of BL content, too.

Second analysis chapter follows question two: What kind of intentional ways to produce and ritually frame enchantment do fans exhibit on TikTok? Applying Utraiainen’s (2016; 2020) theory on ritual framing as way to produce enchantment, I argue that fans use ritual framing to open up and play with BL possibilities in a subjunctive “as if” manner. This is to bring enjoyment, excitement and enrichment, and to have contact with or “feel” their specific objects of fandom, such as particular BL pairing that is important to them and may offer support or encouragement. Fans also use ritual framing to construct narratives which (re)enchant, as they imaginatively play with the boundary of real and fictional, and reimagine real life events, for example. Ritual framing can work to enrich fans’ ordinary life in many areas and ways, and it is a skill and art, which also allows fans to manage their enchantment and to operate and mediate between enchanted and disenchanted.

Finally, the third research question: How is the enchantment of BL fan culture portrayed as similar to religiosity by fans? The analysis in this section builds on Hills’ (2002) theory of fan cultures as a form of neo-religiosity in particular. I look into the ways fans use “common”/familiar religious vocabulary and sentiments to describe the enchantment of the fandom, and its value and meaning. For example, fans refer to important fictional texts as sacred, relate the actors they like to deities, or the fandom to a cult. Fans themselves also sometimes describe their fan tourism like a religious pilgrimage. This is to have a way to articulate the “faith” and devotion for the object fandom (and the enchantment) without need for rational justification, but in a “secular” society, religious discourse can also bring connotations of delusion, irrationality or obsession, too. Religious discourse is not “empty”, and fans intentionally utilize it, and in this way fandoms play at the traditionally religious field and transform it. Hills (2002) suggests also that sociology of religion can help understand the similarities in experience between fandom and religiosity, and I consider especially ritualization and ritual framing when analyzing fans’ way of differentiating between (re)enchanted and disenchanted, and finding and producing the BL enchantment within the ordinary.

Previous research on BL fan culture allowed me to consider from what kind of reality, and why is it possibly that BL content arises as (re)enchanted, but looking into fan accounts directly helps to understand the kind of practical presence and value (re)enchantment as such

has for individuals in BL fandom. Furthermore, having looked into the phenomenon of (re)enchantment in, and through BL fandom I will next tentatively explore how that (re)enchantment places BL fan culture in the wider Western spiritual field characterized by re-enchantment (Partridge 2004).

5.2 BL fan culture as occulture

Partridge (2004) argues that deteriorating or secularized Christian culture, which does not fulfill the “spiritual needs” of people anymore, is in the West being replaced with *cultic milieu*, or more accurately *occulture*, a sphere characterized by its agents’ pursue for re-enchantment. Partridge (2004) describes this milieu of sub-cultures and communities as kind of agents of opposition, and counter cultures which challenge the normalized and “official” definitions and assumptions about our reality, and in that sense bring back a certain culture of magic. (Partridge 2004, 40–41.) Especially when still described as “cultic milieu”, occulture has been characterized as “society’s cultural underground”, from which, for example the 1960s counter culture arose from. The sub-cultures of occulture and people’s connections to them may be ephemeral, but occulture as a larger collective stays, though it morphs. (Kirby 2014, 13–14.)

Occulture as such is not a worldview, but layered and flickering source where people derive ideas, inspiration, beliefs and practices from, and within which different players also interact with each other and are connected. (Partridge 2004, 84–85.) Even though occulture has been defined based on its opposition to, and differing from norms and the cultural mainstream, that does not mean that these beliefs and forms of practice often described “alternative” would be wholly separate from tradition, and the cultural and social context around them. Occulture draws from many sources, and in return the mainstream and popular culture derive elements and ideas from occulture. Occulture includes according to Partridge (2004) everything from esoterism to UFO-beliefs and environmental activism, as people build up their worldviews based on their personal desires and interests and what brings them re-enchantment.

Right now, BL fan culture could be viewed as a form of occulture. This is specifically in the way it is able to bring tangible (re)enchantment in multiple ways to the fans’ lives, and in the way it has historically been a sub- and counter culture of mostly women and queer people who challenged the mainstream through it. Even when it is through entertainment first, or playfully, BL fans are re-enchanting their world following their own interests and desires in

making it meaningful. At least warranted that our understanding of religion stays functional enough, the way BL fans conceptualize their fandom and intentionally “dabble” into the religious sphere, and both let themselves be enchanted and produce enchantment via ritualizing in a “secular” society, BL fan culture is also akin to religiosity. BL fans have culture defining texts, they have deity and saintlike figures, there are rituals and pilgrimages, but moreover fandom influences the way fans live their everyday lives. Belonging in a community, and finding novel ways to bring in joy, excitement and strength, or meaning and moments of magic are all something the fans “get” from the fandom. On this note, Porter (2010) describes fandoms:

Far from being a pathological symptom of cultural consumption gone wrong, fandom can be seen as an integral vehicle for the articulation and experience of something deeply meaningful—a statement about what truly matters—as filtered through and symbolized by pop culture. Fan communities are, or at least can be, places that embody a persons and/or a community's expression of what it means to be human, to be in community, to be in space and time, to be moral or immoral, to be finite or eternal, to simply be. (Porter 2010, 271.)

According to Partridge (2004), popular culture derives ideas and themes from occulture, and occultural beliefs also spread and stay viable partly due to media and popular culture. Besides the BL fan culture itself considered as occulture, as fictional texts BL works of course also represent and spread ideas and themes of occulture, or may reinterpret and possibly re-enchant cultural tradition or folk lore, for example. Popular culture spreads occulture to larger audiences, and in that sense trivializes it, but that does not mean occultural beliefs that people adopt due to popular culture would be diminished or they would lack in sincerity. “Occulture, which is, to a large extent, being supported by popular culture, is becoming ever more pervasive and influential. The emergence of popular occulture ... has led to a certain de-stigmatization.” (Partridge 2004, 122–123.) This de-stigmatization felt within BL fan culture, which is not just an object of fandom, but those within the culture actively practice it and exist as members of the community.

Bro, why does liking yaoi seem so performative nowadays. There’s just no way, like, the whole universe reads yaoi now? But I don’t even know if it’s serious, like if y’all read yaoi can you recite the national anthem? [Playing a music video of *Painter of the Night* animation] Can you identify this treasured relic? [Holding up the novel *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*] My culture is not your costume! Yaoi has become another, like, “brain rotted” thing. Oh my God. This is the first time I’ve ever in my life admitted to reading yaoi. Because back in my days, you say you like yaoi you’re getting burned at the stake. I still feel a little trembly, if I’m discussing it. Like where are people finding out about this stuff. It’s like a whole meme now. It’s also funny

cause it's getting accepted now. I used to literally go in the corner, cover my screen like this [shielding their face with a hand]. Obviously at home because I'm not doing that in public [...] (@minamarkk 14.8.2025)

This is TikTok by @minamarkk (14.8.2025) partly transcribed, and it shows a theme I noticed clearly during my online observation. BL fans feel the increase in the amount of commercial BL content and the resulting increase in the size of the (wider) fandom, and they see something that used to be very niche now discussed and enjoyed more by the mainstream. This seems to bring conflicting feelings, as fans simultaneously feel more comfortable in expressing and enjoying their fandom publicly, but also wary, and in a way “territorial” over the fan culture and genre of media that used to be safeguarded and that they saw develop to what it is today. Many fans have brought up the older works, “ancient scriptures” and how they got into the fandom (usually) quite young, making them kind of “elders” and emphasizing their status as someone who did *not* get into BL content through recent popular media like *Heated Rivalry* (2025). As people who know the history of the fan culture and the stigmatization that the fans have faced (often first-hand), they are also worried what happens if the fan culture is exposed to mainstream more, and/or if it loses what was special about it (knowledge and practices limited to certain sphere, the uncommercial core of fandom enjoyment, etc.) in that process.

There has historically been a kind of secret and concealed quality about the BL fandom. The enchantments have been kept hidden and limited only to a certain group of people, those who share certain knowledge and understanding between each other. Now BL has become more mainstream and blended into it, and the market is even somewhat oversaturated¹³. The more niche tropes or sub-genres within BL, such as omegaverse are getting (after originally appearing in fan works and literary BL only) depicted in commercial, live-action BL media as well, for example. However, our understanding of BL should not be limited to the commercial forms of it. BL fans have always imagined and created what they want to see and consume, and played with ideas purely for the fun of it. BL fans reinvent even the commercial BL to better fit their own desires and interests. These imaginations and ideas often, even if somewhat subconsciously, stem from the reality they want to subvert and resist, or simply make more magical and entertaining. Considering BL culture's history as an underground sub-culture, I could see it invent new ways of existence and answer to novel needs and

¹³ Depends on specific “branch” of BL content, but in Thailand, for example, in 2022 there were 75 BL series produced that year alone (Bunyavejchewin et al. 2024, 2).

purposes. As Partridge (2004) describes, there is a cycle of underground forms of occulture eventually adapting and fusing to the mainstream, and then people rummaging the underground again and reinventing the old as the enchantments diminish or cease, so that they may find re-enchantment – this cycle will continue.

The role and influence of religion and religiosity is not gone in Western society, it is simply that the current religious and spiritual scene is becoming that of occulture, or re-enchantment stemming from various sources like popular culture based on people's individual interests and beliefs, and this re-enchantment and practices around it are reshaping religious sphere (in the West). (Partridge 2004; Hills 2002.) I have made some initial/tentative observations about BL as a form of occulture, and how it can be considered as a player in the contemporary religious field. However, to comprehensively analyze what kind of tangible influence (if any) BL (and the fan culture) has in the fans' worldviews, or what they explicitly define as spirituality/religiosity, it would demand a research approach focusing on that specifically.

5.3 Future research prospects

Besides the possibility of further consideration of BL fan culture as occulture, there have been some future research prospects I identified when conducting this study. While I maintained a focus on the individual fan experiences, the videos included in the primary research material together with all the other ones I observed while conducting online ethnography, notably bring up the sense of community and solidarity among BL fans. (Re)enchantments are shared among the community, constructed (in the sense of imagined scenarios, for instance) and enjoyed together. Stainova (2019), talks about these “mutual enchantments” that are built up, and dreamt and played with together, and it is this sense of togetherness and letting oneself be moved that makes enchantment so valuable and strong as a transformative, radical force. BL fans online also talk about being able to withstand the opinions from outside as a community, and describe finding joy and sense of meaning from friendships/connections with other fans, as they have special understanding with each other (and about BL enchantment). This topic of (constructing) mutual (re)enchantment, and its role in forming solidarity and sense of community could be a prospect for future research.

Somewhat in connection to mutual enchantment, and sense of community and solidarity, the limited scale of this study and the focus on empirical fan accounts ruled out most of fan art from being included in the collection of primary research material. Fan art – in the case of

TikTok this means mostly fan edits, so videos edited to music or other audio-clips and which tell a specific narrative, convey a “vibe” or reimagine a trend, for example – after all is a major form and mediator of re-enchantment within BL fandom. It is also how mutual (re)enchantments often come to be. Fan art does not only reimagine and in that way concretely re-enchants a certain piece of media. Due to fans playing with their object of fandom quite freely, fan art in its many forms often has the power to re-enchants other products of popular culture that were somehow intertextually utilized (like music, memes, art, literature, etc.), too, or certain places, items, or even traditions, for example.

Both of these would be interesting prospects to further look into the phenomenon of enchantment in BL fandom. More information could potentially be gathered by directly asking fans about their experiences via surveys or interviews, for example. The topic of this research, the individual fan enchantment could also be further explored by interviewing fans, to gain even more information or to focus on a specific sub-group of BL fandom (such as Thai BL fandom), as the scope of this study was purposely kept broad and inclusive in terms of who are included within “BL fan community”.

Bibliography

5.4 TikTok material in order of appearance

- finch (@blckbrdquitter). 2025. "im fujoing out guys" *TikTok*, 17.4.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@blckbrdquitter/video/7494096445876833566?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- nia (@fujoshiiqueen). 2025. "never" *TikTok*, 7.4.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@fujoshiiqueen/video/7490554026736618774?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- Ben (@koreanbeef27). 2024. "#funny #comedy" *TikTok*, 18.10.2024. Retrieved 16.10.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@koreanbeef27/video/7427102483819826462?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- LTNmcqueer (@ltnmcqueer). 2025. "Why was the group named yaoi lovers 🌈" *TikTok*, 1.4.2025. Retrieved 16.10.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@ltnmcqueer/video/7488438327557754118?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- not miles (@littleherobrinexx). 2024. "❤️" *TikTok*, 20.11.2024. Retrieved 16.10.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@littleherobrinexx/video/7439369878563261727?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- kat ! (@heartboa). 2025. "#yaoi #real" *TikTok*. 26.1.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@heartboa/video/7464070924153752875?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- k (@wolfstaryuri). 2025. "being a fujoshi isn't a choice it's a lifestyle and it's saved me time and time again." *TikTok*, 28.3.2025. Retrieved 16.10.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@wolfstaryuri/video/7486744817809067294?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- FingerEater (@0grimlin0). 2025. "motivating yourself to work by thinking by thinking of the gay ship you'll get back to right after" *TikTok*, 14.3.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@0grimlin0/video/7481641754316279062?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- dj senpai (@djs3npai). 2025. *TikTok*, 15.4.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025. Video deleted, link to account: https://www.tiktok.com/@djs3npai?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc.

- ♡ lammy ♡ (@theyaigorl). 2024. “opened my eyes to real beauty” *TikTok*, 19.9.2024.
Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@theyaigorl/video/7416384551569640734?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- Bert (@bertubble). 2024. “Anyways Jayce and Viktor look great in Arcane Season 2” *TikTok*, 15.11.2024. Retrieved 16.10.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@bertubble/video/7437274010179685663?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- XAN 63 (@sharkielvr4evr). 2026. “The BL effect” *TikTok*. 4.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@sharkielvr4evr/video/7591584766294609174?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- andy 🌹 (@lovesickmisfit). 2026. “me and chenle are so excited for this debut” *TikTok*.
12.2.2026. Retrieved 4.3.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@lovesickmisfit/video/7605762641776135455?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- probablypooping (PP) (@probablypoopingidk). 2026. “extra points if the red one is angsty and has trauma and the blue one is sassy and has a savior complex” *TikTok*. 26.4.2026.
Retrieved 27.4.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@probablypoopingidk/video/7632801883689602334?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- jor (@meeowjor). 2025. “red...blue..cough” *TikTok*. 25.1.2025. Retrieved 27.4.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@meeowjor/video/7463666576890268959?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- mito ° ୨୧*° (@mito3633). 2025. “REUPLOAD + why did I do this again” *TikTok*.
26.6.2025. Retrieved 27.4.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@mito3633/video/7520009397322534166?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- zen (comms OPEN) (@zensiart). 2025. “I love being an artist” *TikTok*, 30.8.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@zensiart/video/7544482833948265759?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

- (@abithacreator). 2026. "i love these glasses" *TikTok*, 30.3.2026. Retrieved 27.4.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@abithacreator/video/7622820879629569310?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- lunitcat (@lunitcat). 2025. "this is a #joke" *TikTok*. 27.5.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@lunitcat/video/7509217410885356831?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- Bell 🍷 (@ellabellablu2). 2026. "Heated biblery" *TikTok*. 11.2.2026. Retrieved 4.3.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@ellabellablu2/video/7605382881984122134?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- Peakunstabledrama (@peakunstabledrama2). 2026. "girl just seeing and hearing exactly what she wants to see" *TikTok*, 18.4.2026. Retrieved 27.4.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@peakunstablek drama2/video/7629838490884263190?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- byurii (@primluvrrr). 2024. "Hashtag: Mr. Exorcist and the Real Estate Heir (bromance who? 🤩)" *TikTok*. 13.11.2024. Retrieved 4.3.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@primluvrrr/video/7436787722867461394?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- Jesse Klaver (@jesse.klaver). 2024. "Resse is back! With a very important message." *TikTok*. 3.6.2024. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@jesse.klaver/video/7376158746445204769?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- resse^Ts (@ressevs). 2025. "help i'm still at the restaurant" *TikTok*. 3.5.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.
https://www.tiktok.com/@ressevs/video/7500193888943099158?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- \$ (@sashgetscash). 2025. "kiss kiss goodbye Ottawa" *TikTok*. 3.5.2025. Retrieved 30.1.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@sashgetscash/video/7500037826394754359?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- bakkkkey_ (@bakkkkey_). 2026. "prolly are" *TikTok*. 14.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.
https://www.tiktok.com/@bakkkkey_/video/7595313190947310861?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.
- Bdog (@bdogtrapmaster03). 2026. "Kiss cam but on the field" *TikTok*. 3.4.2026. Retrieved 4.3.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@bdogtrapmaster03/video/7624627037755559181?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Cupcake (@cirrusloveslemonade). 2024. "being part of Ronans,BW,peraya,polca,babi is everything to me 🥰" *TikTok*. 21.12.2024. Retrieved 16.10.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@cirrusloveslemonade/video/7450888246906653973?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Chesapeake Kitchen 🍴 (@thechesapeakekitchen). 2025. "I want nothing but historical accuracy for my gay cannibals." *TikTok*. 17.5.2025. Retrieved 16.10.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@thechesapeakekitchen/video/7505384675154693398?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

🌀 Jae or Tony 🍏 (@t0ny.m0ly). 2025. "I've had this for over 10 years yall" *TikTok*. 30.12.2025. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@t0ny.m0ly/video/7589471249043115278?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Inosukesleftusk (@inosukesleftusk). 2026. "do not cite the deep magic to me, witch. I was there when it was written" *TikTok*. 15.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@inosukesleftusk/video/7595666484702203168?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

camitaloupe (@camitaloupe). 2026. "we're losing the ancient texts" *TikTok*. 31.1.2026. Retrieved 4.3.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@camitaloupe/video/7597830568570621239?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

miraslau (@miraslauuu). 2026. "and suddenly im a believer" *TikTok*, 17.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@miraslauuu/photo/7596428809956560150?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

izzy 🦋 (@_isabellaboyd_). 2026. "spreading the gospel" *TikTok*, 18.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@_isabellaboyd_/video/7596459895243721998?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Sam (@samlivez). 2026. "Literally the funniest thing ever I love New York" *TikTok*, 17.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@samlivez/video/7596210396147518733?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

totheworldmiranda (@totheworldmiranda). 2026. "JUST LIKE A PRAYERRR" *TikTok*, 01.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@totheworldmiranda/video/7593789964631018783?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

stef (@tpwk.stef). 2026. "I'm coming to the cottage cult" *TikTok*. 11.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@tpwk.stef/video/7593864117706935565?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

bombie blondie (@egeborki). "#heatedrivalry" *TikTok*, 20.12.2025. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@egeborki/video/7586070014239706389?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Anan (@sincoztan). 2025. "bisa bisanya bikin lagu imina skynani 🤖" *TikTok*, 2.2.2025. Retrieved 16.10.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@sincoztan/video/7466782057042070791?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

bl_newyorkcity (@bl_newyorkcity). 2025. "Dear Shaman, Thank you for blessing the community." *TikTok*, 6.9.2025. Retrieved 16.10.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@bl_newyorkcity/video/7546997603796339999?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Vonn (@kapisun_kidd). 2025. "The first in my generation to go to the yaoi dungeon" *TikTok*, 21.9.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@kapisun_kidd/video/7552345565367995678?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Char 🍒 (@bonznuttermasher). 2025. "Felt a strong spiritual presence when entering upon the sacred yaoi dungeon." *TikTok*, 26.10.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@bonznuttermasher/video/7565346436074851615?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

emma june (@eemmajunee). 2026. "and i finally have friends who don't judge me for it 🥺" *TikTok*, 16.3.2026. Retrieved 27.4.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@eemmajunee/video/7617830899710790943?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

akira (@iwishiwasmikasgf). 2025. "Im so happy that i finally made it there and 15 yo me is so proud" *TikTok*. 12.10.2025. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@iwishiwasmikasgf/video/7560360141300976914?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

ruji ❤️ (@rujisatur). 2024. " I squealed when i saw jeffs ad 🤪🤪" *TikTok*. 22.10.2024.

Retrieved 8.12.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@rujisatur/video/7428644697540807953?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

j_inchina (@j_inchina). 2025. " POV: visiting GMMTV in Bangkok I finally went back to visit GMMTV after one year." *TikTok*, 10.2.2025. Retrieved 16.10.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@j_inchina/video/7469718073537252630?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Hiro Go Now (@hiroryuta). 2025. " I still miss Sarawat and Tine 🇹🇭" *TikTok*. 30.4.2025.

Retrieved 16.10.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@hiroryuta/video/7498965579718593799?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

ig: @marveeee_ (@marveeee). 2026. " not my school but i know my way around" *TikTok*, 16.1.2026. Retrieved 30.1.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@marveeee/video/7595828540042398983?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

HONGSTAR (@skulltoki12). 2025. " Не деген бақытты ит дедім ғой 🤪" *TikTok*,

26.3.2025. Retrieved 16.10.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@skulltoki12/video/7486178666683190533?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Juanito (@ju4.nito). 2026. "i still have ptsd for this movie" *TikTok*, 17.2.2026. Retrieved 4.3.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@ju4.nito/photo/7607627716174548245?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

theculturalsatanist (@theculturalsatanist). 2026. "a video that didn't work the first time haha" *TikTok*, 20.2.2026. Retrieved 4.3.2026.

https://www.tiktok.com/@theculturalsatanist/video/7609019923167218966?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

Caitlyn Mina (@minamarkk). 2025. ”👁️” *TikTok*, 14.8.2025. Retrieved 8.12.2025.

https://www.tiktok.com/@minamarkk/video/7538547736996515103?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7597812919489299990.

5.5 Literature

Abramovitch, Seth. 2025. Down to Puck: Why Women Are Going Wild for ‘Heated Rivalry’.

The Hollywood Reporter. 22.12.2025. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/heated-rivalry-hbo-max-gay-drama-hockey-players-hit-women-1236456083/>

Appadurai, Arjun. 2000. Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination. *Public Culture* 12 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-12-1-1>.

Baudinette, Thomas. 2023. *Boys Love Media in Thailand: Celebrity, Fans and Transnational Asian Queer Popular Culture*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Baudinette, Thomas and Chavalin Svetanant. 2023. Mobilizing idol celebrity in queer affective advertising: exploring the impacts of ‘Boys Love’ media and fandom in Thailand. *South East Asia Research* 31 (4): 417–434.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2023.2253723>.

Bennett, Jane. 2016. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400884537>.

Blom, Minja. 2013. Television Vampire Fandom and Religion. *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 25. <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67430>.

Booth, Paul. 2015. *Playing Fans: Negotiating Fandom and Media in the Digital Age*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Bornet, Philippe and Maya Burger (edit.). 2012. Preface. In *Religions in Play: Games, Rituals, and Virtual Worlds*. 7-11. Zürich: Pano Verlag.

Brooker, Will. 2007. Everywhere and Nowhere: Vancouver, Fan Pilgrimage and the Urban Imaginary. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (4): 423–444.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877907083078>.

Campbell, Colin. 2002. The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization. In *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Jeffrey S. Kaplan ja Heléne Lööv. 12-26. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

- Chang, Jiang and Hao Tian. 2021. Girl Power in Boy Love: Yaoi, Online Female Counterculture, and Digital Feminism in China. *Feminist Media Studies* (ABINGDON) 21 (4): 604–620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1803942>
- Dogson, Lindsay. 2021. TikTok users obsessed with two Dutch politicians are writing and posting fan fiction about their imagined relationship. *Business Insider*. 30.10.2021. <https://www.businessinsider.com/rob-jetten-jesse-klaver-resse-tiktok-dutch-politicians-love-fake-2021-10>.
- Elo, Satu, and Helvi Kyngäs. 2008. The Qualitative Content Analysis Process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 62 (1): 107–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>.
- Fleeson, Nathan E. 2024. Fandom and the Cult of the Saints as Alternate Religious Networks: Fanzines and Books of Hours. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 36 (1): 30–46. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.2022-0041>.
- Foster, Daniel R. 2026. ‘Heated Rivalry’ Raves Become Nationwide Phenomenon. *Forbes*. 20.1.2026. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rdaniel-foster/2026/01/20/heated-rivalry-becomes-nationwide-rave-phenomenon/>.
- Frank, Georgia. 2000. *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*. 1st ed. University of California Press.
- Frömming, Urte Undine, Steffen Köhn, Samantha Fox, and Mike Terry. 2017. Digital Environments and the Future of Ethnography An Introduction. In *Digital Environments: Ethnographic Perspectives across Global Online and Offline Spaces*. 13–22. Edited by Urte Undine Frömming, Steffen Köhn, Mike Terry, and Samantha Fox. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839434970>.
- Hailu, Selome. 2026. ‘Heated Rivalry’ Reaches 10.6 Million Viewers in The U.S. With Audience Increasing by Over 100% Since Finale. *Variety*. 9.2.2026. <https://variety.com/2026/tv/news/heated-rivalry-ratings-viewers-1236657375/>.
- Hills, Matt. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. 1st ed. Oxford: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361337>.
- Isomäki, Hannakaisa, Tiina-Riitta Lappi and Johanna Silvennoinen. 2013. Verkon etnografinen tutkimus. In *Otteita verkosta: verkon ja sosiaalisen median tutkimusmenetelmät*, edited by Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, Janne Matikainen and Minttu Tikka. 150–169. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2000. Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium. *Max Weber Studies* 1 (1): 11–32.

- Jirattikorn, Amporn. 2018. Thai Popular Culture: A New Player in Asia Media Circulation and Chinese Censorship. *CSEAS Newsletter* No. 76. https://www-archive.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/newsletter/nl76/76_03_amporn.html.
- Kang-Nguyễn, Byung'chu Dredge. 2022. Faen of Gay Faen, Realizing Boys Love in Thailand betwixt Imagination and Existence. In *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*, edited by James Walker. 194- 208. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Kaplan, Jeffrey S. and Heléne Löow (edit.) 2002. Introduction. In *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*. 1-11. Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Kirby, Danielle. 2014. *Fantasy and Belief: Alternative Religions, Popular Narratives and Digital Cultures*. Oxford: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315728674>.
- Le, Nguyen. 2024. The Rising Girl Love Factor in Thailand's Soft Power. *E-International Relations*. 4.9.2024. <https://www.e-ir.info/2024/09/04/the-rising-girl-love-factor-in-thailands-soft-power/>.
- Mahlamäki, Tiina. 2020. Kuvittelu Esoteerisuuden ja Taiteen Tekniikkana: Esimerkinä kirjailija ja antroposofi Kersti Bergroth. In *Kuvittelu ja uskonto: taustoja, tulkintaa ja sovelluksia*, edited by Aila Viholainen, Jaana Kouri and Tiina Mahlamäki. 199–225. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Neville, Lucy. 2018a. *Girls who like boys who like boys: Women and Gay Male Pornography and Erotica*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Neville, Lucy. 2018b. 'The Tent's Big Enough for Everyone': Online Slash Fiction as a Site for Activism and Change. *Gender, Place & Culture* 25 (3): 384–98. <https://doi:10.1080/0966369X.2017.1420633>.
- Olsen, Daniel H. 2021. Fan Pilgrimage, Religion, and Spirituality. In *The Routledge Handbook for Religious and Spiritual Tourism*, edited by Daniel Olsen and Dallen Timothy. 90–110. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429201011-8>.
- Pagliassotti, Dru. 2008. Better than romance? Japanese BL manga and the sub-genre of male/male romantic fiction. In *Boys' Love Manga : Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre*, edited by Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry, and Dru Pagliassotti. 59-83. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.
- Partridge, Christopher H. 2004. *The Re-Enchantment of the West. Volume 1, Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*. London: T & T Clark International.

- Porter, Jennifer. 2010. Implicit Religion in Popular Culture: The Religious Dimensions of Fan Communities. *Implicit Religion* 12 (3): 271–80.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.v12i3.271>.
- Prasannam, Natthanai. 2019. The Yaoi Phenomenon in Thailand and Fan/Industry Interaction. *Plaridel* 16 (2): 63–89. <https://doi.org/10.52518/2020.16.2-03prsnam>.
- Schellewald, Andreas. 2023. Understanding the Popularity and Affordances of TikTok through User Experiences. *Media, Culture & Society* 45 (8): 1568–1582.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221144562>.
- Seligman, Adam. et al. 2008. *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sobhan, Athena. 2024. A Decade-Old Reddit Post Inspired the Viral 'Lamp Looks Weird' Trend on TikTok. *People*. 13.12.2024. <https://people.com/the-viral-lamp-looks-weird-tiktok-trend-explained-8760823>.
- Stainova, Yana. 2019. Enchantment as Method. *Anthropology and Humanism* 44 (2): 214–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/anhu.12251>.
- Tan, Chris K.K., and Miao Li. 2025. Digital Fandoms and the 227 Incident: A Case of Cancel Culture with Chinese Characteristics. *The China Quarterly* 262: 515–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741025000049>.
- The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (SFE). 2026. *Fanzine*. <https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/fanzine>. Referred 5.5.2026.
- Thorn, Matthew. 2012. Girls and Women Getting Out of Hand: The Pleasure and Politics of Japan's Amateur Comics Community. In *Fanning the Flames: Fans and consumer culture in contemporary Japan*, edited by William W. Kelly. 169–186. State University of New York Press.
- Tuomi, Jouni and Anneli Sarajärvi. 2018. *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*. Uudistettu laitos. Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-04-0011-8>.
- Turtiainen, Riikka and Sari Östman. 2013. Verkkotutkimuksen eettiset haasteet: Armi ja anoreksia. In *Otteita verkosta: verkon ja sosiaalisen median tutkimusmenetelmät*, edited by Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, Janne Matikainen and Minttu Tikka. 49–67. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Utriainen, Terhi. 2016. Ritually Framing Enchantment: Momentary Religion and Everyday Realities. *Suomen Antropologi* 41, no. 4 (2016): 46–61.
- Utriainen, Terhi. 2018. Epävirallinen ja eletty uskonto. In *Uskontososiologia*, edited by Ketola, Kimmo, Tuomas Martikainen, Teemu Taira. 113–124. Eetos.

- Utriainen, Terhi. 2020. Lived Religion Meets Secular Life: The Dynamics of Framing and the Subjunctive Power of Ritual. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35, no. 2 (2020): 195–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2020.1759900>.
- Utriainen, Terhi and Kari Mikko Vesala. 2020. Maaseutukaupungin ihmeestä globaaliksi instituutioksi: Uskonnollisen kuvittelun rajapintoja ja toimijoita Lourdesin pyhiinvaelluskohteessa. In *Kuvittelu ja uskonto: taustoja, tulkintaa ja sovelluksia*, edited by Aila Viholainen, Jaana Kouri and Tiina Mahlamäki. 146-170. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Viholainen, Aila. 2020. Johdanto: Kuvittelua, historiaa ja nykypäivää. In *Kuvittelu ja uskonto: taustoja, tulkintaa ja sovelluksia*, edited by Aila Viholainen, Jaana Kouri ja Tiina Mahlamäki. 9-50. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Vuori, Jaana. 2021. Laadullinen sisällönanalyysi. *Laadullisen tutkimuksen verkkokäsikirja*. Tampere: Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tietoaarkisto. <https://www.fsd.tuni.fi/fi/palvelut/menetelmaopetus/kvali/analyysitavan-valinta-ja-yleiset-analyysitavat/laadullinen-sisallanalyysi/>. Referenced 5.3.2026.
- Zubernis, Lynn, and Katherine Larsen. 2018. Make Space for Us! Fandom in the Real World. In *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth. 143-159. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119237211.ch9>.

Attachments

Attachment 1. Summary in Finnish

”Elämästä tulee taianomaisempaa, kun on yaoia odottamassa kotona päivän jälkeen” - Boys’ Love fanikulttuuri lumon lähteenä

Johdanto aiheeseen ja tutkimuksen lähtökohdat

Kirjoittamishetkellä suurin innostus maailmanlaajuisen populaarikulttuurin ilmiön *Heated Rivalry* (2025) ympärillä alkaa hieman laantua. Suosittu televisiosarja toi paljon huomiota erään genren fandomille, joka yleensä on pysynyt valtavirralla piilossa, tai jopa asettunut sitä vastaan. Tämä genre on *boys’ love*, tai BL, joka tunnetaan myös nimellä *yaoi*. BL on romantiikan ja erotiikan laaja alagenre, johon kuuluvat tekstit kertovat miesten välisistä homoseksuaalisista suhteista. BL sisällyttää kattoterminä paljon erilaisia kaupallisia ja ei-kaupallisia tekstejä, ja siihen liittyy olennaisesti fanikäytännöt kuten “shippaaminen”. Sillä on suuri faniyhteisö, jolla on omat perinteensä ja tapakulttuurinsa. Vaikka BL fiktio keskittyykin queer-miehiin, faniyhteisön kaikkein näkyvimät jäsenet ovat hieman kiistanalaisesti olleet (heteroseksuaaleja) naisia, jotka myös ajatellaan genren luoja. (Prasannam 2019, 65–66.) BL faneilla on kyky myös “tuoda” BL-tyylinen faniuden harjoitus osaksi mitä tahansa fandomia, ja tämän lisäksi he tuovat, tai voivat avata BL-mahdollisuuksia monenlaisiin muihinkin kulttuurillisiin ja arkipäiväisiin konteksteihin. Tässä tutkimuksessa korostuu fanikulttuuria määrittelevänä, ja BL faneja yhdistävänä tekijänä heidän tapansa kuluttaa tekstejä ja osallistua fandomiin, rajaamatta faniyhteisöä sen enempää.

Tutkimusta BL fanikulttuuria koskien on toteutettu, mutta se on pyrkinyt erityisesti selittämään eri sosiokulttuurillisissa konteksteissa elävien naisfanien syitä kuluttaa BL-sisältöä, joka historiallisesti on nähty melko kontroversaalina. BL fanien henkilökohtaiset kokemukset ja empiiriset kuvaukset faniudesta, sen harjoittamisesta ja siitä nauttimisesta ovat jääneet vähemmälle huomiolle. (Neville 2018a.) Kuitenkin usein se, mikä on yksilöille tärkeää ja merkityksellistä fandomissa määrittyy ja tulee tunnistetuksi nimenomaan faniuden käytännön läsnäolossa ja toiminnallisuudessa yksilöiden elämässä. Halusin tutkia BL fanien kokemuksia tavalla, joka ottaa vakavasti ja merkityksellisesti konseptoi fanikulttuuriin olennaisesti kuuluvan luovan leikillisyyden ja hauskanpidon, ja käytän tähän *lumon* käsitettä. ”BL maailma” voi tuoda fanien elämään (yksilöllisesti) merkityksellistä ilonpitoa, ja rikastuttaa sitä muokkaamalla tai vastustamalla tavallista arkea/todellisuutta – eli

(uudelleen)lumoa sitä – ja tutkin millä tavoin tämä ilmenee fanien kokemuksissa ja tietoisestikin saavutetaan.

Tutkimuskysymykset

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on fanien kokemuksia havainnoiden tarkastella lumoa BL fanikulttuurissa ja sen kautta. Tutkin fanien kokemuksia netissä, sosiaalisen median alusta TikTokissa julkaistujen videoiden kautta, joista on koottu myös pääasiallinen aineisto. Videoita lähestytään ja analysoidaan teoreettisesti ja tutkimuskysymyksiin, jotka rakentuvat koko lähestymistavan lähtökohtana olleen lumon käsitteen ympärille.

1. Kuinka BL fanikulttuuri ja BL-sisällön kuluttaminen spontaanisti (uudelleen)lumoa fanien elämää?
2. Millaisia tietoisia keinoja tuottaa, ja rituaalisesti kehystää lumoa voidaan havaita BL fanien TikTok videoissa?
3. Miten BL fanikulttuurin lumo esitetään uskonnollisuuden kaltaisena fanien toimesta?

Tutkielman analyysikappaleet on järjestelty näiden tutkimuskysymysten mukaisesti.

Ensimmäinen tutkimuskysymys käsittelee BL-sisällön ja sen kuluttamisen ”automaattisesti” faneille tuottamaa (uudelleen)lumoa. Toinen kysymys tarkastelee fanien tietoisia keinoja tuottaa ja rituaalisesti kehystää lumoa. Kolmannen tutkimuskysymyksen kautta tarkastellaan miten fanit sanoittavat ja kuvailevat BL fanikulttuuria uskonnon kaltaisena.

Teoreettinen viitekehys

Lumon konsepti toimii lähtökohtana koko teoreettiselle viitekehykselle ja taustoittaa sitä, ja on siksi kaikkein keskeisin käsite. Lumo nähdään voimana ja kokemuksena, joka erottuu (ja erottaa) tavallisuudesta ja ”rationaalisesta” jollain tapaa. Sen nähdään olevan elämää rikastava voima, joka usein liittyy taianomaisuuteen ja unelmointiin, sekä kokemuksiin ”jostain suuremmasta” tai arkisen ylittävästä. Lumo voi yllättää ja ”iskeä” spontaanisti, mutta sitä voi myös tuottaa tai hakea tietoisesti, jolloin erityisesti se voidaan nähdä eräänlaisena mahdollisuuksia avaavana voimana. Lumon näkökulmasta johtaen, tutkimukselle keskeisiksi käsitteiksi muotoutuu myös lumon haihtumisen ja etenkin uudelleenlumon käsitteet, joita on konsepteina käytetty kuvaamaan länsimaista uskonnollisuuden kehitystä ja kenttää laajemmin. Lisäksi ja näistä johtaen teoreettinen viitekehys hyödyntää lumon rituaalisen kehystämisen teoriaa (Utriainen 2016; 2020) ja lumoon johtavan tai siihen liittyvän kuvittelun teoriaa, ja faniutta ja uskonnollisuutta vertailevaa näkökulmaa (Hills 2002). Lumon käsitettä

hyödynnetään joustavasti ja monitasoisesti. Koska lumoa ja uudelleenlumoa voidaan nähdä tapahtuvan samanaikaisesti, käytän tutkielmassa usein muotoilua (uudelleen)lumo.

Teoreettisen viitekehyksen lisäksi taustalla vaikuttaa BL fanikulttuuria koskeva aikaisempi tutkimus, jonka kautta erityisesti lumon ”lähtökohdat”, ja sen mahdollisuuksia avaava, mullistava/vallankumouksellinen voima myös tarkentuu. Rakennetun teoreettisen näkökulman kautta lumoa sinällään, ja sen kokemusta, ”läsnäoloa”, tuottamista ja voimaa fanien elämässä voidaan tutkia empiirisesti, ja siten laajentaa ymmärrystä BL fanikulttuurista.

Menetelmät ja aineisto

Tutkimusta on toteutettu online etnografiana sosiaalisen median alusta TikTokissa, joka on tunnettu erityisesti lyhytvideosisällöstä, ja kirjoittamishetkellä yksi ajankohtaisimmista ja suosituimmista sosiaalisen median alustoista. Tutkijana asetuin sisäpiiriläisen asemassa havainnoimaan faneja osallistumatta itse aktiivisesti, ja seurasin esimerkiksi trendejä ja suosittuja aiheita pidemmällä aikavälillä. BL fanit tuottavat TikTokissa paljon sisältöä, joka kuvaa heidän ”todellista” elämäänsä. Tutkimukselle tärkeä näkökulma on, että netissä tapahtuvaa (kulttuuria) ei voi nykymaailmassa erottaa ”todellisuudesta” mitenkään selkeästi tai tarkoituksenmukaisesti.

TikTok ympäristönä kenttätyölle tarjoaa rikkaan audiovisuaalisen kokemuksen videoiden kautta, jotka tarjoavat fanien suoran ja omin sanoin kuvatun näkökulman tutkittuun aiheeseen. Videot ovat ”monikerroksisia”, joten tutkimuksessa painottuu kuvallisen videosisällön lisäksi erityisesti ääninauha, ja tulkitsemiseen vaaditaan usein aiempaa tuntemusta esimerkiksi (fandomin sisäisistä) trendeistä. TikTokista kerättiin lähempään tarkasteluun ja referoitavaksi lopulta 60 videota varsinaista aineistoa varten, jota tutkittiin laadullisen, teoriaohjaavan sisällönanalyysin keinoin. Videot valikoituivat sen perusteella, kuinka hyvin ne vastasivat tutkimuskysymyksiin, ja videoiden määrää rajattiin erityisesti näkyvyyteen perustuvien kriteerien hallittavaksi kokoelmaksi. Sisällönanalyysi tapahtui teoriaohjaavasti, aiempaan tietoon pohjaten ja teoriasta näkökulmia ja pohdintoja ammentaen, mutta antaen riittävästi tilaa fanien kertomuksille, jotta voidaan muodostaa kokonaisvaltainen kuvaus lumon ilmiöstä.

Havainnot

Analyysiosio tutkielmassa on jäsennelty tutkimuskysymyksiin pohjaten, ja ne myös muodostavat keskeiset kolme kategoriaa/teemaa joihin videoita on jaoteltu. Pääkategorioiden sisältä perustuen siihen, mitä videoista nousi esille identifioin alateemoja, jotka muodostavat

löyhästi jaotellut alakategoriat. Ensimmäinen kategoria keskittyy spontaaniin lumoon, jota fanit saavat BL fanikulttuurista ja BL sisällön kuluttamisesta. Fanien kuvauksissa BL näyttäytyy hauskana, nautittavana, rentouttavana ja myös mieltä piristävänä sisältönä, jonka kautta voi uppoutua unelmiin ja fantasioihin. BL genrenä kääntää ylösalaisin ja haastaa normeja, ja tylsää, rationaalista, tai jopa epäoikeudenmukaista yhteiskuntaa ja arkielämää. Tämä on osasy sille, miksi BL näyttäytyy niin lumoavana, ja fanit myös itse tiedostavat realiteetit, joita BL haastaa, ja minkä kautta myös BL-sisällön kuluttamista ajoittain ”oikeutetaan”.

Toinen kategoria keskittyy fanien tietoiseen lumon tuottamiseen, ja hyödyntää erityisesti Utraisen (2016; 2020) rituaalisen kehystämisen teoriaa. Argumentoin, että fanit toteuttavat rituaalista kehystämistä avatakseen ja leikkiäkseen BL-mahdollisuuksilla, ja hakevat kontaktia fiktiiviseen BL maailmaan ja heille tärkeään fanituksen kohteeseen. Fanit myös kehittävät (uudelleen)lumoavia narratiiveja, ja leikkivät tietoisesti todellisuuden ja fiktiivisen rajalla. Rituaalinen kehystämisen kautta fanit voivat säädellä ja ohjaila lumoa, sekä navigoida ja tehdä eroa lumotun ja lumottoman välillä.

Kolmas analyysiluku käsittelee BL fanikulttuurin lumoa esitettyä uskonnollisuuden kaltaisena, pohjaten erityisesti Hillsin (2002) teoriaan fanikulttuureista, tai fanikulteista, uususkonnollisuuden tyyppinä. Fanit käyttävät uskonnollista sanastoa kuvaamaan lumoa, ja liittävät tietoisesti faniuden kokemuksen ja oman fandominsa (heille tuttuun) uskonnolliseen diskurssiin, esimerkiksi kuvaamalla julkisuudenhenkilöitä jumalallisina, tai faniyhteisöä kulttina. Fanit myös toteuttavat lumoa tuottavia “pyhiinvaelluksia” BL kohteisiin. Hills toteaa, että uskontososiologia voi auttaa ymmärtämään faniuden ja uskonnollisuuden samankaltaista kokemusta, ja tästä näkökulmasta voidaan tarkastella erityisesti fanien ritualisoinnin käytäntöjä, joilla pyhää ja maallista, tai tässä tapauksessa erityisesti lumottua ja lumotonta voidaan erotella.

Lopuksi

Lopuksi tutkielmassa pohditaan alustavasti BL fanikulttuuria osana länsimaista okkulttuurin kenttää (Partridge 2004), jota yhdistää pyrkimys uudelleenlumoon. Lumon lähteenä ja tapahtumapaikkana toimivan BL fanikulttuurin voidaan nähdä eräänlaisena lumotonta todellisuutta, ja normeja vastustavana ja haastavana ala-kulttuurina nähdä okkulttuurin edustajana. Erilaiset BL tekstit myös levittävät ajatuksia ja kuvauksia esimerkiksi perinteistä,

historiasta ja vanhemmista populaarikulttuurin tuotteista, jotka voivat tulla uudelleenlumotuiksi.

Syvemmin mahdolliseen BL-okkulttuuriin perehtymisen lisäksi tämän tutkimuksen pohjalta jatkotutkimusmahdollisuuksiksi nousi fanisisältö/-työt kuten taide, ja erityisesti TikTokissa fanien ”edit-vidoot”, (uudelleen)lumon lähtenä, sekä BL fanikulttuurille ominainen lumon jakaminen ja sen yhteisesti rakentaminen solidaarisuuden ja yhteisöllisyyden muodostajana.

Attachment 2. Link to the TikTok collection of primary source material

“Masters thesis source material”

[https://www.tiktok.com/@roosaurinko/collection/Masters thesis source material-7600383675112442646?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc](https://www.tiktok.com/@roosaurinko/collection/Masters%20thesis%20source%20material-7600383675112442646?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc)