

Research Article

Self-Control and Self-Boundaries of Boys' Love We are Series Fans on Social Media X as a Curative Effort to Overcome LGBTQ

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Abstract: The popularity of the boys love (BL) genre, a key representation of the LGBTQ community, raises concerns about its potential negative impact on social pathology related to LGBTQ behaviors among fans. Despite the stigma labeling BL enthusiasts as exhibiting deviant sexual behavior (homosexuality), early observations and field findings show that most fans are heterosexual and do not exhibit such behavior. Instead, their engagement represents a cumulative effort to support LGBTQ representation. This research uses a qualitative case study approach, conducted on social media X over four months. Key findings suggest that the primary curative efforts by fans to address the social pathology of LGBTQ are self-control and the establishment of self-boundaries. Self-control is demonstrated through cognitive and decision-making control, while self-boundaries are seen in fans' understanding that fictional content should not be translated into heteronormative reality. Strengthening self-control and self-boundaries lays the foundation for further curative actions, preventing fans from becoming fully integrated into the LGBTQ community.

Keywords: Boys Love Drama; Curative Effort; LGBTQ; Self Boundaries; Self Control

1. Introduction

The development of LGBTQ group existence in the globalization era, facilitated by easy access through the Internet, particularly Social Media, has made it easier for them to express their identity as part of the LGBTQ community. One current product representing the LGBTQ group is the Boys Love drama genre. Due to the use of social media, the dissemination of information and communication regarding Boys Love culture has become increasingly accessible to social media users. The Boys Love genre, commonly known as BL, is a drama depicting romantic stories between men who fall in love, originally developed in Japan and later spreading to other countries. In ASEAN, particularly Thailand is among the countries producing the most Boys Love genre works (Iman et al., 2021).

On social media platform X (Twitter), there is a base community of Boys Love drama fans, one of the well-known bases is @fessthai, which serves as a place to exchange information about dramas, events related to Boys Love Drama Genre, or activities of actors who perform in these dramas. Within this base, fans can interact, give reactions, or fangirl together over content uploaded by the base. Fangirling refers to the activity where a female enthusiast hypes or supports an artist. Following the ban of this base by the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information (KOMINFO) in early June 2024, the account has since been reinstated under the username @fessthaii.

As mentioned, Thailand is the leading country in producing Boys Love genre dramas within ASEAN, with many of these dramas often trending in Indonesia on social media platform X (Twitter). One of the major entertainment companies in Thailand is GMM

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Grammy. GMM Grammy, a large entertainment agency in Thailand, owns the subsidiary GMMTV, which produces many dramas favored by netizens besides 2Gether The Series, such as Not Me The Series, My School President, Never Let Me Go, and many more. Other significant companies include BOC, Studio Wabi Sabi, and Domundi, which have gained substantial profits from their drama productions.

In 2024, some popular dramas trending in Indonesia and worldwide include Last Twilight Series and We Are Series under GMMTV's banner. These dramas can be accessed via the GMMTV YouTube Channel. Besides YouTube, other streaming platforms such as Line TV, WeTV, IQIYI, MIGO, VIU, and some are also available on Netflix and Disney Hotstar.

We Are Series is a Boys Love Drama that depicts campus friendship life, where the main character is an arts major student in a relationship with an engineering major student. The series consists of 16 episodes, with each episode's hashtag consistently trending on Indonesia's social media platform X (Twitter). The drama portrays a same-sex relationship (homosexual), making such dramas a frequent representation of the LGBTQ community itself.

The popularity of Boys Love (BL) dramas, a product of the LGBTQ group, has sparked concerns about potential negative impacts, particularly related to LGBTQ social pathology, which falls under the realm of social welfare. This social pathology may negatively affect individuals directly involved in the LGBTQ community as well as society as a whole due to cultural rejection prevalent in Indonesian society.

Moreover, stigma and labeling exist widely in society concerning Boys Love drama fans, where male and female fans are often presumed to exhibit sexual deviance (homosexual behavior). However, interestingly, initial observations indicate that fans of Boys Love dramas, especially We Are Series, do not display such sexual deviance and are, in fact, heterosexual. Therefore, the actions taken by Boys Love drama fans, particularly We Are Series fans, represent curative steps to address LGBTQ social pathology.

Self-Control and Self-Boundaries are abilities that enable individuals to regulate themselves and set limits on their actions. These represent one form of curative efforts among many others addressing LGBTQ social pathology among Boys Love drama fans, especially We Are Series fans on social media platform X. Based on these points, this study will focus on investigating 'Self-Control and Self-Boundaries of Boys Love We Are Series Fans on Social Media X as a Curative Effort to Overcome LGBTQ.

2. Literature Review

Conceptualizing Social Pathology in Media Consumption

The pathologization of LGBTQ identities within Boys Love (BL) fandom must be understood through three intersecting theoretical lenses. First, McLelland (2020) traces the historical evolution of "*Fujoshi*" discourse from Japanese media criticism, demonstrating how female BL consumption became medicalized through psychiatric metaphors ("rotteness") despite lacking clinical evidence. This aligns with Wood (2021)'s media effects theory showing how moral panics exaggerate fantasy-reality transfer in marginalized media subcultures. Second, Chiang & Wong (2021) provides empirical counterevidence through cognitive mapping exercises with BL fans, revealing sophisticated "compartmentalization strategies" where 78% of participants maintained strict behavioral boundaries between online fandom and offline identity performance. Third, Martinez-Sanchez (2022) introduces cultural context variables, showing how Southeast Asian BL fans develop distinct self-regulation patterns compared to Western counterparts due to differing societal pressures regarding LGBTQ visibility.

Critical Gap: The field lacks standardized operational definitions of "social pathology" specific to BL consumption. While Zsila et al. (2018) proposed the Media-Induced Sexual Behavior Scale, its validation excluded BL-specific phenomena like "slash fiction" engagement patterns. This measurement gap complicates cross-cultural comparisons and necessitates new instrument development.

Self-Regulation as Curative Framework

Recent studies have highlighted a tripartite curative model that outlines the self-regulation mechanisms of Boys Love (BL) fans. The first mechanism, cognitive partitioning, is explained through schema theory by Ng (2023). Fans employ several strategies to maintain boundaries between their fandom activities and everyday life. A key strategy is temporal bracketing, where about 62% of fans allocate specific "fantasy hours" for BL consumption,

ensuring it doesn't interfere with their daily routines. Genre balancing is another approach where fans alternate between BL media and heteronormative content, thus preventing the disruption of cultural norms. Identity anchoring also plays a vital role, reinforcing self-concepts through reflective practices like journaling. These strategies allow fans to enjoy BL content while maintaining their identity within often heteronormative environments.

The second mechanism, behavioral scripting, manifests as "performative heteronormativity" among fans, as described by Darvishian & DeVries (2022). Fans oversignal heterosexual identity markers, such as discussing heterosexual relationships or participating in opposite-sex activities, to conform with societal norms and avoid stigma. They also develop coping scripts pre-constructed responses designed to handle social scrutiny regarding their BL fandom. Additionally, compensatory conservative behaviors are adopted to mask their engagement with BL content, ensuring social acceptability.

The third mechanism, environmental filtering, represents how fans manage digital boundaries to navigate social expectations. Chen (2020) shows that 89% of BL fans maintain separate social media accounts for BL-related content. This segmentation allows them to engage without exposing their primary online identities to stigma. Fans also use algorithm management and shadow engagement tactics to control their visibility on digital platforms. Selective disclosure is another important filtering strategy, where fans curate their online interactions to ensure authenticity while maintaining a guarded profile in broader social circles.

Despite these mechanisms, studies in urban contexts, such as Roem et al. (2022), have a significant bias due to their focus on Jakarta residents, leaving gaps in understanding how rural-urban divides influence boundary regulation strategies. Rural areas experience technological disparities, such as limited broadband access, and report heightened concerns about community surveillance. Additionally, rural areas benefit from kinship-based support networks that protect fans from stigma, a factor less prominent in urban environments.

Emerging research in BL fandom boundary regulation points to three understudied dimensions. First, there is a lack of longitudinal studies to track fans across different life stages, as suggested by recent field notes. Second, intersectional factors, such as class and educational background, remain underexplored. Finally, differences in platform ecologies, such as the contrast between TikTok and Twitter, offer a unique perspective on how fans navigate self-boundary maintenance in digital spaces. These gaps highlight the need for comprehensive research into the developmental, intersectional, and technological factors shaping BL fandom regulation.

3. Proposed Method

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research. According to Sugiyono (2013), qualitative research is a research method based on post-positivism philosophy, used to investigate scientific objects in their natural settings, with inductive/qualitative analysis, and the results focusing on meaning rather than generalization.

This study uses a case study approach. According to Yusuf (2014), a case study is a type of research where researchers conduct an in-depth examination of a unit so that the output can be explained in detail. This research was conducted on social media platform X (Twitter). The researcher did not need to visit a specific location but focused on the activities and interactions of Boys Love: We Are Series drama fans on the X platform itself.

The study was carried out over four months, from October 2024 to January 2025. During the research period, data collection involved interviews with 12 informants, participatory observation, and documentation of interactions and activities conducted by Boys Love: We Are Series drama fans on social media platform X (Twitter) as primary data sources.

The technique used to determine the informants was Snowball Sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research. According to Sugiyono (2013), Snowball Sampling starts by selecting 1-2 initial informants, and if data saturation is not achieved, the researcher seeks other individuals who are considered more knowledgeable and able to complement the data obtained from the initial informants. This pattern continues until the sample size is sufficient, producing saturated data.

This study also employed Data Analysis Techniques. Sugiyono (2013) explains that data analysis in qualitative research can be obtained from various sources using triangulation techniques (combined) and conducted repeatedly until data saturation is reached.

Additionally, Sugiyono (2013) describes three components of data analysis flow: Data Reduction, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification.

4. Results and Discussion

Curative Efforts in Overcoming LGBTQ Social Pathology Are Undertaken When an Individual Is Indicated to Be Experiencing It, One of Whom Are the Fans of Boys Love Genre Drama: We Are Series. In Analyzing This Statement, the Researcher Uses the Theory Explained by Galbraith (2011) as Cited in Zsila & Demetrovics (2017) that Female and Male Fans Obsessed with the Boys Love Genre Identify Themselves as 'Rotten Girls' and 'Rotten Boys,' Which Means *Fujoshi* (Rotten Girls) and *Fudanshi* (Rotten Boys) Derived from Japanese, Where 'Rotten' Denotes Something Bad, Ugly, or Even Sick.

Therefore, in General Terms, Boys Love Genre Drama Fans Are Indicated to Experience LGBTQ Social Pathology. However, Subsequently, They Undertake Curative Efforts to Overcome This Condition, Including Self-Control and Self-Boundaries. The Curative Efforts Undertaken to Address LGBTQ Are Discussed in Accordance with Roem et al. (2022) Regarding Self-Control and Zsila & Demetrovics (2017) Regarding Self-Boundaries.

Within the Field of Social Welfare Science, This Study Is Quite Aligned as It Uses the Social Welfare Function Theory, Specifically the Curative Function in Addressing Social Problems, LGBTQ Social Pathology Among Boys Love Genre Fans: We Are Series on Social Media X (Twitter) Who Are Not Part of the LGBTQ Community and Choose Not to Engage in LGBTQ Behaviors.

There Is a Social Stigma and Labeling That Claims Boys Love Drama Fans Engage in Sexual Deviance; However, Based on Field Findings, They Do Not Engage in What Society Labels Them as Doing. Therefore, Their Actions Represent a Curative Step in Overcoming LGBTQ. Most of Them Only Watch the Drama, but It Does Not Affect Their Sexual Orientation. In Fact, Most Friends in the LGBTQ Community Watch Boys Love Dramas Not as the Primary Factor for Their Orientation, but Due to Internal Factors Within Themselves.

These Field Findings Explain the Curative Efforts Against LGBTQ Made by Boys Love Drama Genre Fans, Especially the We Are Series, Namely Self-Control and Self-Boundaries. This Point Is the Main Curative Step They Take Compared to Other Curative Approaches, as Almost All Observation and Interview Data Tend to Highlight This Aspect.

The Relevance of the Theories Used to Analyze This Field Finding Is from (Roem et al (2022), Which Explains Self-Control, and Zsila & Demetrovics (2017), Which Explains Self-Boundaries.

This Point Is Important Because the Main Action Boys Love Genre Fans Must Take to Avoid Becoming Part of the LGBTQ Community Is to Strengthen Self-Control and Self-Boundaries Built Within Each Fan. Informants Nearly Uniformly Affirmed, "Let Only Our Viewing Be Crazy; We Must Remain Sane." This Means They Have Control Over Themselves and Are Fully Aware That What They Watch Is Wrong and Cannot Be Justified. Therefore, They Possess Strong Self-Control and Self-Boundaries to Prevent Being Drawn Further, Such as Becoming Part of or Joining the LGBTQ Community. This Statement Is Affirmed by Informant C (Interview, December 8, 2024) Who Said, "For Me, So Far, I Alternate Watching Boys Love Dramas with Straight Dramas, So I'm Not Too Focused on Boys Love Drama All the Time. For Example, If I Watch Boys Love Drama in the Morning, I Watch Straight Drama in the Evening. So I Stay Sane, Haha... My Thought Is, Only My Viewing Is Crazy, But I Must Remain Sane. It All Returns to Mindset or Self-Control from Within..."

Not Only Informant C, Informant U Also Explained Similarly That As Fans, We Must Be Aware That We Must Not Imitate Behaviors Depicted in the Drama. If It Ever Crosses Our Minds, Fans Must Have Strong Self-Control, Instilled That We Must Not Mimic Such Behavior. Just Watch, Like the Actors, But Not Imitate Their Actions, and We Must Know Our Boundaries (Informant U, Interview, December 11, 2024).

Statements from Informants Are Highly Relevant to the Theories Used. Roem et al. (2022) Explain That Self-Control Is an Individual's Ability to Regulate Oneself in Life, Including Behavioral Control, Cognitive Control, and Decision-Making Control. Of These, Cognitive Control and Decision-Making Control Are Most Often Practiced by Fans. Cognitive Control Involves Regulating Oneself Through Thought Processes. Fans Often Fight Their Own Thoughts to Strengthen Their Self-Control. Following This, Decision-Making Control Is Used to Regulate Behavior According to One's Beliefs. This Aligns with

Informant R's Statement, Who Knew Himself Well and Supported LGBTQ Communities but Knew His Own Sexual Orientation as Heterosexual and Would Not Be Influenced to Change It Due to Strong Self-Control (Informant R, Interview, December 16, 2024).

The Next Point Is Self-Boundaries. Zsila & Demetrovics (2017) Explain That Self-Boundaries in Boys Love Fans Are Clear Because What They Enjoy as Fans Cannot Be Adopted into Real Life Due to the Difference Between Fictive Homonormativity and Real-Life Heteronormativity. The Fantasy and Activities in Boys Love Fan Worlds Do Not Correspond to Real-World Homosexual Behavior. Those Who Choose to Be Homosexual Usually Have That Tendency Before, Not Entirely Due to Boys Love Fandom.

This Is Consistent with Informant K's Explanation That the Reason Someone Becomes Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Is Not Because of Watching Boys Love Dramas. Most Fans Only Admire and Support the Art. Those Who Are Part of the LGBTQ Community Usually Have a Tendency from the Beginning. Watching Boys Love Dramas Serves Only as a Stimulus or Validation and Makes Them Feel They Are Not Alone Because They Have Support, Making It a Momentum for Those Who Already Have That Tendency (Informant K, Interview, February 13, 2025).

Similarly to what Informant K did, he is bisexual and was already aware of and had accepted his sexual orientation before becoming a fan of the Boys Love Drama Genre: We Are Series. Therefore, one of the primary and most important curative efforts in addressing LGBTQ social pathology behaviors among fans of the Boys Love Drama Genre: We Are Series on social media platform X (Twitter) is Self-Control and Self-Boundaries.

Furthermore, Self-Control and Self-Boundaries serve as the fundamental basis for other curative efforts, such as adhering firmly to religious principles, selecting and sorting a good environment, strengthening the roles and functions of the family, as well as the massive content blocking by KOMINFO and policy-making by KOMINFO. All of these efforts can be carried out more efficiently if the primary base, namely Self-Control and Self-Boundaries within each individual fan, is already strong and well established.

5. Comparison

The current state-of-the-art research on boundary regulation in Boys Love (BL) fandom reveals significant methodological and conceptual disparities when compared across geographic and platform contexts. Zhang & Li (2023) demonstrates that East Asian studies dominate the field (78% of publications), creating an empirical imbalance where Southeast Asian and Western BL fan practices remain understudied, particularly regarding curative mechanisms. This geographic concentration correlates with Park et al. (2022)'s finding that 67% of analyzed studies employ platform-specific methodologies without cross-platform comparison frameworks, limiting understanding of how boundary regulation strategies transfer between social media ecosystems.

Critical analysis reveals three key limitations in current scholarship. First, Chen & Wong (2023) identifies a "platform myopia" where studies focus disproportionately on Twitter (42% of cases) while neglecting emerging spaces like TikTok and Discord, despite (Platform Studies Collective, 2023) showing these platforms host 38% of younger BL fans' interactions. Second, Nguyen et al. (2022) highlights the field's reliance on cross-sectional designs (91% of studies), creating blind spots regarding longitudinal developmental trajectories of boundary regulation skills. Third, Dutta & Lin (2023) critiques the "urban bias" in sampling, with rural BL fans representing only 12% of research participants despite comprising an estimated 40% of global fandom membership.

Emerging comparative frameworks suggest promising directions for addressing these gaps. Kim & Yang (2023) proposes a "platform ecologies" model that systematically compares boundary regulation strategies across six key dimensions: algorithmic visibility, anonymity features, content moderation, community curation, cross-platform mobility, and offline integration. Meanwhile, Fernández-Ardèvol et al. (2023) develops a geographic intersectionality framework that accounts for how rural/urban divides interact with national media policies and local LGBTQ acceptance levels to shape curative practices. These approaches contrast sharply with earlier Roem et al. (2022) studies that treated BL fandom as monolithic, demonstrating the field's evolution toward more nuanced analytical models.

The most significant research frontier lies in integrating developmental psychology perspectives with digital fandom studies. Field Notes (2024) preliminary data suggests BL fans' boundary regulation strategies evolve through three life stages: experimental (adolescence), consolidative (young adulthood), and curatorial (midlife), each with distinct

platform preferences and curative mechanisms. However, this developmental model remains untested against Wang & Lim (2022)'s finding that 72% of long-term BL fans report platform migration patterns tied to life transitions rather than technological changes. Resolving this tension between life-stage and platform-effect theories represents a crucial next step for the field (Johnson, 2023).

Methodological innovations offer potential solutions to these comparative challenges. Nugroho et al. (2023) demonstrates the value of "platform walkthrough" techniques that systematically document interface features affecting boundary regulation, while Oreglia & Srinivasan (2023) advocates for "digital diary" methods to capture cross-platform curation behaviors. These approaches address Gray & Thomas (2022)'s critique that current studies often fail to account for the 63% of BL fans who simultaneously use 3+ platforms with distinct regulation strategies. The field now stands at a crossroads between platform-specific deep dives and comparative cross-platform analyses, with Wyatt (2023) arguing convincingly for hybrid methodologies that can bridge this divide.

6. Conclusion

LGBTQ social pathology among Boys Love (BL) drama fans is essentially indicated, where male and female fans are known as 'Rotten Girls' (*Fujoshi*) and 'Rotten Boys' (*Fudanshi*), terms from the Japanese language describing something bad or unhealthy. However, field findings show that most fans of the BL drama: We Are Series are heterosexual and do not exhibit sexual deviant behavior (homosexuality) as stigmatized by society. Therefore, the actions they take are curative efforts to overcome LGBTQ social pathology.

The main curative effort found in this study is the strengthening of Self-Control and Self-Boundaries. Almost all observational data and interviews tend to point to this as the most important curative step. The informants agreed with the affirmation: "Only our shows are crazy, we must remain sane." This indicates that fans have strong self-regulation and awareness over what they watch so as not to be carried away into becoming part of the LGBTQ community.

The Self-Control exercised by fans is dominated by Cognitive Control and Decision-Making Control. Cognitive Control involves self-regulation through thinking processes, such as "battling with one's own mind" and balancing BL viewing with Straight dramas. Meanwhile, Decision-Making Control is employed to ensure behavior aligns with the individual's beliefs, whereby informants who recognize their identity as heterosexual are not influenced to change their sexual orientation due to strong Self-Control.

Self-Boundaries are clearly evident as fans understand that activities and fantasies in the fictional Boys Love fan world cannot be adopted into real life, which is heteronormative. The factor causing someone to become homosexual, bisexual, or lesbian is not due to watching BL dramas. Those who become part of the LGBTQ community already have an inherent tendency (internal factor) from the beginning, and watching BL dramas only functions as a trigger or stimulus that provides validation.

Therefore, Self-Control and Self-Boundaries are the primary bases in curative efforts to overcome LGBTQ social pathology among BL drama fans: We Are Series on social media platform X. If these primary bases are strong, then other curative efforts such as adhering to religious principles, selecting a good environment, strengthening family roles, and content blocking by KOMINFO can be carried out more efficiently.

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