



Ligia Prezia Lemos & Enoe Lopes Pontes

When Mon Meets Sam

Language, Toxicity, and Disputes in Brazilian Fans' Appropriations of *GAP: The Series*

ABSTRACT

The contemporary phenomenon of Thai Boys Love (BL) has come to the attention of the academic community regarding issues related to LGBTQIAPN+ visibility and representations. After almost a decade of the genre's ongoing popularity in different media, the first TV series of Girls Love (GL) aired in Thailand in 2022. There are several studies related to BL fandoms, however, no research was conducted so far that addresses the relationship between both BL and GL fandoms. Therefore, the main objective of our paper is to verify if toxic attitudes in/between both fandoms generate disputes or if disputes generate toxic attitudes. In order to accomplish our goal, we sought to analyze the shared language and the use of the same jargon by Brazilian BL and GL fans, using qualitative content analysis, inspired by the KDD method (Knowledge Discovery in Databases). Further, we present a virtual ethnography of Twitter/X to select and analyze posts about the GL program *GAP: The Series* (2022) by Brazilian fans. In doing so, we were able to identify three types of Brazilian fans: The ones that are simultaneously fans of BL and GL, and those who are only fans of BL or GL, respectively. The data indicates that there are polarizations revealing a certain toxicity within the disputes between these fandoms.

KEYWORDS

fan studies, queer, Girls Love (GL), Boys Love (BL), toxicity, disputes

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Introduction

Boys Love series in different media, commonly called BL,¹ are popular worldwide. This cultural phenomenon has been raising academic discussions ranging from analyses of the production aspects and its narratives to those that deal with reception, audience, and fan studies. Within this context, questions regarding its country of origin, the history of the genre, its circulation among countries in East and Southeast Asia, and, recently, its circulation in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the USA have also been discussed. Like any media product, BL series offer several opportunities for convergence of opinions as well as notable controversies. We are faced with a vast production of BL television series originating in countries like Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Currently, Thailand is the largest producer and distributor of BL. Streaming technologies facilitate their international distribution, allowing them to circulate in Asia and, later, in Europe and other countries, such as Brazil, which will be the national context of our fandom case study, emphasizing the transnational and trans-cultural complexity and quality of this phenomenon.

Building on the success of Thai BL series, the first Thai Girls Love (GL) production, *GAP: The Series*, was produced in 2022. A certain migratory strategy of narrative models typical for Thai BL series can be perceived in the composition of this first Thai GL series. Prior to its release, there was significant activity and anticipation within Brazilian BL fandoms. Subsequently, specific publications about *GAP: The Series* emerged on social media. During this period of time, we started to form our research and to structure our study within these fandom contexts. Our hypothesis was that the Brazilian fandom watched this first Thai GL series based on the literacy acquired through the prior consumption of BL series. The research investigates whether *GAP: The Series* fans used words and expressions common in the Brazilian BL fandom. The methodology was inspired by the KDD process, Knowledge Discovery in Databases (cf. Fayyad/Piatetsky-Shapiro/Smyth 1996; Wiedemann 2016). The fan reception of the series was observed based on sentiment analysis (cf. Evangelista/Santana/Rodrigues/Faraco/Vorrique/Nogueira 2022) and language functions (cf. Jakobson 2003 [1960]). In this way, it became clear that all communities dedicated to queer couples still face disputes over meaning. This raises an important question that needs

¹ BL has also been called 'Y-series' in most East and Southeast Asian countries. This is because BL first spread under the term 'yaoi,' which emerged in the 1980s among fan writers and referred to parodies and adaptations of homoerotic and homoaffective male works, such as anime, manga, and novels (cf. Torres 2023), with the counterpart being the 'yuri' content with lesbian themes and female homoerotic and homoaffective relationships. In Japanese media, 'yaoi' stands for "no climax, no point, no meaning" (Li 2009, p.VII), while 'yuri'—which literally means 'lily' in Japanese—is not an acronym but a poetic term that emerged in the 1970s to metaphorically describe romantic relationships between girls.

further exploration regarding non-heterosexual ships and fandoms: Why do canonically queer couples fail to erase the interpretive divergence of fannish readings? Within the BL and GL fan communities, our research suggests that the practice of shipping real people² (RPS/RPF)³ can significantly impact the dynamics of these disputes. Our analysis reveals that the tensions between companies releasing BL and GL content, which often emphasize on the chemistry between same-gender actors, and fan expectations are a primary driver of subsequent disputes over meaning that unfold online.

Regarding the structure of this paper, we start by introducing our object of study and will briefly describe the Thai BL series phenomenon and the first GL series. Afterwards, we will present the concept of toxic fans and disputes between fandoms, followed by a discussion of the methodology, process, and some quantitative data of our research, concluded by the evaluation and interpretation of the results obtained.

The Boys Love Series (BL)

Thai BL series are a phenomenon appealing to worldwide audiences, to the point of being considered one of the country's main *soft power products* (cf. Nye Jr. 2004). The success story of Thai BL began in 2014, with the release of the series *Love Sick* (2014), followed by *Sotus The Series* (2016)—which consolidated GMMTV, the main Thai media conglomerate, as a market leader, aiming on the creation of stars and the expansion of an international and transcultural fan base (cf. Prasannam 2023). The first BL series from Thailand to achieve international success was *2gether* (2020), which spawned spin-offs, films, and adaptations. During the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022), the Brazilian spectatorship of series from East and Southeast Asia, including BL, increased significantly. In 2023, Brazil was the first country outside of Asia to host fan meetings of Thai BL actors due to fan engagement on social media (cf. Lemos/Torres 2024).

Whether they originate in Japanese works (cf. Baudinette 2019) or have Hallyu as direct competitors (cf. Almeida 2019), Thailand produces and promotes a much larger number of these works, along with numerous related transmedia activities, both domestic and international—including spin-offs, adaptations, remakes, fan meetings, fashion shows and editorials, music shows, TV programs, product launches, among others. In this environment, two occurrences must be highlighted: the *shipping practices*, that is, the investment in romantic relationships between characters or actors, inside or outside the narrative, carried out by both production and fans, and the *fan service*, which, in this case, involves the creation of content with actors or characters that shows suggestive interactions to satisfy fans' desire and romantic fantasies of seeing them as a couple (cf. Lopes/Rangponsumrit/Lemos 2025; Lemos 2024). Both phenomena intensely involve fandoms and are maintained by an industry focused on this producer-fan-relationship.

GL follows the same logic as BL, but with female couples. As stories with homoromantic pairings, these terms parallel concepts in the Western discourse about non-heterosexual ships: slash and fem-

² Among famous ships of Thai BL actors, we would like to highlight #OhmNannon, #MileApo, #JimmySea, #MaxTull, and #MewGulf (cf. Lemos 2024).

³ RPS/RPF means Real Person Slash/Real Person Fiction. In fan communities, it is possible to find groups of shippers that will root for couples that have artists or celebrities involved (cf. Pontes 2024). Some fans also ship same-gender couples involving famous people, which can lead to stressful interpretive disputes between fans that may be complicated to solve, since they are addressing comments not about fiction but real life (cf. Nordin 2018; Brennan 2019).



slash pairings. Thai BL and GL series have fanbases worldwide that are active and engaged. However, Brazilian fan engagement is intense and marked by a strong presence on social media (cf. Amaral/Souza/Monteiro 2015; Pontes 2024). In Brazil, BL and GL series can be watched via fansubs (where there is greater quantity and variety), also on official channels of Thai TV broadcasters on YouTube, and, to a lesser extent, on large international platforms (cf. Lemos 2024). In Brazil, the audience for BL series and fan engagement on social media has grown exponentially, and, according to data from the streaming service Rakuten-Viki, the Brazilian BL audience grew significantly since 2022 (see <https://billboard.com.br/voce-ja-ouviu-falar-no-fenomeno-boys-love/>).

GAP: The Series

Following the success of BL, *GAP: The Series* launched as Thailand's first GL product, originally broadcast on local Channel 3 on Saturdays from November 19, 2022 to February 11, 2023. The main roles are played by actresses "Becky" Rebecca Patricia Armstrong (as Mon Kornkamon) and Freen Sarocha Chankimha (as Sam Samanan Anantrakul). The series was produced by the production company Idol Factory, co-produced by Saint Suppamong, known for his work as an actor in the BL series *Love by Chance* (2018) and *Why R U?* (2020). The actor also served as a producer of BL *Secret Crush on You* (2022), which featured the two lead actresses of *GAP: The Series* as the characters Kongkwan and Fon. *GAP: The Series* has twelve episodes of approximately 55 minutes each, it was adapted from the novel *GAP* by writer Devil Planoy, scripted by Patty Phatphatson Warissaraphuricha, and directed by Nuttapon Wongka-veepairoj. Since its debut, it has received a total of 38 awards, including the Maya TV Awards and the BIC Seven Awards. In Brazil, *GAP: The Series* can be watched on Idol Factory's YouTube channel, which has reached almost 800 million views over the course of the entire season.⁴ The narrative centers around the blossoming relationship between the couple Mon and Sam, whose connection dates back to their childhood. In a poignant moment, Sam heroically saves Mon from being hit by a vehicle. From this event on, Mon becomes obsessed with Sam and begins to follow her every step. As an adult, Mon starts working at the company Diversity, where Sam is the CEO. However, Sam is not the heroine that Mon expected, on the contrary, the businesswoman is rude and morally harasses her employees. Slowly, Mon wins and softens Sam's heart.

The narrative logic of the series is similar to what the viewer often finds in BL series. This similarity can be seen regarding the plot that follows the PhiNong dynamics⁵ and enemies-to-lovers tropes—a narrative style that portrays two characters that initially dislike each other and then discover that they actually love each other, with clichés already known by the audience, such as, for example, the kiss in slow motion, the fall that leads to an almost kiss, the hand that wipes a crumb in the corner of the other's mouth. But it also occurs in relation to other aesthetic and production choices, such as, location, costumes, and casting decisions—all aiming at a unity of vision in terms of identity, discourse, and conception.

Regarding the reverberations of *GAP: The Series* in Brazil, we highlight two relevant events that occurred during our research period: First, at the end of July 2023, actress Freen suffered from an inva-

⁴ The complete show is available on the official IdolFactory page: www.youtube.com/@IDOLFACTORY (where the data was collected), accessed on Jun. 5, 2024.

⁵ 'Phi' is the way Thais informally refer to the oldest person, whereas 'Nong' refers to the youngest person. The terms are gender neutral and are also used between older and younger siblings. The PhiNong trope can be seen in relationships between people of different ages, even if this difference is small.



sion of her privacy (see <https://the-bl-xpress.com/2023/08/06/recent-controversies-in-the-bl-industry/>), when images of the interior of her home were leaked, where she was in the company of actor Seng Wichai—a well-known actor from BL series who participated in *Secret Crush on You*, in which she also acted—which generated dating rumors and a lot of activity from haters. The second event was Becky Armstrong’s visit to Brazil on September 8, 2023, organized by her biggest fan club in Brazil, for the launch of the movie *Long Live Love* (2023), in which she appears as a supporting actress. *GAP: The Series* had a great impact on Brazilian fandoms, with strong engagement on social media, as we will see later.

Toxic Behaviors within Fandoms

The terms ‘toxic’ and ‘toxicity’ have become ubiquitous in contemporary digital culture, often used casually and losing their original gravity (cf. Arouh 2020). Similarly, fan communities, such as those discussed in this article, frequently adopt and popularize trending terminology. However, starting from the original understanding of this concept, we will try to present a clear definition of the term and would like to unravel the deeper logic of GL and BL fans. Therefore, we emphasize that:

In contemporary speech, the use of the word toxic has become pervasive—most prominently in expressions, such as ‘toxic leadership,’ ‘toxic masculinity,’ ‘toxic spaces,’ ‘toxic relationships,’ ‘toxic families’—leading the Oxford English Dictionary to declare “toxic” their 2018 word of the year. (Arouh 2020, pp.68f.)

In this way, our goal is to leave aside the usual internet expressions, precisely because the term is on the verge of losing its meaning. But, how can we reconnect the term ‘toxic’ to our context and determine that there is in fact toxicity within the *GAP: The Series* fandom? Fan studies theorists have examined the concepts of ‘toxic’ and ‘toxicity’ to better understand the boundaries between inflated accusations of toxicity and actual harmful actions, both online and offline, within fandom cultures (cf. Walton 2018; Proctor/Kies 2018; Arouh 2020). Although a certain understanding was developed within fan studies, e.g., by observing hate speech regarding members of marginalized communities, it is insufficient to consider racist, homophobic, sexist, and transphobic behavior simply through the lens of toxic demeanors. Researchers must obtain a certain awareness if they are indeed facing criminal activity since there are acts and speeches—online and offline—that exceed the limits of toxicity (cf. Proctor/Kies 2018). Thus, “most fandoms [...] are exclusionary to people of color; many are exclusionary to women [...] and some are exclusionary to queer people (and of course people of color can also be queer and/or women, and women can be queer)” (Proctor/Kies 2018, p.371). Building on the logic found inside fan groups that produce a hostile environment, it is clear that some of the intense discussions and tensions between fans deserve a greater attention in debates surrounding toxicity. Although this paper adapts a concept from internet terminology, our goal is to make use of it to better understand what generates and spreads conflicts among Brazilian fans who transitioned from BL to GL and now engage in interpretative disputes on social media. In order to execute our analysis, the terms ‘toxicity’ and ‘toxic’ will be considered as hostility and aggressive behavior. This notion operates as a guide to identify the process of fans’ tasteless interactions, looking at how they can occur within the cyber-environment, among fans, as a category within technoculture (cf. Proctor 2017). In our research, we observed that the originally harmonious environment burst, based on frustration and disagreements regarding the sexuality of the protagonists of

GAP: The Series. In this way, based on our initial observations and understandings focused on toxicity, we arrive at the following question: Do harmful attitudes generate disputes over meaning or the opposite? Therefore, we sought to investigate more about the ruptures and interpretative clashes.

Disputes inside Fandoms

Interpretive communities (cf. Fiske 1992) can present different constructions of meaning and behavior toward a media product. When this variety of viewpoints causes ruptures among fans or fan groups, it is possible to see the structure of the society in a microsystem. This common notion in reception and fan studies employs concepts like cultural, symbolic, economic capital, and so on as a process of elaboration of social hierarchies (cf. Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Fiske 1992; Curi 2010; Einwächter 2013; Amaral/Souza/Monteiro 2015; Greco 2019). Nevertheless, it is also known that authors of a media product have their own intentions and design with a specific audience in mind. Assuming that, “Generating a text means executing a strategy that includes predictions of the movements of others” (Eco 2011, p.39), it is possible to assume that authors and filmmakers choose the aesthetical path of their work focusing on their audiences. This suggests that different media products target distinct audiences and therefore follow specific production models. Brazilian telenovelas, American TV series, and Thai BL dramas, for example, differ in their visual, discursive, and aesthetic approaches. Choices have to be made, and all the cast and crew involved on *GAP: The Series* made these choices that delivered the show that is out there to be consumed. With that notion, we can return to what Eco (2015) discusses in terms of intentions versus results regarding the process of fan reception and what comes back to the cast and crew from that.

In this perspective, BL and GL fans tends to fight with each other because of series’ actresses and actors, since they expect to see an interaction that is constantly promised to them on social media and on the marketing strategy of the BL and GL series, but they do not get to have it the way they expected it to be. Because of this context, we consider that since studios and companies work with the celebrities’ images to sell a product (cf. Torres 2023; 2024), there is a range of different narratives within this universe,⁶ that the producers manipulate to increase the fans’ attention to their materials. Production companies may use queerbaiting strategies in order to play with their fans’ expectations (cf. Nordin 2019; Brennan 2019; Pontes 2024). In consequence, disputes over meaning in a fan community occur, where there is a (subtextual) frame that is constantly reinforced by media products, agencies, entrepreneurs, directors, scripters and so on. Still, interpretative limits may not exist (cf. Eco 2015) because, at all times, with each consumption that an individual makes of a certain work, the product exists in some way, having multiple meanings (cf. Iser 1996). At the same time, even if the different interpretative paths present in a given production escape its creator, he or she knows—or, at least, has an idea—who the work’s model reader is and what they expect (cf. Jauss 1994; Eco 2015).

However, the fannish desire to answer the question of intentionality can be hard to fulfill. The limits of the narrative are expanded, and, as a result, the artists’ intentionality and the fans’ reception seem to settle in a more blurred realm with less defined borders. And it is precisely from this clash of interpretations that toxic behaviors are born, with statements that disguise themselves as love for a certain work but may be imbued with prejudice and/or hate speech. From our research,

⁶ The authors employ the term ‘universe’ in accordance with Jenkins’ (2008) conceptualization of a narrative universe, which refers to the storyworld that expands across multiple media platforms.



we understand that the main factor for the occurrence of interpretative disputes and toxic behaviors would therefore be the frustration built up by a group of fans that expected to see actors and actresses from the same gender dating in real life, since they feel teased by the marketing strategy regarding the actors and actresses that are romantically involved in the fictional product. In part, we believe that this irritability in the GL fandom is due to the scarce presence of lesbian representation in media products. Thinking about the concepts of timely controversy and shared fantasies (cf. Jenkins/Ford/Green 2014), we must assume that the majority of fans' interactions regarding queer audiences, queer readings, and queer representations (cf. Brennan 2019) are about a desire of queer fans to see themselves represented. Therefore, when the majority of the *GAP: The Series*, Thailand's first GL, was connected to the interactions between the two main actresses of the show, expectations were built. The shipping of the actresses Freen and Becky came as a hope for a community that suffers from a lack of visibility (cf. Alves/Alves/Ferreira 2019). This process is further intensified by the notion that, in Western productions, practices of queerbaiting have become more common (cf. Nordin 2015; 2019; Brennan 2019). That concept translates itself into a marketing strategy created to capture the attention of queer audiences, with a promise of a same-gender pairing in the text or even—like in the case of BL and GL series—within the celebrities' and artists' real lives.

We perceive the disputes over meaning among Brazilian fans of *GAP: The Series* as a consequence of queerbaiting. Several interactions between the actresses Freen and Becky—which were not explicitly romantic and could be read as friendship between co-workers—allow for the interpretation as romantic interactions that may evolve into a real romance between the two artists. However, as we mentioned before, Freen was 'caught' in a privacy invasion episode in the company of actor Seng. Because of that, accusations of queerbaiting started to appear on X (formerly Twitter). Nonetheless, the fans kept engaged with the series' content, posting not only toxic content but also Freen/Becky appreciation posts—such as memes, fancams, giphys, and so on. Afraid of feeling betrayed by the *GAP: The Series* actresses, fans of the series began to extend their disputes over meaning to Freen and Becky and sent nasty and negative comments. However, we believe that the reality of the consumption of GL is more intense and/or expressive and cannot be reduced to these fan reactions. For this reason, by returning to our specific research environment, we may be able to show the connections to BL series while investigating this specific GL Brazilian fandom.

Methodology, Process, and Some Quantitative Data

In our study, we sought to select and analyze posts from Brazilian GL fans using terms and jargon researched among fans, also Brazilian, of Thai BL. This choice was made because these BL fans were the first to react to the launch of *GAP: The Series* and many of them also identify as GL fans. To develop the research, we followed the five steps in the KDD process, which are data selection, data pre-processing, data transformation, data mining, and interpretation/evaluation of results. This method allows for the intersection of different fields of research and involves techniques and tools aimed at transforming large volumes of data, with the first three of its five stages being considered an exploratory analysis. (cf. Steiner/Soma/Shimizu/Nievola/Steiner Neto 2006). For data mining, in this work, we used Twitter/X's tools to process the datasets. Although we found some quantitative insights, we emphasize that this is a qualitative research approach and that the inspiration by KDD was experimental, with the objective only of systematizing virtual ethnography.

We began selecting the data by surveying Twitter Brazil Trends (Trending Topics Brasil), searching for the “Top Hashtags 24h,” using the criteria of “Most Tweeted” and “Longest Duration.” For this, the GetDayTrends tool, provided by the social network itself, was used and the survey was carried out hourly, daily, and monthly.⁷ As *GAP: The Series* originally aired between November 2022 and February 2023, it is important to point out that the present research was conducted after the series’ original airing period and took place between May 9 and November 30, 2023. The final data selection, therefore, concerns the engagement of Brazilian Twitter/X users focusing on *GAP: The Series* and the #FreenBecky ship after its broadcast. However, during the data pre-processing stage, we found that mentions of GL or similar products (i.e., the specifically lesbian theme in serial fiction) were present in TTs Brazil for a total of 172 hours, with emphasis on hashtags: #FreenBecky, from the Thai series *GAP: The Series*; #Clarena, from the Brazilian telenovela *Vai na Fé* (2023); #Englot, from the Thai series *Show Me Love* (2023); and #Valu, from the Brazilian web series *Stupid Wife* (2022). The first findings indicated a strong emphasis on the hashtag #FreenBecky, with 137 hours spent on it alone (see fig.1).

It is relevant to highlight that, during the research period, mentions of BL or similar ones (i.e., serial fiction with a gay theme) were present in TTs Brazil for 151 hours (see fig.2), with emphasis on the hashtags: #FirstKhao, from the Thai series *Only Friends* (2023); #KelmiroDimaury, from the Brazilian telenovela *Terra e Paixão* (2023), #Narlie, from the British series *Heartstopper* (2022); #AlexHenry, from the US-American film *Red, White & Royal Blue* (2023); #PondPhuwin, #JoongDunk, #FirstKhao, #JimmySea, #GeminiFourth, #ForceBook, #OhmNanon and #EarthMix, from the ships of the actors of the Thai anthology series *Our Sky 2* (2023); #ZeeNunew, from the Thai series *Cutie Pie 2 You* (2023); and #JimmySea, from the Thai series *Last Twilight* (2023).

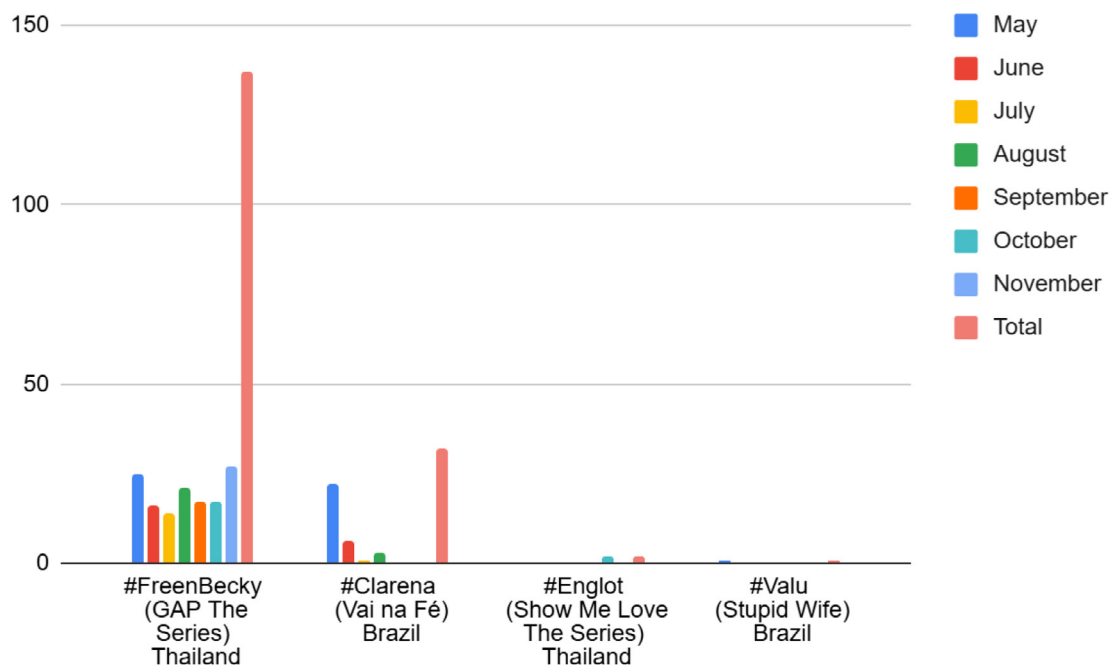


Fig.1: TWITTER TRENDS BRAZIL – GL (May to Nov. 2023)

⁷ The data was collected following the methodology and with the research team of GRUPA (Grupo de Estudos de Análise de Produtos Audiovisuais), based at Universidade Paulista (UNIP), São Paulo, Brazil. The work was funded by the FAPESP Project – Grant number 2021/14200-8, for the period 2022 to 2024.



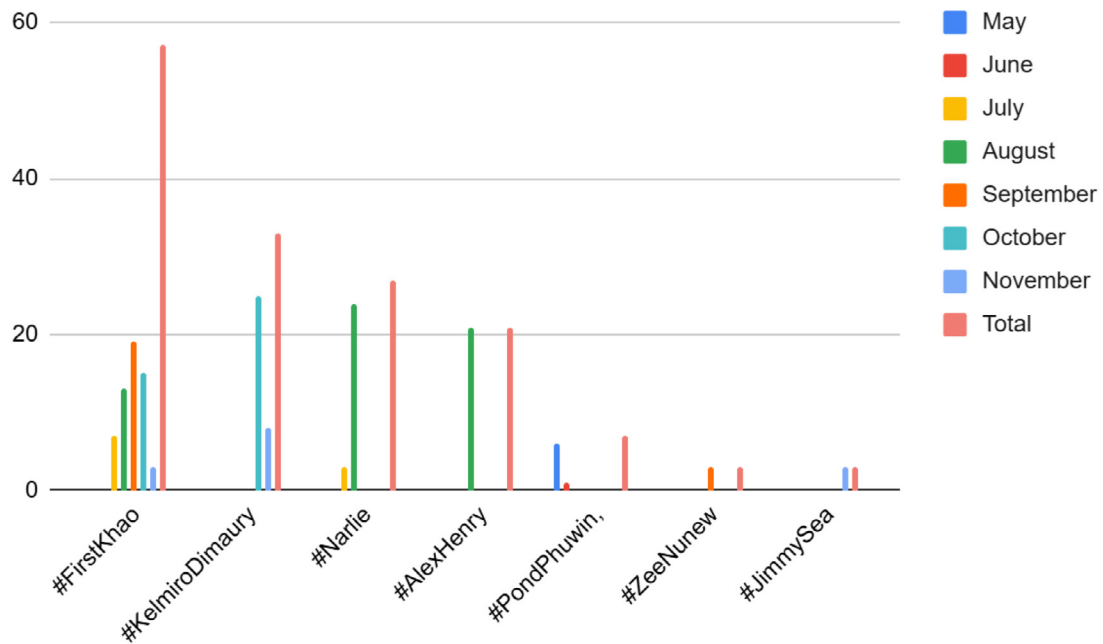


Fig.2: TWITTER TRENDS BRAZIL – BL (May to Nov. 2023)

The number of hours on Twitter/X TTs referring to mentions of GL was larger than the number of BL. We conjecture that this may be related to the massive publicity of *GAP: The Series* as the first Thai GL series, to speculations about the possible arrival of actress Becky to Brazil and her subsequent visit, to the release of the film *Long Live Love* and, certainly, to the movements of fans and haters regarding the private life of the actress Freen. The presence of different BL ship hashtags was more diverse, that is, with a greater number of different ships, indicating that the significantly greater volume of BL productions in relation to GL generates more significant fragmentation of and expansion within this niche. Therefore, in the indicated period, we had a total of 323 hours of presence in Brazil's trending topics (TTs) of ship hashtags related to actors/actresses and/or characters from fictional television programs with gay or lesbian themes, especially those pertaining to BL and GL series.

Then, for the data transformation phase, we carried out a bibliographic survey with the aim of creating a list of the central jargon present in BL that could be discovered in the Tweets about *GAP: The Series* researched during this period. This stage encompasses “functions related to data filtering, data cleaning, data coding and data enrichment” (Correia/Mendonça/Borges/Cordeiro 2023, p.122). Thus, our objective of generating a list of terms used by BL fans was to prepare this data so that it could be processed/filtered by data mining algorithms when comparing the hashtags #FreenBecky, #GAPTheSeries, #GAP, #MonSan and #monesam. In order to generate the jargon list, we used a glossary provided by a publication on the Amino fandom social network (cf. Heartbreak 2019), a table in a monograph made in Indonesia that presents a survey of jargon used by BL fans in a Telegram fan community (cf. Meriantini 2023), as well as our own knowledge as aca-fans (cf. Jenkins 2008; 2011; Lopes/Greco/Castilho/Lemos/Pereira/Lima/Néia 2017), drawn from experience in different fandoms. We thus arrived with a first list of 36 terms. We refined this list with the aim of reducing it, eliminating words such as “SemeTop,” “UkeBottom,” “Fujoshi,” “Fundanshi” that were specific to themes only covered in BL. We also eliminated less common words that are less common in comments by Brazilian BL fans, such as “Tomboy,” “Trope,”

“Yaoi,” and “Yuri.” The data mining process was conducted using Twitter/X’s own advanced search tool (with the criteria: “All posts with any of these words” from the refined list, “Posts in Portuguese,” including “Replies and original posts,” in addition to “Posts with links,” from the period from May 9 to Nov. 30, 2023). It occurred synchronized to our netnographic approach (cf. Fragozo/Recuero/Amaral 2016; Kozinets 2010; 2019) because, in addition to, we read and evaluated the pre-selected terms in the posts from the search. The objective was to examine the hashtags #FreenBecky, #GAPTheSeries, #GAP, #MonSan, and #monesam with regards to the 24 terms from the refined list. This procedure resulted in another 18 new terms that we believed to be relevant to our search. During this manual process, we also eliminated terms that did not appear even once in posts with relevant characteristics. The final list, with 29 jargons, terms, and expressions related to BL fandom that appeared in Tweets about the GL program *GAP: The Series* consisted of BL, *Boiolar* (slang meaning to fall in love, in a very intense and silly way), *Engajar* (Engage), Fanbases, Fandom, Fanservice, *Fãs Tóxicas* (Toxic Fans), Feat, FS (Fan Service), Gay, Gays, GL, Hate, *Homossexual* (Homosexual), *Indústria* (Industry), LGBT, LGBTQIA+, *Migalhas* (crumbs), *Pessoas Não Gays* (Non-Gay People), Pink Money, Queerbait, Queerbaiting, *Química de Milhões* (Chemistry of Millions), Remix, Ship, Shippers, Shipping, Tag, *Tag Oficial* (Official Tag).

We combined the hashtags with these 29 terms from the final list, obtaining a list of 49 tweets from Brazilian fans of *GAP: The Series* that presented jargon, terms, and common expressions among BL fans. It is worth mentioning that data mining, in this case, was carried out manually, which is unusual. Our goal was to redo the process as many times as necessary so that we could find new terms at each step (and which were also common to BL fan jargon), thus allowing us to refine that initial list. The search aimed, therefore, to find new results in the tweets that appeared from each new list and its additions. We, therefore, went through three manual filters until we reached the final list. It is necessary to mention that, in Brazil, fan studies of serial television fiction permeate studies of Latin American Reception, which causes “a qualitative influence on content analysis aimed at this specialized audience, made up of fans” (Greco 2023, p.98). In this matter, the approach is not towards the content of the works per se but rather towards the content of the production of these fans. It is also worth emphasizing that we searched for tweets in Portuguese and, therefore, many of the terms in the lists, including slang, were in that language (examples: *Boiolar*, *Engajar*, and so on), however, there were also terms in English already incorporated by Brazilian fans (examples: hate, queerbait). The final selection was made through the elimination of redundant content.

Posts were numbered sequentially and classified in terms of sentiment analysis as positive (P), negative (N), or neutral (=). Sentiment analysis aims to identify a text’s polarities and, therefore, to verify whether subjective content can be categorized according to its degree of positivity, negativity, or neutrality (cf. Evangelista/Santana/Rodrigues/Faraco/Vorrique/Nogueira 2022). Thus, “the sentence ‘How beautiful you look today’ is positive and the sentence ‘Today is a bad day’ is negative, while the sentence ‘Today is October 21’ has no polarity and is normally classified as neutral” (Benevenuto/Ribeiro/Araújo 2015, p.3). Among the criteria for establishing this investigation, it is possible to mention publication polarity as a whole, the comparative observation between all posts, the search for understanding the satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the text, and other less usual perspectives (cf. Evangelista/Santana/Rodrigues/Faraco/Vorrique/Nogueira 2022). In this paper, the categorization was carried out by the authors based on the individual analysis of the polarity (or polarities) of each post itself from a more general perspective. Posts were also classified in terms of language functions (cf. Jakobson 2003), as we will see below. In the



following analysis, we transcribe some excerpts from these posts, that is, the statements by these fans, in quotation marks, with their code indicated in parentheses. For example, the ninth post, classified as positive and neutral and of referential (R) and conative (C) functions having the reference (09.P=.RC).

Interpretation and Results Debate

For the qualitative analysis of the posts' content, we agree with Guerra (2014) and Greco (2023), without considering the "principle of mutual exclusion" (Greco 2023, p.105), that the same post can present different opinions and belong to more than one category. Thus, when investigating the sentiment expressed in the 49 selected tweets, we found that 19 contained positive comments, 41 negative, and 9 neutral and/or informative. To carry out a first qualitative approximation with the posts' content, we chose the classic language functions proposed by Jakobson (2003 [1960]), namely, referential (R), related to the context, the transmission of information; emotive (E), about the sender, expressing feelings, emotions, or attitudes of the speaker; conative (C), used in requests or commands and seeking to influence the reader/receiver; phatic (F), which deals with contact between interlocutors in that medium/network and, therefore, includes greetings and connection checks; metalinguistics (M), used to discuss or clarify language itself; and poetics (P), in which the emphasis is on the form, the aesthetics of the language. These functions are non-exclusive, that is, they can encompass that several functions can be present in one communication, helping us to categorize and select the main content so that we could then discuss the posts in relation to fan studies.

Thus, **neutral** comments have the referential category as their predominant function, transmitting information in sections such as the one that says that the ship #FreenBecky is coming to Brazil to satisfy the "thirsty sapphic women" (32.P=.R) or one that clarifies the fact that fan service "is something established by the company and the industry" (19.N=.R). They also have characteristics of the conative function, due to the use of imperative language (convincing and persuasive), as in the post that calls on fans to view Freen's appearances at the launch of BL *The Sign* (2023): "Tomorrow a new trailer for BL the sign will be released, let's keep an eye out if it appears give views" (08.=.C); or those who promote the tag for the series *The Loyal Pin* (2024): "Guys, the official tag for the series is this #TheLoyalPin whenever you talk about the girls' gl, put the tag to engage together" (48.P=.C). We recorded, among the neutral comments, the following terms and jargon used by BL fans, as found in the comments about *GAP: The Series*: BL, Engajar, Fanbases, Fandom, Fanservice, FS, GL, *Indústria*, *Migalhas*, Pink Money, Queerbaiting, *Química de Milhões*, Ship, Shippers, Tag, *Tag Oficial*.

The **positive** comments on the selected posts were categorized mainly as having an emotional function, in which fans mainly express their state of contentment. The posts address the recognition of the series by different awards, the large volume of views on YouTube, and the joy that more GL series are being produced. In this category, the posts also celebrate that *GAP: The Series* paved the way for the development of more GL series. Following this idea, fans also celebrate the international fame that actresses Freen and Becky achieved with this work. Finally, we highlight that some fans reiterate the importance of female representation for the LGBTQIAPN+ community. In the positive comments, there is also an emphasis on the poetic function with a multitude of art piece, edits, and memes such as, for example, those that show the actresses on the cover of the *GQ Year 2023* magazine, which previously only featured men. The terms and jargon in this category were: BL, *Boiolar*, Engajar, Fandom, Fanservice, FS, GL, LGBT+, Queerbaiting, *Química de Milhões*, Tag, *Tag Oficial*.

Among the comments classified as **negative**, we recorded the following terms and jargon: BL, *Boio-lar*, Fandom, Fanservice, *Fãs Tóxicas*, Feat, FS, Gays, GL, Hate, *Indústria*, LGBT+, *Pessoas Não Gays*, Pink Money, Queerbait, Queerbaiting, Remix, Ship, Shippers. We detected some neuralgic points between the posts classified as negative, for example, topics related to disputes between fandoms (as expressed by the language used), especially when there is the presence of terms, concepts, and ideas related to issues like shipping, fan service, and queerbaiting. It is also worth pointing out that we see the recurrent use of the expression “the machos of BL” with a pejorative tone referring to the BL actors and the fan service they perform. Just like in the posts categorized as positive, the negative ones also have a predominance of an emotive function. The expression is directed towards a dispute, as in: “The more they try to take these two down, the stronger they rise again” (06.N=.E). The question remains: Who is trying to take them down? This dispute, in which the fans are apparently involved, appears in a large number of the selected posts. It suggests tension between fandoms, but it does not show responses or dialogue, just provocative manifestations. One of the posts provokes the Idol Factory, accusing them of boycotting the actresses, devaluing the ship, and not even offering adequate food for them on trips abroad. When Idol Factory published another BL series, namely *The Sign*, fans felt that BL series are more advertised than GL: “this new BL from Idol Factory is very much about sexual appeal [...]. It’s not cool what they’re doing, making a lot of profit through #FreenBecky” (12.N.E). In addition to the tensions arising from the works themselves, there is the factor that controversies are raised by previous struggles of these fans, who see spaces and the tools created by fandoms to achieve specific objectives—which can refer to any type of objective—as a chance to appropriate places to fight for their social causes.

On the other hand, some controversies are directed towards the individuality or character of the individual fan. One fan asks, “Do you want to spew venom disguised as an opinion and act as if no one noticed? Not here, my dear. If it bothers you so much, go to any BL fandom out there, and you’ll find exactly what you’re looking for. Please slam the door when you leave and don’t come back!” (14.N.C). A fan of BL—and also of GL—who perhaps brings harsher analyses to the work might be seen as a threat by others, as Lima (2016) observes:

Divergences within the same fan community occur for a variety of reasons: changes in the narrative, different interpretative practices, celebrity charisma, textual (in)coherence, breach of expectations formed from the reading contract, etc. Any narrative element that potentially threatens the “ontological security” (Silverstone, 1994) provided by the media object may become the reason for controversy. (Lima 2016, p.57)

Considering that Thai BL series have a history of more than ten years of development, success, and visibility in the gay community, the launch of the first Thai GL series comes with this emotional weight that is added due to the lack of representation over all these years. This happens even though many BL series have lesbian representation via lesbian minor characters with significant narrative arcs. Certainly, this is not enough, precisely because they are inserted into a context with predominately gay protagonists, and for this reason, this type of response from fans may be expected.

Fighting sexism, lesbophobia, and transphobia can be examples of issues that became relevant in some fandoms, which included (successfully or not) the themes that were urgent to them. Timely controversies are linked to the clash of values, in scenarios in which the public engages with fandoms and



the consumption of media products motivates to participate to defend a point of view and arguments. “Often, media text spreads particularly far when it portrays a controversy that concerns a community at the very moment it is seeking content that could act as its rallying cry” (Ford/Jenkins/Green 2014, p.266). Fan service, or FS, is the cause of intense disputes. Some fans believe in the relationship represented in the series, as we see in the following statement: “Today I’m just here to see this perfect couple. And yes, it’s a couple, I believe in my fanservice because it suits me and makes me happy shyyyyyt #FreenBecky is real. Suck WORLD” (17.P.E). Other fans are aware of FS as an action involving heavy industry investment, as in: “Guys, do you hate all this just because the girl is dating? Can’t you see that this only makes no one want to do gl afterwards? [...] what do actresses do? Represent. And fan service is part of showing the series!” (24.N=.EC). The controversy regarding the romance between Freen and actor Seng continues to spark criticism and debate among fans. Alongside public apologies, the artists suffered financial losses, a drop in their fan base, and had to face publications of mocking content with montages of images of Freen and Seng. There are many posts that say that Freen lied, that she is “with her guy,” or that mention being angry with “straight women who fake lesbian sexuality” (22.N.E) to gain an audience.

It is worth mentioning that we did not find any post suggesting the possibility of the actress being bisexual, which reflects the polarization of the dispute and the persistent invisibility of the third letter of the LGBTQIAPN+ acronym. Nonetheless, the ‘discovered’ romance also spilled over to Becky, and we read in a post: “Becky is even an expert in doing fanservice and deceiving fans to take money” (19.N=.R). There are a few posts that address the seriousness of the crime of invasion of privacy suffered by Freen. Still on this issue, it is important to highlight a post in which the fan says that Idol Factory made an “error in fanservice that had a very big impact” (27.N=.R). The critical perception of Brazilian fans regarding the strategies of the Thai BL and GL industry is relevant. In this sense, the media literacy of fans is crucial and the company is blamed in other posts— “they knew everything and did nothing” (25.PN.R) or “they work to pretend they are gay and thus guarantee pink money from each day. There are no saints there, much less victims. They live by pretending” (43.N.R).

Evaluation of Results and Conclusions

Considering the behaviors that mark the fandom’s interactions, the effects, amplifications, and implications of entering and remaining in the digital environment and the characteristics specific to Brazilian fans of Thai GL, it is possible to reach some conclusions and outline potential directions for further research within the field of fan studies. Initially, we started with our research problem: Do harmful attitudes generate disputes over meaning or the opposite? Therefore, we sought to investigate more about the ruptures and interpretative clashes. At the same time, we seek to understand the motivations and consequences of these disputes. Firstly, from our research, we can suggest that the larger number of hours of mentions of GL on Twitter/X TTs—in relation to BL—may be related to two factors. The first is that many Brazilian BL fans are also GL fans, that is, GL fans increased a fan base that had already existed. The second and main point refers to the disputes that did not exist in BL fandom, which related to questions regarding of LGBTQIAPN+ representation; that is, GL fans arrived and fought for their space, expanding engagement and, consequently, the quantity of posts on Twitter/X. Moreover, BL fans have an infinity of BL series at their disposal—of different genres, aesthetics, and production quality—and are familiar with expressing their criticisms and analyses. The content

of these analyses could, perhaps, reach GL fans who, at that time, had only one work to call their own, *GAP: The Series*. Such comments and criticisms, in which GL fans may have seen negative content, triggered the disputes that we observed. Thus, these comments may have induced GL fans' strong reactions regarding both the work itself and their own sexual orientation.

Different from these points are the toxic attitudes towards actress Freen Sarocha Chankimha and her sexual orientation. We see serious consequences related to the strategies of the Thai BL and GL industry, in terms of shipping and fan service actions which, in this industry, despite being carried out to please fans, can generate an opposite reaction to that intended, when these same fans turn against the series' producers because they consider themselves deceived. Based on our conclusions, we assess the need to carry out further research focused on the field of shipping non-fiction couples, looking at possible consequences for the artists involved. Even though Real People Shippers already appear in fan studies as an object of research, we reiterate considering this sphere regarding their relevance for disputes over meaning, receptions, queerbaiting, and possible reverberations. In addition, we emphasize that studying Real People Shippers may focus on the marketing relationships established by the media products market. How can the lack of representation create false advertisements for homosexual couples? How do these advertising resources affect the lives of celebrities and artists? Our article aimed to shed light on facets of this intricate transcultural network, which encompass concerns that are relative to the Global South and tensions in the flow of East-West television fiction. It presents complex questions that are just starting to be studied and debated. We are facing corporate acts related to shipping and fan service, bubbling emotions from two passionate fandoms, questions of LGBTQIAPN+ visibility and representation, aside from countless controversies and significant disputes over meaning that certainly deserve further study.

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