Korapat Pruekchaikul (2026). Homosexual Men's Identity in Thai and Hollywood Movie Posters: A Visual Discursive Analysis. *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics & Discourse Studies* Vol. XIV, pp.1-27.
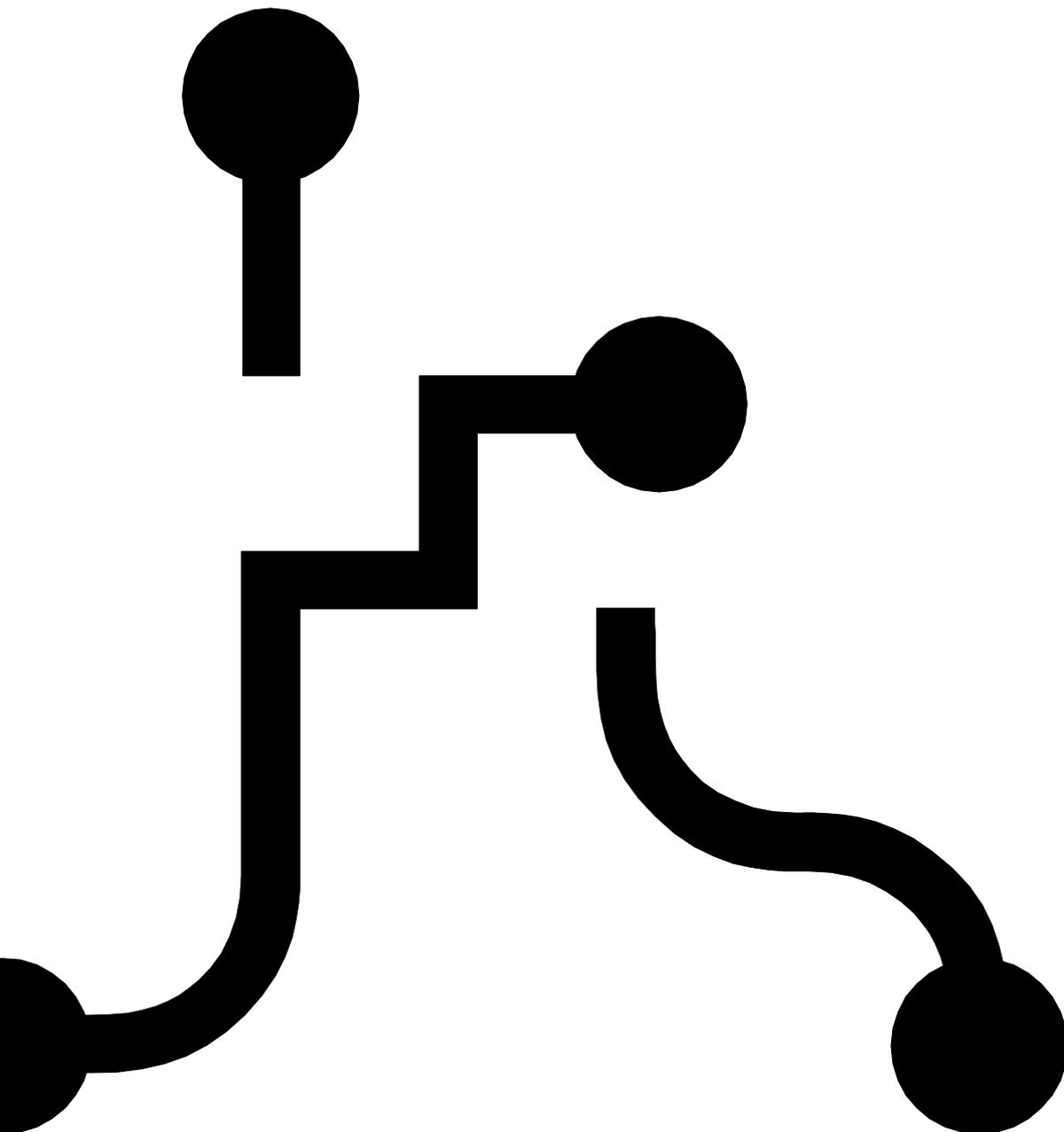
Homosexual men's identity in Thai and Hollywood movie posters: a visual discursive analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines how homosexual men's identity is constructed, idealized, and ideologized in Thai and Hollywood movie posters released between 2007 and 2023. By drawing on eight movie posters revolving around male same-sex relationships, the study elucidates how they function as both semiotic texts and marketing artifacts. Conceptually and methodologically, it combines Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) *Grammar of Visual Design* with social semiotics and advertising ideology theory (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985; O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2005), alongside film-based models of homosexual masculinity (Naksing & Taifapul, 2013). The analysis of narrative, conceptual, interactional, compositional, and modality structures shows that both Thai and Hollywood posters represent homosexual men as defeminized, emotionally sincere, and oriented toward monogamous relationships, while also depicting their identities as ambiguous, concealed, and socially regulated. At the same time, these identities are commodified through advertising strategies of meaning transfer, behavioral normalcy, and problem reduction, producing a marketable form of modern masculinity that is intimate, sensitive, and visually desirable. The study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how film posters actively reshape homosexual identity at the intersection of visual semiotics, ideology, and global film marketing.

Keywords: gender identity, homosexual men, movie posters, advertising ideology, grammar of visual design

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0. Introduction

"I wish I knew how to quit you."

Jack Twist to Ennis del Mar in Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005)

The 2006 film *Brokeback Mountain* marked a significant shift in Hollywood's representation of homosexuality. Directed by Ang Lee, the film depicts the complex and ultimately tragic relationship between two cowboys, Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist, between the 1960s and 1970s. While critically acclaimed films featuring homosexual male protagonists existed prior to *Brokeback Mountain*, such as John Schlesinger's *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* (1993), the impact of *Brokeback Mountain* was demonstrably greater as it became "a cultural phenomenon" (Giannetti, 2008, p. 484) immediately upon its release.

The reason why *Brokeback Mountain* ably navigates the sensitive topic of homosexuality lies in its artistic merit and mainstream accessibility. Lee's meticulous direction and the film's poignant narrative effectively brought the lived experiences of homosexual men to a wider audience, encouraging open and serious discussion. Notably, the film's success catalyzed a subsequent wave of Hollywood productions featuring homosexual characters, including Gus Van Sant's *Milk* (2008), Tom Ford's *A Single Man* (2009), and Morten Tyldum's *The Imitation Game* (2014). These films, while critically well-received, did not achieve the same level of widespread recognition as *Brokeback Mountain*.

Thailand also possessed a history of cinematic portrayals of homosexuality predating *Brokeback Mountain*. In 1987, a Thai adaptation of Mart Crowley's Broadway play *The Boys in the Band* titled ฉันผู้ชายนะยะ [*Chan Phuchai Na Ya*] was released. Directed by the renowned Thai aristocrat Mom Luang (M.L.) Pundhevanop Dhewakul, nicknamed by Thai actors, actresses and audiences as Mom Noi, the film garnered moderate critical acclaim domestically. This reception might be attributed to the perception of the film by general Thai audiences as a highly intellectual, artistic, and allegorical work, despite its comedian elements.

Coinciding roughly with the release of *Brokeback Mountain*, Thai cinema revisited the theme of homosexuality with surprising success. The 2007 film *Rak Haeng Sayam* [*The Love of Siam*],

directed by Chookiat Sakveerakul, featured a cast of both established and up-and-coming teenage actors. While its narrative diverged from *Brokeback Mountain*, *Rak Haeng Sayam* garnered critical acclaim in Thailand and reignited a conversation about a topic often deemed taboo even within families, particularly resonating with adolescent audiences.

The critical and commercial success of the aforementioned films can undeniably be attributed, in part, to the producers' advertising campaigns. Movie posters, alongside trailers, play a significant pre-release promotional role. However, unlike trailers which are confined to cinemas or online platforms, posters offer a ubiquitous and readily accessible offline marketing tool for audiences. Unfortunately, despite their effectiveness in conveying thematic elements and capturing audience attention, as recently highlighted by Pruekchaikul (2024), movie posters are often seen as mere promotional paraphernalia and consequently disregarded by the public. The ultimate fates of films and their corresponding promotional materials diverge significantly. While films are often archived in physical formats such as DVDs or Blu-rays, movie posters typically face disposal.

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of movie posters as artworks, promotional tools, and valuable data sources for linguistic analysis, particularly within the framework of social semiotics, the researcher has conducted and published studies on the visual representation of normative masculinity and femininity in Portuguese advertisements (Pruekchaikul, 2022) and movie posters (Pruekchaikul, 2024). Those works suggest that Portuguese movie posters, like other advertising texts, function as a platform that simultaneously promotes films and reinforces prevailing ideologies of stereotypical masculinity and femininity among viewers. However, as the researcher has acknowledged in his previous research, movie posters still offer rich possibilities for further investigation, especially in the context of cross-cultural discursive studies on gender identity, a field currently characterized by diversity, dynamism, and intellectual stimulation.

This paper addresses the under-researched area of homosexual male identity representation in movie posters across cultures, particularly the Thai and American ones. The analysis and discussion's foci lie on the visual discursive construction of homosexual male identity. The study utilizes the framework of visual design grammar, as postulated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021). Additionally, considering that movie posters are a form of print advertising, the paper examines the relations between advertising ideology and identity representation. The analysis is guided by two research questions: (1) How does the Grammar of Visual Design contribute to our

understanding of representation of homosexual men's identity in the selected Thai and Hollywood movie posters? (2) How is this identity ideologized and idealized in these movie posters?

1. Literature Review

1.1 Representation of homosexual men in Thai and Hollywood movies

Research on gender has been conducted for a long time across various fields, including social sciences, anthropology, and even translation. In linguistics, this research gained widespread recognition with the publication of Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (1975). Subsequent academic works, particularly in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, have further explored gender and language. Notable contributions include those by Coates (1998, 2011), Bucholtz (1999), Cameron and Kulick (2003), Hall (1995), Kiesling (2009), Wetherell and Edley (2009), Ochs and Taylor (2012) and Johnstone (2018). These scholars have paved the way for the extensive exploration of gender and language, analyzing how gender identity is constructed through language, exclusively used by and among white heterosexual American women and men. Despite the different methodologies and various theoretical frameworks used in these studies, they converge on the thesis that gender identity is the result of language performativity—how speakers wield the power of language to change, negotiate, and maintain their identity in speech acts.

In terms of research on language and gender, especially as regards homosexual identity in Thai and Hollywood movie posters, which is the focus of this paper, the researcher has found that the majority of published academic papers explore movies rather than posters. Those works can be divided into two groups. The first one deals with Hollywood movies (Giannetti, 2008; Robert, 2009; Rudy, 2016; Greven, 2022); the second with Thai films (Naksing and Taifapul, 2013; Sukmuang and Singlamphong, 2018). Both groups, despite exploring movies from Thailand and the US separately, shared the similar representation of homosexual men's image and identity which not only conforms to social expectation and reality but also defies them. On the one hand, homosexual men in Thai and Hollywood movies may enjoy a happy life, possess funny personalities and live in a carefree world. On the other hand, they are portrayed as being promiscuous, isolated and embittered people living in a far-out, gloomy and pessimistic world. This finding, in turn, implies that modern masculinity is threatened and challenged as males are

no longer the symbol of physical strength, professional success and emotional stability, but social marginalization as well as physical and psychological fragility, sensitivity and complexity.

Gabriel (2012) and Huth (2020) likely align with the topic of this paper, as both authors examine American film posters in relation to gender identity. Gabriel (2012) analyzes masculine and feminine gender portrayals, while Huth (2020) focuses on the visual representation of queer identity. On the other hand, both authors consider movie posters as marketing tools and cultural artifacts to decipher gender representation – either queer or heterosexual identities – and provide social understanding of gender identity.

To discuss the representation of homosexual male identity in Thai and Hollywood movie posters, this paper adopts the argument made by Naksing and Taifapul (2013). While the authors focus on the construction of homosexual men's identity in modern Thai films, their analysis of identity representation can be applied to both Thai and Hollywood movie posters, as it effectively connects and integrates the social and cinematic worlds. According to Naksing and Taifapul (2013), homosexual men's identity constructed in Thai movies is consistent with 6 key aspects.

The first aspect focuses on the concept of 'defeminization' (Naksing and Taifapul, 2013, p. 42). This concept suggests that homosexual men value masculine appearances and physiques in the same way that heterosexual men do. Compared with transgender individuals, homosexual men appear to prefer masculinity, whereas transgender individuals tend to prioritize feminine qualities.

The second aspect of homosexual men's identity is their diverse range of behaviors, which are similar to those of heterosexual men. In other words, heterosexual and homosexual men are not easily distinguishable unless the latter openly expresses their sexual preferences.

The third one concerns non-promiscuous relationships, which are ideal not only for homosexuality but also for heterosexuality. Naksing and Taifapul (2013) argue that society often views homosexual men as unfaithful and licentious, as they are perceived to have multiple partners and prefer one-night stands over long-term relationships.

Since homosexual men's identity cannot be determined solely by physical appearance based on the binary opposition that distinguishes males from females and vice versa, it is considered ambiguous and fluid, varying according to specific contexts and situations.

Moreover, another aspect of homosexual male identity is the inability or difficulty in clearly identifying the reason for the sexual orientation. Naksing and Taifapul (2013) argue that society often stigmatizes homosexual men by attributing their sexuality to family problems. However, as suggested by many films, there are various factors influencing one's sexual orientation. Instead, the focus would rather be on how homosexual men navigate life within society.

Finally, Naksing and Taifapul (2013) address the fact that homosexual men in movies often struggle with self-acceptance because their identity deviates from social norms and expectations. Also, society enforces rules—through families, schools, and workplaces—to penalize those who defy these norms. As a result, only when homosexual men successfully achieve self-acceptance can they live happily and peacefully within society.

1.2 Constructing masculinity: ideological perspectives on advertising

As discussed earlier in the Introduction, movie posters are a pervasive marketing tool. However, they are also important for linguistic studies, and particularly for visual analysis, because, like other advertising texts, they play a key role not only in product distribution but also in the promotion of ideologies.

Linguistics defines ideology differently depending on the specific areas of study. For instance, stylistics views ideology as "a set of social, cultural, and political beliefs and values that inform the way we think things ought to be" (Verdonk, 2002, p. 119). In contrast, discourse analysis defines ideology as long-standing, socially shared belief systems that influence various social and discursive practices (van Dijk, 2011). Thus, ideology can be understood as the socio-cultural and socio-political convictions held by individuals about a given subject—whether they are conscious or unconscious.

In their linguistic studies on media analyses, particularly advertisements, Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) as well as O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) define ideology as an idea or concept so natural, perfect, and ideal that people find it difficult to deny or question. The authors further state that advertisers often exploit this concept—both verbally and visually—to commodify products and promote their quality, as prospective buyers need to recognize the advantages and benefits of these products.

Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) further explain that advertising ideology typically addresses "behavioral normalcy" (p. 141) and "problem reduction" (p. 143). Behavioral normalcy is often treated as unquestionable and acceptable in advertisements, as it can lead to problem reduction to attract buyers and sell products. For example, an advertisement for health insurance may present an unpredictable situation, such as chronic illnesses or accidents that could result in significant expenses, to persuade people to purchase the insurance, even though they might consider alternatives, such as learning to save money effectively for future uncertainties.

Additionally, Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) introduce the meaning transfer technique to elucidate how advertisers ideologize a product through language use. This technique consists of two processes. The first involves relating the qualities or values of a product to those of an endorser, which can be a person or an object. This process is effectively achieved through figurative language—either verbal or visual—such as metaphor or metonymy, to create the 'aestheticization of commodities' (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985, p. 154). Once the product is idealized in terms of its qualities and values, advertisers employ persuasive language to incite prospective buyers to take action.

Besides the general idea of advertising ideology, Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) and O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) also discuss in detail the ideology of masculinity in advertisements. This discussion is rather useful because it chronologically suggests the development of masculine gender in advertising texts in case the first authors are read before the second ones.

Starting with the work of Vestergaard and Schroder (1985), it becomes clear that advertisements portray men differently depending on a product's target audience. When an advertisement is aimed at women, male presenters are typically presented as family-oriented and characterized as being "kinder," "more friendly," "more understanding," and "less macho" (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985, p. 90) than those portrayed in advertisements targeting men. The authors refer to this type of male figure as "the new man" (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985, p. 90), as he embodies traits rarely seen in advertisements directed at men.

In contrast, male figures in advertisements targeting men are usually depicted as a "sexual animal" (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985, p. 104), portrayed as "brutish," "[e]arthy," and

"primitive" (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985, p. 104). In other words, the ideal man in male-targeted advertisements is expected to appear as natural and instinct-driven as possible. He must also be both sexually and professionally active, since, according to Vestergaard and Schroder (1985), competitiveness—whether in pursuing women or succeeding in business—is a core value associated with male figures in such advertisements.

Published two decades later, the work of O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) reinforces the earlier argument made by Vestergaard and Schroder (1985), while also highlighting evolving representations of masculinity in advertising. Viewing gender as a social construct, the authors argue that masculinity in the 2000s has shifted in response to emerging socio-political movements, particularly feminism and the gay rights movement. Since advertisements are social products, they inevitably reflect prevailing norms and societal changes.

On the one hand, advertisements targeting men continue to portray masculinity through "physical and/or social power" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005, p. 245) over women, the environment, and other men. Even cosmetic ads for men must emphasize traditional masculine traits, as they are tasked with "overcoming the perception that the purchase and use of cosmetics are feminine activities" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005, p. 254).

On the other hand, whether intentionally or not, such advertisements increasingly depict male figures as objects of desire—a quality traditionally associated with femininity in advertising, as already discussed by Vestergaard and Schroder (1985), who argue that women, not men, are conventionally positioned as passive objects to be looked at and admired. Consequently, some advertisements—beyond those promoting cosmetics—frequently feature semi-nude or scantily clad men, rendering them "objects of sexual gaze" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005, p. 255), much like women in advertisements.

To conclude and synthesize, the works of Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) and O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) reveal both continuity and change in how masculinity is represented in advertisements. Whereas Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) emphasized the rigid dichotomy between the nurturing new man in female-targeted advertisements and the aggressive, competitive sexual animal in male-oriented ones, O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) acknowledge the persistence of these traditional masculine ideals but also note their

gradual transformation. Influenced by shifting social and political contexts, such as feminism and gay rights, advertisements have begun to blur gender boundaries, increasingly sexualizing male bodies and presenting men as objects of visual desire. This suggests that, although advertisements continue to reinforce conventional power dynamics, they also reflect and contribute to evolving conceptions of masculinity, underscoring its socially constructed and fluid nature.

1.3 Research gaps

Building on the discussion in 1.2, several research gaps are worth highlighting.

In terms of gender identity, research on the language used by and about heterosexual men and women has been consistently conducted. In contrast, academic studies on the language of homosexual men in movie posters remain relatively scarce, not to mention the representation of homosexual men in Thai and Hollywood movie posters.

Likewise, as mentioned in 1.1, research on the identity construction of homosexual men in Thai and Hollywood movie posters has been conducted far less frequently than studies on their identity construction in movies. The main reason is that they are being carried out separately rather than jointly, focusing on data-sets from only one language. Therefore, it is difficult to realize shared perspectives resulting from their respective analyses, as endeavored in this paper. Moreover, while the six aspects of homosexual men's identity proposed by Naksing and Taifapul (2013) are sufficient and fundamental, they have only been discussed in the context of Thai movies. Therefore, it would be valuable to explore these aspects through an analysis of both Thai and Hollywood films.

The concept of masculinity and advertising ideologies, as discussed in section 1.2, has been explored in detail through advertisements analyzed in the works of the four previously mentioned authors. However, it remains unexamined in the context of movie posters, particularly Thai and Hollywood ones. Since movie posters are a form of advertising text and a marketing tool, regardless of language, applying this concept to the representation of homosexual males could offer valuable insights. Examining this within a cross-cultural perspective may pave the way for further discussions.

2. Methodology

The data analyzed in this paper consist of eight Thai and Hollywood movie posters, all of which focus thematically on same-sex relationships among homosexual men. These posters are available online at www.imdb.com. Following the primary theme established by *Brokeback Mountain*, movies featuring transgender individuals and cross-dressers were excluded since these films center on individuals whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth or those who wear clothing typically associated with another gender.

All the selected films were released after *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), with release dates ranging from 2007 to 2023. Although numerous films featuring homosexual men appeared during this period, only those viewed by the author were included in the present analysis. In addition, while no genre restrictions were imposed during data collection, all of the selected movie posters were found to belong to the drama or comedy genres.

Below is the list of the data for analysis along with the release dates in the chronological order and the synopsis of each movie:

- *Bangkok Love Story* (2007) – A romantic and action drama about an unlikely relationship of a hitman and a police officer who tries to catch him;

- *The Love of Siam* (2007) – A multi-layered romantic drama about long-lasting friendship of two male adolescents and the love of their families;

- *The Imitation Game* (2014) – A biographical drama of Alan Turing, a Cambridge alumni tasked to crack Nazi codes during WWII;

- *Fathers* (2016) – A drama about the life of two gay men and their son in contemporary Bangkok;

- *Call me by your Name* (2017) – A coming-of-age drama about a young boy falling for his father's student in Italy during the 80s;

- *Malila The Farewell Flower* (2017) – A philosophical drama about the intimate relationship of two men in rural Thailand;

• *Bros* (2022) – A romantic comedy about two homosexual men; and

• *Red, White & Royal Blue* (2023) – A romantic comedy about the relationship of a son of an American president and a British prince.

Additionally, the data analyzed in this paper include only movies produced in Thailand and the United States. This classification is based on the official language used in the films—Thai or English—as well as the nationality of the producers and distributors who must be Thai or American. The selection criteria do not consider the movies' settings or the nationality of the actors and actresses.

Upon data collection, visual analysis was conducted within the theoretical framework of the Grammar of Visual Design put forward by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021). Incorporating social semiotics (van Leeuwen, 2005) and Halliday's functional grammar, the Grammar of Visual Design posits that images are not created arbitrarily but are shaped by socio-cultural influences. It highlights three metafunctions: (1) the "ideational" metafunction (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 17), which represents the visual self; (2) the "interpersonal" metafunction (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 17), which represents visual interaction with viewers; and (3) the "textual" metafunction (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 17–18), which represents coherence between an image and its broader context.

This paper pursues the visual analysis of the Thai and Hollywood movie posters on the five-fold typology of representations propounded in the Grammar of Visual Design. The first one concerns the "narrative representation" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 44–75), which accounts for the description of the world in which visual participants or people in an image communicate with one another. The second is called the "conceptual representation" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 76–112) as it deals with how the visual participants look or appear. The third type refers to the "interactional representation" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 113–148), which explains how the viewers and the visual participants are connected and engaged. The fourth one is termed the "compositional representation" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 179–223), as it deals with how a picture's visual elements are arranged and organized in a textual form. Finally, the fifth type, "modality" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 149–178), concerns how natural and realistic a picture appears.

Based on the data analysis, Section 4 will discuss the representation of homosexual men's identity in Thai and Hollywood movie posters, as well as the idealization and ideologization of this identity in detail.

3. Data analysis

A pilot study on the collected data resulted in the pairing of Thai and Hollywood movie posters *vis-à-vis* visual representations, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Analysis of the Thai and Hollywood movie posters in terms of visual representations

Title of Movie Poster	Type of Visual Representation
Red, White & Royal Blue	Narrative Representation
The Love of Siam	
The Imitation Game	Conceptual Representation
Malila The Farewell Flower	
Bros	Interactional Representation
Bangkok Love Story	
Call me by your Name	Compositional Representation
Fathers	

Following the theoretical framework outlined earlier, the data analysis is categorized into 5 types of visual representations according to the Grammar of Visual Design (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). They are discussed in the subsections below:

3.1 Narrative representation

Of all the movie posters under analysis in this paper, the ones for *Red, White & Royal Blue* and *The Love of Siam* feature prominently the narrative representation.

Figure 1: Movie poster for *Red, White & Royal Blue*

The two actors in the movie poster for *Red, White & Royal Blue*, as shown in Figure 1, are also considered visual participants. They create a "bidirectional reaction" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 72) by looking at each other, forming an interactive eyeline. Besides the eyeline, the bidirectional reaction is further emphasized as both visual participants cross one of their legs over the other's.

The movie poster for *The Love of Siam*, as shown in Figure 2, highlights a somewhat different narrative representation from the one for *Red, White & Royal Blue* in terms of action-reaction realization.
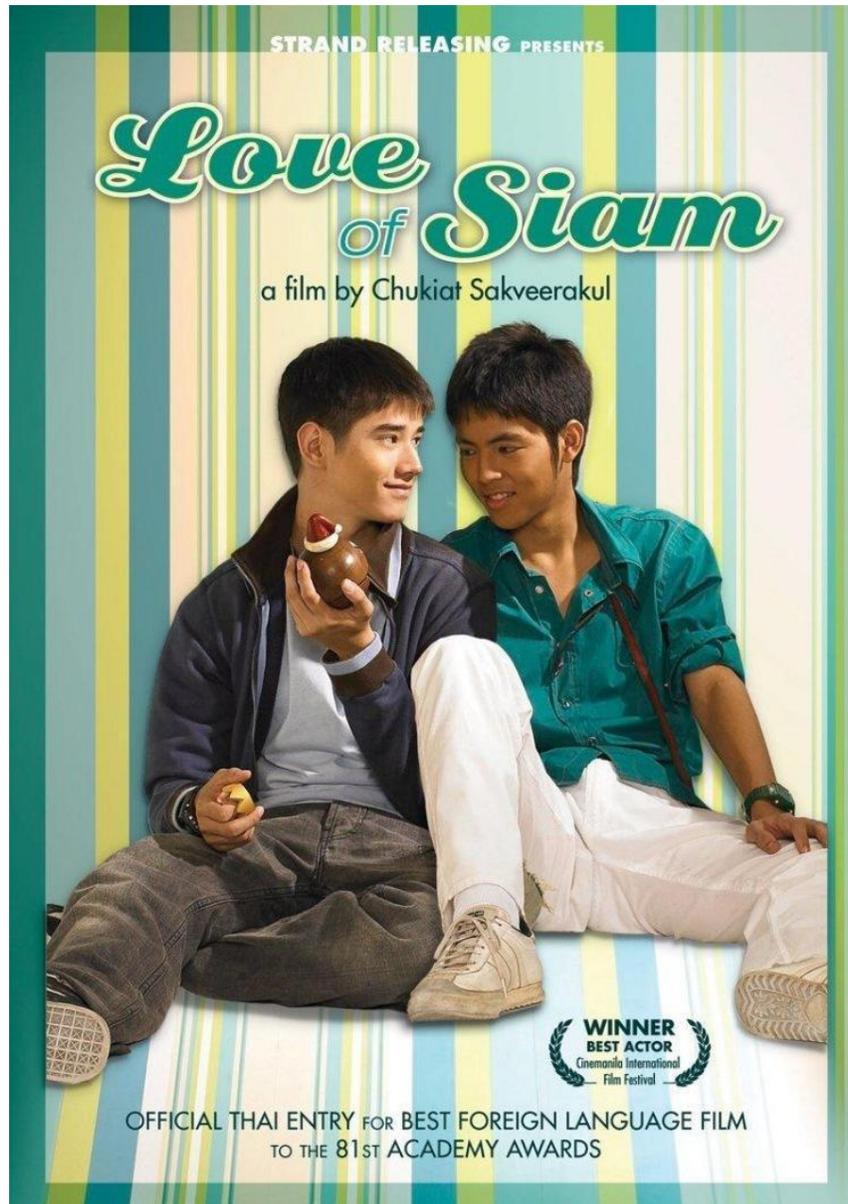

Figure 2: Movie poster for *The Love of Siam*

Unlike the two actors in the *Red, White & Royal Blue* poster, those in the *The Love of Siam* poster create a different type of action-reaction dynamic: the "unidirectional transactional reaction" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 72). Here, the actor on the left is the only one gazing at the one on the right. In contrast, the actor on the right does not return the gaze but

instead looks at a small wooden doll held by the other. This unidirectional transactional reaction emerges from their eyeline vector, as neither of them engages in direct interaction. Instead, they are considered "reacters" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 72) who, despite sitting close to each other, focus on different objects presented in the poster.

3.2 Conceptual representation

The movie posters of *Malila The Farewell Flower* and *The Imitation Game* aptly exemplify the conceptual representation, despite their different countries of origin.

The large, meticulously decorated Bai Sri, made of folded banana leaves layered together and topped with jasmine flowers, as shown in Figure 3, is not just an item used in traditional Thai spiritual and blessing ceremonies. Rather, it plays a role as significant as the two male actors in the poster, symbolizing their identity, whether obvious or subtle.

According to the Grammar of Visual Design, the Bai Sri in the movie poster is identifiable as symbolic, not only because of its central position in the poster but also due to its meaning as "coming from within" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 105). Its shape resembles a phallic form. Besides constituting a meticulous artistic form of traditional Thai culture, this shape symbolizes both physical masculinity and homosexual desire shared by the two actors since they are seen admiring the Bai Sri, the symbol of male sexual organ (Wilailack, 2018; Yodhong, 2018) which, in terms of heterosexuality, is supposed to attract people of the opposite sex. As a result, the Bai Sri in this movie poster plays a key role in both the film's storytelling and the two male characters' personal space and identity. It implicitly conveys the unspoken love they secretly cherish and share.

Figure 3: Movie poster for *Malila: The Farewell Flower*

The identity of homosexual men can also be represented through their symbolic attribution. The visual representation in the poster for *The Imitation Game* (Figure 4) resembles the one discussed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), specifically the "disguised symbolic attributive" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 104–105). In this poster, actor Benedict Cumberbatch is positioned in front of a machine that, according to the film, was invented to decode Nazi messages during World War II. At first glance, these two visual participants may appear to be

unrelated. However, a visual analysis of the disguised symbolic attributive reveals their connection.

Figure 4: Movie poster for *The Imitation Game*

The machine behind the actor serves as a symbolic attribute, imparting implicit meaning and identity to him—or, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) describe, "the carrier" (102). This meaning, derived specifically from the film, conveys incredible speed and intelligence, reflecting the machine's physical efficiency. However, beneath its precision lies the emotional depth and secrecy of its inventor. The audience will come to understand that the film's main character does not perceive the machine as merely inanimate; he names it Christopher after a man he secretly loved in his youth. Similar to the Bai Sri in the poster for Malila: The Farewell Flower, the image of the machine represents the personal connection with the actor in the poster.

In addition, viewers of *The Imitation Game* will recognize that, despite its intelligence and speed, the machine must operate in complete secrecy during wartime. The secret operation of the machine – the symbolic attribute -- parallels the hidden identity of the protagonist – the carrier --, who is not heterosexual. In a society where such an identity is deemed unacceptable by some, it must remain unspoken.

3.3 Interactional representation

The movie posters of *Bangkok Love Story* and *Bros* in Figures 5 and 6 below feature salient interactional representations between the visual participants in the posters and the audience. Nonetheless, these representations are rather different.
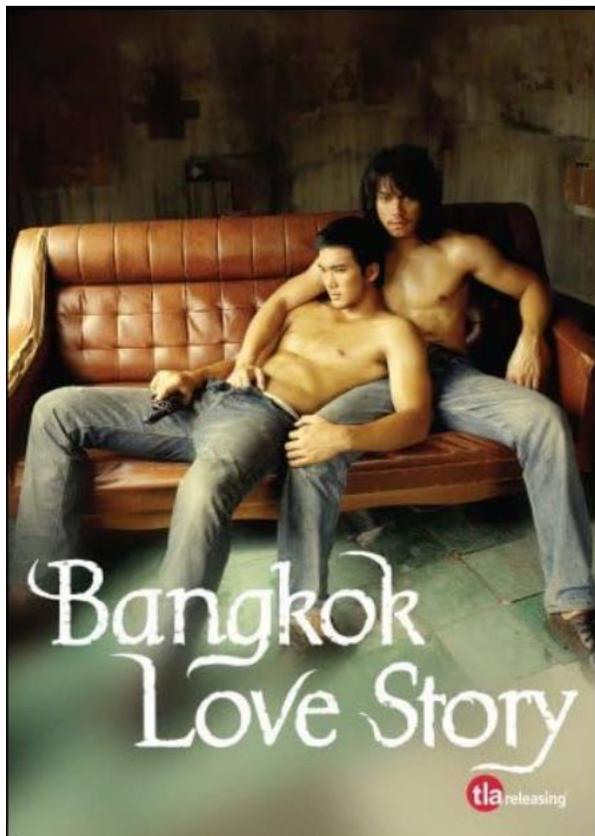

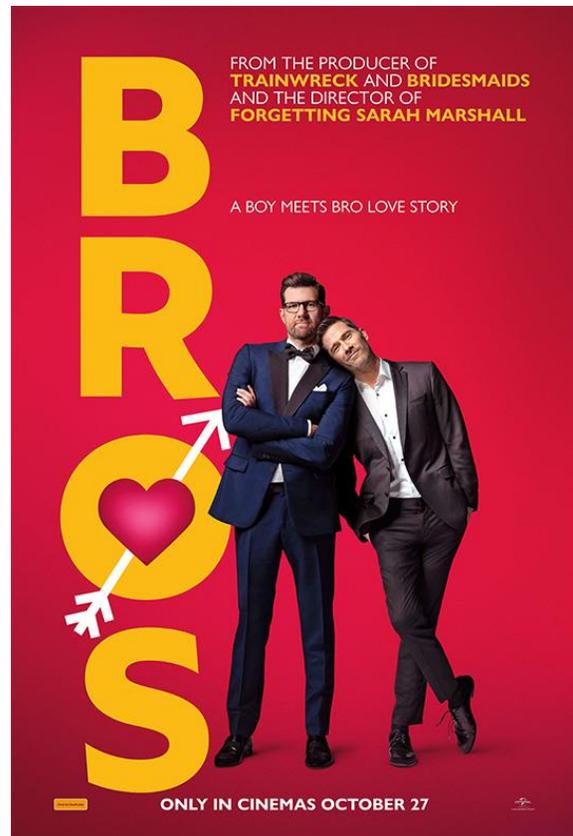Figure 5: Movie poster for *Bangkok Love Story*

Figure 6: Movie poster for *Bros*

The two male actors in the poster for *Bangkok Love Story* differ in terms of their visual interaction. Regarding distance and angle, the image employs a long shot and an eye-level angle, creating a sense of "public distance" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 124) and establishing equality between the viewers and the visual participants. However, these visual

techniques also imply that the actors look like strangers despite sharing an equal social status with the audience. Additionally, the actor on the left is positioned with an "oblique angle" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 144). Although he is captured and positioned on the same frontal plane as the actor on the right, he does not look directly at the viewers. Instead, he leans in a half-sitting, half-lying position with his body tilted. In contrast, the actor on the right is shown from a "frontal angle" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 144), as he not only looks directly at the viewers but also sits up straight, facing them. These angles differentiate their levels of social involvement. The oblique angle makes the actor on the left appear more socially distant and detached compared to the one on the right. This sense of involvement is further emphasized by their differing gazes. The actor on the left does not make direct eye contact with the audience, whereas the one on the right does. These contrasting gazes correspond to what Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) define as an "offer" (143) for the former and a "demand" (143) for the latter. The actor with the offer gaze becomes a passive subject of impersonal observation, whereas the one with the demand gaze actively seeks the viewer's attention.

Less sophisticated in terms of the interactional representation is the movie poster for *Bros*. The two leading actors are presented with a direct demand gaze. Although the image is shot from an eye-level point-of-view, it maintains a sense of public distance, similar to the poster for *Bangkok Love Story*. Additionally, both actors are captured from a frontal angle. These visual techniques convey an equal social status as well as a sense of invitation and engagement between the actors and the audience. Despite their physical distance, the actors appear to be socially involved with the viewers.

3.4 Compositional representation

The posters for *Call me by your Name* and *Fathers* in Figures 7 and 8 are both similar in terms of visual composition, particularly the "real-and-ideal values" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 190–198) as well as the "center versus the periphery" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, pp. 198–204).

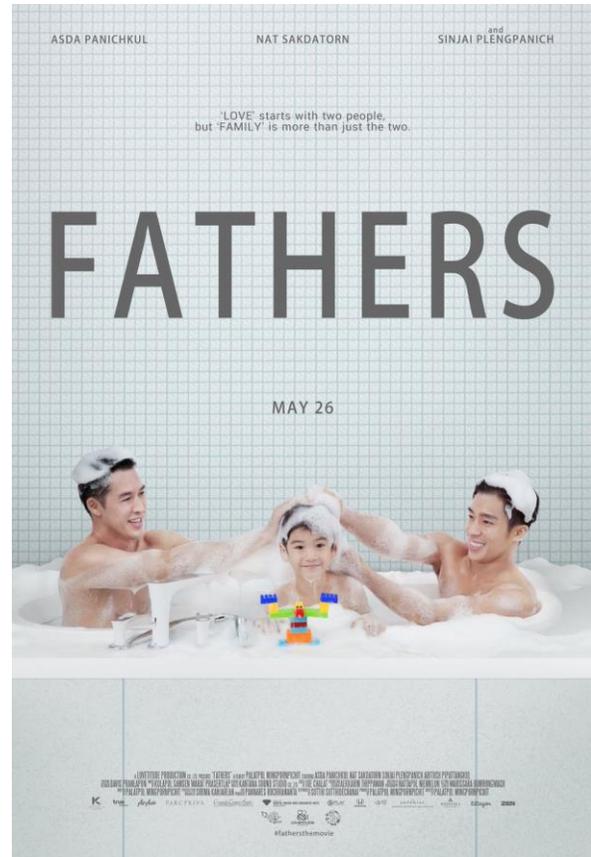Figure 7: Movie poster for *Call me by your Name*

Figure 8: Movie poster for *Fathers*

The two movie posters depict the actors positioned in the lower section, while the upper section contains textual information about the films, including the title, tagline, and the names of the director and actors. However, when this textual information is disregarded, a visual similarity emerges between the two posters. In *Call Me by Your Name*, the space above the actors resembles a bright blue sky, whereas in *Fathers*, it features a tiled bathroom wall. This composition symbolizes a dichotomy between the abstract—the ideal—and the concrete—the reality—within the visual elements of the posters. In other words, the sky above the actors in *Call Me by Your Name* and the tiled wall in *Fathers* signify "the beyond" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 180) above the visual participants, while the actors' position represents the tangible, real world where people live.

Furthermore, the visual composition of the two movie posters highlights the contrast between the center and the periphery. In *the Call Me by Your Name* poster, the two actors lean their heads against each other, hence forming a heart shape in the center. Similarly, the *Fathers* poster positions the boy centrally, with two actors on either side shampooing his head. According to

Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), the central part of an image is significant because it conveys the core message the image intends to highlight and communicate. This compositional approach suggests an idealized relationship between the visual participants and emphasizes their Platonic love for each other and their family members.

3.5 Modality

The visual modality markers: chromatic saturation, differentiation, modulation, contextualization, detail, depth, illumination and brightness (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021) are responsible for manipulating the naturalness of the portrayed visual participants.

The chromatic saturation, differentiation, and modulation in the movie posters utilize a balanced color palette. In other words, the posters' coloring is neither overly intense nor absent, attesting to the images' naturalistic posture. The contextualization in the movie posters is also effective, as viewers can easily identify and understand the setting of the visual elements.

Additionally, the movie posters exhibit a moderate level of detail, depth, illumination, and brightness. Besides reinforcing the naturalistic quality of the visual elements, these markers also give a hint about the movie's genre. They suggest that both the visual participants and their surroundings are realistic rather than exaggerated.

4. Discussion

4.1 The representation of homosexual men's identity in the movie posters

The results from the analyses in 3 parallel the arguments made by Naksing and Taifapul (2013), as discussed earlier in Section 1.1, concerning the identity of homosexual men. They suggest that the Thai and Hollywood movie posters present shared cultural values and attitudes on this aspect of personal identity, despite differences in visual representation. Those values and attitudes shared in the movie posters, vis-à-vis Naksing and Taifapul (2013)'s arguments, will be discussed in this section.

Regarding defeminization, the visual representations in the Thai and Hollywood movie posters already analyzed clearly highlight this quality. The modality in these posters suggests that all of the visual participants are real and natural—that is, they appear as male as their identities at

birth. Moreover, the interactions they engage in, as well as their physical appearances, resemble those of heterosexual males. These elements contribute to the construction of homosexual male identity by suggesting that homosexual men are not different from heterosexual men. The visual participants' interactions depicted in the movie posters for *Red, White & Royal Blue* and *The Love of Siam*, along with the physical appearance of the actors in *Bangkok Love Story* and *Fathers*, exemplify this argument.

Because movie posters are a printed medium and not moving images, viewers cannot easily distinguish the shared identity of the visual participants. However, their actions and behaviors are visually presented with implications that invite audience interpretation. The interactions of the actors in the movie posters for *Red, White & Royal Blue*, *The Love of Siam*, *Bangkok Love Story*, and *Bros*, for instance, suggest that homosexual men are defined solely by their sexual orientation, since their behaviors are as diverse as those of normative males (Naksing and Taifapul, 2013).

In addition, the movie posters for *Red, White & Royal Blue*, *The Love of Siam*, *Bangkok Love Story*, *Bros*, *Call Me by Your Name*, and *Fathers* effectively portray non-promiscuous relationships—another aspect of homosexual male identity construction highlighted by Naksing and Taifapul (2013). This quality is implied through the earlier analyses on the interactions among the visual participants, their engagement with the audience, and the overall compositional design. Collectively, these representations counter the social stigma that homosexual men are typically unfaithful to their partners. Instead, they emphasize that homosexual men value long-lasting love and monogamous relationships.

The conceptual representation in the movie posters for *Malila The Farewell Flower* and *The Imitation Game* compellingly suggests that homosexual male identity cannot be determined based on binary oppositions such as stereotypical masculinity and femininity. In both posters, the actors appear as normative males, making it difficult to clearly and definitively judge who is sexually active or passive. This ambiguity is even more pronounced in the poster for *The Imitation Game*, which features only one visual participant and no counterpart. What can be confidently identified, however, is the gender identity of the visual participants, as revealed through the earlier conceptual representation analysis. Therefore, as Naksing and Taifapul (2013) reiterate, homosexual male identity is vague, unidentifiable, and contextually fluid.

Finally, the struggle for self-acceptance in the face of gender nonconformity is another important issue worth discussing. The conceptual representation in the movie poster for *The Imitation Game*, for instance, implies how brilliant the visual participant is in comparison to the machine behind him. However, viewers who have seen the film may realize that he is homosexual and must conceal his sexual identity due to its perceived social unacceptability. Additionally, the social involvement created by the demanding gaze and public distance of the visual participants in the movie posters for *Bangkok Love Story* and *Bros* draws not only the viewers' attention but also invites broader social awareness. As the earlier analysis of these two posters suggests, the use of public distance renders the visual participants as strangers to the audience, even though they are depicted at eye level with a direct gaze that equalizes their social status with the audience. These visual representations are compelling in their suggestion of the challenges faced by homosexual individuals under the pressure of social norms and expectations.

4.2 The relation between identity representation and the ideology of advertising in the movie posters

Another equally important point of discussion concerns how the Thai and Hollywood movie posters, as advertising texts, idealize and ideologize homosexuality. The visual representations, discussed in the earlier section, can be understood via the meaning transfer technique (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985), as they connect the qualities of the actors to the underlying themes of the films as visual discourse. These representations not only suggest the plot and genre of each film but also convey meanings about the gender identity of the visual participants. The actors' bodily gestures, the way they look at each other, how they are visually positioned, and their interaction with the viewer all emphasize homosexuality—an identity that the posters commodify as an idealized portrayal.

It is also interesting to note that the meaning transfer accomplished through visual representations points to advertising ideological concepts such as "behavioral normalcy" and "problem reduction" (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985, pp. 141, 143). Similar to other advertising texts, the movie posters analyzed in this study—despite foregrounding homosexuality—strive to depict it as a gender alternative that encounters challenges comparable to those faced by people of other gender identities. In other words, the posters portray homosexual men as ordinary individuals who confront and manage conflicts other than their sexual orientation in ways similar to their heterosexual counterparts. By doing so, the posters ideologize homosexual

males by equalizing their social roles and behaviors with those of heterosexual men. This technique is noteworthy because movie posters serve as marketing tools. The more effectively meaning transfer is employed, the more compelling the posters become in presenting, promoting, and selling the film to audiences—whether heterosexual or homosexual.

Finally, by ideologizing homosexual men, the movie posters suggest the emergence of an alternative form of masculinity. They portray a new image of men—gentler, more emotionally sensitive, and sexually passive—despite retaining physical strength. This representation offers an alternative lens through which audiences enjoy films, as a different gendered expression of masculinity is produced and re-produced. It also signals a shift in the traditional dynamics of desire: female characters are no longer the sole objects of the gaze, as male figures, too, are idealized and sexualized. The posters for *Bangkok Love Story* and *Fathers*, in particular, exemplify this shift. While it may not be possible to definitively claim that conceptions of masculinity in Eastern and Western cinema have fundamentally changed, the ways in which male characters are idealized and ideologized in these posters point to a transitional phase in the portrayal of modern masculinity.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the visual fabric of Thai and Hollywood movie posters to shed light not only on the construction of homosexual men's gender identity but also on its idealization and ideologization within these advertising texts. The results and discussion, as previously presented, indicate that homosexual men's self, love, and relationships are perceived similarly to their heterosexual counterparts', despite differences in sexual orientation. Attempting to highlight this normalcy, advertisers designing these movie posters sought to represent it visually—whether consciously or not—for artistic purposes and to convey information about both the films and gender identity. More importantly, the analysis in this paper suggests that modern masculinity is both conflicted and challenged in Eastern and Western societies. Yet, this phenomenon is not inherently negative; rather, it highlights the fluid nature of gender identity development.

Although the data and analysis presented in this paper are sufficient for a linguistic study, particularly in terms of social semiotics and gender identity, further research on this topic is recommended. For instance, additional data could be collected and analyzed to reinforce

quantitatively the validity of the findings. Alternatively, researchers may choose to focus solely on one visual representation analysis, leading to more specific insights. Additionally, a diachronic analysis of movie posters could help trace how long masculinity has been challenged and evolved in both Eastern and Western societies.

Acknowledgements

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