Heteronormative Elements in Lesbian and Gay Fan Fiction of the Manga and Anime Fandom

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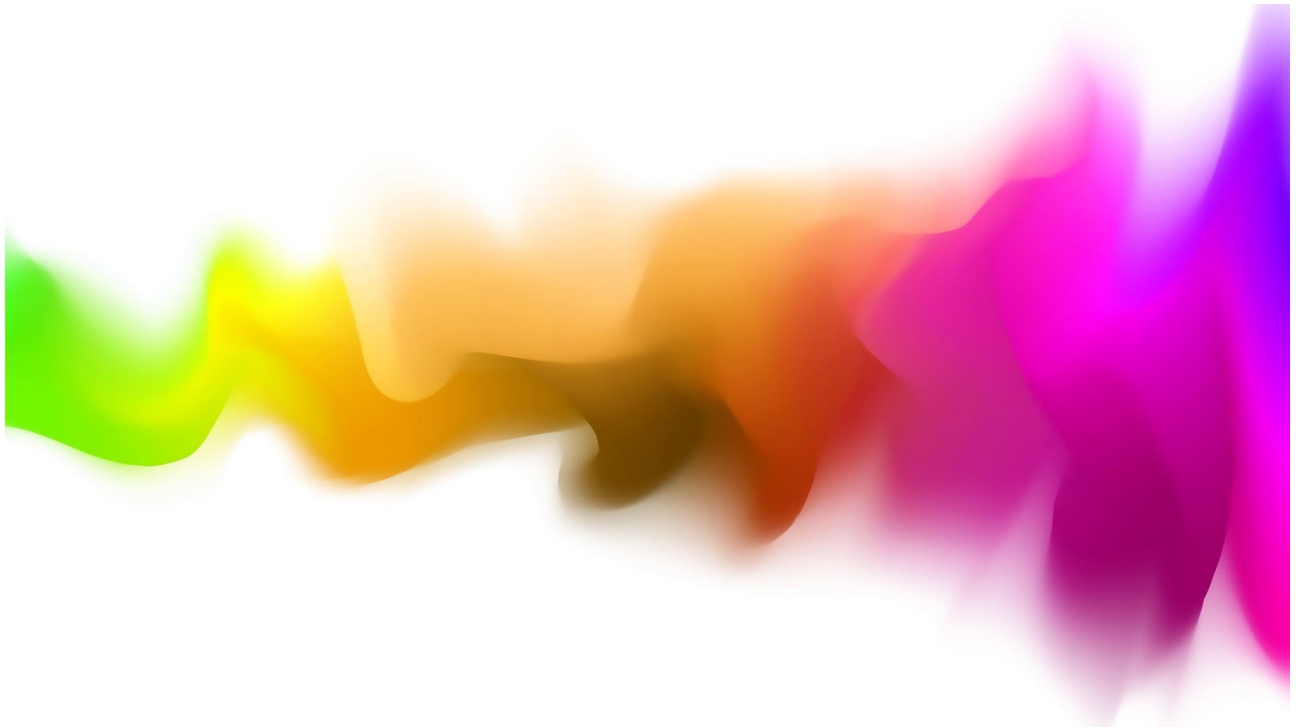
A comparative qualitative study of lesbian and gay fan fiction from Japanese manga with a focus on heteronormative narrative elements

Structure



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Fan Fiction as a Research Subject

Fan Fiction as a Research Subject

- Various research areas:
  - Individual fandoms
  - Their stories
  - The interactions between fans through comments
- Can provide insights into:
  - Topics fans engage with and how they process certain narratives
  - Insights about individual fandoms and their protagonists are possible
  - Possibility to explore fan culture and discover which media have influenced fans.
- However:
  - Only text-level analysis is possible
  - Statements about how fans think about fan fiction can only be partially captured through comments
  - Direct surveys are more productive for such questions.

To what extent are there heteronormative narratives related to Japanese media in German fan products and how do they manifest themselves?

Research question of the master's thesis

Theoretical Section

Theoretical Section: Gender Studies

- Heteronormativity = a construct in which there are only two genders (male and female) and only one type of romantic/sexual relationship (heterosexual).
- Gender is determined at birth.
- Affects various areas of life.
- Heteronormativity is supported by social power structures and institutions#
- Consequences:
  - Exclusion
  - Discrimination
  - Disadvantage
  - And so on

Theoretical Section: Fan Studies

- Fan fiction = stories written by fans about a fan product
- Slash fiction = Western form of homoerotic or homoromantic fan production
  - Subgenre of fan fiction
  - In slash fiction, two characters are placed in an erotic and/or romantic relationship (usually homosexual)
  - MaleSlash = gay relationships
  - FemSlash = lesbian relationships
- Heteronormative norms can be questioned and reinforced
- Similar to Japanese-influenced doujinshi
  - German fans in the tension between slash fiction and doujinshi

Theoretical Section: Manga/Anime

- Shōnen ai, Yaoi, or Boys Love (BL for short) = manga/anime with gay main characters
- Characteristics:
  - Stories between aesthetically beautiful men
  - True love only with a man
  - Phase of denial of homosexuality
  - Taboo topics (e.g., rape as an expression of love, BDSM, prohibition of homosexuality)
  - Roles and tasks reminiscent of a binary division between men and women
  - Seme (more stereotypical male characteristics) and uke (more stereotypical female characteristics)

Theoretical Section: Manga/Anime

- Yuri = manga/anime with lesbian main characters
- Characteristics:
  - More serious in tone
  - More conflicts with society,
  - Roles: Crimson Rose (similar to seme) and Candy Girl (similar to uke)

Theoretical Section: Manga/Anime

- Shōnen = stories for boys and young male adults
  - More action-oriented
  - Example: Naruto, One Piece, Dragon Ball

- Shōjo = stories for girls and young female adults
  - More romance-oriented
  - Example: Sailor Moon, Hana Yori Dango, The Rose of Versailles

Method

Method

- Qualitative content analysis
- Fan Fiction platform: "Fanfiktion.de"
- One Shōnen fandom and one Shōjo fandom -> 40 fan fiction were analyzed
- Fandom:
  - Shōjo: Sailor Moon (3,230 fan fiction works)
  - Shōnen: Naruto (27,260 fan fiction works)
- Selection criteria:
  - Gay main characters
  - Most popular stories
  - Downloadable and citable

Basic data of the analysis material

	Naruto-Fandom		Sailor-Moon-Fandom	
	MaleSlash	FemSlash	MaleSlash	FemSlash
Kapitelanzahl (Durchschnitt)	22,5	2,1	43,8	1,1
Wortanzahl (Durchschnitt)	117.307	4.097	101.866	2.677
Empfehlungen (Gesamtanzahl)	1.182	15	280	60
Reviews (Gesamtanzahl)	2.774	123	1.716	58
Reviews (analysiert)	529	103	277	58
Veröffentlichungsspanne	2012–2021	2007–2022	2014–2018	2015–2019

Created from analysis material

Method

- More than three chapters -> sampling of the chapters
- Analysis program: "Qualcoder"
- Inductive and deductive category creation
  - A total of 10 main categories and 41 subcategories

Excerpt from the Analysis

Excerpt from the Analysis: Portrayal of Love

„[...] mich geborgen zu fühlen, egal, wo ich war, denn sie wurde meine Heimat, ist es noch heute und jede Sekunde an ihrer Seite ist die Erfüllung all dessen, was ich so lange schmerzlich ersehnt habe.“

(Fan Fiction 22)

- Category describes romantic depictions of love
- Based on heteronormative romantic narratives
  - Fulfillment in love (114 mentions)
  - Soul mate (95 mentions)
  - The partner is portrayed as an ideal (243 mentions)

-> This alone is not heteronormative, but in conjunction with other categories, it becomes so.

- Fans may be familiar with these narratives from their own media experience.

Excerpt from the Analysis: Heteronormativity in Relationships

„Ein weltbekannter und -berühmter Mann im Musikgeschäft, während ich mit einem Handicap namens Blindheit geschlagen war.“

(Fan Fiction 13)

- Clear focus in the subcategories
- Exclusively monogamous relationships almost exclusively homosexual relationships
- clear role distribution: (124 mentions)
  - Based on seme and uke (especially MaleSlash)
  - Based on Crimson Rose and Candy Girl (especially FemSlash)

-> Assumption: Fans have consumed media that has reflected this distribution

Excerpt from the Analysis: fan comments

„da ist wirklich jemand EXTREM Eifersüchtig und das finde ich Süß“

(Comment on Fan Fiction 13)

- Little to no mention of heteronormativity
- Authors are praised
- Certain narratives are advocated (e.g., dominant behavior)
- **However:** based on the comments, it is not possible to determine whether fans differentiate between real gay lives and fan fiction. There was only one quote that suggested a distinction.

Excerpt from the Analysis: Other interesting findings

- Queer couples are portrayed more negatively
- Characters deny their own queerness
- Characters are framed as heterosexual and become homosexual only for the sake of love

Answer Research Question

Research Question

- Heteronormative narratives can be found in the fan fiction analyzed and manifest themselves in a variety of ways
- In particular:
  - Depiction of romantic love
  - Importance of monogamous love
  - Heteronormative role models and stereotypes (partially borrowed from BL)
  - Address the power relations between men and women
  - Reproduce heteronormative patterns of oppression

Challenges and Problems

Challenges and Problems: selection of the material

- Significant imbalance between MaleSlash fan fiction and FemSlash fan fiction (in terms of the number of chapters and thus the length of the stories)
- MaleSlash stories are, on average, much longer
  - More analysis material
- FemSlash fan fiction are only one-shots
- Consequences for the analysis:
  - Categories must be put into perspective
  - FemSlash genre in the Sailor Moon fandom: only two female authors among the selected stories

Challenges and Problems: Sampling

- MaleSlash fan fiction of the Sailor Moon fandom:
- The term "MaleSlash" was used incorrectly

-> Therefore: no stories with gay characters were included in the analysis, but (with one exception) only fan fiction with heterosexual characters

- It cannot be definitively determined why the fans misused the term MaleSlash despite the glossary entry on the website.

Conclusion

Conclusion

- Heteronormative narratives can be identified among German fans
- Narratives appear to be borrowed from slash fiction or BL
- Whether the fans are conveying their own worldview or not cannot be determined
- Possible further research:
  - Make fans a distinction between heteronormative representations in fan products and real queer life?
  - International comparison within the same fandoms.
  - Reasons for the misuse of the term "MaleSlash"

Selection of literature

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Thanks for the attention!