How Do Queer Characters Live in German-Language Fan Fiction?

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Structure

- Theoretical overview
- Methodology
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Theoretical Overview

Theoretical Overview - Heteronormativity

- Heteronormativity = a construct in which there are only two genders (male and female) and only one type of romantic relationship (heterosexual).
- Gender is determined at birth.
- Affects various areas of life.
- Heteronormativity is supported by social power structures and institutions

Theoretical Overview – Fan Fiction and Slash Fiction

- Fan fiction = creative work creative work produced by fans
  - Based on a particular source text or media
  - Written stories, which can deviate from or expanding upon the media canon.
- Slash fiction = specific fan fiction
  - Focuses on romantic relationships between characters
  - Often same-sex relationships

Theoretical Overview – Manga and 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
- Boy's Love (BL) = gay main characters
- Yuri = lesbian main characters
- BL and Yuri have both developed its own conventions and stylistic features.

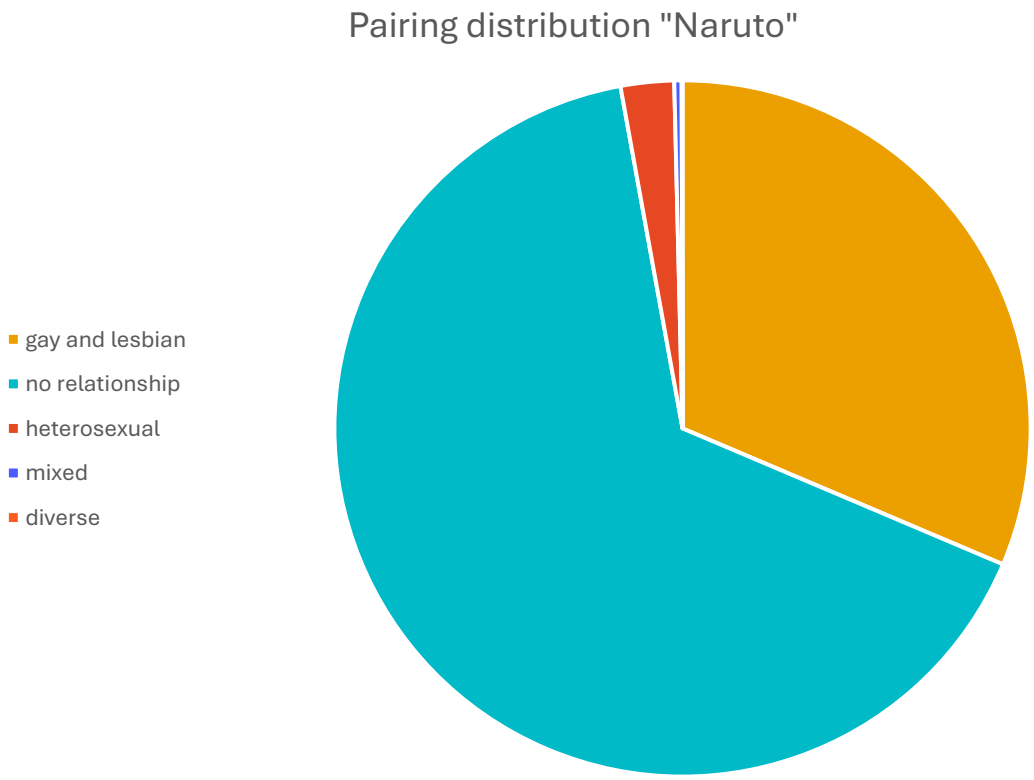
Methodology

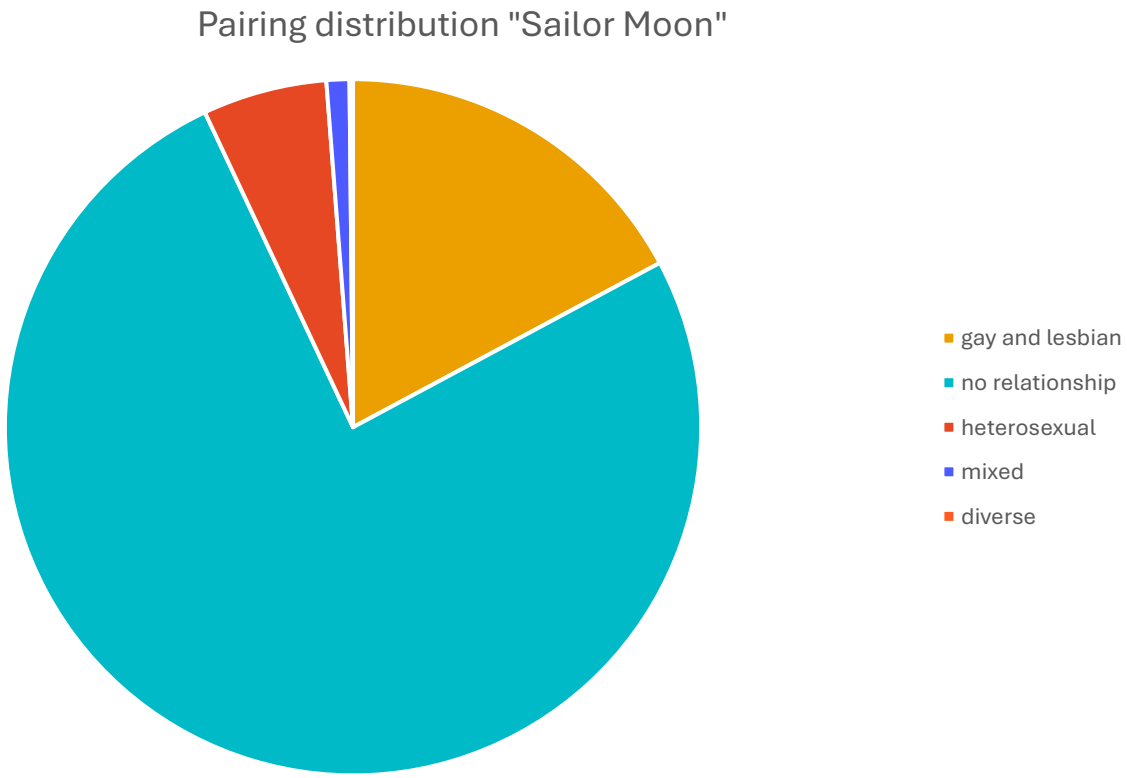
Theoretical Overview – Methodology

- Focus on: German-language fan fiction derived from anime and manga.
  - Platform: Fanfiktion.de
  - largest German-language platform for fan fiction
  - allows users to comment on stories
  - exclusively in German

Theoretical Overview – Methodology

- Analyzed: the most popular Shōnen Fandom and the most popular Shōjo Fandom
- Shōnen -> “Naruto” with over **27,246** published fan fiction
- Shōjo -> “Sailor Moon” with over **3,217** fan fiction





Created from analysis material

Theoretical Overview – Methodology

- Analysis material restrictions for each fandom:
  - 10 most popular fan fictions featuring lesbian protagonists
  - 10 most popular fan fictions featuring gay protagonists
  - Fan fiction needs to be completed, downloadable, and citable
- In the end: a total of 40 stories

Basic data of the analysis material

	NARUTO-FANDOM		SAILOR-MOON-FANDOM	
	MaleSlash	FemSlash	MaleSlash	FemSlash
Number of chapters (average)	22,5	2,1	43,8	1,1
Number of words (average)	117.307	4.097	101.866	2.677
Recommendations (total number)	1.182	15	280	60
Reviews (total number)	2.774	123	1.716	58
Reviews (analyzed)	529	103	277	58
Publication range	2012–2021	2007–2022	2014–2018	2015–2019

Created from analysis material

Theoretical Overview – Methodology

- Method: qualitative content
- Work process:
    1. Formulating initial categories
    2. Defining these categories
    3. Applying the categories to the text material
    4. Identifying new themes or phenomena
    5. Developing new categories
    6. Re-analyzing the texts
- Dynamic and iterative process
- 10 main categories and 41 subcategories

Findings from the Analysis

Findings from the Analysis - Queerness and Behavior

Original:

„Naruto redete sich sogar so stark ein, er sei hetero […].“

Translation:

"Naruto even convinced himself he was straight […]."

(Fan-Fiction 18)

- Central aspect: How respond characters to their own queerness?
- Findings from the example:
  - The character is in denial about being queer
  - Character does not reflect on queerness
  - Implies character lives in a world where open reflection on one’s own sexuality is not possible or permissible.
  - Character experience internal conflict regarding their queerness.
- Highest number of negative portrayals (20 instances) appears in the Naruto fandom with male same-sex pairings

Findings from the Analysis – Queer Couples and Persons

Original:

„Ich wusste von Gaara, dass er bi war. Er hatte es mir recht früh erzählt und ich hatte damit auch keinerlei Probleme. Ich selbst war schwul und ich war glücklich damit. Ende.“

Translation:

"I knew from Gaara that he was bisexual. He told me pretty early on, and I had no problems with it. I was gay myself, and I was happy with it. The end.“

(Fan-Fiction 13)

Original:

„Aber du weißt, dass Temari das anders sieht? Sie ist ganz offiziell... du weißt schon... homosexuell ist“.

Translation:

"But you know Temari sees it differently? She's officially... you know... gay.“

(Fan fiction 5)

- Central aspect: How does the environment perceive queer people?
- Findings from the example:
  - Both positive and negative portrayals
  - Negative portrayals predominate with 67 mentions
  - Here, too, queer people and couples are portrayed rather negatively

Conclusion

Conclusion

- Complex topic with no singular or clear-cut answer
- Each narrative must be interpreted within its specific context
- Main findings:
  - Queer characters in fan fiction often exist in worlds where they must deny or suppress their queerness
  - Queer characters and couples are portrayed from the outside in both positive and negative ways -> yet, negative representations predominate
  - German-speaking fans may not be writing fan fiction that centers or affirms queer identities
  - Reinforces a heteronormative worldview

Conclusion

- Queer fan fiction is not necessarily queer fiction
- Whether the fans are conveying their own worldview or not cannot be determined
- Further research work can be added

Selection of Literature

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Thanks for the attention!