

Women and Yaoi Fan Creative Work

เพศหญิงและงานสร้างสรรค์แนว Yaoi

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Abstract

Slash and Yaoi are types of creative works with homosexual relationship between male characters. Most of their audiences are female. Using textual analysis, this paper aims to identify the reasons that these female media consumers and female fan creators are attracted to Slash and Yaoi. The first author, as a prior Slash fan creator, also provides part of experiences to describe the themes found in existing fan studies. Five themes, both to confirm and to describe this phenomenon are (1) pleasure of same-sex relationship exposure, (2) homosexual marketing, (3) the erotic fantasy, (4) gender discrimination in primacy text, and (5) the need of equality in romantic relationship. This could be concluded that these female fans temporarily identify with a male character to have erotic interaction with another male one in Slash narrative. A reason that female fans need to imagine themselves as a male character, not a female one, is that lack of mainstream media consists of female characters with a leading role, besides the romance genre. However, the need of gender equality, as the reason of female fans who consume Slash text, might be the belief of fan scholars that could be applied in only some contexts.

Keywords: *Slash, Yaoi, Fan Creation, Gender*

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บทคัดย่อ

แสลชีชและยาโอโย เป็นงานสร้างสรรค์ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับรักร่วมเพศของเพศชาย ซึ่งผู้อ่านและผู้เสพงานชนิดนี้มักเป็นผู้หญิง วัตถุประสงค์ของการเขียนบทความนี้คือ เพื่อค้นหาสาเหตุที่งานชนิดนี้เป็นที่โปรดปรานของผู้หญิงซึ่งเป็นทั้งผู้สร้างสรรค์งานและผู้เสพงาน บทความนี้ใช้การวิเคราะห์ด้วยทฤษฎีโดยรวบรวมแนวคิดที่ได้จากงานวิจัยและงานวิชาการที่เกี่ยวข้องกับแสลชีชและยาโอโย ประกอบกับประสบการณ์ของผู้เขียนที่เคยผลิตงานชนิดนี้ ประเด็นที่ค้นพบสามารถช่วยยืนยันว่าผู้หญิงชื่นชอบงานแสลชีชและยาโอโยอย่างแท้จริง และยังช่วยอธิบายสาเหตุที่พวกเขาชื่นชอบ โดยมีอยู่ 5 ประเด็น คือ (1) สุนทรียภาพในการรับชมงานเกี่ยวกับรักร่วมเพศ (2) การตลาดเกี่ยวกับรักร่วมเพศ (3) การจินตนาการเพื่อฝันเมื่อรับชมงานรักร่วมเพศ (4) การกีดกันเพศหญิงในสื่อ เช่น บทภาพยนตร์ และ (5) ความต้องการรับชมความรักที่มีความเท่าเทียมกันทางเพศ โดยรวมแล้วสามารถอธิบายได้ว่าผู้หญิงที่ชื่นชอบแสลชีชและยาโอโยเหล่านี้จะจินตนาการไปว่าตนเองเป็นตัวละครชายและมีความรักใคร่กับตัวละครชายอีกตัวหนึ่ง แต่เหตุผลที่พวกเขาไม่จินตนาการร่วมกับตัวละครหญิงเพราะในสื่อที่พวกเขาชมมักมีแต่ตัวละครชายที่ได้รับบทบาทนำในเรื่อง ยกเว้นภาพยนตร์แนวโรแมนติก อย่างโรแมนติค อย่างไรก็ตาม ความต้องการความเท่าเทียมกันทางเพศอาจเป็นเหตุผลหนึ่งที่ทำให้ผู้หญิงเหล่านี้ชอบงานแนวแสลชีชและยาโอโย

คำสำคัญ: แสลชีช ยาโอโย ผลงานสร้างสรรค์ของแฟนคลับ เพศ

Introduction

Slash or male/male homoerotic fan work has been generally produced and consumed by female fans. This article primarily aims to identify the major cause that female fans prefer this genre of fan work by cooperating the findings of previous Slash fan studies with description and examples given by the first author, based on the author's experience being a part of Slash fandom.

Fan fiction is the narrative written based on the primary text, which is generally the mainstream entertainment media (Macdonald, 2016). It is somewhat like other kinds of narrative that were retold in different ways. For example, the circumstances in WWI and WWII were used as the core narrative in many films, cartoons, and comics, i.e.,

Wonder Woman⁴ worked as a military nurse during the war time. Biography of important persons was commonly found in Hollywood narratives, for instance, Joan Jett⁵, Alan Turing⁶, Mark Zuckerberg⁷, and Margaret Keane⁸. Similarly for Disney animated fairy tales, more recently, they have bent the original narrative and reinforced it with feminism empowerment theme (Arunrangsiewed & Pasomsat, 2016).

Slash is another way to retell the primary text by filling the romantic relationship into two main male protagonists who in the original text were close friends (Tosenberger, 2008). Some Slash pairings could be developed from conflicts between hero and villain (Arunrangsiewed, 2017). Scholars from various fields come to investigate Slash fan art and fan fiction, including media studies, English literatures, gender

⁴Wonder Woman is the name of comic title and also a female superhero. She is the first female superhero created with the belief that women could work as good as men, or even better than men.

⁵The Runaways is the name of 2010 films telling a part of Joan Jett's and Cherie Currie's biography as the rock stars. The Runaways is also the name of their band which was famous in 1970s.

⁶The Imitation Game is the film about the biography of Alan Turing, who was an English mathematician. During the war in 1939, he joined the team to decrypt the Enigma machine used by Nazi in sending code.

⁷The Social Network is the film regarding the biography of Mark Zuckerberg, who worked on Harvard Connection and founded a social network called Facebook since 2003. Six years after that, he became one of the accidental billionaires.

⁸Big Eyes is the film telling the biography of Margaret Keane. The uniqueness of her artwork was big-eyed children. She had to lie that the creator of her work was her husband, Walter.

studies, feminism and queer, psychology, and also sociology (Hata & Ieshima, 2014). With the unique homosexual relationship in Slash fan creations, these scholars have been interested in this topic, although in fact many other types of fan work are waiting to be more deeply explored (Graffeo, 2014).

Another genre of creations, close to Slash, is Yaoi. Some understood that Yaoi and Slash were the same thing, but with different creating territory, Japan and Western world (Cavcic, 2017). McLelland (2005) distinguished that Slash characters look more masculine and older than Yaoi characters, which seem to be beautiful boys with younger ages. The authors defined Yaoi as the big umbrella that involves all creative narratives and artworks with homosexual relationship between two male characters who are whether the original characters or the borrowed characters from mainstream media. On the other hand, Slash is the creative work that borrows the characters or plot from original texts, which could be films, TV serials, comics, novels, or cartoons. Slash artists often mixed two names of the characters (Islands, 2017), e.g., Snarry (Harry Potter and Severus Snape), JayDick (Jason Todd and Dick Grayson), Thorki (Thor and Loki), Stony (Steve Rogers and Tony Stark), and Clex (Clark Kent and Lex Luthor).

Slash work could be also created based on actual famous people, which is called “RPS,” or real-person Slash (Chen, 2007; Rahmawati, 2017), such as the pairings of male members in J-Rock and K-Pop bands. Slash fans, who created RPS works, are sometimes aware of the leaking of their creative work into the public sphere. They only want to keep the romantic story of their favorite famous people within their RPS fan community (Wang, 2017). In Japanese comics (manga) fandom, female fans who consumed

female manga (fujoshi) also avoid the outsiders to look at their creative work and their fan object (Tanaka & Ishida, 2015). This is similar to nerd cultures, comics and video games fandom, that male fans perform like gatekeepers who filter female nerds out from their community (Robinson, 2014).

In aforementioned paragraphs, Slash fan creation could be read as the secondary text, reproduced from the primary text, whether fictional narrative media or famous people’s news and biography. However, some mainstream media that were retold in Slash fan work were created from historical events, such as Three Kingdoms TV serials⁹, or created from actual persons, such as Octavius and Jedediah (Night at the Museum¹⁰). These mainstream media are already the secondary texts. This implies that the Slash creations based on these works do not only perform as the tertiary text, but it also destroyed the clear cut between mass media, historical text, and transformative work by providing the new meaning to the unchangeable or untouchable historical text (Tian, 2015).

Gender of Slash and Yaoi Fans

Earlier, Jenkins (1992) described Slash fan creators as female fans. Both Slash and Yaoi are created by female and also consumed by female (Cumberland, 2003; Scodari, 2003; Tosenberger, 2008). Most of these creators and audiences are young (Bolt, 2004), and amateur (Kustritz, 2003). Although the storyline of Slash fan fiction is about homosexual relationship of gay men, both creators and audiences are heterosexual women (Ishikawa, 2008; Kustritz, 2003; Lam, 2010; McLelland & Yoo, 2007; McLelland, 2010). However, women who preferred reading Slash fan fiction may consider themselves as tomboy when they were younger

⁹Three Kingdoms, mentioned in the current article, is the 2010 TV series, which was originally written based on the historical novel of China.

¹⁰Night at the Museum is a trilogy telling the story of a night security guard and his friends who are the animated inanimate objects or sculpture which were cursed by an ancient spell.

(Salmon & Symons, 2004). While most Slash fans are female, in 2004, Bolt (2004) noticed that there was a slight increase of male fans, too. Slash, created by female fans, is more likely to be about love and emotion, which is the way fans filled in the missing part of original media by making the characters to have more humanity (Jenkins, 1992). On the other hand, Slash created by male fans, seems to be more violent and focuses into the masculine power and gender hierarchy (Brennan, 2013).

Web 2.0 and social network do not only provide the opportunity for the organization to solve the internal conflict (Liwjaroen, 2016) or for the business to reach its customers (Thaipradit & Treeratanaporn, 2016), but these female fans find them as the places of freedom to communicate to one another in the way they need. Although they do not have the full right on the original text, their authority in Slash online fan community allows them to express feminine world view and erotic need in the way that had never been done in mainstream media, which are ruled by male producers (Hemmann, 2015).

Yaoi work could be more often found in the real world context, such as Comic Market in Japan (Lam, 2010), since it has more originality than fan work. About half of Japanese teens have been exposed to Yaoi work, and its fans are both genders but with bigger portion of female fans (Ui, Fukutomi, & Kamise, 2008). Pagliassotti (2008) also added that in the United States and some Western countries, Slash and Yaoi are favorable by people with queer identities. Although Slash fandom seems to be the safe place for women to express their erotic need, some gay men remade the original text in the form of sexual explicit gay pornography (Brennan, 2013). The current article is limited to the texts about female Slash or Yaoi creators and consumers, whereas future academic work may need to investigate the activities and psychological process of those with other genders, too, since there were lack of the studies about them.

For the outsiders, they believe that female Yaoi fans did not understand the reality of sexual relationship and nature of gay men, and most of them had never had sexual experiences (Hata & Ieshima, 2014). Many of them are attracted to Slash fan work because of its emotional narrative and sexuality (Levi, 2009). Additionally, female Slash creators may see men as their idealized persona or something that they want men to be, which might be opposite from what men actually are or actually look at themselves (Wang, 2017).

Benefit of creating Slash

It is important to note that fan identity salience is the important factor that brings about many levels of fan activities (Taylor, 2015), which finally results in the benefit that an individual fan could earn from the particular activities. In other words, fans with high identity salience could do more frequent and various kinds of fan activities than fans with lower identity salience. Since the number of fan activities engaged by each fan is not the same, they are unequally benefited from being a part of fandom. Fans in the current article are those who either consume or create the texts to contribute to Slash and Yaoi fan community. They are not only the fans who admire the work in mainstream media, but they enjoy reading, watching, and viewing the work created by other fans who shared the same identity as Slash or Yaoi fans. Some of them who have a higher identity salience would create Slash or Yaoi work, too.

Writing fan fiction and making fan art could benefit young adolescents in several ways, including the improvement of academic skills (Bahoric & Swaggerty, 2015), the construction of identity (Black, 2006), and the involvement in a bigger community (Black, 2005). Similarly for creating Slash fan work, Slash fan work allows women to express their erotic thought in safe place, since most young women are shy to write about sexual relationship in their native language, so non-English speakers tend to write Slash

fan fiction in English, which is a way to develop their language skills (Bloem, 2014). Chinese Slash fans could also learn Western culture through making Slash fan works that consist of American fictional characters (Wei, 2014).

Slash fans, similar to other fandoms, feel that their life is fulfilled when they meet other fans with the same taste, whether in online space or convention (Santos, 2014). Although Slash and Yaoi fan activities were looked down by older adults, these activities could offer a ton of benefits, especially if these fans were guided to create work in the right direction (Islands, 2017). In general, fairy tale generally teaches its audiences to hate stepmother and believe that passive princess has to marry to the subjective prince to meet their happily ever after (Arunrangsiewed & Pasomsat, 2016), while in fan fiction, fans add the emotional part, like trauma healing, and also make the happy ending to be only temporary peaceful moment (Baxter, 2014). This could be closer to the real life than the existing text, which reinforces false beliefs to the audiences. Moreover, sometimes many male characters tried to help a female character from dangers, so Slash fans change the plot by creating love interest between male ones (Zheng, 2016). This would help suggest the producers of mainstream media to offer more active roles to female characters.

The purpose of this article is to understand the actual reason that female fans appreciate Slash fan work. The following section would discuss the probability that might cause these female fans to find this genre attractive to them.

Why do women like Slash?

It would be important to understand the reasons why female fans enjoy making creative work, to see if it is about their psychological force, worldview, or other factors. Doujinshi is a kind of comic book

created by amateur artists, and it could be either fan work or original work. Slash and Yaoi work are very well-known and commonly found in doujinshi. Fan artists who produce doujinshi have to have a very high effort to complete the whole book with many drawings (Arunrangsiewed & Beck, 2016). The effort and motivation to complete a doujinshi are about self-expression and self-serving (Cavcic, 2017). Tanaka and Ishida (2015) found that enjoyment of female manga fan creators (Fujoshi artists) was established from other related fan works and challenges to develop the work with their own skills and add-on idea. The following part of this article was proposed by using textual analysis to find out the reasons that female fans enjoy making and consuming Slash and Yaoi fan work. Five themes could be found from early studies, including the pleasure of looking at same-sex relationship, the marketing purpose, the erotic fantasy, the inappropriate role of female characters in original media, and the need of equality in romantic relationship.

Pleasure of same-sex relationship exposure

Both Slash and Yaoi fans agree that the homosexual relationship in fan work is “hot” (Bustos, 2013). For doujinshi creators, they prefer making Yaoi doujinshi because they found male/male relationship cute and sexy, and this genre of creation could be easily sold out, since many people like it (Joyce, 2016). Comparatively, some emo girl, as a part of emo sub-culture, asked her boyfriend to kiss another emo boy, since she felt that a boy kissed another boy was hot, too (Schmitt, 2011). In the film, *Suicide Room* which was directed by Komasa¹¹ (2011), the main male character kissed another male one, and in its storyline, their friends shot the video and posted it online; then, it became the hottest video with a ton of audiences. This film could be the evidence that the mainstream media producer also thinks that male/male kissing is hot.

¹¹*Suicide Room* is a Polish film released in 2011. It tells the story of a male teenage student who became engaging in a virtual world social network. Later, he developed self-harm and deviant behavior.

Some women do not like to watch heterosexual porn, because they feel that women in media are objectified and unhappy. To view Slash and Yaoi creation could fulfill their erotic need without disturbing by gender inequality (Neville, 2015). Moreover, “Penis” is the main part that causes sexual pleasure in men, but women do not have it, so they could identify with a male character who has sexual relationship with another man to fill in the missing part of pleasure (Madill, 2016). These evidences could explain the reason that women choose to identify with male Slash characters, that (1) they avoid sexual inequality and (2) imagine that they have an active sexual organ.

However, this does not help make it clear regarding some male audiences who prefer lesbian pornography better than heterosexual one. Male pornography audiences might not watch lesbian pornography due to of the avoidance of sexual inequality. Male audiences have already had an active sexual organ, too. Therefore, they do not need to temporarily imagine of having it while consume pornographic media.

In conclusion, the reasons given in this part of paper could help explain only how female audiences prefer consuming Slash creations, but they may not be used to support the way male audiences watch lesbian pornography or viewing Femslash creations (homosexual fan creations between two female characters). For these men, Neville (2015) also added that they may prefer looking at the body of female actors better than the male ones, and while they watch it, they identify themselves with one of lesbian actresses to have sexual intercourse with her partner.

Homosexual Marketing

In Korea, gay men marketing has been used to increase the profit of media production organizations that created media focusing into female target audiences (Kwon, 2014). For example, same-sex relationship between male characters was portrayed

in both films and TV serials. Some K-pop bands, like Exo, Bigbang, and GOT7, also repeated this fashion to engage their female fans. This kind of marketing strategy is not new and it could be widely seen in J-Rock bands and some American rock and metal bands, too. The authors have noticed the kissing between the members of Avenged Sevenfold, a metal band. The vocalist, for instance, kissed the lead guitarist, and two guitarists also kissed each other, even though most band members have married actual women. As the result of this, their fans drew their Slash fan art based on the direction of pairing suggested by the musicians themselves. Because the business achieves their marketing goal by using gay men relationship in media, some members in K-Pop girl groups also acted like lesbians and tomboys to engage male audiences (Kwon, 2016).

Lesbian relationship is sometimes the narrative of Shojo manga or Japanese comics for girls. The female characters in Shojo manga are often cute, cheerful, young, and virgin looking. Although this kind of manga is created for female readers, it is desirable for some male fans who have sexual fantasy with young cute girls (Sheehan, 2017). For example, one of the authors’ male students also enjoy collecting the image of female Shojo characters. Opposite from Yaoi, the word, “Yuri,” is used to describe the romantic relationship between female characters or lesbians. If Yuri work is created as the secondary text based on the original media, it would be called “Femslash”. While Yuri portrays lesbian desire and female intimacy, male readers often purchase this genre at comic market or Comiket (Graffeo, 2014). This may help explain that the way female fans prefer viewing Slash and Yaoi creation is similar to the way male fans read Yuri manga and watch lesbian pornography. However, it is still unclear about the reason that these people like to see the homosexual relationship of others who have opposite sex from them.

Pre-Slash refers to the initial story before two male characters become romantic partners. Pre-Slash could be considered as another marketing strategy without making the mainstream media to be homo-erotic theme. This could expand the range of media audiences, not limited to women or gay men who consume Slash text. Smallville TV series¹², for instance, intentionally included the selected main actors, plot, and screenplay that persuaded fans to write Slash fiction (Meyer, 2013). These producers did not see Slash fans as people who ruined the business, but the ones who helped spread the words about the media and contribute to their favorite TV show.

Drawing technique in Japanese manga and anime (Japanese animation) could be another way to suggest fans to create Slash work. In this type of media, male characters often have smaller eyes than female ones, and female characters are generally cute, vivid, and have a rounder face. Vo (2017) introduced “bishonen” which refers to male characters with big eyes and a round face, which make them look as young and adorable as female characters. This reminds the authors about a fan-pairing couple from a manga, Black Butler¹³, which are Ciel Phantomhive and Sebastian Michaelis. Ciel is a bishonen character with the age under 18 years old, while Sebastian is taller and more masculine with the age more than 100 years old. These characteristics of two main protagonists could lead fans to create Slash work based on their narrative.

All of these evidences help confirm that Slash and other kinds of homosexual marketing could be effective, especially in female fan creators and female audiences. However, it was the fact that most fan creators are female, not male. While many

lesbian-based texts were viewed and preferred by male, these male audiences rarely contribute to their objects of interest by creating fan work. This could be concluded that the similar homo-erotic desire with fans’ gender difference could cause different kinds and levels of fan contribution. With these natures of both genders, fans should not look down or discriminate fans with opposite sex only because of different interest and fan activities.

The erotic fantasy

Slash fan community might be known as a safe place for female fans to express their sexual fantasy. They could interact with other fans and exchange their erotic imagination as anonymous in online spaces (Lindström, 2017). Zsila and Demetrovics (2017) agreed that these female fans from all around the world join Slash fan community and get encouraged from one another without getting blamed by both insiders and out-group members of the community.

The first author of this paper had an opposite experience from what mentioned in the paper of Zsila and Demetrovics (2017). She is the prior Slash artist, whose artwork got removed following from the community report that the artwork contained sexual explicit content, although in fact, that piece of artwork does not show any sexual organs and all characters wore cloths. Contrastingly, many Slash artwork, with sexual explicit content and all naked characters did not get reported and removed from the community. Hence, the first author realized that her artwork got removed because it violated the fanon (the agreement within fandom), which in this case, is the wrong shipping or pairing between some particular characters. She drew an unacceptable Slash pairing and many fans clicked

¹²Smallville is one of the longest running TV series with 10 seasons, telling the story of Clark Kent or Superman and other major characters from DC Comics.

¹³Black Butler is firstly created as manga or Japanese comic and later produced as anime or Japanese animation. The storyline is about cult, devil, and black magic, and it was set in England.

the report button, then the system approved the report and removed her artwork from the website. Therefore, the author disagreed that online Slash fan community was the safe place for women to enjoy their sexual fantasy, since sexual explicit and sexual violent artwork are not removed, as long as the pairings are acceptable among fans.

Salmon (2015) discovered another fact regarding sexual fantasy of Slash fans, of which Slash fan fiction readers are more masculine than non-Slash readers and the former also imagine themselves having sex with others more frequently than the latter. Both female Yaoi fans and male Yuri fans have experienced sexual fantasy and emotional perception of the characters with opposite gender apart from oneselves (Lamerichs, 2014). The findings of both Salmon (2015) and Lamerichs (2014) could be explained by Foster's paper (2015) that everyone has both feminine and masculine part. Female Slash fans could obtain masculine identity to imagine about having sex with other men during they read or write Slash texts.

To integrate this theme with the first theme could provide the conclusion that, female Slash fans may need to have sex with their favorite male character in media. However, they choose to identify with another male character in the story, instead of female one, because they prefer looking at male body better than female body that they experience it in everyday life.

Regardless the beliefs of other Slash fan scholars, the first author disagrees that this kind of erotic fantasy is safe for young female fans, because they could be exposed to sexual violent contents created by other fans. Moreover, they might mimic others' artistic idea and make their own artwork with BDSM style. In other words, these female fans might be safe because they stay at home, create, and consume Slash work in online space, but their psychology is unsafe since these fans both consume and produce fan creations with sexual violence

based on the primary text with non-sexual violence (Arunrangsiwed, 2015).

Gender discrimination in primacy text

Not every woman wants to imagine herself as a man to have a sexual intercourse with other man. These female fans may have no choice and no chance to imagine themselves as female partners of their favorite male characters. We could not deny the fact that mainstream media are full of subjective and active male characters, but fragile, objective, and passive female ones (Hata & Ieshima, 2014). Most point-of-view characters in media are male, for example, in almost all of the fantasy, peplum, action, and superhero films, while female leading role may only be found in romance and horror or thriller genre with final-girl theme (Patkachar, 2017). Generally, media audiences are forced to identify with the point-of-view characters and share the same experience regarding excitement, traumatic, triumph, and romantic emotion. Since female fans are forced to identify with male characters, when they retold the story in the form of fan fiction or doujinshi, they became a temporary tomboy (Salmon, 2015) or a feminine gay man (Santos, 2014). This could help explain the reason that most Slash fan creators are female.

In the early age of fan creations, the time before internet has existed, "Mary Sue" was a genre of fan fiction that fan authors created their own original female character whom they identified with, and this female character was too perfect with superpower and being loved by many male protagonists. Although this genre allows female fans to enjoy heterosexual romantic relationship with their favorite male characters, it was not acceptable among fan community members (Zheng, 2016). Mary Sue genre was considered as a weak plot and character development, and over identification of fan authors (Zheng, 2016). The authors of this paper suggest that although fan fiction authors identify with "Mary Sue" or the original additional female

character, other fan fiction audiences could not experience the same way, since they have never known this new character from the mainstream media and it is hard for them to identify with an unknown female character. In other words, fan fiction authors could find the happiness to write themselves as Mary Sue, but in contrast, their readers could not enjoy the narrative with an unknown point-of-view character. Therefore, the solution of this case is the Slash fan fiction with male point-of-view characters who are initially known by every fan and have an active role in the original storyline.

Nowadays, we have some narrative-based media that allow female fans to identify with an active female character and construct a romance fan fiction between her and the male character in the narrative. The noticeable examples are the romance between Rey and Kylo Ren from Star Wars film series¹⁴ between Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde from Howard and Moore's film, *Zootopia*¹⁵ (2016), and between Windblade and Starscream in *Transformers*¹⁶ (IDW G1 comics). The authors suggest that to persuade fans to create heterosexual romance fan work, both female and male characters in primary text have to be active and subjective, and both also need to have emotional interaction to each other.

This conclusion could describe the phenomenon only in the area of Slash fandom, but not Yaoi fandom. Yaoi, as mentioned earlier, could be either homosexual narrative (or creation) between original male characters created by any artist or between existing characters from mainstream media. This implies that Yaoi creators do not need to

initially identify with any character in films or TV series in order to create Yaoi work. These artists are not forced to imagine themselves as a male protagonist in media, but they still create the work based on the idea of homosexual relationship between men. Generally, both Yaoi and Slash are consumed and produced by the same group of fans. Therefore, the forth theme could not be used to describe the psychological process of Yaoi fans but the first and third theme could.

The need of equality in romantic relationship

Fan scholars often view Yaoi creation as the expression of feminist empowerment (Zheng, 2016). Female fans who read Slash fan fiction often perceive themselves as more masculine and prefer the equality between loving partners, such that both have to equally work outside home and equally do housework (Salmon & Symons, 2004). Female fans' perceived gender equality in Slash fan work does not only occur because both loving partners are male, but Zhang (2014) also suggested that Slash fan work portrays one of loving partners as objectified, which means that a male character is objectified. Generally, in heterosexual relationship, women are in this objectified role, so Slash fan work offers female fans the opportunity to perceive their authority over male characters who were objectified (Zhang, 2014).

It could be found in the mainstream media, that recently, the number of powerful and subjective female characters are increasing, such as in action films and video games (Arunrangsiwed, 2015). However, in the real-world context, Steijn (2016) argued that most organizations are ruled by male

¹⁴Star Wars Episode VII, VIII, and IX are the female-led films. They are not only about women's empowerment, but also minority empowerment as a whole. This is because (1) two main characters, Rey and Finn, were originated from working class, (2) old people played important roles in movies, and (3) the major villain was a white man, which is generally the hero in most media.

¹⁵*Zootopia* is an animated film released in 2016 intentionally created to promote the idea of anti-stereotype and the attempt to prove that the stereotype was only the myth, especially for the main character, Judy Hopps.

¹⁶Windblade (G1) is the name of both a female autobot and the title of the first female-led transformer comics. She is the first transformer created by fan and her name was also voted by fans, too.

managers, and especially in board of directors, which is very close to homosocial society. Hence, female fans may still perceive sexual inequality in their real life, which lead them to create Slash fan art. Additionally, the favorable male characters among Slash fans often look beautiful and have deviant behaviors from male gender norm (Lin, 2013). The taste of Slash fans reflects onto their worldview, too, because they tend to reject gender stereotype and patriarchy system (Lin, 2013). Because some societies are matriarchy, the aforementioned claim may not be applied. This leads to another question that might be answered in future research studies that if women who are raised in matriarchy system and commonly consume female-led media are still possible to become Slash fans.

Since Slash fan work is related to the idea of gender equality, some works were created for political purpose, the minority empowerment. Minority, in this case, is not limited to only people with queer identities, but also people with colors. Lindström (2017) found that these Slash fans intentionally created their fan works with English language in order to spread the words about their progressive views.

While it was widely accepted that Slash fan work was created based on the need of gender equality, and some were also written to promote minority rights, Slash pairings with villain character(s) have a significantly lower equality than the pairings with both hero characters (Arunrangsiwed, 2015). Moreover, Slash fan work was found as lack of racial equality, because most Slash characters are white men. Therefore, some people with colors composed the racial-politic fan fictions and post them into Slash fan community to express their need of racial equality and convey the message regarding blackness identity (Pande, 2017). These Slash fans could be considered as fan activists who may change the world view of other community members and the producers of mainstream media.

One of the most favorable anime among Slash and Yaoi fandom is Hetalia: Axis Powers which is full of white male characters discussing and telling the story both emotionally and historically (Zheng, 2016). Although it is a positive idea to provide the basic historical knowledge of various countries to young audiences, Hetalia: Axis Powers contains too much racial stereotype and most main characters are Caucasian. This narrative could confirm that whiteness is commonly accepted in Slash fan community. This stereotype may serve as a double-edged sword that young people might learn and use it to discriminate against others' identities. Hence, the authors might somewhat agree that Slash is about gender equality, but Slash, without fan activists, is certainly not about racial equality and other kinds of minority empowerment. Future academic papers and research studies should investigate more about the issue of equality in Slash fan work to examine if it is one of the main reasons that leads female fans to create Slash work.

Conclusion

Since most Slash fan creators and consumers are female, it is important to identify the causes that lead these women to prefer this type of text, male/male homosexual relationship. The first author reviewed past fan studies and integrated them with her knowledge and experience and found five themes that could confirm and be the actual causes that female fans are attracted to this genre of fan work. As homosexual-based marketing helps verify the fact that many female fans both in Asia and Western countries have a positive attitude toward Slash and pre-Slash narrative, it could be summarized that these female fans enjoy imagine themselves as a male fictional character and have a sexual interaction with their favorite male character. This intrapersonal communication occurs while they create Slash fan work and consume Slash work created by other fans. Female fans may prefer male/male relationship

because they perceive male body more attractive than female one, and they might enjoy the narrative without objectified women, which refers to the need of gender equality.

This paper helps solidify the knowledge regarding Slash fandom, and suggests that fan activities and taste could be different and varied by genders and traits of each individual fan. Female fans may find more enjoyable by creating fan work, while male fans may prefer discussing about their favorite text in online forum. Finally, the authors would like to suggest that it is important for fans to understand the norm of other groups of fans with different practices, and try to avoid stereotype misuse, gender discrimination, and minority depowerment.

Additionally, based on all cited works, there were only few studies discussing people with queer identities as Slash fans. These researchers only focused into the style of Slash work they consumed and produced, but they did not fathom the actual need of these fans. Future studies should conduct an interview or a focus group of this group of fans. The authors would like to suggest that there might be some difference between female Slash fans who identify with feminine gay and those with masculine gay. A focus group should be able to help understand and distinct their psychological needs, too. It was generally known that Thai fans consume the media from both Eastern and Western world, which makes them a unique group of fans. It could be a good opportunity to conduct the research studies with Thai participants and contribute to the knowledge regarding Slash fandom in Thai context. ❖

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