Equality, Friendship, and Violence in Slash or Yaoi Fan Art

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Abstract—Slash or *Yaoi* fan art is the artwork that contains a homosexual relationship between fictional male characters, who were heterosexual in the original media. Previous belief about Slash or *Yaoi* fan art is that the fan fiction writers and the fan artists need to see the equality in romantic relationship. They do not prefer the pairing of man and woman, since both genders are not equal. The objectives of the current study are to confirm this belief, and to examine the relationship between equality found in Slash fan art, friendship in original media, and violence contained in fan art. Mean comparisons show that equality could be found in the pairing of hero and hero, but rarely found in the pairing of hero and villain. Regression analysis shows that the level of equality in fan art and friendship in original media are significant predictors of violence contained in fan art. Since villain-related pairings yield a high level of violence in fan art and a low level of equality, researchers of future studies should find the strategies to prevent fans to include villains in their Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

Keywords—Equality, fan art, slash, violence, yaoi.

I. INTRODUCTION

YAOI or Boys' Love (BL) is a type of fan art, fan fiction, Japanese comic books (Manga), or games with homosexual relationship between men [1]-[4]. Yaoi fan art could be called "Slash." Slash originated from fan fiction and the first Slash fan fiction is the romantic relationship between two male protagonists from Star Trek: the Original Series, that ran from 1966 to 1969, which are Kirk and Spock [5]. The scope of this study is limited to two dimensions of *Yaoi* fan art – equality and violence. Many researchers have agreed that Slash or *Yaoi* fan creations are about equality between two male protagonists, where they fought the enemy together and developed their romantic relationship [3], [4], [6]-[9]. This is different from heterosexual love, where in real life, women and men are not equal in physical strength, work opportunity, and even in gender hierarchy. For the action movie, superhero comics, and games with fighting women, characters do not have characteristic of women, but they are men in women's body, created as lust objects for male fans [10].

Lately, many Slash couples between hero and villain have been paired by fans [11]. This might cause a lower level of equality compared to the original couple, hero, and hero. Moreover, there might be violent acts contained in villain-related fan creations. The objective of current study is to compare the level of equality and violence across three types

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of Slash couples: Hero/hero, hero/villain, and villain/villain. The outcome of this study would suggest if some type of artwork might be harmful for children, and if it should be avoided by websites such as Deviantart.com, Google, etc.

II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

A. Yaoi and Slash Fan Creations

The main creators and consumers of Slash and Yaoi fan creations are young heterosexual women [3], [4], [9], [12]-[14]. Salmon and Symons [3] suggested that the attraction in *Yaoi* and Slash was the reflection of the actual personal characteristics of women that they preferred equality between genders. Moreover, many researchers found a positive outcome when girls create general fan art or fan fiction and join fan communities. These activities would create enjoyment among young girls, and they could find new friends and online communities [15]. Creating fan art could also heal mental illnesses [16] and improve and exchange drawing techniques [2], [14]. Some of the fans even grew up to become professional artists [14], [17]. Writing fan fiction also strengthened writing skills in English [2], [15], [18]. While creating and watching artwork can be beneficial activities, if artwork is created as violent or pornographic objects, it could be harmful for young children. In the section of Sexual Violence in Media, the researcher will discuss violence and pornography in fan art and comics, including comic books and online comics.

B. Sexual Violence in Media

In many countries, child pornography is illegal, and it cannot be found in Google Image which is the main search engine. Although Google Image does not provide the results with child pornography, it still shows *Hentai Manga*. *Hentai* (meaning "perverted" in Japanese language) is hardcore pornography, both heterosexual and homosexual, that appears in comic or erotic games [19]. Most research papers mentioned similar problems relating to sexual violence in comic such as Yuri and *Lolicon*, both of which usually have pornographic content. Yuri is homosexual love between girls, and *Lolicon* is about young girls. Yuri and *Lolicon* are not as famous as *Yaoi*, but past researchers have been concerned about the sexual violence in these types of art [1], [14]. Comic characters do not always have a biography, and no one can tell their exact age, but many of them dress with student uniforms. This means these characters could be under 18-year-old, and comic such as *Yuri*, *Hentai*, and *Lolicon* should be considered child pornography. The only positive aspect of Yuri, *Lolicon*, and *Hentai* is that they could increase the numbers of male

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fans in *Comiket* (meaning "Comic Market"), which is a festival for selling comic books made by amateurs or fan (*Doujinshi*) [14], [17]. Commonly, women are the main customers in this festival, and also the main contributors of other fan creations [2], [17].

McLelland [13] also considers *Yaoi* as well as Yuri and *Lolicon*, child pornography. Some parents might worry about *Yaoi* fan art or Slash, which was created based on the original media, such as Harry Potter. Harry Potter is the books or movies which most parents believed that it was appropriate for their children [15]. With the same characters where in the early books and movies were under 18-year-old, if Harry Potter was recreated as pornographic media in *Yaoi* fan art, it could be another example of child pornography, and it might worry some parents. Whenever Slash and *Yaoi* are created as pornographic media, they would likely be the only type of pornography that women are interested in [13].

In the United States, age rating system in *Yaoi* comic books has been used to suggest the readers and their parents what is suitable for them [12]. This is different from Japan, where the laws are less restrictive [13]. However, Slash content can be found on the Internet. As mentioned earlier, previous researchers often mentioned about pornography in Yuri and *Lolicon Manga*. However, in the current study, the researcher found that "*Lolicon*" was not popular. *Google Keyword Planner* does not show that people searched for the word, "*Lolicon*." On the other hand, "*Hentai*" was searched about 13.6 million times on average per month [28]. Moreover, the search results of "*Lolicon*" do not contain much violence, but tend to be cute drawings of girls, whereas most results for "*Hentai*" are sexual abuse of young girls.

While most previous studies considered pornography appearing in *Yaoi*, *Yuri*, and *Lolicon* artwork or comics, they did not discuss sexual abuse. In the current study, sexual abuse is considered as violence in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art. This type of violence is not about two naked characters who love each other, but it is about when one of the two characters is hurt, tightened, beat, or abused in some other ways. This artwork can promote sexual abuse and violence, which many organizations, such as National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Equality Now, have tried to stop. This fan art with sexual abuse has also been mentioned by [21]. That was how Slash character from Merlin, BBC TV series, was recreated by fans as they wanted to have a greater power than another character.

Violence in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art may not be found in the classic type of pairing between hero and hero. Not only because of their friendship, the media have often given a happy ending and a good life outcome to the heroes. For example, hero and heroine in animated Disney films are mostly attractive and they always have positive life outcomes [22]. On the other hand, villains often face a bad outcome at the end of the story in general movies and comics. In some films, villains come with a much higher power than heroes to engage the audiences. For these reasons, Slash couples of hero/villain and villain/villain might have lower level of equality.

C. Hypotheses

H1: The level of equality and the level of friendship have a negative association with the level of violence in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

H2: The level of equality between hero and hero is higher than the level of equality between hero and villain in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

H3: The level of equality between hero and hero is higher than the level of equality between villain and villain in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

H4: The level of equality between villain and villain is higher than the level of equality between hero and villain in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

H5: The level of violence between hero and hero is lower than the level of violence between hero and villain in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

H6: The level of violence between hero and hero is lower than the level of violence between villain and villain in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

H7: The level of violence between villain and villain is lower than the level of violence between hero and villain in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art.

III. METHOD

A. Deviantart.com

The researcher chose to select the cases from Deviantart.com, because this website is the most famous website that fans publish their fan art. Earlier, [17] found that fans publish their artwork in two websites, SmackJeeves and Deviantart. The researcher of the current study had looked for the websites' statistic on Alexa.com. It shows that the rank of Deviantart is 153 worldwide and 82 in the United States, which is much more famous than SmackJeeves that its rank is 20,268 worldwide. Lam [14] also supported that comic fans used to upload their work in Youtube and Deviantart. However, Youtube is video-based social network, so the current study used Deviantart as the website for gathering fan art.

B. Case Selection

Sixty pieces of artwork in Deviantart.com were selected to be the cases in the analysis. These sixty pieces were based on 6 pairs of Slash characters, 10 drawings per each pairing. Thirty pieces were drawn based on the original Japanese animation and *Manga*, and other 30 pieces were drawn based on western entertainment media listed in Table I. In this study, Transformers is considered as a Western work, since its films are one of the highest-grossing film produced by western companies.

Each pairing was one of the most frequent searches on Google and the most frequent drawn in Deviantart.com. Although not all of them are the most popular pairings, the researcher tried to find the pairings which could fit into the categories.

All characters should have a similar background, so they can be compared to each other well. All of these characters are

from original action narratives, in which all characters have supernatural powers.

TABLE I
SELECTED SLASH PAIRING

Pairing Types	Original	Names
hero/hero	Japanese	Sasuke Uchiha / Naruto Uzumaki
hero/villain	Japanese	Grimmjow Jaegerjaquez / Ichigo Kurosaki
villain/villain	Japanese	Zabuza Momochi / Haku
hero/hero	Western	Ironman / Captain America
hero/villain	Western	Thor / Loki
villain/villain	Western	Megatron / Starscream

The researcher used the name of the characters as keywords to find the drawing in DeviantArt. These drawings were the newest uploads in March, 2015. They have to contain the physical touch between two characters. Only one drawing from the same artist was selected, since the researcher found that some artists uploaded multiple similar drawings at the same time.

C. Instruments

After 60 pieces of artwork were selected, four blind coders rated the level of friendship of six pairs of characters. This is to confirm that the level of friendship should not be high in the pair of protagonist with antagonist, and should be higher in the pairs with similar type of role. The examples of items in this friendship scale are "Both of them have been close friends," and "Both of them have worked together."

Four coders have rated the 60 pieces of artwork by using a 6-items scale to measure the level of equality between two characters, and a 7-item scale to measure the violence contained in artwork. The examples of items in equality scale are "Both of them can make a decision," and "One of them is under control of the other (reverse)." And the examples of items in artwork violence scale are "One of them is tied or chained," and "One of them tries to escape from the other."

D. Analysis

ANOVA and t-test have been used for analysis to compare means between groups. Mainly, this study focused to compare the mean between the pairs with a high level of friendship (protagonist/protagonist and antagonist/antagonist) and the pairs with lower level of friendship (protagonist/antagonist). The additional analysis showed the difference between three groups, and also the difference between the drawings which were made based on Japanese and Western entertainment media.

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine if friendship or equality might be the better predictor of violence contained in fan art. Because there is a belief that Slash fan fiction and artwork are about the equality and friendship between the male couple [3], [4], zero-order correlation was used to examine how much these independent variables of equality and friendship are overlapping. There might be an interaction between these two predictors, which could help explain more about Slash fan communities.

IV. RESULTS

After running a Regression analysis, it shows that both friendship of Slash pairing in original media and equality appeared in fan art are enable predictors of violence in fan art (F = 54.707; R Square = .657; p = .000). Partial correlation of both predictors shows that equality appeared in fan art can describe the dependent variable (Partial r = -.779; t = -9.385; p = .000) better than friendship in original media (Partial r = -.398; t = -3.276; p = .002). The results of Regression analysis support the first hypothesis that the level of equality and the level of friendship have a negative association with the level of violence in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art. Additional Correlation analysis was also run to see the overlapping between both predictors. There is a positive relationship between the level of equality and the level of friendship, but no statistic significant is found (r = .138; R Square = .019; p = .292).
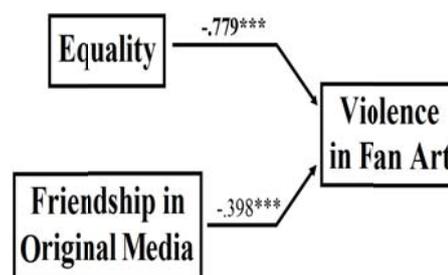

Fig. 1 Prediction Model of Violence in Fan Art

Another part of analysis is mean comparisons. Since the numbers of case in each group are equal, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is allowed to be used. For the comparison of equality of two characters in Slash artwork, overall results of ANOVA and descriptive statistic support hypothesis 2, 3, and 4 (F = 3.775; p = .029). Additional Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test was run to see a mean difference of each comparison. It shows that the level of equality between hero and hero (M = 18.75; SD = 5.72) is significantly higher than the level of equality between hero and villain (M = 13.15; SD = 8.707) in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art (p = .049), which supported the second hypothesis. However, Post Hoc Test does not show any difference between the pairing of hero/hero and villain/villain (p = .057), and the pairing of villian/villain and hero/villain (p = .998). This means the results of Post Hoc Test do not support hypotheses 3 and 4.

For the results of comparison of violence in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art, there are a difference among three types of character pairing (F = 7.925; p = .001), hero/hero (M = 1.45; SD = 1.701), villain/villain (M = 3.45; SD = 3.591), and hero/villain (M = 7.4; SD = 7.323). Post Hoc Test shows the difference between the pair of villain/villain and hero/villain (p = .032), and also between the pair of hero/hero and hero/villain (p = .001). However, there is no difference found between the pair of hero/hero and villain/villain (p = .393). Based on the results of Post Hoc Test, the null hypotheses of hypothesis 5 and 7 are rejected. An additional independent t-test was also run to see if there was any difference of the level of violence in Slash or *Yaoi* fan art made based on Japanese and Western characters.

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It was found that there is no statistically significant difference between Slash or *Yaoi* fan art with Japanese and Western characters (t = .673; p = .504).

V. DISCUSSION

Based on mean comparison of level of equality appeared in Slash artwork, the Slash pairings with the highest level of equality is the pairing of hero and hero. This supports the findings of previous qualitative studies in the area of Slash fan art and fan fiction, that female fans who prefer this type of fan creation need the equality in their romantic relationship [3], [4]. The current study has contributed the knowledge to this field by adding villain-related pairings. The levels of equality in villain-related pairing do not yield a high level of equality. This shows that Slash artists do not always need the equality between two fictional characters, but there should be other reasons that cause them to create this type of fan art. Future study should step further than just considering the need of equality as the motive of Slash artists.

One of the characteristics of Slash or *Yaoi* fan creation is that Slash is not about sex or pornography, but it is about love and emotion [3], [23]. The mean comparison of the level of violence in artwork does not support this early belief about Slash fan creation. This is because the early studies in this field did not include villain-related pairing. The way fans fill the violence into Slash artwork is similar to the finding of Brennan [21], that Slash is another form of homoerotic expression, which men need to have a greater power than other men. However, this violence in Slash artwork is not only created by male fans. Most selected artwork (cases) in the current study was created by female fans. This might imply that some female fans may also need to have a greater power than men, too.

Since media suggest the way people make crime [24] and young adolescents intend to imitate their favorite fictional characters [25], media could also suggest the way fans have inappropriate sexual relationship. For example, Pilipino teenagers mimicked the torture strategies from the movie, 50 Shades of Grey and caused the death of a female friend [26]. In the current study, the Slash pairing of hero and villain has the highest level of violence in artwork. To create the Slash artwork with violence or sexual abuse might be more dangerous than consuming media with violent content. This is because fans fill the violence scene into the original non-sexual-abuse media. As this result, comic code or any other organization would not be able to stop this type of violence in media, because they do not have any control in fans' thought. The results of the current study could suggest that the media organization should not promote Slash pairing between hero and villain. As the fact that sometimes, media organizations or media owners intend to set up the characters for fan to make them to be Slash pairing [27], they should not set up the Slash pairing of hero and villain, since it could cause fans to create violence in their artwork.

In conclusion, the low level of friendship and low level of equality could often be found in villain-related Slash couples. The low level of friendship and low level of equality are the main reasons that cause the violence in fan art. One way to stop this type of violence in fan art is to make the hero in the media to be the real hero of fans. In the other words, the media organization should find the strategies to stop people from being fans of villains. Future study should examine the reasons why some people appreciate villains better than heroes. For example, the role of some villain seems to be protagonist, but hero's is not. If media organizations knew the reason that people preferred the villains, they would know how to product the media that do not cause the violence in future fan art.

APPENDIX

Three scales were used as the instruments in this study. They were used to measure the dimensions and characteristic of Slash or *Yaoi* fan art quantitatively.

A. Friendship Storyline Measure (FSM)

FSM was earlier written by the researcher of the current study, and used in a fan study, called, "The Confirmation Study of Mutant Being and Friendship of Slash Characters in Original Media [20]." This measure is 5-item 4-point Likert-type scale (4 = agree; 3 = somewhat agree, 2 = somewhat disagree; 1 = disagree). Its average alpha reliability from 4 raters is .910.

B. Equality between Slash or Yaoi Characters (ESYC)

ESYC is a 6-item 2-point scale (1 = agree; 0 = disagree). Raters need to view Slash or *Yaoi* artwork before they rate on this scale. Average alpha reliability is .893.
1) Both of them are equal.
2) Both of them can make a decision.
3) Both of them are happy.
4) Both of them are satisfied.
5) Both of them are in the mood of love.
6) One of them is under control of the other. (reverse item)

C. Measure of Violence in Slash Fan Art (VSFA)

VSFA is a 7-item 2-point scale (1 = agree; 0 = disagree). Average alpha reliability is .814.
1) One of them is tied or chained.
2) One of them is oppressed.
3) One of them is tortured by the other.
4) One of them is hurt by the other.
5) One of them tries to escape from the other.
6) One of them has a physical pain.
7) They have a harmful sexual relationship.

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