

# **The Confirmation Study of Mutant Being and Friendship of Slash Characters in Original Media**

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## **Abstract**

This quantitative content analysis was conducted to confirm the findings of past qualitative studies in the area of Slash or *Yaoi* fan creations. Slash or *Yaoi* fan creations include homosexual relationship between two male characters borrowed from original media, such as movies and comics. The findings of past research were that (1) Slash characters were nonhuman being, and (2) homosexual relationship in Slash fan creations was developed from friendship in original media. The results support that most Slash characters were nonhuman being. On the other hand, homosexual relationship in some type of Slash pairing was developed from enmity, not from friendship. This finding suggests that the future research should examine the relationship between the villain-related Slash pairings and fan artists' personal characteristic. Moreover, the violence in villain-related Slash fan art should be identified.

**Keywords:** Slash; Yaoi; Fan art; Fan fiction; Friendship

## Introduction

Fan art and fan fiction are created by serious fans (Lopez, 2012: 433). In this study, fan art includes drawings and paintings of the characters that fans borrow from the mainstream media. And fan fiction includes the stories that fans write about their favorite characters. Generally, fan fiction authors maintain the setting of the original story, but they extend the story or change its ending. Fan art and fan fiction are different from cosplay in which fans dress as movie, comic, or game characters. Cosplay events require actual meetings in the real world setting, but fan art and fan fiction do not need it. Moreover, fan art and fan fiction can also be combined with cosplay events. For example, Lamerichs (2013) who attended a cosplay event in Japan found that fans were selling their own copy of artwork during the event. Many cosplayers also called themselves with the same pseudonym that they signed in fan art and fan fiction.

Slash or *Yaoi* fan art and fiction are a type of fan creations. They tell the stories about the homosexual relationship between male fictional characters. Most of Slash and *Yaoi* fan creations have been created by female fans (Jenkins, 1992). Almost all studies in this area have described the criteria for selection of characters for Slash and *Yaoi* creations qualitatively, but there is a lack of confirmation by quantitative research. The current study will confirm two dimensions of Slash and *Yaoi* selection criteria, which are friendship between male couples and nonhumanness of individual characters in the original work, including movies and comic. The researcher narrowed the definition of nonhumanness to be “mutant,” which was taken from X-Men. A mutant looks similar to a human, can communicate with humans, and has supernatural power.

The roles of Slash characters are also worth to examine. They can be used to suggest the Animation and Film students of how they might design the character, its characteristic, and relationship with other characters. Kalinowski (2014) suggested that writing fan fiction did not hurt the business of copyright owners, but it supports the original media, just like word of mouth advertising. The artists or students may need to

learn how to create a character which fits to fans' selection criteria for Slash or Yaoi fan art.

## Literature Review

### Fan Art and Fan Fiction

Both fan art and fan fiction tell the story from fans' points of view. And they can be combined with each other perfectly. They can be a one-page comic, or a whole book of *Doujinshi*. *Dōjinshi* or *Doujinshi* is similar to a comic book or manga (Japanese Comic), but it is made by fans or amateur artists (Lamerichs, 2013; Lam, 2010; Ishikawa, 2008).

Most fan art can be found in Deviantart.com, which is the largest online community for artists (Salah et al., 2012). This website contains visual media, such as drawings, paintings, and photographs. Young artists can upload their single-page fan art, multiple-page *Dōjinshi*, text-only fanfiction, photograph of cosplay, and other form of fan art. This website is a part of selection criteria in the current study, where the researcher looked for the famous slash couples based on the numbers of uploaded artwork. Although Deviantart.com allows fans to upload their fan fiction, Deviantart.com is not the most popular place to read and post fan fiction. The general place for fan fiction is Fanfiction.net (Vasilyeva, 2011: 79). Therefore, these two websites were used to draw the samples for this study. Since the current study is based on the online popularity of slash couples in fan creations, technology usage by fans will be discussed, followed by the definition of *Slash/Yaoi* fan creations and fans' criteria for selecting the characters.

Internet is a powerful tool for fans to share their creations and to search for creations by other fans. Internet is easier and cheaper for them to post their artwork online than to print out whole books or to make color copies of paintings (Lam, 2010; Bolt, 2004). Both internet and technology also help fans to publish their creations faster and to reach more audiences (Bolt, 2004)

Lamerichs (2013) showed that traditional cosplay meetings still occur in various territories including Japan, the United States, and Europe.

This means that internet cannot replace the traditional fan cultures, but it helps to support the culture itself, the communication among sub-communities, and fan activism. For example, in the case of “Avatar: The Last Airbender,” the 2010 film which was made from the original cartoon series with Asian characters, there was a strong online fan movement against the use of white actors in the film, but there was a lack of a real-life movement. The result was that their online protest could not change the casting of the film (Lopez, 2012).



**Figure 1:** Slash or Yaoi fan art of Megastar (Megatron and Starscream) from Transformers G1/Comic

## Slash

The scope of this study is limited to Slash or *Yaoi* fan creations. Slash or *Yaoi* fan creations are about the romantic relationship between male characters. Female couple is called “*Femslash*.” In the original story of mainstream media, these characters do not have any sexual relation-

ship with each other, but fans add a homosexual relationship into the storyline. They expressed this idea through fan art, fan fiction, and sometimes through the actions in cosplay. While Tan (2008) tried to point out the cultural difference between Slash and *Yaoi*, both of these creations portray a similar homosexual relationship. *Yaoi* has a wider definition. The *Yaoi* characters do not need to come from the mainstream media and can be the original characters created by the artists themselves. This means “Slash” is “*Yaoi* fan art.”

Slash or *Yaoi* fan art and fan fiction are generally made by female fans (Tosenberger, 2008; Cumberland, 2003; Scodari, 2003), and most of them are amateur (Kustritz, 2003) and young artists (Bolt, 2004). Earlier, Bolt (2004) found a slightly increase in male Slash fans, but most of them were still female. This type of creations could benefit women in some ways. For example, women can retell the story which was originally created as male-centric media (Kalinowski, 2014; Kustritz, 2003). Moreover, young girls can improve their writing skills by writing fan fiction (Black, 2006; Kalinowski, 2014; Bolt, 2004), and also improve their communication skills by interacting with other fans. Jenkins (1992) viewed this type of creation as a kind of critique and analysis of original media.

A prominent characteristic of Slash or *Yaoi* pairing is how the male protagonists are paired based on the original friendship in the original media (Salmon and Symons, 2004; Kustritz, 2003; Ishikawa, 2008; Woledge, 2005; Jenkins, 1992). Normally “protagonist” means “hero” or the main character in the positive side who drives the plot. On the other hand, the characters who drive the plot could also be villains, and the researcher does not believe that friendship can occur between a hero and a villain. Dennis (2010) found many Slash pairings between protagonist and antagonist in the artwork of young fans of Western TV series. Another belief is that porn is about sex, but Slash is about love and emotion (Salmon and Symons, 2004; Woledge, 2006). Love and emotion may not occur in the pairing of a hero and a villain. One of the objectives of the current study is to test the belief if the different kinds of Slash couples are created based

on friendship from original story.

Hypothesis 1: The level of friendship between hero and hero is higher than the level of friendship between hero and villain.

Hypothesis 2: The level of friendship between hero and hero is higher than the level of friendship between villain and villain.

Hypothesis 3: The level of friendship between villain and villain is higher than the level of friendship between hero and villain.

Another characteristic of fictional characters that fans choose to portray in fan art and fan fiction is nonhumanness. Fans are fascinated by characters' lifestyle, concept (Olin-Scheller and Wikström, 2011), and the setting of the story (Bolt, 2004; Kustritz, 2003; Leavenworth, 2009; Kirby-Diaz, 2009). Although some scholars examined the species' transformation between original character and the appearance in Slash fan art (Dennis, 2010), the number of human characters were too high compared to the traditional belief about characters' selection.

The word, "nonhuman", may have too many definitions which are opposite to "human." In this study, nonhuman characters are called, "mutants." This word was taken from an idea in Marvel Comics, and mostly mentioned about characters in X-Men who have supernatural power. Their ability could separate their life from the rest of the world. They may not have a common kind of routine, or have a normal occupation. The current Mutant Being Measure was written based on two dimensions, which are nonhumanness and isolation from the usual world.

Hypothesis 4: Most characters in Slash fan art and fan fiction have a high level of nonhuman/mutant in the original media.

## **Objectives**

1. To confirm past findings of qualitative studies in the area of Slash or Yaoi fan art.
2. To confirm if fans' selected characters portrayed in fan art and

fan fiction are mutant or nonhuman.

3. To confirm if characters in Slash pairings have been friends in the original story.

4. To contribute the knowledge to the field of fandom.

5. To suggest a new type of Slash sexual relationship, which is found in villain-related couples.

## **Method**

This study is mainly to confirm the findings of past qualitative studies. Content analysis was chosen since the selected unit/characters might not be known by general people, so a survey was not possible. The researcher assumed that every rater knew the selected characters well. This is because all raters in this study were serious fans of Slash and *Yaoi* fan creations. They made their own *Yaoi* fan art and also read *Yaoi Dōjinshi*.

### **The Level of Friendship**

Thirty Slash/*Yaoi* couples were selected based on three criteria. All these criteria were for checking their popularity. First, the name of each original work was searched by internet users on Google at least 100,000 times on average per month. This information was found through Google Keyword Planner. Second, the name of each character was in at least 100 Slash or *Yaoi* fan fictions on fanfiction.net. Lastly, they were drawn as Slash or *Yaoi* in at least 5,000 pieces of artwork on Deviantart.com.

The researcher wrote a scale to measure the level of friendship between two characters in each couple called Friendship Storyline Measure (FSM). FSM is 5 items 4-point Likert-type scale (4 = agree; 3 = somewhat agree, 2 = somewhat disagree; 1 = disagree). The lowest possible score is 5, and the highest possible score is 20. The examples of items in this scale are “both of them have a long time friendship,” and “at least one of them has helped the other.”

Four raters, who were serious fans, were asked to rate the level of friendship of these thirty Slash/*Yaoi* couples based on this scale. The results from one of the raters were not included in the final analysis

because of invalid answers copied from another rater. Intraclass correlation was used to measure rater reliability of the three raters, and it was .915.

### **Mutant Being**

Forty characters were taken from the first thirty selected couples. Some characters were overlapping in two couples. For example, Steve Rogers (Captain America) was paired with James Bucky Barnes (Winter Soldier) and also Tony Stark (Iron Man). Some characters were cut-off because of they were from less famous couples, which appeared in the same movies/comics as the selected cases. To cut these characters off helped to reduce sampling bias, since characters from the same story would have a similar level of mutant being. The characters from Kingdom Hearts were also removed since Kingdom Hearts is a game, while all other characters are from movies and comics.

The current study will measure the level of nonhumanness of the Slash characters by using a scale which was specially written for this type of nonhuman character called Mutant Being Measure (MBM). This scale contains two dimensions which are nonhumanness and unusual routines or lifestyle. MBM is 9 items 2-point scale (yes was coded as 1, no was coded as 0). Five items are for measuring the level of nonhumanness, and four items are for measuring unusual lifestyle. The lowest possible score is 0, and the highest possible score is 9. The examples of items in this scale are “he/she has an eternal life,” and “he/she has a supernatural power.” Four raters rated the level of nonhumanity and untouchable characteristic, and their intraclass correlation was .891.

### **Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the combination of results of MBM to confirm the previous statements from past qualitative studies related to this topic. This was to test the last hypothesis, if the characters in Slash and *Yaoi* fan creations were not general humans in the original media. T-test and ANOVA or Robust test were used to test the first three hypotheses, which were to compare if the level of friendship of



pairing between two heroes was higher than the villain-related couple.

## **Results**

### **The Comparison of Levels of Friendship**

An ANOVA analysis showed a significant difference between the levels of friendship of three types of Slash couple: Hero/hero, hero/villain, and villain/villain in the original media ( $F=9.765$ ;  $p=.001$ ), but Levene statistic showed non-homogeneity of variances ( $F=4.213$ ;  $p=.026$ ), so an alternative test is required. Welch's robust test of equality of means showed a statistic significant difference between three groups ( $F=7.341$ ;  $p=.020$ ). This part of finding was that there was a difference between three groups of selected case.

Three pairs of t-test were also run. There was a statistic significant difference between the levels of friendship of hero/hero and hero/villain ( $t=4.011$ ;  $p=.002$ ). The similar significant result of this pair was also found in Tukey HSD Post Hoc test. There was no statistical significant difference between other two pairs, the comparison of hero/hero and villain/villain ( $t=.507$ ;  $p=.644$ ), and the comparison of villain/villain and hero/villain ( $t=1.767$ ;  $p=.103$ ).

This result can be interpreted that the level of friendship between a hero and a hero ( $M= 49.75$ ;  $SD= 6.598$ ) was higher than the level of friendship between a hero and a villain ( $M= 30.60$ ;  $SD=14.167$ ). This part of results supported the first hypothesis. However, there was no difference between the level of friendship of hero/hero and villain/villain, so this result did not support the second hypothesis. For the third hypothesis that was the level of friendship between a villain and a villain was higher than the level of friendship between a hero and a villain, its null hypothesis could also not be rejected with a low number of samples. But, the descriptive statistic showed that the level of friendship between a villain and a villain ( $M= 45.75$ ;  $SD=15.435$ ) was higher than the level of friendship between a hero and a villain ( $M= 30.60$ ;  $SD=14.167$ ).

## **MBM**

Another part of the current study was to confirm the level of nonhumanness by using Mutant Being Measure ( $M=17.95$ ;  $SD=7.161$ ). Overall result of this part showed that most characters have the medium level of mutant being on MBM. Since this scale measure two dimensions – nonhumanness and unusual behavior, the researcher ran an additional analysis, to see only the results from the dimension of nonhumanness. The descriptive analysis shows that 31 cases out of 40 are nonhuman characters.

## **Discussion**

After coders rated the Slash couples based on their level of friendship in original media including movies and comics, the level of friendship was very low in the couple of hero and villain compared to the couple of hero and hero. Before this study, the researcher did not expect that fans would have created many pairings of hero and villain as a loving couple. Jenkins (1992) has classified different types of fan fiction, and one of them was to shift the roles from villain to hero and hero to villain. When the fans pair hero and villain as loving couple in their Slash fan art, they might have a similar thinking process of the type of fan fiction that Jenkins (1992) has mentioned. Fans' pairing of hero and villain could be related to personal characteristics.

These fans did not just change friendship to be a romantic relationship in Slash or *Yaoi* fan creations, but they changed enmity to be romantic relationship. Since this type of romantic relationship was from the previous enmity in the original media, the future research could explore if this romantic relationship might turn into sexual violence. If fans create artwork for this type of paired couple artwork with sexual violence, that might be harmful for young children, or might reflect their negative worldview of artists. Brennan (2013) has found sexual abuse in Slash creations, which were written by male creators. These male creators tended to make Slash as gay pornographic media, while female creators' Slash artwork tended to be artistic nude.

On the other hand, if fans create artwork for the couple of hero and villain without violence, they might be the fans with positive thinking. For example, they might want to be friends of someone who did not like them. While artists would make artwork in the way that they wanted the world to be (Prigent, 2001), fans could also express their need through their favorite movie/comic characters in their artwork. There might be some link between the criteria of selecting Slash characters and fans' personal traits. The relationship across personal traits of "argumentative" and "willing to compromise" and fans' selection of hero/hero or hero/villain couples should be explored.

Another related finding was that the difference in the levels of friendship between hero/hero and villain/villain is not statistically significant. This means that villain could be a friend of another villain, as well as in the couple of heroes. The deep friendship can be found in one of the selected cases, the villains' couple of Zabuza Momochi and Haku, from a Japanese animation, *Naruto*. Both were dead in a battle and with their friendship, one of them tried to move his body to die beside the other. Since villains in the movie often faced a negative ending, fans might dissatisfy and want to create a happy ending for them. Leavenworth (2009) analyzed fan fictions of two main protagonists in a novel, *Black Dagger Brotherhood*. The author of this novel did not give a happy ending to the homosexual relationship of these two characters, which might cause fans to start writing fan fiction about them (Leavenworth, 2009).

Kustritz (2003) viewed fan fiction as a reflection of what fans wanted to happen in the original media. The previous examples of *Naruto* and *Black Dagger Brotherhood* could describe this phenomenon. This could benefit the authors of original media that they could know the need of their fans. For the case of villains' ending, the original writers might not put villains to death, but they should give an alternative ending to the villains, such as making villains to repent and be responsible for all they did. This example is more similar to real life situation that people should not kill each others, and the researcher believes that it would teach young children to be forgiving adults.

According to the previous studies, most of Slash characters are nonhuman and the second part of results supported this finding. This means nonhumanness of characters can impress fans, or attract them to the plot or setting. And so, the fans borrow the plot and setting and recreate it as fan art and fan fiction. The current study has not only confirmed the findings of past studies, but has also contributed to the knowledge about Slash or *Yaoi* fan creations within the field of fan culture. This study also suggests the mainstream media of the way to design engaging characters and to create engaging settings. Similarly Kalinowski (2014) believed that fan fiction does not hurt business with copyrights issue, but it supported business by spreading the words to fans' friends, or make the original media more interesting. The copyright owner should support fan activities, like being sponsor for cosplay events, better than using their authority to remove fan creations from websites such as Youtube fan videos.

In conclusion, the current study has contributed the research in the area of fandom, which is how fans develop the enmity in the original story to be homosexual relationship in their fan art. This type of character pairing reflects a different thinking process of fan artists, where previous studies rarely mentioned. Since hero and villain have a low level of friendship, there might be some violence contained in Slash artwork. The future study should identify the violence in this type of artwork.

### **Limitation**

There was a small number of cases in this analysis, only 30 couples of Slash characters. If future researchers want to study about fan-pairing couple, they should increase the numbers of cases to get statistically significant results. They might also expand the inclusion criteria to increase the level of generalization. The selected cases need not be as famous as the current study. They might include other types fan-pairing couples, such as Femslash, which is romantic relationship between two female characters, and crossover pairings, which is the pairing of characters from different movies, such as Elsa from *Frozen* (2013) and Jack Frost from *Rise of the Guardians* (2012).

## **Acknowledgement**

The researcher would like to thank Animesh Rathore, PhD student in Media Art program, Ohio University, for reviewing English grammar and flowing of this paper; and also thank to Prof. Dr. Christina S. Beck as the advisor of this study.

## **Appendix**

Tools or measurements are listed below:

### **Friendship Storyline Measure (FSM)**

FSM is 5 items 4-point Likert-type scale (4 = agree; 3 = somewhat agree, 2 = somewhat disagree; 1 = disagree). Average alpha reliability is .910.

1. Both of them have been close friends.
2. Both of them have worked together.
3. At least one of them has helped the other.
4. Both of them have a long time friendship.
5. Both of them trust each other.

### **Mutant Being Measure (MBM)**

MBM is a 9 item 2-point scale (yes = 1; no = 0). Average alpha reliability is .692.

1. He/She is human being. (reverse)
2. He/She is just the same as me. (reverse)
3. He/She has a supernatural power.
4. He/She has an extraordinary ability.
5. He/She lives in the current world. (reverse)
6. He/She was born in the ancient day.
7. He/She is an unearth creature.
8. He/She has an eternal life.
9. He/She lives in a different world from me.

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