

In The World We Manifested: Homonormativity, Gender Roles, and Sexism Within Queer Fan Fiction

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Introduction

Fan fiction has existed for years as a tool for fans to insert their opinions, ideas, and sometimes themselves into their favorite stories. Many fans have used fan fiction to add queerness to their favorite media that lacks it. Although this element leads to some consumers assuming that fan fiction has subverted constructs of gender and sexuality, queer fan fiction often reinforces gender roles, homonormativity (expected behavior within the queer community that often mirrors expected heterosexual familial standards), fetishization of queerness and marginalization of queer women. This manifests in several different ways, including the feminization and masculinization of each half of same gender couples and the vast disparity in representation between queer men and queer women.

Methodologies

In order to determine just how common these traits were, I used two methods. The first was statistical analysis. I examined how many heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian relationships were depicted in the seven most popular fandoms on Archive of Our Own, a popular fan fiction database. These seven were chosen because they were the most popular across the ten categories Archive of Our Own sorts fan fiction into.

The second method I used was close reading of passages from popular works of fan fiction. I looked for gendered language in descriptions of characters and movement, as well as gender roles, implied or explicit expectations of family, and language around queerness.

Through these two methods, I was able to analyze both quantitatively and qualitatively how queer relationships are portrayed in fan fiction.

References

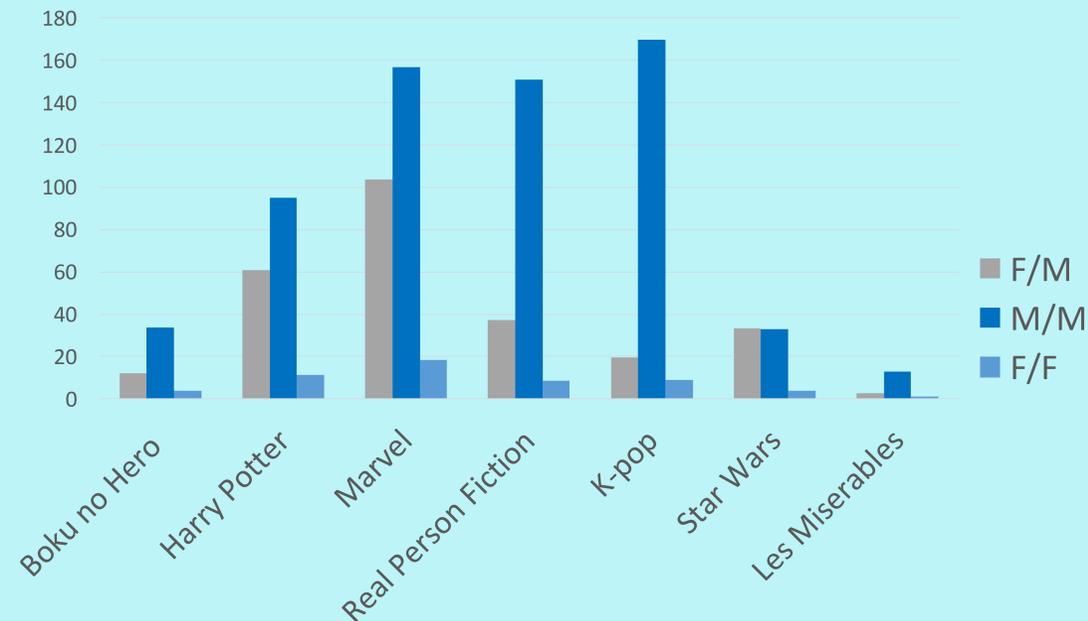
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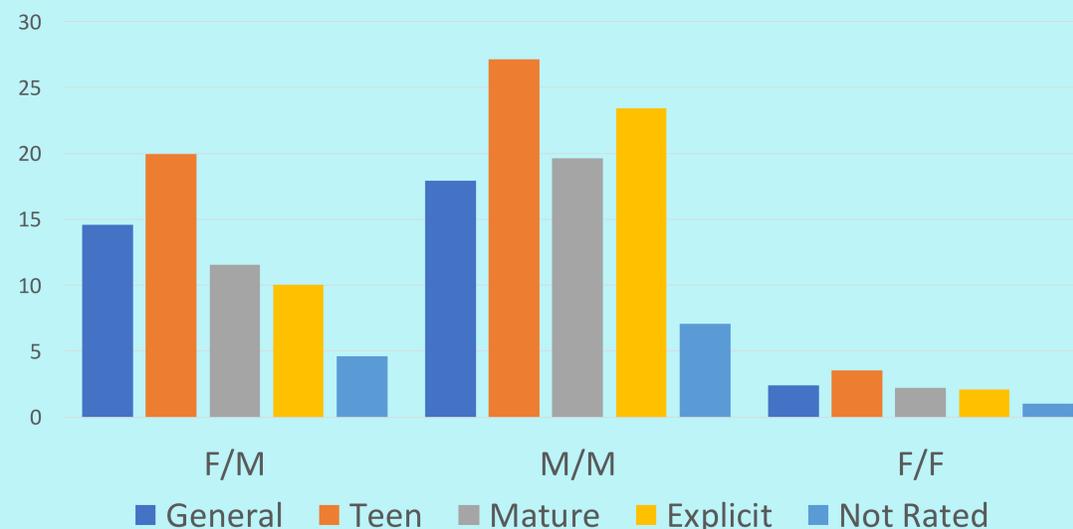
<http://archiveofourown.org>

Findings

Relationship Frequency in Most Popular Fandoms



Ratings in *Harry Potter* Works by Gender



Conclusions

In my research, I found that the gender roles, homonormativity, fetishization of queerness, and marginalization of queer women scholars had observed was pervasive throughout the medium. While the most represented relationship in six of the seven most popular fandoms was m/m, there is still an apparent fetishization of queerness; explicit is often one of the top three most common ratings in m/m and f/f categories, but usually second to last in f/m categories.

This representation of queer people is significant because of the place fan fiction, and fan culture in general, has in the lives of young people, particularly young queer people. When a beloved work or series lacks representation of themselves, young people turn to fan culture. How those identities are then reflected in fan culture tells young people what those identities look like or "should" look like, potentially seeing how children, teens, and young adults see, understand, and perform their own identities.

There is no obvious solution to this problem. Part of the beauty of fan culture is the lack of regulation. So fans must take it upon themselves to self-regulate, challenging work that consistently falls into these stereotypes and creating works of their own that challenge them.

Further Research

I plan on continuing this research by doing an even closer statistical analysis of popular and unpopular works of fan fiction; how often is gendered language used in popular fics? How many of the most popular fics depict queer people in homonormative relationships? All of this will lead to a broader understanding of depictions of queer relationships in fan fiction.

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