

## **Roundtable: The Internet and Women's Transnational "Boys' Love" Fandom**

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### **Abstract**

In the last decade Japanese comic book and animation fandom has exerted a strong influence upon youth cultures globally via the Internet and other new media. Of particular interest is the yaoi or "boys' love" (BL) fandom popular with girls and young women worldwide. Since 2000, there have been annual fan conventions in the United States dedicated to the genre. Mainstream publishing houses in the US (and elsewhere, including throughout Asia,) are translating original Japanese comics (manga) as well as commissioning their own BL titles. Recently, yuri, or "girls' love" has also emerged as a dynamic and rapidly growing fandom. The role of the Internet (and digital media more generally) has been fundamental to the global spread of these homoerotic genres. A google search for "yaoi", in January 2007, for instance, produced almost 5 million hits (the first of which is its own wikipedia entry). The Internet is home to hundreds of thousands of yaoi/BL/yuri sites featuring discussion groups, original and parody fictions, role-play games, illustrations and animations (including BL parodies and animation edits on popular sites such as YouTube). Amateur BL publications, also known as "dojinshi", also flourish via the Internet due to the promotion and sale of dojinshi titles, the sharing of reviews, and the auctioning of rare items.

This roundtable discussion, featuring researchers who have been studying these online fandoms in several different regions and languages, investigates the different ways in which the "traditional" homoerotic Japanese literary genre of "boys' love" has been taken up, deployed and expanded by female fans transnationally. Comparisons will be made between Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean fandoms and the exchange of imagery and narratives that take place between them. The way in which these stories and images are received in different cultures as well as the (sub)cultural ends to which they are deployed will be discussed, as will the impact of the fandom on changing expectations about gender, sexual identity and sex roles in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. The panel will also consider some of the legal issues facing the fandom, including concerns over copyright and the production, transmission and consumption of fantasy narratives and images of "under-age" sexuality that can transgress local legislation banning "child abuse publications" or prohibiting the involvement of "minors" in online erotic exchanges.

Participants in the panel hope to reach out to and include in the discussion researchers working on other online fandoms (particularly those developed by women) in an attempt to better understand the diverse ways in which the Internet and new media are encouraging new ways of "playing" with identity, gender and sexual orientation, among girls and young women internationally.

## Participants:

Dr Mark McLelland is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Wollongong. He has published extensively on Japanese cultures of sex, gender and new media, including the books *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan*, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* and the edited volumes *Japanese Cybercultures* and *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*.

Dr Druann Pagliassotti is an associate professor in the communication department of California Lutheran University. She has conducted an online survey of Western boys' love fans that was recently translated into Italian and replicated by a graduate student at the University of Genova. Dru manages the Yaoi Research Wiki <http://www.yaoiresearchwiki.com>, and her research interests include popular culture, identity displays, and internet technologies.

Andrea Wood holds a B.A. from McGill University and a Master's from the University of Edinburgh. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in English at the University of Florida. Her research interests include gender and sexuality studies, feminist and queer theory, subcultural media, the Internet and transnational fandoms, and popular genres. Her dissertation is titled *Radicalizing Romance: Subculture, Sex, and Media at the Margins*. A chapter from this project, "'Straight' Women, Queer Texts: Boy-Love Manga and the Rise of a Global Counterpublic," was recently published in *Women's Studies Quarterly*.

Dr. Seunghyun Yoo is Assistant Professor in the Department of Behavioral & Community Health Sciences, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh. Her research interests include community-based participatory research, community empowerment strategies, community capacity, online communities, popular media and public health, and interdisciplinary research. She is co-author with Mark McLelland of the paper "The International Yaoi Boys' Love Fandom and the Regulation of Virtual Child Pornography: Current Legislation and Its Implications" in Volume 4, Issue 1 of *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, the journal of the National Sexuality Resource Center.