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Fandom and Sexuality in the Archives: Collecting Slash Fan Fiction and Yaoi/Boys' Love Manga

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## **Fandom and Sexuality in the Archives:**

### **Collecting Slash Fan Fiction and *Yaoi/Boys' Love* Manga**

Sandy Enriquez and Andrew Lippert

“One thing I do want to be clear about. You do understand these are K/S as in Kirk and Spock are lovers? I have found that in a few cases when I approached people they backed off when I was explicit about the contents.”

—Donor letter regarding donation of K/S fanzine collection.

The past two decades have seen a proliferation and rise in stature of a number of science fiction and fantasy archives, mirroring the rising significance of speculative fictions within academia and society as a whole. This has occurred at a time when issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion have taken center stage. Archivists are also looking at their collections and their role in shaping the archives with a renewed critical eye, especially through an emerging framework known as critical archival studies. This is a valuable tool to analyze what our institutions have historically said about who and what has value. In the realms of speculative fiction, this work of bestowing value and creating canon has traditionally been done by authors who won (or were nominated for) the top awards and honors of their genre. It is impossible for archivists and librarians to be experts in all aspects of a subject as large as sf; therefore, the utilization of nationally recognized book awards, honors and “best of” recommendation lists to help guide curation has become commonplace. In the worlds of sf and fantasy it was primarily a very

narrow slice of the population creating these lists: namely, white men at conventions (e.g. Hugo awards) or within a small professional community (e.g. Nebula awards). The result is, unsurprisingly, both a canon and an archival record of sf that is overwhelmingly white and male despite a long history of contributions by more diverse communities. Efforts in the past decade to begin diversifying both sf and the archival record have been slow and, at times, painful.<sup>1</sup> This reliance on, or default to, collecting so-called canonical works and ignoring fandom materials can be detrimental to the larger project of diversifying archival holdings. Critically interrogating the canon, and the archives, reveals several steps that can hopefully serve as a foundation for more diverse, representative, and inclusive sf archival collections in the future, which will also set the stage for new scholarly endeavors.

In this article, we will trace how archival theory and praxis have developed into critical archival studies and, in turn, how this new framework influences our work as archivists in a sf archive. We then explore the academic study of slash and *yaoi* materials through their intersection with feminist and queer studies frameworks along with some of the the conversations going on within the respective fan communities. Finally, we will touch on some of the challenges associated with obtaining and making accessible two niche fandom-based collections in the Eaton Collection of Science Fiction & Fantasy at the University of California, Riverside. We hope this essay demonstrates both the work that is being done to move our collections into the 21st century while at the same time showing the long path still ahead. The collections we will highlight are the K/S Star Trek fan fiction collection (MS 320) and *shōnen-ai* or *yaoi* (“boys’ love”/BL) Japanese manga materials. MS 320 contains slash fiction, which refers to fanmade media that portrays two fictional male characters in non-canonical sexual or romantic relationships. “Boys’ love” encompasses both commercial and fanmade media where romantic or

erotic fictional homosexual relationships can be canon or non-canon. This essay will be focusing on the commercially published BL manga held in the Eaton collection. While both slash and BL manga portray homosexual relationships, in the past scholars have argued that they are not always indicative of a queer perspective since they are primarily created by women for women, although nowadays these assumptions and boundaries are blurring as recent studies show that these fandoms are more fluid and diverse. Although slash and BL manga have strong fandoms, they are still considered taboo even within their larger fan communities. We use the term “fandom” to differentiate these collections from more established and widely accepted examples of mainstream pop culture.

In a lengthy interview essay with *Para•doxa* in 1995, Samuel R. Delany provides an elaborate discussion of canon, literature, paraliterature, and the relationships between them. He explores the political, and often conservative, nature of establishing canon, the delimiting nature of the gulf between the literary and paraliterary that is used to define both, the way in which “the canon ‘believes in’ the society that produces it,” and much more (Delany 205). He was engaging with a long running conversation on the assigning and withholding of value to texts and genres. These arguments over canon and value continue as the battlegrounds shift and rotate amongst niche subgenres. In recent years, scholarly interest has been spurring libraries and archives to wade into these same discussions and re-evaluate items traditionally considered “low-brow.” We can look at the popularity and study of comic books and graphic novels as demonstrating a resurgence of interest within academia of traditionally disregarded or paraliterary texts. Despite this wave of interest, we see that libraries and archives have been slow to respond with regard to the collecting of slash fiction and BL manga. Few institutions are collecting slash and even fewer are collecting BL manga. This makes the Eaton Collection uniquely situated to support and

encourage emerging scholarly interest in slash and BL manga. Despite their marginal and even taboo status, these fandom collections have enduring value and belong in the archival record as they represent an important facet of speculative fiction and culture generally. With that in mind, we do acknowledge that we will examine these collections from our position as archivists and not subject experts. We also wish to acknowledge that these collections, while marginal in the archival record, do not experience the same level of oppression and marginalization as other collections have or will face due to their intersectionality.<sup>2</sup>

### **Archival Theory from the Dutch Manual to Critical Archival Studies**

Archives and archivists can trace their historical roots to ancient times but the professionalization of the field is relatively young. Western archival theory was first consolidated with the Dutch Manual in the late 19th century which brought together the traditions of “Continental European archival theory as expressed through practices begun during medieval times on medieval records” (Ridener 40). Early modern archives were mainly concerned with the management and custodianship of small numbers of very old documents, this changed after World War I as the volume of wartime records pushed the limits of archival theory of the time. Sir Hilary Jenkinson’s *A Manual of Archive Administration* was “one of the first comprehensive statements of archival theory” (41). He built upon the foundations of the Dutch Manual adding an emphasis on theory rather than practice. Jenkinson viewed the archival record as “a substitute for memory” (52) and his theory necessitated an objective archivist to provide custodianship over documents that served to “create an unfiltered and unquestionable truth direct from record creators” (55). This approach to archives and historiography aligned with the empirical methods of scientific

history stemming from the work of German historian Leopold van Ranke in the late 19th century.

The Second World War brought with it an exponential growth in the documentary record produced by growing bureaucracy. This was a watershed moment that enabled a paradigm shift in archival theory. Confronted with an avalanche of records, American archivist Theodore Schellenberg broke with European archival practices; the legacy based on custodianship of medieval records did not apply to the needs of American archivists in the post-war era. As social and cultural perspectives changed, the writing of history changed as well and the objective “truth” of Jenkinson’s archives was also no longer a predominant factor. Schellenberg’s theories enabled archivists to manage the massively expanding documentary record while also embracing a “definition of archival value based on interest and research value” (70). The scientific history of van Ranke gave way to historical relativism and the French *Annales* school, followed by a number of different schools of thought in academia. Each new historiographic turn interrogated the archival record in a different way creating downstream effects on archival theory, specifically with regard to determining that which is kept in the archives. Schellenberg’s theory can be summarized into two essential elements: “records are produced during official activities and...the value of records in the archives is different than the reason the records were created” (82). Although this new paradigm was the first significant change in archival theory and happened to coincide with massive cultural and societal upheaval during the post-war period, it did not free Schellenberg’s approach from perpetuating problems associated with traditional power dynamics. Schellenberg’s methods were later critiqued as reinforcing the hierarchies in place at the time of records creation which perpetuates “the under-representation of groups of people who already lack substantial amounts of official power” (97).

A common thread running through twentieth century historiography is an ever quickening pace of historians applying new methodologies to interrogate the archival record in different ways. However, the causal relationships between history, historiography, and archival theory have resulted in an archival record that has been slow to reflect the changes in the society that creates it. It was not until the last decade of the 20th century that archivists began, in earnest, to reevaluate archival theory; this simmered within the profession and has found a renewed vigor with the emergence of critical archival theory in the last few years.<sup>3</sup>

The archival profession has been an active participant in the wider societal trend to critically examine representation and traditional power dynamics. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) has taken proactive steps to address matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion in both professional membership and archival holdings across the United States. SAA began incorporating elements of diversity in its institutional documentation in the early 1990s, adopted an official “Statement on Diversity and Inclusion” in 2010, and incorporated these elements in the 2014-2018 strategic plan. These gradual steps are having an impact on the field, but, as mentioned above, archives are slow to change. A growing number of theorists have continued to challenge and push the profession with a movement known as “critical archival studies.” Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand rooted this emergent field in the critical theory of Max Horkheimer in which they work to “[expose] what is wrong with society and [identify] the actors enabled to change it” (2).

In his 2016 keynote address to the National Digital Stewardship Alliance, Bergis Jules discussed the “silences, absences, and distortions, mostly affecting the legacies of the less privileged” that still exist despite decades of changing professional and societal values. Current trends further reject the “neutrality” of previous theoretical paradigms as such a stance forgoes

the “critical interrogation of the cultural character of our records” (Jules). The historical touchstone for this critique of archival theory is Howard Zinn’s address at the SAA annual conference in 1970 in which he argued that the traditionally fundamental archival principle of neutrality “perpetuates the political and economic status quo” and that archival work is an inherently political act (qtd. in Jules). Jules takes this one step further when he states that “in our line of work neutrality is a dangerous idea that prioritizes dominant culture, white male culture.” This is true whether we are talking about government archives, corporate records, or sf collections.

The inclusion of materials in the archives confers legitimacy and creates a tangible evidentiary record of the actions, or even existence, of individuals, groups, and society as whole. In this context, the rejection of a stance of neutrality provides us with an appropriate next step in archival theory and collecting. There is a clear progression from Jenkinson’s passive archives to the active collecting and appraisal of Shellenberg. The development of critical archival studies presents an opportunity for a new paradigm shift in the archives: to take a further step and leave behind the traditional and historical assumption of neutrality, look beyond an inferred research value of collections, and begin to collect intentionally in order to erase silences and address absences in the archival record.

### **No Question of Value**

Fandom materials present an interesting case for exploring questions of value or issues of inclusion in the archival record. In the same way that sf and fantasy, as “genre material,” were deemed by most to be unworthy of academic inquiry for many decades, so too the boundary of what is worth studying has slowly progressed to incorporate marginal sub-sections and mediums



within the genres. For example, science fiction pulp magazines were seen as “low-brow” content not worthy of serious consideration, but new avenues of research are being found that utilize them and libraries and archives are beginning to develop collections that serve these new interests. In the meantime, sf communities themselves have started to receive peer recognition of collecting and organizing their own content: the 2019 Hugo award for Archive of Our Own demonstrates this increasing attention to, and validation of, fandom as a whole that we hope will be followed by a continued increase of academic interest.

Traditionally, public libraries have been more active in providing graphic novels, comics and manga for their patrons than archives or special collections departments. However, one need only look at the growing use of these materials for teaching and research to see this starting to change. A 2010 study found that academic libraries were collecting graphic novels at higher frequencies than manga, though the researchers felt that neither of the two were avidly collected (Masuchika and Boldt). However, this study only searched for manga titles that appeared on “best of” lists and, due to the scarcity of such resources for manga, only 8 manga titles were selected for use in the study. It’s highly likely that other manga held in the libraries were not counted due to this requirement. In addition, the inclusion of Ohio State University in the study, which holds over 13,000 manga (Kamolpechara), skews these statistical surveys. Another study conducted in 2014 found that 97% of public libraries were collecting graphic novels and comic books in some capacity (Scheider). Even professional organizations are starting to see the need to provide guidance on the use and collection of graphic novels and comics in academia. In 2018, the American Library Association decided to convert the 8-year old grassroots comic interest group to an official roundtable (“Graphic Novel and Comics Member Initiative Group becomes Round Table”). While it is evident that graphic novels, comics and, to some extent, manga are

mainstays in both public and academic libraries, it can be difficult to track their exact representation in collections due to limitations in cataloguing (O'English et al.). Thus, some scholars are drawing attention to the fact that libraries will need to reassess how they make graphic novels and comics accessible as well as exploring unique solutions such as crowdsourced social tagging (West).

Ephemera are a common mainstay of sf archives and slash fiction falls into this category with its homemade and small-scale character. Slash fiction gets its name from the forward slash used to symbolize the non-canonical romantic, and often sexual, relationship between two characters of an entertainment franchise. Its origins can be traced to *Star Trek* fandom in the 1960s when Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock became the first slash pairing and served as the model for many years. According to research from Jenna Sinclair, a community member and fanzine publisher, the first Kirk/Spock (K/S) story was published in 1974, though anecdotal evidence suggests it started in the late sixties around the time the show was cancelled with the earliest material circulated privately between fans in the UK (“A Short History of Early K/S or How the First Slash Fandom Came to Be”). The chronology Sinclair pieced together shows publishing of K/S slowly gained traction and by the late 1970s there were a number of dedicated fan anthologies and zines being published on a regular basis. Slash fiction fandoms would eventually emerge alongside most popular entertainment franchises and in the 1990s femslash started to gain traction with the popular *Xena: Warrior Princess* tv show. Slash fiction and its corresponding fandom community has grown steadily since the late 1970s, but the legitimacy of such material and groups in academic circles lagged behind for many years. The first serious academic inquiries into fandom and slash did not emerge until Constance Penley's work on feminism and pop culture in 1989 and Henry Jenkins' analysis of fandoms in his book *Textual*

*Poachers* published in 1992. These beginnings did not unleash waves of research and the study of slash fiction and fandom remains a relatively untapped resource.

Furthermore, although sf fandom emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, resources for scholarly inquiries of fandom are scarce. Penley's groundbreaking work relied on an ethnographic methodology, rather than a historical one, as she immersed herself into fandom circles by attending conventions, interviewing fans, and developing her own collection of fanzines. Whereas Penley had to create her own collection of primary source material and engage face to face with her subjects of study, the development of sf archival collections allows for new avenues of scholarly research. Justine Larbalestier's work *The Battle of the Sexes* is an example of how the inclusion of new materials in the archives creates research opportunities and shapes discourse. She expanded on this in a talk about her dissertation research for the Friends of the University of Sydney Library in 2002:

"Sitting in Rare Books surrounded by thousands of sf fanzines, magazines and books I was able to follow the emergence of science fiction fandom and the science fiction community. The majority of academic work on science fiction either ignores or says very little about the importance of the science fiction magazines and of science fiction fandom. I believe the major reason for that is simply lack of access." (Larbalestier, "Researching")

This groundbreaking work on the participation of women in early science fiction fandom and its analysis of the discourse on sex and gender was made possible by the existence of a large collection of materials in the archives, materials that, for decades, were seen as ephemeral and the unserious domain of mid-century male adolescence.

In contrast to the gradual development of sf fandom, the popularity of Japanese manga has steadily increased since the genre was first introduced to western audiences in the 1960's through Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy*. Market research indicates that manga sales are growing at an even faster rate than traditional graphic novels and comic books with manga sales now accounting for 25% of the total graphic novel market in the US ("2019 Manga White Paper Release"). Simultaneously, the academic study of manga has remained steady with an average publication of 34 articles per year since 2015 according to Web of Science. Recently published scholarly articles on manga explore topics as diverse as portrayals of self-injury (Seko and Kikuchi), the soft power of 'Cool Japan' (Tamaki), and copyright law (Schroff). Scholarship specifically on BL is scarcer, yet BL has been a minor object of study in the west since Sharon Kinsella's dissertation on the evolving manga market for the University of Oxford in 1996. While more institutions are choosing to validate the academic study and cultural popularity of manga by collecting it for scholars, few institutions are collecting subgenres that are considered marginal, even by fans. One such subgenre is known as *shōnen-ai*, which translates to "boys' love" and depicts romantic relationships between male protagonists. The terms *shōnen-ai* and *yaoi* tend to be used interchangeably by fans in the US, but there are some key differences between them. In contrast to the softness and romance of *shōnen-ai*, *yaoi* portrays erotic and sexually explicit relationships between male protagonists. *Yaoi* originally developed as a fanmade subgenre of commercially printed *shōnen-ai*, but today *yaoi* encompasses both fanmade and commercial media due to its rising popularity. "Boys' love" (or BL) is sometimes used as an umbrella term in the US to refer to both *shōnen-ai* and *yaoi*.

Tokyopop became the first US company to publish a BL manga in the fall of 2003, however, BL manga emerged in Japan much earlier in the 1970's and coincided with the rise of

the first female *mangaka* (manga artists), often referred to as the Year 24 Group. Although manga geared towards female audiences had existed before then, they were written by male *mangaka* and were simply known as *shōjo* manga (girls' comics). While the first BL manga focused primarily on romance, eventually the BL fandom expanded in popularity and fans began to develop, create and disseminate their own works. These fanmade and self-published works (known as *doujinshi*) expanded the scope of BL by parodying homoerotic relationships between characters outside of their respective canons, thereby assuming some of the same conventions and practices found in western slash fiction communities. This new subgenre became known by the self-deprecating term *yaoi*, which is an acronym for the Japanese phrase *yama nashi* [no climax], *ochinashi* [no point], and *imi nashi* [no meaning], emphasizing the focus on the erotic rather than the romantic narrative typical of BL. Yet paradoxically, while it quickly rose in popularity, *yaoi* manga and its fans remained ostracized by many outside of their tight-knit community.

Whereas slash fiction remains a primarily grassroots community without commercial representation, *yaoi* found commercial success in both Japan and the US. Despite its self-deprecating nature, *yaoi* fandom became a commercial powerhouse in Japan and continues to remain popular abroad. Japanese publishers were even known to hire talented creators of *yaoi doujinshi* to develop commercial *yaoi* manga for publication in popular magazines like *Juné* (McLelland 277). Despite this major difference, there are many similarities between the slash and BL fandoms. The internet has become not only a communication hub for these communities, but also a site where the boundaries separating these fandoms can be blurred. In many cases, the terms slash and *yaoi* become interchangeable online. Slash (no longer limited to just *Star Trek* fandom) and *yaoi* fan fiction can be found on websites like Archive of Our Own (36,956 works

tagged as slash), Fanfiction.net (112,059 works tagged as *yaoi*) and Wattpad (105,000 works tagged as *yaoi*, 30,000 tagged as slash). BL manga and slash artwork can be found on sites like Deviant Art (352,000 works tagged as *yaoi*) and, in the case of manga, specialty sites like Mangago.me. Fans also congregate in online forums such as AarinFantasy, one of the largest English-speaking BL manga forums with over 480,000 members. Following in the sf tradition, slash and BL fans worldwide host their own fan conventions, including (but not limited to): Yaoi-Con, ConStrict, CON.TXT, Escapade, Lubricus, get/together Tribal Forces and KiSmet, oftentimes with select proceeds going to charitable causes. The enduring presence of slash and BL communities cements them as important participants in the broader story of speculative fiction in the US. As social and cultural trends continue to change, especially with regards to gender and sexuality, the longevity and growth of slash and BL communities demonstrates the importance of acquiring and preserving materials relating to their activities and fandom. For decades, these communities have created their own space for exploring and discussing non-traditional views of gender and sexuality. Documenting these groups is integral to understanding fandom as a whole.

### **Subverting the Gender Binary**

Incorporating slash and BL manga into the archive does present some challenges. For one, as we seek to diversify our holdings and incorporate more inclusive viewpoints into our ever decreasing archival space, we must also be mindful of which identities and perspectives are represented by slash fiction and BL manga. For instance, while slash directly challenges the sexual mores and gender roles of dominant culture, it is coming from a near homogeneous demographic group “made up almost exclusively of overeducated but underemployed

heterosexual women” (Kustritz 376). Early studies of slash were often focused on general fandom elements and what role participation in this type of fandom served for the participating members. Until recently, slash should not be construed as part of an LGBTQ+ movement or about homosexuality. Early research by Constance Penley showed a fair amount of debate within the K/S community whether or not Kirk and Spock should be seen as homosexual (313). She noted that “there is a tendency in this literature to put these two men together sexually but still, improbably, maintain that they are heterosexual” (314). Taking a different approach, Anne Kustritz circumvents the gender question entirely by arguing that “slash is not about being gay (or being straight). It is about being in love” (379). The early studies that touched on slash fiction were primarily coming from the general pop culture and fandom angle, but the last decade has shown a growing interest in slash and how it fits in with gender and queer studies. The journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, primarily focused on fan and media studies, is a good example of this and saw a small but consistent presence of works on slash each year for the past decade. It is worth reiterating that research is frequently dictated by the material resources that are available. Archival collections documenting marginal(ized) or underrepresented groups open new paths of inquiry and create opportunities for new perspectives and understandings. This is exemplified by comparing the works of Constance Penley and Justine Larbalestier. Where Penley’s research relied on physically meeting fandom groups and becoming a part of the community, Larbalestier’s examination of gender and sexuality in science fiction and fandom was enabled by the existence of large collections of primary source materials. A similar scholarly step is waiting to be taken with regards to studies of slash and yaoi/BL; expanding the archival record, and making it more inclusive, is a prerequisite for new scholarship to be undertaken.

As with slash fiction, researchers are now beginning to examine how BL creates spaces for fans to explore their own sexualities outside of established binaries and traditions. For instance, Simon Turner's survey of interdisciplinary approaches to studying *yaoi* urges us to incorporate concepts of queer theory to "consider how identification with *yaoi* need not be thought of as identification with characters, but rather connections with whole narratives" that disrupt heteronormativity (464). Andrea Wood takes this idea a step further, arguing that BL can be viewed as an act of queer resistance, one that clearly demonstrates a "queer articulation of dissatisfaction with heterosexual hegemony" although she also acknowledges that not all BL is "radically queer, unproblematic, or completely free from or resistant to heterosexism" (46). Certainly, there are BL tropes and dynamics that may be viewed as problematic and objectifying. One common example is casting the two protagonists into either a *seme* (from *semeru*, to attack) or *uke* (from *ukeru*, to receive) role (Turner 459). These can be translated as the 'top' (dominant) and 'bottom' (submissive) partner in a western colloquial context. Typically, the *seme* is older, taller, more masculine and the *uke* is younger, smaller, and more feminine. Mark McLelland argues that the *seme/uke* binary is evidence that "although women's boy-love stories manage to sidestep the power differentials inherent in all cross-gender relationships in Japan, they are (to a certain extent) still bound up with notions of power based on age" (280) and other characteristics. There is also a self-awareness in the fan community of the potential for *yaoi* to be interpreted as fetishizing and voyeuristic. BL fans are known as *fujoshi*, which is a Japanese term meaning "rotten girls" originally meant to ostracize female BL fans (Galbraith 212), although it is in the process of being reclaimed by the community. Cristal Marie, a self-proclaimed *fujoshi* and a member of the anime video club Get in the Robot, provides important context to understand how complex, and sometimes conflicting, BL can be, even for *fujoshis*:



“BL is not written to appeal to or accurately reflect the experiences of a queer audience, but rather a heterosexual one. It doesn’t show gay couples, it shows the desires of straight women...As *fujobait*, or fan service for *fujoshi*, becomes a trend in mainstream anime it can sometimes blur the line with queerbaiting. It can easily slip into fetishizing the LGBTQ+ community. Many feel that BL itself is a kind of queerbaiting, although many feel that BL is also about female sexual empowerment and catering to the female gaze, which almost always complicates the issue. Especially, if you’re like me, you’re both a *fujoshi* and an ally.”

Marie’s insight demonstrates the often politically and culturally charged realities of participating in BL or slash fandom. Still, in a society in which gender and sexuality are increasingly accepted as a spectrum instead of a binary, the boundary pushing nature of slash fiction and BL manga merits academic inquiry and a place in the archival record.

We inhabit a society in which love, and the ways we love, are heavily prescribed. A society in which “sex is not natural but something that must be learned.” Justine Larbalestier locates this concept of learned sex in a longer tradition of feminist critique, to which she includes the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award’s ability to provide a space “in which this learning process can be investigated and deconstructed” (211). Slash can offer an alternative approach that gives voice to those excluded by dominant power structures: “it allows women to construct narratives that subvert patriarchy by reappropriating those prototypical hero characters who usually reproduce women’s position of social disempowerment” (Kustritz 371). Slash fiction, *yaoi*, and their respective fandoms enable this deconstructing of gender and the unlearning of socially dictated sexual identities. Similarly, the aesthetics of BL manga, particularly *bishounen* (meaning ‘beautiful boy’ and referring to the androgynous/gender-bending characters

quintessential to BL), can be read as “symbol[s] of liberation” (Welker 866) as they offer an opportunity to free readers “not just from patriarchy, but from gender dualism and heteronormativity (843).” Researchers have also started to explore how *yaoi* can be used as a means to subvert authority (Piraquive), promote community-building (O’Brien) and engage in healthy, creative expression (Zsila). Thus, slash fiction and BL manga challenge dominant power structures not only through their existence, but also through the ways that they open avenues for fans to congregate and create their own spaces outside of heteronormativity. This aligns with the principles promoted by critical archival studies to preserve and make accessible materials that pertain to underrepresented voices and communities. The inclusion of slash and BL materials in the archives should be an intentional step to address a broader absence within speculative fiction and fandom archives of marginalized groups and subject matter. It helps recreate the context in which different portions of fandom were in dialogue with each other, the interplay between the margins and the center, and how these dialogues can lead to increased acceptance of once radical perspectives. Bringing these previously neglected materials into the archives ensures an enduring legacy for those groups that created them by giving them a voice within the historical record. It has the compound effect of making our archival collections richer and more inclusive while also presenting new research opportunities.

### **Connecting to the Visceral**

Slash and *yaoi* are meant to arouse and entice. Characters are often depicted in acts of masturbation, fellatio, and sex, among others. Some *yaoi* manga also illustrate rape or other sexually violent acts. These materials can evoke strong, often visceral, responses from researchers, archivists, catalogers, and others who work with them. We define viscerality as an

intense and immediate bodily or emotional response, a so-called “gut reaction,” such as disgust or arousal. While it may seem bizarre to imagine a place for arousal in the archives, the reality is that sexually visceral works (such as pornography or erotica) have been part of the archival record for many years—as long as they conform to particular viewpoints. Erotic booklets known as “Tijuana bibles” are one example. These ephemeral booklets were produced in the 1920s in the US when pornography was illegal and are now prized items within the US antiquarian book trade and archives alike. The archival record also privileges other types of explicit content; pornography blogger and writer Whitney Strub asserts “it’s relatively easy to find smutty Victorian novels and mimeographed sex stories in places like the British Museum and even the Library of Congress” (“Why Libraries Need to Archive Porn”). This preference is not just limited to old or rare materials either. A search on ArchiveGrid shows that institutions hold far more materials pertaining to the *Playboy* magazine empire than to gay, homosexual or queer pornography. These discrepancies and trends suggest there is an “acceptable” type of sexual content which more easily enters the archival record: that which replicates the white, heteronormative male gaze. In contrast, collecting slash and BL affirms that both the female gaze and queer sexualities belong in the archives.

On the surface, an encounter with viscosity, particularly arousal, in the archive may seem inappropriate or unprofessional, but these feelings, whether intended or not, are a typical condition of embodied research. Some avenues of scholarly research, exemplified by feminist and queer studies, specifically seek to engage with these experiences of embodiment. For example, Zeb Tortorici has explored using viscosity as a framework to examine the documentation and archiving of criminal cases of “sins against nature” (such as sodomy or necrophilia) in eighteenth and early nineteenth century New Spain. Tortorici’s framework is

“one that allows us to explicitly link visceral sensations (and archival affects) to the production of historical knowledge and the very processes through which the bodies and desires of others come to be archived in the first place and thereby enter historicity” (408). While we do not equate the subject matter of slash or BL with “sins against nature,” Tortorici’s framework of viscosity can provide critical insight into the ways that the inherent viscosity of slash and *yaoi* impact how they are perceived, archived, and accessed. We speculate that it is exactly their otherness which may deter archivists and librarians from collecting or purchasing these materials. Yet, by avoiding these materials because of the visceral responses they provoke within us, we may “unwittingly relegate such representations of bodies and desire to the margins of archival ontology and historical inquiry” (432). Doing so would be counter to the principles of critical archival theory and would, instead, continue the historical absence of queer communities from the archival record or perpetuate collecting practices that pathologize queerness. Alana Kumbier exemplifies this point by writing that if queerness even shows up in the archives, it is often found “in the places deviance is measured, recorded, and defined: in medical records, police files, case studies, research reports, and propaganda” (81). As archivists, we must seek to preserve materials that represent queer perspectives outside of such pathologization. This is but one example of how archivists must push back against the professional stance of neutrality; instead of avoiding these materials, we should strive to recognize their value and be intentional as we create space for diverse viewpoints and identities in the archive.

### **Journeys to the Eaton Collection**

Access is a key challenge to consider when collecting marginal fandom materials. As mentioned earlier, cataloguing limitations can make finding graphic novels, comics and manga difficult for

researchers. This is especially the case with manga, which in the Eaton Collection are accessed through the library catalog. This is complicated by the fact that they are catalogued under various terminologies including: graphic novels, comics, manga, periodical, and even journal due to the fact that manga are often serialized. Differences in cataloging can also be caused by changing tools, local conventions, and staff turnover. Similarly, it is difficult for researchers who are interested in a particular subgenre of manga (such as *yaoi*) to search for only that type of manga in the library; oftentimes these nuanced terminologies are not included in the bibliographic record. Therefore, sometimes the only method of searching for a particular subgenre is to search by author or title, which can be very daunting, or to already know what you are looking for. Libraries and archives can make these subgenres more accessible by creating LibGuides, blogs or other forms of curated content showcasing what subgenres or key subjects are represented within their collections. These tools also have the potential to open up dialogue with community members themselves, so they can give input and clarification for instances where the archivist may need additional knowledge. This connection and dialogue with the community is a crucial part of the movement to incorporate principles of critical archival studies into our daily work.

As academic interest and usage of graphic novels, comics and manga continues to grow, libraries will need to find ways to collect these items and accurately describe them.

Unfortunately, there is not always consensus within the library profession with regard to the cataloging of these materials and this fractured approach can make it harder to find and co-locate materials. Additionally, the tools available to the profession, e.g. LOC cataloging and authorities, are slow to adapt and are not always current with the cutting edge of best practices in terms of identity and classification. Still, this is necessary work. Creating systems and cataloging standards to make accessibility easier for patrons is part of the process of legitimizing the

presence of these fandom (and other marginalized) materials in our spaces. It is not enough to simply acquire the items and consider our work towards inclusivity done; we must also find ways to support the discovery and usability of these items for our patrons. This may require challenging archivists and librarians to acquire more specialized knowledge of the niche fields they collect while also limiting their reliance on award winners or “best of” lists.

The arduous journey of the K/S collection to UC Riverside exemplifies the slow, and often meandering, way in which these challenges to traditional archival methods are made. The Kirk/Spock Star Trek fan fiction collection was donated to the Special Collections department at UC Riverside in 2008, but it was not a straightforward process. The donor had amassed a very large collection of K/S fanzines and had reached out to several institutions with pop culture collections to find a home for it. She commented on the clear lack of interest from other institutions once they understood the nature of the fanzines in correspondence with the then director of Special Collections. In one example, the donor was engaged in discussions with an institution for two years, visited the institution, and came away with “the DISTINCT [sic] impression that the librarian didn’t want them” once the content of the materials was understood (Departmental correspondence with donor). It was a benefit to the Eaton Collection that other institutions were clearly not interested in these slash materials, however we cannot say that they were acquired specifically because they were slash zines. In the same correspondence thread with the donor, it is clear that the director saw them first and foremost as an addition to the already substantial fanzine collection at UC Riverside, secondly it was a good complement to a wide range of other *Star Trek* materials and collections, and the slash aspect was a tertiary concern.

The BL manga in Eaton were acquired in two ways: some were included in a donation by Fred Patten (1940-2018) and others were purchased through an initiative to increase diversity

and representation in the Eaton Collection. Fred Patten was a pioneer in bringing anime and manga to the US through his bookstore Wonderworld Books and his leadership in co-founding the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization in 1977, the first US anime fan club. Patten's materials were acquired for the Eaton Collection in large part due to his crucial role in the sf community, particularly his participation in the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society of which he had been an active member since 1960. A fortuitous bonus for the archives was the inclusion of materials from Patten's other interests in anime, manga, and furry fandom. As with the K/S collection, interest in these niche fandoms was secondary to the foremost interest in Patten as an established sf fan, writer and historian. Similarly, it is possible that the BL manga went unnoticed, as it constitutes a very small portion of Patten's large manga donation and the materials were not explicitly labeled as BL in any internal documentation.

The BL manga acquired during the diversity initiative, however, presents a different case. These manga were batch-purchased along with LGBTQ+ graphic novels and comics in preparation for an LGBTQ+ outreach event. While well-intentioned, BL manga should not be confused or considered interchangeable with LGBTQ+ literature as they have very distinct origins and different audiences in mind. Likewise, for the uninitiated, at first glance it can seem obvious that slash fiction is clearly about male homosexuality. Without a familiarity of slash or BL fandom, it is easy to see how such conclusions are arrived at. Nowadays, however, the boundaries are more blurred and it can be argued that BL manga and slash are queer due to their rejection of traditional heteronormativity. These materials may also appeal to Queer audiences regardless of their intended audience. Still, it remains important to be conscious of these nuances between slash/BL and media specifically made by LGBTQ+ people, especially in an era where we recognize and value the power of #OwnVoices.

## **Conclusion**

Calling for archives to collect these materials is only one step in a larger process towards better serving and supporting underrepresented communities.<sup>4</sup> For that reason, we cannot ignore the long-term responsibilities inherent in collecting these materials, such as preservation and digitization. The ethics and risks of digitizing fanmade and sexually explicit materials is beyond the scope of this paper, however it is crucial to consider in a conversation about future directions. Institutions will need to have ongoing conversations with their constituents and the communities represented in their archives before embarking on those next steps. Similarly, we want to acknowledge that these materials are not without their limitations due to their ephemeral nature. It is often difficult to trace copyright holders in normal archival contexts, even moreso with fanmade materials collated into personal archives, as in the case of the K/S Star Trek fan fiction collection. Yet, these challenges should not discount the benefits of collecting these materials. While they may not readily lend themselves to easy access online, they do provide a wealth of research information and insight into niche communities that continue to thrive.

While neither slash nor BL were the focus of acquiring these collections for the Eaton Collection, they are nonetheless valuable additions to the archives. They attest to the cultural and historic significance and uniqueness of slash and BL fandoms. Situated within the larger genre of speculative fiction and sf, which is white and male dominated, these materials represent fluidity in gender, sex, queerness and the power of the female gaze. As such, they are subversive, and to many, taboo. Slash and BL fans have faced ostracization both from within their larger fan communities and outsiders as well. Yet they still manage to cultivate spaces of their own through conventions, online forums, and fan fiction/art websites. Archiving slash and BL also offers new



research opportunities for scholars who have typically relied on ethnographic methods to study and engage with these communities. Furthermore, the principles of critical archival studies call on us to consider the needs of those who have been historically erased or silenced in the archive. Slash and BL communities have received some academic attention as objects of study, but still have little to no representation in archives. Why are the products of these fandom communities considered worthy of study, yet not worthy enough to warrant preserving and protecting for future generations? The archive must not cater only to researchers, but also to those who are researched by ensuring that they are properly represented and included in larger narratives, if they so wish. It is often easy for archivists to get lost in the weeds, focusing too much on the materials in our collections, and lose sight of the real mission of the archives: to serve the entire community, especially those whose perspectives have not been traditionally valued. The power of the archives to legitimize and bestow enduring value stems from this fundamental charge.

Preserving slash fiction and BL manga makes the bold statement that these groups have value as part of the documentary record and that sexuality and fandom have a place in the archive, perhaps because of their visceral nature. These materials help shape and define fandom and play a role in documenting the larger story of speculative fiction and sf in the cultural context of the US. The ways that they were acquired, however, also shed light on how happenstance can sometimes “fill in the gaps” for current or emerging trends in archival theory and historiography. It is easy from our current cultural and academic vantage point to look back on such acquisitions and say that the slash or BL aspect should have been a larger factor rather than an afterthought. However, the collections still found their way to an archive for the benefit of researchers and we must give credit where it is due for recognizing potential value in a collection, especially when others refused it or denied it that value. It should be emphasized that

BL and slash are just two examples of groups expressing themselves in opposition to the oppression of dominant culture and its drive for conformity; two groups seeking a space in which love “is entirely free of the culture’s whole discourse of gender and sex roles” (Russ 89). These types of collections, the ones that inherently pose questions both to society and institutions, simply through their being in the world, are exactly the kind that need to be a larger part of the archival record because of the way they interrogate or challenge our praxis as historians, archivists, and members of society.

## **Notes**

1. See the Sad/Rabid Puppies campaigns at the Hugo awards from 2013 to 2016.
2. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality’ in 1989 to reference Black women’s dual oppression as both people of color and members of the female gender.
3. The last chapter of Ridener’s book outlines some of these theorists from the early 2000s. The below cited works by Jules and Caswell et al. also refer to many others who are actively challenging the profession and contributing to this current critical movement.
4. While we argue for the importance of academic archives to collect more queer and/or fanmade texts, we recognize this cannot erase or replace the work already being done by queer community archives. For example, The ArQuives do have select BL materials in their collections and others may also collect similar fandom materials. Our aim is to complement the work of queer community archives in documenting these historically marginalized voices and to make academic archives more diverse and inclusive for all.

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