

SHONEN

VOGUE



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Why Does Everything have to be Gay:

The Voyage of the Gay Ships

Op. Ed

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There are a multitude of factors that make a shonen identifiable as a shonen; There's a journey motivated by a goal, trials of friendship, and of course intense battles. Shonen is a genre that initially was targeted towards young boys, but nowadays there are a multitude of diverse peoples who enjoy the genre. With the rise in both visibility and popularity for manga in general, this medium is seeing increased engagement through discourse.

A popular area of discussion has always been ships, or pairings of characters that fans envision together romantically. These ships may or may not always be supported by canon, and oftentimes they are not. This is especially true regarding queer ships. With the rise in shonen manga popularity, so too has risen the popularity of genres like boys love (bl) which centers on relationships between two men. While this genre has always been present, within fandoms there has been a seemingly sudden and meteoric rise in queer ships.

As I've said, this genre and these ships have always existed; SasuNaru and NaruSasu shippers existed long before the days of BakuDeku. These types of ships have become more of a commonality within the community, particularly concerning shows that portray close male relationships such as shonen and sports manga.

With these two genres specifically, there is the added tension of rivalry and competition between these male characters. In shonen, it is often the norm that the female counterparts of the male leads lack development and real characterization. Their motivations rely on the male characters and they exist merely as a romantic interest that will be important at a later time. Even with these female characters positioned as the romantic partners of the male leads, their relationship to the male character seems lacking in comparison to that of their bond with their male rival.

This is seen in Naruto with both Hinata and Sakura. Both girls are long foreshadowed to be the endgame love interests of Naruto and Sasuke respectively, but Naruto and Sasuke spend infinitely more time invested in each other. Their motivation to improve is each other and their development hinges on their relationship. In Haikyuu, the characters Kageyama and Hinata have a journey to their goal that begins and ends with one another. They are bonded by their mutual goal and like Naruto and Sasuke they possess a deep emotional understanding of each other. Both the lack of development with female characters and the complex bond shared between these male characters leads to a tendency to pair them together romantically, rather than in the 'traditional' heteronormative pairing.



Much of the argument negating these ships centers around the fact that they will likely never be confirmed by canon and the author. Truthfully, while it is unfortunate, this isn't outside of what is the norm for queer relationships in this genre. Series like Tiger & Bunny feature dialogue heavily laden with innuendo and implication, but the romantic relationship between the two leads has never been confirmed. In Haikyuu, the ending of the series features Hinata at last meeting Kageyama on the world stage as his rival and Kageyama confirming that Hinata had indeed 'made it'. Though Kageyama recognized Hinata as his rival and partner in every conceivable way, their relationship is acknowledged as one of mere friendship and friendly rivalry. But, just because canon does not support these ships does not mean that such plotlines are never explored. Platforms like Archive of Our Own and Wattpad allow for fans to become creators and generate their own content that may investigate these relationships. Fanfiction supersedes the boundaries set by traditional canon and allows for increased representation through the expression of these queer identities and stories.

Much of the discontent that exists with these fictional ships also begs the question: Would there be as much resistance if the pair was heteronormative? This is not to suggest that preferring the pairings supported by the plot is overtly homophobic, but much of the discourse that surrounds queer ships is. To argue that the innate dislike of these pairings is not rooted in unadulterated homophobia would be simply untrue. Many times fans will argue that such a pairing is 'just weird' or that they 'just can't imagine it'. But would this be the case if the pair were a boy and girl? If Naruto had told a female Sasuke that he was willing to die alongside them, would that not be deemed a romantic notion? It's my opinion that it would be.







