

# How does queerness intersect with fandom bonding in a Discord youth writing community?

## Introduction

Write4Change is a collaborative international authoring community of youth writers (13+) supported by a team of adult and youth moderators and researchers connected to the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. The Write4Change Discord was launched this July as a public server. Discord was launched in 2015 and has now become one of the most used sites for youth to connect online over gaming, fandoms, and meet others online. From experience, fandom conversation is essential to many Discord servers. However, there is not yet enough research on how bonds between queer youth form through fandoms in Discord communities. As a deeply queer person, English major, and author, I have a particular interest in fandoms and queer culture, so I chose the above question to research.

## Research Setting (Server)

There were 80 members in the server. I studied the server from July to August 20th. The public launch of the server took place in July. I helped construct the server and modify it with feedback from beta users before the launch. The majority of my data was taken from discussions between queer server members in the #fandom-n-ff-talks channel (ff standing for fanfiction).

## Methods

- Observational (field notes from reading through the server)
- Artfactual (screenshots of examples of fandom bonding, ex below)

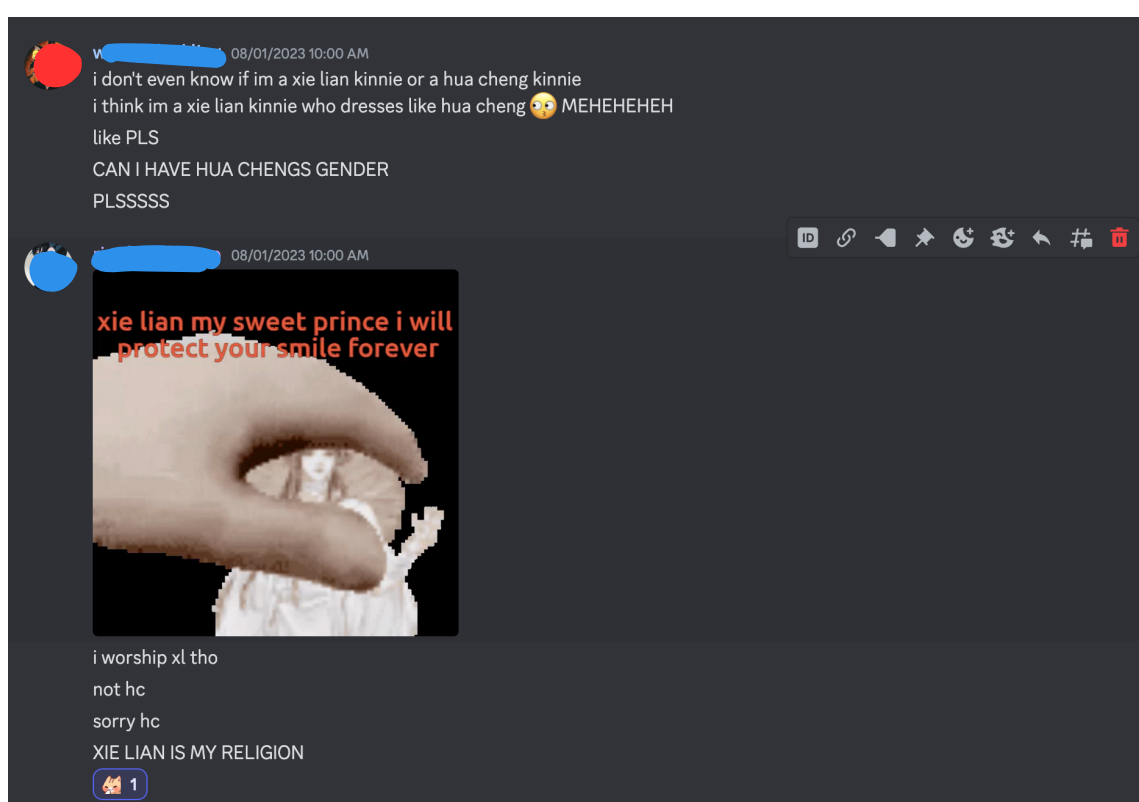
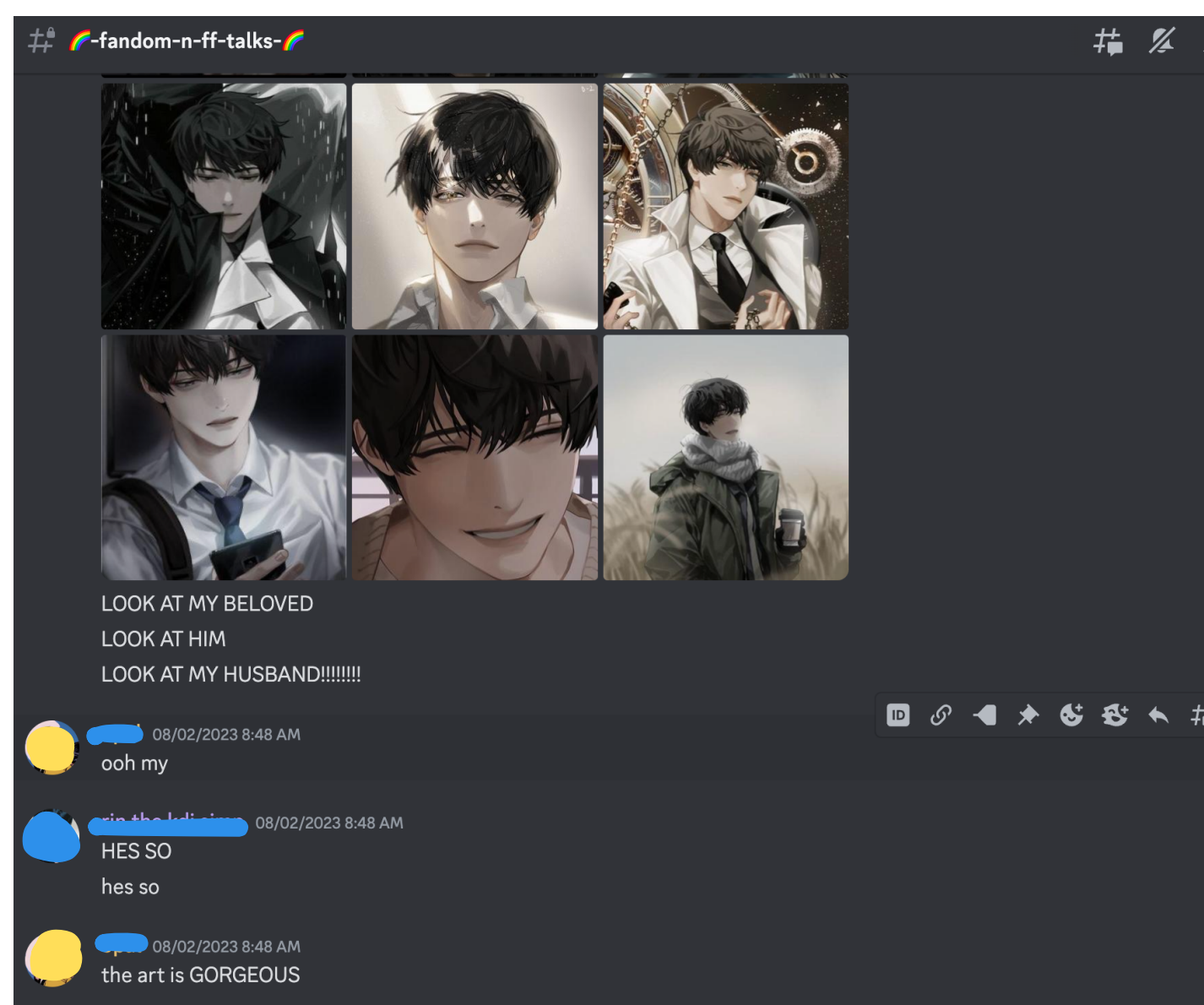


Image 1: Server members raving (positively) about the "gender" of a character from Tian Guan Ci Fu, a Boys Love Chinese novel by MXTX. They are sending one another funny memes and gifs that show affection for the series' characters, particularly the main gay couple.

Image 2: Server members sharing fanart and official art from Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint and typing in all caps to show excitement. The user is fanpesoning over the character Kim Dokja's handsomeness. They soon went on to send official art shipping Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk, a gay, non-canon but popular fandom ship.



- Computational (text scraping)
  - various words were counted for frequency such as "fandom", "fanfic", "gay", "OP", "fan"
  - keyboard smashes were counted (defined as 5+ random letters that are not a misspelled word)
  - all caps messaged were counted (defined as messages with 3+ words in all caps)
  - mentions of certain fandoms popular with server members were counted (ex, MXTX)

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Poster by Ryu (Haley) Creighton, COL 2026

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## Results

43 instances of "fan" and "fans" combined  
0 instances of "stan"  
27 instances of "fandom"  
5 instances of "OP" from users in reference to "overpowered"  
20 instances of keyboard spams (always all caps)  
- 2 users used it most, both queer  
292 instances of all caps in messages in #fandom channel, used most by queer users

LGBTQIA+ words  
29 instance of "queer" in fandom-related conversations  
24 instances of "gay"  
9 instance of "lesbian"  
2 instances of "trans"

23 memes and images related to fandoms being discussed were shared, usually at high points of "fanpersoning"  
vast majority of fandoms mentioned in 2+ messages were queer (ex., MXTX, various xianxia Boys Love novels, Castle Swimmers, Yuri on Ice)  
fandoms without canon major queer presence were discussed in a queer light (ex, Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint, Percy Jackson, Harry Potter)

## Conclusions

- The topics it is most common for young queer writers to bond over are canon queer ships, non canon queer ships, jointly suffering from plot angst, the attractiveness of characters, favorite characters (specifically character personalities and characters with tragic backstories).
- Non canon queer ships can be even more beloved by young online queer fans, who often spend lots of energy and time debating and supporting these ships as canon. I postulate that this occurs as a form of fighting the common queerbaiting that occurs in popular media. It allows such ships to become canon in young queer fans' hearts..
- Queer youth often fandom bond through keyboard smashing, swearing, and writing in all caps, all actions that denote excitement and passion. This may be a habit unique to queer youth. More research must be done here; not much data has yet been collected on non-queer members of the server..
- Sending memes, gifs, fanart, and official art depicting favorite characters is a common fandom bonding style of queer youth.
- Queer youth part of one fandom are more likely to share other fandoms in separate genres (ex. MXTX and ORV).
- More research must be done into queer fandom bonding, such as what exactly bonding over a character's "gender" means, how queer ships so often become fanon, and why queer youth gather online in such communities to bond over fandoms.

## References

1. Widita, A. (2018). The evolving consumer behavior: Fan culture in online community. *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Kearifan Lokal Indonesia*, 2(1), 34. <https://doi.org/10.26805/jmkli.v2i1.17>

