

Mie Hiramoto (National University of Singapore, Singapore) &  
Vincent Pak (National University of Singapore/King's College London, UK)

## Uncritically queer

### Queer speech and visual semiotics of *okama* characters in *shōnen* anime

Anime has become synonymous with global pop culture originating from Japan. This presentation investigates media semiotics of queer male characters in popular *shōnen* 'young male' action anime, a genre that is aimed at adolescent boys and young adults. In particular, we discuss representations of queer male characters that are often marked with distinctively unfavorable features such as creepiness. By examining mediatization strategies of queer anime characters and their portrayals in mainstream pop culture, we disambiguate constructions of masculinity and sexuality from the viewpoints of media semiotics and Foucauldian discourse analysis.

Most characters that appear in mainstream *shōnen* anime conform to heterosexual norms, and protagonists are conventionally dominated by heteronormative male characters. However, some of them feature queer male characters. While they are traditionally relegated to insignificant roles, in more recent anime, there has been a rise of heroic queer characters that take on major roles. Nonetheless, heroic queer characters are still marked with peculiarly non-normative features including the use of *onē-kotoba* 'queer speech', feminized looks/behaviors, and hyper-sexuality. As a result, these characters keep iterating unfavorable images of queer men at the cost of endorsing the dominant heteronormative ideologies.

While dominant discourses based on ideal masculinities function to affirm heteronormative ideologies, they also reaffirm the stigmatization of minority groups and naturalize unequal power relations between dominant and non-dominant groups. By focusing on the discursive patterns and visual representations of the characters, we argue that characteristics of queer male characters are conventionalized via caricatures based on dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity.