

# Harry Potter Fanfiction and LGBTQ+ Acceptance

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## Background

Michelle and I are avid Harry Potter fans, and for our project, we decided to analyze Harry Potter fanfiction data. Specifically, we wanted to research the potential use of fan fiction as an indicator of LGBTQ+ acceptance in society.

Fan fiction consists of stories written by fans of a particular media franchise, such as Harry Potter. They expand on the world of the original work and can take on multiple genres, including romance. What's particularly interesting about Harry Potter fan fiction is the prevalence of same-sex relationships and characters, despite the original works lacking queer representation.

## Hypothesis

Our research question: Can the number of Harry Potter fanfiction pieces written about queer relationships in a certain language be an indicator of a country's LGBTQ+ acceptance? We hypothesized that if a country had more Harry Potter fanfictions with LGBTQ+ relationships written, it would be more likely to also be accepting of LGBTQ+ people. What we found, though, was the exact opposite.

We found the number of queer Harry Potter fanfiction pieces written in a country was actually negatively correlated with LGBTQ+ acceptance in that country. Before we delve further into this finding, we'll briefly expand on our data sources and analysis.

## Data Sources

We obtained our fanfiction data from Archive of Our Own (AO3), which is a popular fanfiction website. They did a one-time release of all their data from 2008 to 2021, with all the fanfictions written during that time, plus metadata and tags.<sup>1</sup> From that, we counted how many Harry Potter fanfiction pieces were written about same-sex pairings, and grouped that by language.<sup>2</sup> We used the language of fanfiction to map to countries where that language is spoken primarily. We evaluated our success by

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<sup>1</sup> [https://archiveofourown.org/admin\\_posts/18804](https://archiveofourown.org/admin_posts/18804)

<sup>2</sup> <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/projects/gai/>

comparing this to LGBTQ+ acceptance data by region collected by the UCLA Law School.<sup>3</sup>

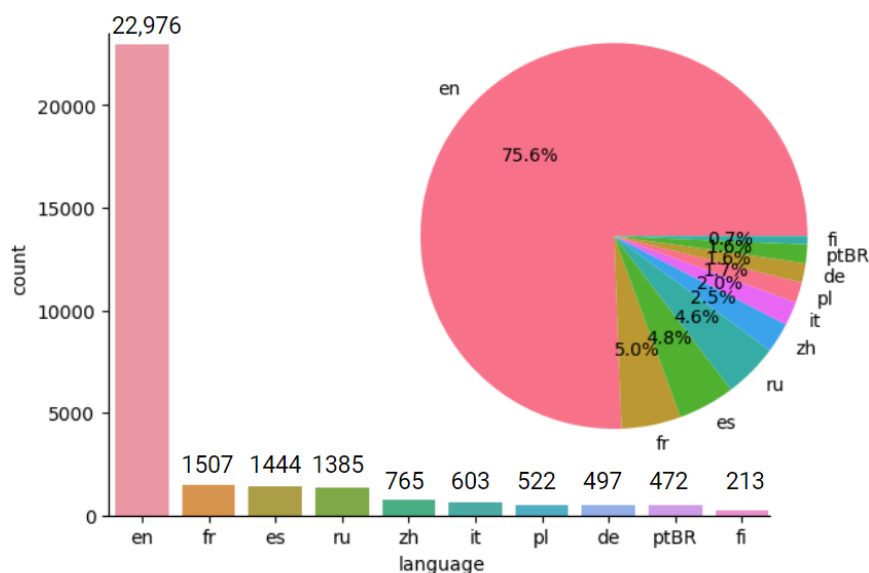
## Exploratory Data Analysis

Before we get back to answering our research question, we wanted to have a bit of fun with our unique dataset and conduct exploratory data analysis.

First, we found the most popular relationships that people wrote fanfictions about, as shown below. Then, we compared this to the most popular Harry Potter relationships written in English fanfiction. Notably, there is one less same-sex couple in the most popular relationships in English.

Most Popular Relationships				Most Popular Relationships in English			
		Ship	Count			Ship	
🏳️‍🌈	1	Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter	44,367	🏳️‍🌈	1	Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter	
🏳️‍🌈	2	Sirius Black/Remus Lupin	19,922	🏳️‍🌈	2	Sirius Black/Remus Lupin	
	3	Hermione Granger/Ron Weasley	12,716		3	Hermione Granger/Ron Weasley	
	4	Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy	12,087		4	Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy	
🏳️‍🌈	5	Harry Potter/Severus Snape	11,275		5	James Potter/Lily Evans Potter	

In addition, we analyzed the number of fanfictions written by language, as shown below. As we expected, the predominant language on AO3 is English.




<sup>3</sup><https://github.com/JovianHQ/opendatasets/blob/master/data/countries-languages-spoken/countries-languages.csv>






Since multiple countries speak some languages such as English or French, it is difficult to attribute the work to a specific region. We decided to focus on languages that are spoken in only one or two countries.

## Answering the Research Question


From visually observing the data analysis, we had already started to get the impression that our hypothesis may not be correct.



### Most Popular Pairings in Korea



	Ship	Count
	1 Draco Malfoy/Ron Weasley	13
	2 Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter	5
	3 Harry Potter/Severus Snape	4
	4 Neville Longbottom/Draco Malfoy	3
	5 Sirius Black/Remus Lupin	2

### Most Popular Pairings in Israel

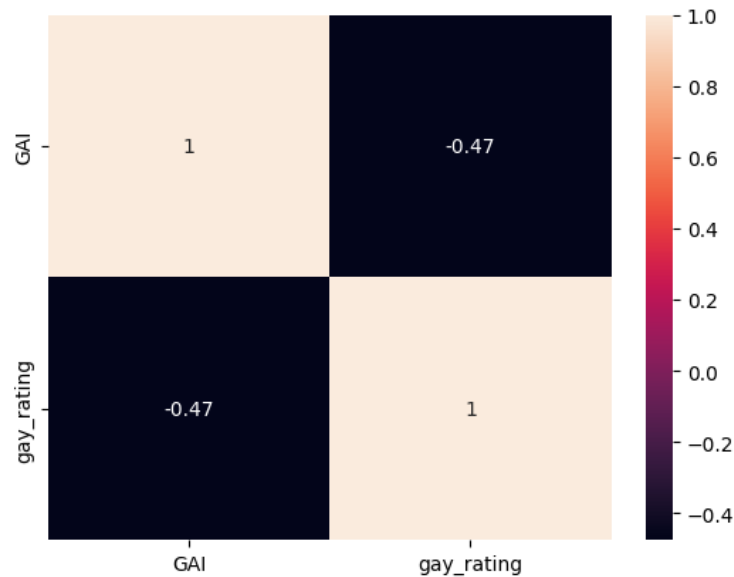


	Ship	Count
	1 Sirius Black/Remus Lupin	17
	2 Draco Malfoy/Ginny Weasley	17
	3 James Potter/Lily Evans Potter	10
	4 Draco Malfoy/Harry Potter	7
	5 Harry Potter/Ginny Weasley	4

The first country we analyzed in depth was South Korea. Korea ranks poorly in global LGBT acceptance, at 75th out of 175 countries, with only 40% of Koreans agreeing that homosexuality should be accepted. However, we noticed that the top 5 pairings for fanfiction written in Korean are all same-sex couples. We compared this to Israel, which ranks much higher than Korea at 44th. However, compared to Korea, only 2 out of the top five pairings written in Hebrew were same-sex.

This is particularly interesting because we hypothesized that countries that were more accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals would be more interested in writing stories about queer couples. However, this seems to be the opposite trend. We hypothesize that one reason for this might be that in countries where gay rights are more restrictive, people seek out alternative forms of media to express their identities.

We sought to confirm this more empirically by finding a correlation between a country's Gay Acceptance Index and our gay-rating, which we calculate as a ratio of same-sex Harry Potter fanfiction over total Harry Potter fanfiction.



As can be seen, we found a -0.5 correlation between GAI and our gay\_rating. This indicates a moderate negative correlation between these variables. This is aligned with our new hypothesis, that countries that are less accepting of LGBTQ+ people overall actually have more Harry Potter LGBTQ+ relationships in fanfiction.

We really enjoyed working on this project and found our findings to be quite interesting. We're grateful for the opportunity to spend time on this topic in this class, and communicate it with the class.