A Look at Boys' Love

In an attempt to shed some light on the overlooked genre of graphic novels and, more specifically that of the homoerotic Japanese comic books of the Yaoi and Shounen Ai genre, this presentation examines multiple representations of the young male body (i.e., the concept of Bishounen or "beautiful boy") in contemporary Japanese popular culture. My presentation demonstrates that Shounen Ai and Yaoi comic books, by women and for women, rely on the well-established concept of the Bishounen body to transcend traditional gender roles that restrict women from exploring their sexualities or experiences outside the domestic sphere. While retracing the origins of the concept in various art forms, I analyze how works of Yaoi and Shounen Ai reimage the Bishounen and invite its readers to consider a disengendered body or the fluidity of a body that embraces both the feminine and the masculine as a medium for escapism.