5-2013

I "like" slash : the demographics of Facebook slash communities.

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I "LIKE" SLASH: THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF FACEBOOK SLASH COMMUNITIES

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2013

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A Thesis Approved on

April 8, 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

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May 11, 2013

The slash fandom is comprised of a group of people who enjoy reading/writing/watching homoerotic interactions between popular heterosexual media characters. Past studies have determined that the fandom is made up of mainly white, heterosexual women. Some theories posited as to why slash is created by the fandom are that it is a remedy to the canon material lacking female role models, a form of empowerment by manipulating egalitarian M/M relationships, an expression of physical and/or mental desire, and a form of social activism. This study surveyed members of slash communities on Facebook in order to collect basic demographic information on this population and to ascertain why these people enjoy slash. Many of the results of this survey agreed with past findings, though the results did indicate that there is some diversity in sexuality and gender identification, and other new demographic data was contributed to the field.

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INTRODUCTION

On July 21st, 2007, most fans of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series said goodbye

to their favorite boy wizard as the seven-book series came to an end with the release of

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Many cried about how their childhoods were

coming to a close, and many shouted, "I can't believe it's over!" However, for some fans

the story has continued on. Harry has gone on many more adventures since destroying

He Who Must Not be Named; possibly one of his biggest adventures was finally seducing

his long time rival Draco Malfoy in the showers after a rousing game of Quidditch, or the

time he was seduced by his most hated Potions Professor Severus Snape after Snape

awoke from his 20 year coma. No, Potter fans, you have not somehow missed out on the

latest Potter book, and you are not missing a few pages at the end of *The Deathly Hallows*.

The scenarios above, and many more like them, are created by fans who use the source

material from their favorite fandom to create their own stories and adventures, many of

which are sexual, and many homoerotic. These stories are called slash fiction.

In the past twenty years there have been several studies done on the topic of slash

fiction and the slash community, though most involve textual analysis of the fictions

themselves or of interviews with small groups of slash fans. Not many studies have been

aimed at gathering information from a larger population of slash fans. Furthermore,

many prior studies were conducted before the popularity of online social media

communities such as facebook.com, and therefore few studies have been targeted

specifically at this community. As such, not much is known about those who participate in slash communities on social media sites. The aim of this study is to survey online slash communities on facebook.com in the hopes of filling this gap in the research by answering the following questions:

- What are the demographics of slash fans on social media communities?

- How involved are they in the slash fandom?

- What are their views about homosexuality in real life?

- How does slash influence their daily interactions with others?

- Why do they participate in the slash fandom?

This study will be viewed through the lenses of reception and queer theories, in that these fictions contain material which has been appropriated from the original, non-homoerotic canon by the fans, and recreated into the slash fictions, which may or may not be a display of or rebellion against heteronormativity.

I am writing this article as an "academic-fan," meaning that I am an active member of the slash community, but also a researcher (Hills, 2002). As a fan of slash fiction and as an academic, I have a unique insight into the goings on in the fandom, and the ability to interpret these events through a theoretical lens. I've chosen to study the slash fandom because although many studies have been conducted about slash and slash fans, there is not much quantitative data on the slash fandom population. Furthermore, many slash studies were done in the early 1990s and early 2000s, and a study of slash fiction communities on the internet will be a unique contribution to the field.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Gender and Sexuality

For this study I need to define many terms. The first of these is the definition of

heteronormativity. Hegemonic beliefs are those beliefs held by the majority in a given

society. In modern American culture the hegemonic belief about sexuality is that it is

heteronormative, meaning there are a set of norms which state that people fall into

distinct sex categories, male and female, with corresponding gender roles. (Lovass &

Jenkins, 2008) Gender is a script constructed by society that is assigned to a person based

on his or her sex. This script commonly dictates that men are supposed to be logical,

assertive, non emotional people (except for aggression), and the main provider and

protector in the relationship, and women are supposed to be emotional, passive, nurturing

and are expected to raise children. (Lorber, 2005) Regarding sexual interactions, women

are expected to be submissive and passive, while men are supposed to be the sexual

initiators and in charge of the interaction. This can be seen in the language we use when it

comes to sex. In typical descriptions of heterosexual intercourse it is stated that the penis

is inserted into the vagina, not that the vagina envelops the penis. Furthermore, in a

heteronormative culture heterosexuality is seen as the norm, and homosexuality is seen as

a lesser other (Lovass & Jenkins, 2008). For this study, homosexuality need also be

defined. In general, heterosexuality--that is, expressing desire for members of the other

sex--is the normative model of sexuality in most cultures throughout history.

Homosexuality--expressing desire for members of the same sex--is most often considered deviant, although certain cultures have, at different times, found a certain level of conditional homosexuality permissible. The most well-known example is that of ancient Greece; young men were expected to attach themselves to an older mentor, who would invariably also serve as a sexual partner. However, men were still expected to maintain wives and families, though marital sexual relations were viewed as duty more than pleasure. Even under circumstances such as these, the adoption of an exclusively homosexual identity was still taboo.

Indeed, such a concept as homosexual identity--or heterosexual identity--is still relatively recent. In fact, the terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual* did not come into common use until the 1880s (and even then, heterosexuality was defined differently than it is today--it encompassed sex for recreational, rather than procreative, reasons, and thus was also seen as deviant, if not to the extent of its counterpart). Before the late Victorian era, homosexual acts did not denote homosexual identity--homosexuality could be conditional. It was around this time, due to a number of factors--renewed religious fervor, a more rigid model of ideal masculinity--that sexuality began to be seen as immutable. If a person took part in homosexual acts, then that person was a homosexual. It was only after advances in neuroscience, many decades later, that sexuality was seen as innate and immutable, though some still refute this.

That sexuality is an either-or proposition is a concept which itself has come under scrutiny. Indiana University researcher Alfred Kinsey, who conducted the first large-scale survey of American sexuality, discarded the either-or model and instead depicted sexuality as a seven-point continuum, in which it was certainly possible for one to be

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completely homosexual (1) or completely heterosexual (7), but more likely that one had experienced some level of attraction to members of both sexes at some time or another. The Kinsey scale has drawn fire from gay rights organizations which argue that it undermines the argument for innate homosexuality. Although there are certainly many people who self-identify as bisexual, members of both the gay and straight communities have accused bisexuals of straddling the fence, trying to have it both ways, and being in denial of their true homosexual orientation. Bisexuals in committed relationships are often classified in terms of their partner's sex, erasing their own sexual identity.

Those who find their sexual orientation lies outside of the norm (i. e. not heterosexual, although in some cases people who identify as straight but develop deviant sexual identities could experience something similar) go through a six-step coming out process as outlined by Cass (1979). In *identity confusion*, one is shocked or confused at the thought that one may be gay. In *identity comparison*, one begins to accept the idea of being gay and weighs the implications of this on one's social and professional life. In *identity tolerance*, one realizes that he or she is not alone and may begin to make connections in the LGBT community. In *identity acceptance*, one has accepted that he or she is gay and is okay with being seen as such by others. In *identity pride*, one takes pride in his or her gay identity and may begin to reject or distance themselves from mainstream heterosexual society, or even see the LGBT world as superior to the straight world. Finally, *identity synthesis* means that one has integrated his or her sexual orientation as just another aspect of self, something that is "no big deal" and does not affect his or her life in any negative way.

Ideally, everyone who goes through the coming out process should arrive at this final stage, although individuals may get "stuck" at one stage along the way or even regress to a previous stage. Some also choose not to proceed, i. e. they accept their homosexuality but keep it to themselves and do not adopt an openly gay identity. Unfortunately, some people may feel they must do this in order to fulfill societal or familial expectations, or for fear of losing or being unable to obtain employment (Cass, 1979).

Many times the heteronormative roles placed upon heterosexual men and women are seen as transferred onto homosexual relationships, such as "the pattern of couple decision-making, the division of household tasks, and sexual behavior in the relationship (Peplau, 1982)." A question often asked by people when confronted by a gay couple is "Who is the man/woman in the relationship?" What the asker wants to know is who is passive or aggressive in the relationship. In a gay male relationship the person who bottoms (the insertee) during intercourse is many times called "the woman," and is often times perceived as effeminate or weak while the top (the inserter) is perceived as "the man," and aggressive, or more dominant. However, viewing homosexual couples in this way is simplistic and incorrect. "[M]ost contemporary gay relation- ships do not conform to traditional "masculine" and "feminine" roles; instead, role flexibility and turn-taking are more common patterns (Peplau, 1982)."

An understanding of the above history, terms, and definitions is important because many of these concepts are present in slash fanfiction. Common themes in these stories have changed over time along with the evolving public perceptions and scientific understanding of homosexuality. With this framework established for understanding the

component of sexuality and gender, it is now necessary to explore the history, terms, and definitions associated with slash fanfiction.

Fanfiction and Fandom

    Fanfiction is a term used to describe the act of a fan appropriating characters from another established work and using the characters to create their own stories. Fanfiction can be based off of any type of media, most prominently television series, but also films, book series, and even real people (reality TV, celebrities, music artists). Fanfictions can be any length, from 100 word "drabbles" depicting a short scene to epic-length novels, some being longer than the original work. The authors of these stories do not write for financial gain--the fact that the characters are protected under copyright prevents this--but for the satisfaction of fleshing out their favorite characters and plotlines, for sharing them with likeminded fans, and "not so much to provide an homage to the fictional universe in question as to rewrite and reinterpret events in the story to suit the desires of the writer (MacDonald, 2006)."

    The material in the original work is defined as *canon*; it is the officially sanctioned works that comprise the continuity of the media. For example, all *Star Trek* television seasons and films are considered canon. *Fanon* is comprised of materials or storylines created by fans using the canon material (MacDonald, 2006). Fanon exists because many times fans will disagree with the canon, and they will write fanfiction as a way to "fix" their problems with the text. For instance, many fans do not like the way things ended in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*; one of the most frequently criticized parts of the text is Snape's death, and many times fiction writers will write stories in which Harry found a way to save Snape from dying or a way to bring him back

from the dead. Some writers even portray Harry finding Snape still alive somewhere and

starting a romance with him, rather than ending up in the canon relationship with Ginny

Weasley. Rewriting the canon this way is akin to "home improvements that refit

prefabricated materials to consumer desires (Jenkins, 1992)."

There are two major types of fanfiction stories: general stories (Gen), in which

the stories do not contain any romantic or sexual plots, and the more popular genre,

romance, or pairing stories. Pairing stories also fall under one of the many different

subgenres, some examples of which include hurt/comfort, in which a character in a story

is hurt and is comforted by other characters; humor; angst; death fic, in which one or both

of the charters in the pairing is dead or dying; and "PWP" ("porn without plot," or "Plot?

What plot?"), in which the story is written purely as erotic material. Similarly, there are

three different types of pairings: heterosexual (het), femmeslash, and slash. Het stories

are stories in which the plot revolves around a romantic relationship involving partners of

different sexes. These pairings can be true to canon relationships, or they can be about a

fan created relationship. Many times authors will write themselves into a story and make

the main character fall in love with them. This (generally frowned upon) type of story is

called a *Mary Sue*. Stories categorized as femmeslash involve a plot when two female

characters are paired. Most of the time these pairings have no basis in canon and are fan

created. Conversely, slash stories are stories in which the plot involves a gay male

relationship. Slash fiction is said to have come about in the late 1970s, and the first slash

couple is often referenced as Kirk/Spock, the captain and first officer of *Star Trek*'s USS

Enterprise. Furthermore, there is the genre of real person slash (RPS), in which real

people, such as the actors that play characters in a media production, are paired together

in fiction as a homosexual couple. A popular RPS pair is 'Pinto,' which is comprised of the actors Zachary Quinto and Chris Pine who play Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk in the new *Star Trek* films, respectively. Another subgenre of slash is chanslash, in which the characters in the story, one or both parties, are under the age of legal consent (the name is derived from the Japanese suffix "*-chan*," which is used to address children). The most traditional definition of slash posits that the characters slashed are decidedly heterosexual in canon, and the homosexual relationship is entirely fan created. Davies (2005) reports that male characters from the canon material are transformed into bisexual men if they had female partners in the past, or into gay men if their relationship history was never clearly established. However, Davies does not mention the fact that many times in these stories the men come out as gay, and claim to have been in the closet beforehand, nor does Davies note the fact that some writers choose not to denote the characters' sexual orientation at all. Furthermore, while "slash fans are often accused of 'misreading,' 'distorting,' or, if the accuser is being positive, 'resisting' the text," many slash authors claim that they slash certain pairings only because there is homoerotic subtext in the original canon (Tosenberger, 2008). Furthermore, many fan communities also include canon homosexual pairings under the slash category, such as Dumbledore and Grindelwald from the *Harry Potter* series, whom J. K. Rowling publicly acknowledged as gay. However it is defined, slash fiction is one of the most popular types of fanfiction, and as such the most studied type of fan fiction academically.

Though most research has pinned slash fiction as being between two male friends in a certain medium, slash fans like to categorize it further. On her Livejournal, slash fan Dira Sudis opined that there are three main types of slash pairings: buddyslash,

enemyslash, and powerslash (Tosenberger, 2008). Buddyslash is the name for slash fiction in which the characters in the pairing are close friends or work closely with one another. Many times these types of characters are paired together because their closeness in the canon is decoded as having homosexual undertones. In this sense, a glance between friends can be translated into a gesture of sexual interest and desire. It is most commonly noted that the first famous pairing of Kirk/Spock, or Spirk, falls under the category of buddyslash. Enemyslash is the name for the opposite type of relationship defined in buddyslash. In enemyslash the characters placed in a pairing are enemies or rivals. Fans typically interpret the hatred and loathing in the canon as a type of unresolved sexual tension, and many use the old adage that there is a thin line between love and hate. One of the most prominent enemyslash pairings is from the Potter slash fandom; Draco/Harry, or Drarry. Draco Malfoy is Harry's perennial adversary. Draco is a Slytherin, the house portrayed as the enemy and the opposite of Harry's own house, Gryffindor. As such Harry is portrayed as noble and brave, honest and true. Draco is sneaky and cruel, and often torments Harry's friends. Harry and Draco compete in the classroom and on the Quidditch pitch and often duel one another. The last, least common type of pairing is powerslash, which is when there is a clear distinction in division of power in the relationship. Although the second most popular pairing in Potter slash fandom, Snape/Harry (or Snarry), could be categorized as enemyslash, it is also a prime example of powerslash. Severus Snape is 19 years older than Harry, he is much more skilled in the magical arts, and he is also Harry's professor in the series, all of which give Snape a clear power advantage over Harry. He frequently treats Harry badly in the classroom, and they both seem to hate one another.

Slash stories, like non-slash stories, can range in ratings. Some slash stories are very mild in content, and may have Gen story lines in which the characters having the adventure just happen to be gay. Moving up the ratings ladder, some slash stories contain tame displays of affection, such as kissing, or an implied established relationship. Finally, some slash stories are graphic in nature, depicting scenes of heavy petting, mutual masturbation, oral sex, anal intercourse, and various other kinks.

Slash fiction is believed to have begun during the height of *Star Trek*, which was one of the first major fandoms beginning in the 1970s. In her study of the *Star Trek* fandom, Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) points out that originally the fandom was mainly dominated by men, and that those men were hostile to female fans who would go to conventions, which were the main gatherings for fan events. Because of their exclusion from the fandom, the women had resorted to creating fan groups of their own. Bacon-Smith opined that active engagement was key in joining a fan group. Early involvement in the fandom required joining "circles," groups of people who are interested in the same fandom as you. These circles produced fanzines (magazines filled with art, stories, and discussions about the particular canon of interest) and video tapes which were passed around for the members' enjoyment. The circles were made up of many talents, including editors, photocopiers, writers, artists, video editors, and even those who simply acquired the produced materials. From these circles and their fanzines came the first documented slash stories. In fact, slash fiction gets its name from the first widely renowned paring, Kirk/Spock from the original *Star Trek* series. The virgule, or slash, between the two names was a way authors denoted that the adults were paired together in a sexual relationship. This denotation stuck, and slash stories today can be identified by

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the virgule between the characters' names. It is important to note, however, that stories involving heterosexual pairings also utilize the virgule to identify the paired couple, yet these stories are not considered to be slash.

In the early days of fandom, fanzines were the main source of fanfiction and slash fiction, and due to the financial and labor investments required to make these fanzines, they were limited in production and access. However, with the growth of technology and the advent of access to the internet by the general population, slash fiction has become more prevalent. In fact, Sharon Cumberland (2000) in a study close to the beginning of the internet slash phenomenon found over 15,000 slash stories on the internet, and claimed that slash "has become one of the main forms of internet erotica." In her study of *Harry Potter* slash fanfiction, MacDonald (2006) estimated that there were at least 25,000 fanfictions on the internet, but conceded that most likely the number is near 100,000. Today there are well over 25,000 slash stories on the internet, and it would be nearly impossible to track them all down. There are thousands of homes for slash on the internet, from forums, to blogs, to fan websites, and to specific websites created just for archiving slash and fan fiction. Furthermore, nearly every type of created work has fanfiction written about it. *Fanfiction.net* is one website created to archive fanfiction. The site was launched in 1998 and is still active today, and it is purported to house the largest collection of fanfiction on the internet. According to the site, the most popular fandom is *Harry Potter*, which is listed to have 555,476 stories as of October 2011, followed by the *Twilight* fandom and the *Supernatural* fandom, respectively. However, although *fanfiction.net* claims to house the most fiction, it would be unwise to assume this as the truth. Website blogging communities such as *livejournal.com* and

insanejournal.com also house fanfiction, yet because these are not traditional archives it would be impossible to know the exact number of stories posted there. *Facebook.com* is another common gathering place for slash fans; thousands of people belong to groups dedicated to specific pairings, or slash in general. Furthermore, there are countless websites devoted exclusively to archiving fictions based on a specific fandom and even specific pairings.

No matter where one finds it, fanfiction always has a rating attached to it. Many times, writers utilize the MPAA system of rating (G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17). Some choose to designate more mature stories with a rating of M, depending on the website where the fiction is stored. Also, the quality of writing varies from website to website. For instance, anyone of any age can upload a story to fanfiction.net. Therefore, it has gained a reputation for housing some of the more amateurish fiction. Other sites like *TheHexFiles.net* (Draco/Harry archive) and *WalkingthePlank.org* (Snape/Harry archive) have strict submission policies, and the moderators of the sites review the quality of the fiction before it is posted.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of slash as an academic topic dates back to nearly twenty years ago. In the early days of research, the internet, the major source of fannish activity today, did not exist. Therefore, the methods of studying slash fandom back then were quite different from today, each with their own unique obstacles to overcome. This review of literature will cover studies from the beginning of the research on this topic up to the most recent. The literature review aims to familiarize the reader to the slash fans, writers, and communities, to the theories about who the slashers are and why they read or write it.

Who Are the Slashers?

Who spends hours writing homoerotic fiction, or creating homoerotic artwork, about characters that aren't even gay and don't even belong to them? Some research has been done on slash writers in the past, but most of the data is from relatively small samples or ethnographic observations, such as the study by Bacon-Smith (1992), who interviewed small circles of slash fans. While the slash writers are fans who are involved in different fandoms; some are involved in many different fandoms, and some only in a few (Jenkins, 1992). In the past fans have been characterized as pitiable, crazed people with no social lives. In fact, William Shatner, who played Captain Kirk, was once quoted as telling fans of *Star Trek* to "get a life" (Hills, 2002) because he could not understand their deep attachment to the show. Jenkins (1992) agonized over this portrayal of fans, and instead asserted that fans were characterized this way because they were going

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against the norm of passivity when it came to receiving media and instead seeking an active role. Jenkins proposed that fans should be celebrated for this and not ostracized. However, these stereotypes of fans can still be seen today in many instances in the media. Often fans of science fiction and fantasy in particular are portrayed as anti-social beings who are often too intelligent to be understood by "normal" people, and tend to have a variety of odd quirks. They are deemed as "geeks" and "nerds." A recent example of this is Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory*, a current popular television show. Sheldon is a fan of *Star Trek* and other science fiction properties, is portrayed as abnormally smart and socially awkward, and is used to garner laughs from the audience. And even in some research fans have been portrayed in a less than kind light. Bacon-Smith (1992) paints a sad picture by describing her sample of women in the slash fandom, stating that "a high percentage . . . were not involved in relationships with men . . . many considered themselves celibate. . . [s]ome of these were divorced . . . but others had never had a long-term, loving, sexual relationship with a man," and that "a small but significant number . . . suffer from extreme, health-threatening obesity (Bacon-Smith, 1992)." While this depiction, paints slash writers as pitiable, it has been disputed that in fact they lead normal, healthy lives outside of the fandom. Furthermore, the results of this survey are questionable, as the size of the sample or of the population was never made clear. As one slasher states, "[l]ike many slashers, I have real life, and I have slash, and the two don't really meet," (Lee, 2003) which makes one curious about the actual makeup of the fandom.

Early studies conducted on fandom seem to find the same results in regards to demographic information of the fandom. Most of the classic studies on the fanfiction and

slash fandoms have generally concluded that the community is made up of mostly heterosexual women (Jenkins, 1992, Bacon-Smith, 1992, Russ, 1985, Lee, 2003). Through her ethnographic study, Bacon-Smith (1992) immersed herself in the fan culture and was able to gain fan writers' unique insights. She found that 70% of the fanfiction writing community she surveyed was unmarried. She did not control for genre preference. Bacon-Smith (1992) also found that "outside of the [s]lash genre, male participation is roughly 10 percent; within it, I have heard of only three gay men who write, and perhaps one or two more who participate regularly as readers." Lee (2003), a slash writer/academic, states that in her experience in the slash community she has observed that most slash writers are heterosexual females. More recent research in the field has yielded some slightly different results.

Davies (2005) reports that slashers are generally liberal, heterosexual females, but does recognize that there is the presence of homosexual men in the fandom. However, it is unclear where Davies got this information. MacDonald (2006) sent a survey out to 25 slash writers which 10 returned. Out of this small sample, all of the respondents were female, most were in their twenties, but only four of them claimed to be heterosexual. Although this sample was incredibly small, it is interesting to note that it suggests that slash writers could be more sexually diverse than has been recognized in the past.

Slashers have been found to be deeply attached to the characters in the particular pairings that they read about and truly care for the characters. Salmon and Symons (2004), based on a previous study they had done in which they had 22 women who read romance novels read a male-male romance novel and had them take a survey. They found that almost all of the women said they could enjoy the story regardless of the characters'

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sexes, and that those who enjoyed the male-male fiction more than the male-female fiction were tomboys growing up, and in adult life "typically score high on tests of assertiveness, competitiveness, and willingness to take risks (Salmon & Symons, 2004)." Furthermore, those that liked the male-male story more than male-female fiction said they liked "buddy, action, science fiction and horror movies. . . these participants were especially attracted to the protagonists' working partnership (Salmon & Symons, 2004)." They also found that those who self-identified as homophobic did not enjoy the male-male romance novel.

Gathering demographic data on this group has proved difficult in the past; it was hard to find slash fans because of the stigma associated with the genre, and because of communication limitations. However, even with the safety of anonymity and the tools the internet has to offer it is still difficult to get accurate demographics on slash fans today. A recent example of this difficulty can be observed a few years ago. "Surveyfail 2009," as it has been derisively dubbed by the online slash community, involved two researchers, Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam, who tried to survey the slash community for a book. Slashers claimed that the survey was filled with loaded questions and believed that the researchers were trying to prove preconceived notions of female desire, which slashers have disagreed with in the past. Furthermore, the researchers had made offensive comments on their research Livejournal, which only angered the slashers more. The slashers formulated a plan to sabotage the survey and succeeded. Slash fans still talk about this survey disaster today and have been leery of researchers ever since (Fanlore.org).

Why Do they Write Slash?

Power and the Romance Formula – A Feminist Agenda?

One of the most prominent theories in this subject area is that slash is a tool in which women empower themselves by reconstructing the romance narrative into something more egalitarian through the manipulation of male bodies and emotions. Per this theory, essentially, slash fiction is similar to, and a replacement for, the romance novel (Lamb and Veith, 1986; Russ, 1985; Penley, 1991, Bacon-Smith, 1992). The empowerment theory, as stated above, proposes that writing and reading slash is a way that women express their desire for equality in a relationship, which is not an aspect of traditional romance novels, and that they write fanfiction to fulfill their own lives with relationships, writing against oppression in their own lives, using the fantasy as an escape (Bacon-Smith, 1992). Constance Penley (1991), when speaking about the appeal of slash fiction in general, opines that "writing about two men avoids the built in inequality of the romance formula, in which dominance and submission are invariably the respective roles of men and women (Penley, 1991)," and by doing this slash writers have "mixed and blended the traditionally masculine and feminine coding of the characters in order to avoid the traditional role of passivity and subordination of the heroine in conventional romance (Keft-Kennedy, 2008)." Traditionally, men have had more access to power than women socially, economically, and in relationships. Using this theory, it is assumed that in writing slash, slash writers are not fantasizing about homosexual relationships, but in writing about two men being in a relationship they are actually imagining an idealized male/female relationship. Falzone (2005) posits that much slash fiction states the characters as being in a relationship, without the actual mention of homosexual orientation, and that the relationship and feelings between the characters is the focus of

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the stories. The men in the relationship, instead of being interested in casual, unemotional sex, are characterized as caring for and loving one another deeply, (Russ, 1985; Salmon & Symons, 2004; Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992) and that "women's desire for nurturance is eroticized and displaced onto masculine bodies (Cicioni, 1998)," to which heterosexual women are attracted sexually (Ciciron, 1998; Davies, 2005). This theory follows the logic that having the men in the fictions submit to one another, or show affection, is a way of stripping power away from the men (Bacon-Smith, 1992).

Those who opine that slash fiction is an egalitarian system of writing have also claimed that slash fiction is similar to the romance novel, which is why it is popular. Jenkins (1992) states that slash "stories centre on the relationships between male program characters, the obstacles they must overcome to achieve intimacy, the rewards they find in each other's arms." This is the typical romance novel formula in which the two main characters face trials and tribulations before realizing their love for one another and finally find their happily ever after. Salmon and Symons (2004) note that much of the slash is romantic in theme, and women who enjoy slash do so because it is "built on the foundation of an established friendship (Salmon & Symons, 2004)." While this may explain why some slashers enjoy buddyslash, it does not account for those whose pairing preferences lean towards powerslash and enemyslash. Furthermore, they state that even though much of the slash is more pornographic than mainstream heterosexual romance novels, "the emphasis," like in romance novels, "is always on the emotional rather than the purely physical aspects of sex (Salmon and Symons, 2004)." Although there are many stories which do fit these criteria, what these researchers fail to take into account are that there are just as many fictions that *are* written purely for the "physical aspects of sex" as

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described above. As was discussed earlier, an entire genre (*Plot, what Plot?*) exists for

slash pairings which is entirely concerned with the physical aspects of sex. For example,

in celebration of Black Friday 2011, the Snape/Harry *Insanejournal* group *Snape_Potter*

had a day devoted to smutty fiction titled "Blow Job Friday," in which authors wrote

short stories all about blow jobs. Below, in its entirety, is Snape/Harry author Alisanne's

(*Insanejournal* user name) 100 word drabble titled "Rubbing Off," which she submitted

for the occasion (Alisanne, 2011):

> Severus groaned as Harry's tongue thoroughly explored his erection."What. . .
> brought this on?" he gasped as Harry tongued his slit before swallowing Severus
> to the root.
> Sliding off, Harry smiled."Aren't you enjoying it?" he asked."Shall I stop?"
> "Don't you dare," Severus growled.
> "Thought not." Harry returned to laving attention on Severus' prick, Severus
> returned to gasping and moaning his gratitude for Harry's attentions.
> When, with a low cry, Severus convulsed and came down Harry's throat, Harry
> swallowed everything, then sat back, grinning."Looks like I get to top tonight."
> Severus sighed. Clearly his Slytherin nature was rubbing off.

This drabble clearly demonstrates that all slash fiction is not exclusively devoted

to the emotional aspects of sex. Salmon and Symons (2004) also stated that slash art

"almost never depicts penetration," which seems to allude to the fact that slash is more

romance novel like instead of purely sexual. However, to the researchers' detriment

"almost never" and "penetration" are not clearly defined, and this claim can be disputed

just by going to a fan art archive, where many NC-17 fan arts depict both oral and anal

penetration, and there is even more explicit art featuring bondage, characters urinating

and defecating on one another, etc.

Hansen (2010) does agree that some slash stories do fit in with the typical

romance formula, but argues that a large amount of slash does not fit that formula.

Hansen's research focuses on a genre of slash fiction called "darkfic," in which

enemyslash and powerslash can sometimes be categorized. Darkfic is "more complex, based on unequal, complicated relationship showing evident dominant/submissive roles, often sadomasochistic, sexually explicit and/or violent (Hansen, 2010)." Stories in this genre may contain scenes of rape, non-consensual sex, torture, slavery, and other kinks that may be considered dark or deviant. This type of slash fiction, even though there are large amounts of it, has been frequently ignored by past research, which mainly centered on buddyslash, in which this subgenre is rare. Keft-Kennedy (2008), focusing on the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom, explores the ways in which slash fiction is unlike the romance narrative, and also contradicts the theory that slash writers fantasize about egalitarian relationships. Keft-Kennedy (2008), utilizing Judith Butler's idea that gender and sexuality are performative, asserts that women can explore the different facets of masculinity through their writing. In the darkfic she studied there are many instances of rape, mutilation, and torture. By writing this way, women can explore the more aggressive actions that are frequently believed to be masculine traits. By using these traits the women put one character in power over the other, which seems to contradict the idea that slash fiction appeals to women because they want to write about egalitarian relationships. Furthermore, this idea seems to point to the possibility that slasher's views on relationships and sexuality may not be as heteronormative as past research has asserted, and may in fact be more fluid.

Role Model Theory

Another theory for why women write and read slash is that women have few female role models to look up to, particularly in science fiction, so women find it difficult to insert themselves into such a role (Bacon-Smith, 1992). Somogyi (2002) found

evidence for this in a study comparing the popularities of pairing stories in *Star Trek*. Somogyi postulates that Janeway/Chakotay (captain of the USS *Voyager* and her Maquis first officer, respectively), a heterosexual pairing, is the most popular and prodigious in terms of stories of all *Star Trek* couples, even more than Kirk/Spock, the reason being that Janeway is a strong female character and is more powerful in story than Chakotay, meaning there is no power imbalance that is otherwise implied in heterosexual pairings. Somogyi theorizes that because Janeway is a strong female character, there is no need for the male/male substitute for the pairing to appeal to women. However, the popularity of slash pairings over heterosexual pairings in other fandoms seems to contradict this. For instance, in the *Harry Potter* fandom there are many powerful female characters. Hermione Granger, a main character, is frequently defined as the most brilliant witch in her year. She frequently makes all of the important plans and preparations that are needed for the heroes to succeed in their endeavors. She is also described as someone the reader can relate to, not overly beautiful with everyday insecurities. Because of this her character has been hailed by many as a strong female role model. Although Hermione pairing stories exist, they are not as prevalent as the slash stories in the Harry Potter fandom. According to the role model theory, because Hermione is a role model, slash fiction should not be as prevalent. However, this is not the case, and therefore the role model theory may not be the most complete explanation of why women are attracted to slash.

Expression of Desire

Another theory is that women write slash because they are attached to the actual characters or actors in the pairing. Bacon-Smith (1992) found that by writing out sexy

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scenes between two beloved characters, a slasher "can share in the fantasy of sexual relationships with both of the male screen characters with whom they already maintain an imaginary relationship," (Bacon-Smith, 1992) and Lee (2003) admits that it is fun to write about the characters that are already fun to watch on screen. Hansen (2010) posits that slash writers may like slash because they are attracted to actors, that "[t]he actors portraying these characters must be thought to be sexually available to the women i.e. heterosexual, and at least one of them is sexually attractive to the writer/reader. " Hansen's theory does not take into account slash that involves book characters, who have no actors, and it does not explain the attraction of some different pairings. For example, under these criteria, Snape/Harry should not be a desirable couple, as canon Snape is ugly with sallow skin, crooked yellow teeth and greasy hair, and canon Harry is described as having knobbly knees, messy hair, and huge glasses, and much slash fiction recognizes these traits. This example may point to a less superficial theory of attraction, but more so an attraction to the character's traits, and not what they look like. However, many women do find Alan Rickman, the man who plays Snape in the films, to be attractive and sometimes this portrayal does come across in the fiction. Furthermore, attraction is not the only form of attachment some writers claim to feel for the characters. Not only do slashers seem to be attracted to the characters sexually, but many times they seem to "mother" them and become protective of the characters (Davies, 2005). Answering the question of why she was interested in writing slash fiction about Harry Potter, DementorDelta, one of the most famous Snape/Harry writers, stated, "I couldn't love Harry Potter more if I'd given birth to him myself. I have a deep profound love for that boy – and that's why I want to see him happy . . . with Snape, of course, but happy"

(Snarry Reader, *Insanejournal.com*). Thus, writing slash fiction can be seen as a way of showing affection for deeply cared about characters.

It's All in the Interpretation

As was briefly mentioned above, many slash writers write slash because they interpret the original canon in a homoerotic way, many claiming there is homosexual subtext. A common term in the community for when one is actively seeking homoerotic undertones is that they are said to be wearing "slash goggles." People have been wearing these slash goggles since the beginning of slash fandom, with Kirk/Spock. Many claimed that such things as the framing of the camera and looks shared between the partners alluded to a hidden desire (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Woledge, 2005). Slashers can find homoerotic subtext in almost anything, but Bacon-Smith (1992) points out that extreme close up shots and shots of eyes and eye contact can be "interpreted as a display of intimacy regardless of the actual gloss the context put on the shot," and that "fanwriters lavish descriptive attention on the romance of eye contact." Kirk often gives Spock looks that many fans describe as "eye sex," and they often invade one another's personal space bubbles. Often cited is the scene from *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (pictured below), in which Kirk and Spock hold hands, while Spock claims that the enemy of the film cannot understand "this simple feeling." To a *Trek* fan it is common knowledge that Vulcans (Spock's race) kiss with their hands. Between the hand-hold and the intense looks shared between the two, many fans claim that the "feeling" Spock speaks of is Spock's love for Kirk.

An extreme instance of homoerotic interpretation can be seen in the first *Harry Potter* movie, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, in which Severus Snape and Harry share a look when the character of Snape is introduced. This look is frequently interpreted by slashers as desirous, when in canon it is intended to be curious or suspicious. Furthermore, fans interpret the ways in which Draco and Harry glare at one another as a display of their unresolved sexual tension. It is sometimes easy for slashers to find ammunition. For instance, when the film *X-Men First Class* made its debut in June 2011 slashers began pairing the main characters Charles Xavier and Erik "Magneto" Lensherr soon after. Charles and Erik were close friends and working partners in the film, and both are depicted as heterosexual. However, there are many instances in the film in which slashers claim there is homoerotic desire. In one scene Charles, a telepath, goes into the mind of Erik to find a happy memory in the hopes that he can reach the full potential of his power. This intimate moment is depicted with prolonged eye contact, tears, and smiles shared between the two. Furthermore, Erik protects Charles by shielding his body closely during a plane crash and later cradles Charles gently after he is shot in the back. Below are some pictures of the examples above in which slashers interpret homoerotic desire:
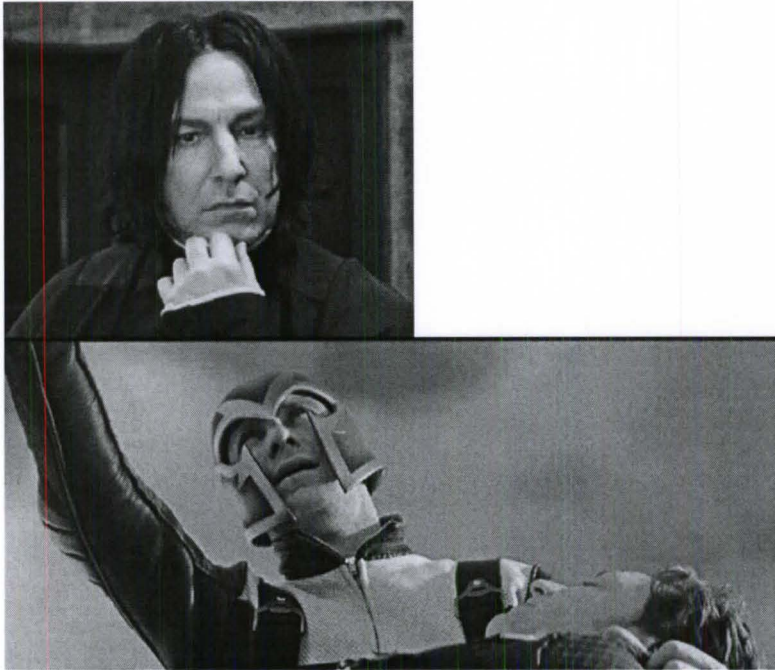
Social Activism

Another motive for writing slash fiction for some is political in nature. While

Bacon-Smith (1992) found that most slashers she interviewed had no interest in real

world homosexual activity, the opposite has been found by others. Falzone (2005) opines

that "[s]lash is rebellion and Utopian rewriting, an attempt to liberate the characters

through radical sexuality." One such rebellion is against the media due to the lack of

realistic portrayals of gay men (MacDonald, 2006). Many times when a television show

or film does have a homosexual character, that character is a gay stereotype. In the

television show *Will and Grace*, for example, one of the gay characters, Jack, is portrayed

as effeminate; he talks with a lisp, he flails his wrists limply, and he makes campy

comments constantly. In a more recent example the television show *Modern Family*

portrays a gay couple, and both of the men frequently display many of the above

mentioned stereotypes. Furthermore, most of the gay characters are not portrayed as

sexual beings in any way. These portrayals could potentially influence public opinion of

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gay people as caricatures. Hamming (2001) also opined that slash writers create slash due to the lack of homosexual couples in media. In her study on *Xena* femmeslash fiction, she posits, "This compulsion to re-produce Xena and Gabrielle as lesbian lovers, evidenced by the ubiquity and formulaic quality of *Xena* slash fiction, marks such texts as an effect of the series' failure to buttress the repressive forces that insist on 'don't ask, don't tell' television." So, in writing slash an author can write about authentic gay couples, and "homosexuality and homosexual relationships are generally presented as something normal, as something sexy and loving (Lee, 2003)," which is a portrayal that has been lacking in the media. In this way writing slash is like a form of social activism, a way to express one's positive views about homosexuality.

The way in which slash writers have portrayed homosexuality in their fictions has also seemed to change throughout the years. Early analysis of slash fiction found that the relationships portrayed were that of two men who just happen to love one another (Russ, 1985; Bacon-Smith, 1992). However, many times the stories that were written involved plots in which the men had to face many obstacles to be together, if they even allowed the characters to wind up in a relationship at all (Bacon-Smith, 1992). This way of writing demonstrates the political climate of the time, in which homosexuality was not as tolerated as it is today. In much slash fiction today there are discussions of sexual orientation in the fiction, whether it be a character coming out as gay after pretending to be heterosexual, a character questioning their heterosexuality after a homosexual encounter, and many make the characters bisexual. In fact, the topics of many slash stories today are exclusively about coming out and how the character deals with it (Tosenberger, 2008). In a study of Harry Potter slash fiction MacDonald (2006) found

that "very few stories have the characters express any angst about their sexual identity.

In most stories the world of witches and wizards is an idealized one, at least in terms of

sexual tolerance, in which someone's sexual orientation is a matter of indifference." This

is illustrated in an excerpt of slash fan schemingreader's Snape/Harry story below, in

which Snape and Harry have just had sex for the first time (schemingreader, 2011):

> "Not bad for a beginner," Snape said.
> "Oh, was it that obvious?"
> "I meant me. I'm the beginner. Though I suppose you have only been with girls."
> Harry nodded."You must have kissed girls, too."
> "Yes," Snape said. He was still looking very pleased with himself.
> "I like girls," Harry said thoughtfully.
> "Who doesn't?" Snape said. He pulled up his underwear, pushed his trousers
> down and rearranged his arms around Harry.
> "I just didn't know if I would stop liking girls when I..." Harry started to say.

The portrayal of sexuality here is an example of how some writers seem to write

as if they or their characters believe that sexuality is fluid, and preference is not

something to be ashamed of, which may be due to "the more widespread acceptance of

gays and lesbians" (Tosenberger, 2008). However, there are also fictions in which the

characters struggle with their feelings for one another, or the reactions to their coming out

by various other characters in the story.

Girls Just Want to Have Fun

The theories detailed above seem to point to the conclusion that slash writers have

an agenda, in that by writing slash they are breaking down barriers and using slash as a

form of social activism. Some would argue that this is not the case, but that the reason for

writing slash is that the slashers find it pleasurable. Lee (2003), a self-reported slash

writer, asserts that she writes it because "it makes [her] so damn happy." Many times,

slashers admit that writing slash stories about beloved characters is just a way of

responding to, and furthering their enjoyment of, the original canon (MacDonald, 2006).

This reflects the theory that the audience is not just a passive vessel, and that they are

active participants when it comes to media reception (Press, 1994).

As a writer, Lee (2003) reports receiving pleasure from watching the canon,

writing a slash story using the subtext she found, but goes further to say that she also

finds pleasure in the physical arousal felt while reading and writing slash, as one may

report from watching pornography. In fact, one reason many writers and readers state for

their involvement in the slash fandom is that they find male bodies, and two male bodies

having sex, sexy (Jenkins, 1992; Lee, 2003; MacDonald, 2006). Finally, a topic not

touched on by much research is the fact that slashers get pleasure from the interaction

with other members of the community itself. Lee (2003) reports that receiving feedback

from other slash fans is part of the fun of writing and sharing the stories.

THEORY

The Audience as Passive

Many different theories exist in the study of culture. Some of the most famous

cultural theories originated from the Frankfurt School. One famous cultural theorist,

Theodor Adorno, came up with the idea of "The Culture Industry," which posits that

those in power produce culture products to control and influence the masses. Adorno

theorized that the culture industry is a form of social control and oppression, working

only to guarantee its own success at the expense of the consumer. This control is

planned; the culture industry produces "products which are tailored for consumption by

masses . . . [and] are manufactured more or less according to plan. The culture industry

intentionally integrates its consumers from above (Adorno, pg. 98)." One could use this

theory in relation to gender and sex roles. An example is gender specific product

marketing. Commercials featuring makeup make the case that if a woman wants to be

beautiful and sexy, she needs to wear the newest shade of lipstick. Even soda is gendered

today. Dr. Pepper, for instance, is marketing a new low calorie soda, Dr. Pepper 10,

specifically to men for fear that men would not buy Diet Dr. Pepper because of feminine

connotations associated with diet soda. The ads for the new soda state, "It's not for

women." If Adorno is correct, then people who see these ads will feel compelled to

adhere to the portrayed roles. When people read books, or watch television shows, they

should receive the message that is presented to them. However, Adorno's theory paints

the masses as passive vessels, with no choice but to believe what the culture industry tells them. However, when one looks at fan studies, it is clear that the audience is more than a passive vessel.

The Audience as Active

As has been presented previously, in most fandoms there have been no homosexual plots or sub-plots in the canon material, yet a plethora of fanfiction exists which are filled with homosexual plots. To argue against the theory of a passive audience that was presented above, it would seem that readers are actively engaging with the media presented to them. The theory that explains this phenomenon is called Reception Theory.

Reception Theory posits that the audience reacts to what the media presents to them, that they are "active rather than passive. . . engaged in a process of making, rather than simply absorbing, meanings" (Jenkins, 1992). The very existence of fandoms and fanfictions seems to validate this notion. Although fan communities have existed for decades, the rise of the internet has made it incredibly easy for fans to share and develop interpretations of texts, creating a parallel narrative (termed "fanon"--fan canon) to the official canon. If the creators of a given series are receptive to fan communities, it is possible that ideas developed by fans may find their way into canon sources.

A clear illustration of this reciprocal relationship exists between the creators of the cartoon series "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" and its online fan community. When fans spotted a blonde, wall-eyed pegasus in the background of the first episode (an animation error resulted in her eyes pointing in different directions), they quickly dubbed

her "Derpy Hooves" ("derp" being an internet slang term for an accident or mistake) and agreed on her personality as a well-meaning but klutzy airhead. The show's director, Jayson Thiessen, was so pleased with the fans' enthusiasm that he ordered the background character's eyes to be "fixed" (meaning deliberately crossed) in all episodes not yet completed for air.

With the advent of the second season Derpy graduated from nameless crowd-filler to a sort of Easter egg for adult fans, with gags for her written specifically into the scripts for new episodes. In the episode "The Last Roundup" she was even addressed by name by one of the main characters. Hasbro (owners of the My Little Pony franchise) now markets T-shirts, toys, and other merchandise for the character (though the name "Derpy Hooves" is no longer in official use due to concerns that it may be insensitive to the developmentally disabled). Although this is the clearest example, fans have contributed names and personalities for other background characters that have been officially adopted and used in promotions and merchandise for the series.

Social media makes communication between fans and creators simple, allowing creators to receive feedback on their works instantaneously. If fans react negatively to an announcement or a storyline turn, the creators will find out about it *that day*, rather than weeks or months later in a magazine letters column or at a convention.

Also addressed under reception theory is the notion that audiences' interpretations of a text are shaped by their cultural backgrounds. Cultural background affects interpretation of the *Harry Potter* series. The starkest example of this is the conflation in the minds of many readers of Lord Voldemort's group, the Death Eaters, with the Third Reich. Although there are similarities between the two groups--such as the parallel

concepts of "blood purity" and Aryan supremacy, and the persecution of groups deemed

to be inferior--it isn't as if the Nazis are history's only genocidal madmen, though they are

perhaps the most infamous in the Western world. The costume designers for the final

Potter films even designed the Voldemort-aligned Ministry of Magic guards to wear

uniforms similar to those of the SS, and the character Albert Runcorn (a prominent Death

Eater Harry disguises himself as for a section of the seventh film) wears a black leather

overcoat reminiscent of those worn by Nazi commanders. However, Rowling never

directly draws such a connection, and indeed, it seems unlikely that Voldemort would

take cues from a group of lowly Muggles, wicked though they may have been.

How is it, then, that a diverse readership can see hints of gay attraction, mutual or

otherwise, where none is intended? It should be understood that in most cases, slash

interpretations only exist among a minority of fans. Tony Bennett (1983) points out that

with reception theory, the readers' interpretation of the text depends not solely on the text,

and the messages within the text, but the context of the text and of the reader's own

experiences. So, what is it about the readers that make them interpret the characters as

homosexual? When looking through the lens of reception theory, it could be argued that

the slash fictions could be a reflection of a queer belief system in the slash community.

Queer Theory

In this study I am going to define *queer* the way that Calvin Thomas did in the

book *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*. In the book,

Thomas (1999) argues that in order to truly understand queerness, one must be critically

queer. To be critically queer is to understand that there is more than one definition of

queerness; that "[q]ueer gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather

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than the heterosexual." To understand this statement one must first understand what is considered to be "the normal." The normal is the heterosexual normative regime, or heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, as described earlier in this paper, is the belief that males and females fall into two distinct gender categories, and should behave according to the roles given to them. Thomas argues that heterosexuals questioning or rejecting these roles is a way of being queer. This extends the identity of queer not only to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people, but to straights as well, that "Queerness . . . [is] more a posture of opposition than a simple statement about sexuality" (Thomas, 1999). Thomas posits that there are various things that make straight people queer, whether they be "drags, clones, leather folk. . . fantasists. . . feminist men. . . Masturbators. . ." or "people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such (Thomas, 1999)." In this study I argue that writing and reading slash fiction is a performative action and a display of queerness because in the fictions, the sexualities and genders of the canon characters are being played with.

Performance and Performativity

Queer and feminist theorist Judith Butler opines that gender is not a natural occurrence; she argues that gender is performative, meaning that it only exists because people perform it. If people did not perform gender, it would not exist. She also posits that gender is something that one is taught, something that one learns, and that is created through societal meanings (Butler, 2004). Humans are born genderless, and based on their sex, are gendered at birth. So, instead of letting a child grow and develop their own traits, they are raised according to their gender. For instance, when a little girl is born she may be swathed in pink blankets, and people may coo over how precious and sweet she is.

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A little boy, on the other hand, may be dressed in blue, and words used to describe him may be "strong" or "handsome." Even the way children are handled is determined by their gender--baby girls are rocked and baby boys are bounced.

From birth on one learns how to be a little girl or boy from watching their parents, peers, or figures in the media, and supposedly begin to perform the roles they learn. One learns to not be the other gender by being reprimanded for performing opposite gender roles. Toy stores are prime places to witness this. The way toy stores are set up is that certain aisles of the store are filled with toys designated for boys (cars, soldiers, wrestlers, etc), some aisles house genderless toys (clay, learning toys, crayons, etc), and the remaining aisles contain toys designated for girls (plush animals, dolls, homemaker sets). If a young male were to go into the "girl" section and pick out a doll, he is likely to be reprimanded because playing with a doll is something that society deems appropriate for little girls only. So, when it comes to gender, although it is performative, it seems that one is only allowed to perform the roles ascribed to him or her based on his or her sex. One only learns to perform the gender he or she is assigned at birth because it is forced onto him or her by heteronormativity (Butler, 2004).

Butler's theory that these masculine and feminine traits are learned is further evidenced by instances of tomboys (girls who exhibit stereotypically masculine behavior) or boys who like to play with dolls. These children are often rebuked for performing the wrong gender, even if the children most associates with the traits of a gender that is not assigned to them. Many times it is hard for people to learn to be the gender ascribed to them, and they are considered deviant because they are going against the norm. For instance little girls may be teased because they like to climb trees or play in the dirt.

Deviant people are often criticized by the normative majority, and this pressure forces not only the deviant, but people who may want to be deviant, to perform their ascribed roles. This could explain why so many of the women in Bacon-Smith's (1992) study were so secretive about writing and reading slash fiction, and why today so many slashers hide behind their screen names and keep slash their dirty little secret; they do not want to be punished for going against the norm.

Sexuality is also performative, in that because people perform sex roles, people are creating and reinforcing the idea of sexuality. Foucault (1978) best illustrates this idea when he discussed the discourse surrounding homosexuality. Foucault posits that homosexuality was created around the time of the medicalization of sexuality (Foucault, 1978). Sex became something one could study, and with this new attitude any type of sex that was not procreative was put under the microscope and was considered deviant or perverse. Homosexuality was believed to be one of these perversions. Prior to the medicalization of sexuality, however, these sexual acts were just that: acts. They did not define a person. However, with medicalization came the label of the homosexual, and the labeling led to people taking on that identity. So, one who had same-sex sex was now a homosexual. Essentially, the creation of the homosexual actually created the category of the heterosexual. Once again, the performance of sexuality is forced upon society based upon the imposing figure of heteronormativity. If one has sex with a person of the same sex he or she is not playing the part of heterosexual, he or she is the other, the homosexual.

The performative nature of sexuality not only affects those who perform the roles of the homosexual. Heterosexuals are confined by heteronormativity as well.

Heterosexuals have a certain script they must play or else they are seen as deviant. For instance, men are supposed to be aggressive sexually. This particularly affects black men (Hill Collins, 2004) in that if one is not aggressive in bed it takes away from their worth as a man. Women are supposed to be submissive in bed, and if a woman does take initiative in bed, she is often criticized for it. A man who sleeps around is normal; a woman who sleeps around is demonized. Hill Collins (2004) points out that black women are especially seen as deviant when it comes to sexuality. Because of the "jezebel" stereotype that has stuck with black women for ages, many black women cannot shake the negative and pejorative labels of *ho*, *slut*, or *tart*.

However, Butler (2004) also points out that transgressive gender and sexual performances can challenge the hegemonic system. Butler's concept of performativity can be applied to slash fiction and the people who write them. Writing these fictions is a performative act, because the writers are making the characters in the stories perform gender and sex roles that are not apparent in the original canon. Furthermore, many times they portray situations which are not considered appropriate to perform in the heteronormative system, such as males behaving tenderly towards one another, or performing other non-masculine roles, and the inclusion of various kinks that go against the norm. Writing and reading these fictions could be a challenge to the hegemonic system because during the act one can play both the part of female and male, and the part of heterosexual and homosexual. So, while it is clear that slash fiction can be defined as queer, can that be said of those who read and write it? Through exploring basic demographics and asking about slash habits, this research aims to survey some Facebook

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slash communities to see if there is sexual diversity, queerness, and tolerance of

queerness present.

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

The units of analysis in this study are people who participate in slash communities on Facebook. The intent of this study was to gather demographic information about this community and to discern why they participate in the slash communities.

Originally, the target population was approximately 8300 people who had "liked" a slash page or group on facebook.com. The maximum sample calculated was 8300 (n=8300), which was based on the sum of the amount of "likes" for each Facebook slash group. Because of the nature of the subject matter, and the structure of facebook.com, a minimum sample number could not be guaranteed, and it was decided that the researcher would work with the number of surveys that were provided. At the time of analysis, 43 people had participated in the study, and those responses are reported in the results below.

Materials and Measures

The following materials and measures were utilized in this study: a memory stick, a Surveymonkey account, a Facebook account, a laptop, an online survey, and an online consent page.

Community Selection

In August 2012 Afterelton.com began a tournament called the *Ultimate Slash Madness Tourney*. They took the most requested slash pairings from their reading audience and put them in a bracket style competition. On facebook.com a search was

completed to see if there was a public page or group devoted to each pairing in the tournament. The survey was posted on the Facebook pairing groups with the most "likes" or members.

The slash pairing pages with the most likes were:

Drarry (Draco and Harry from *Harry Potter*)

Thor X Loki (Thor and Loki from Marvel's *The Avengers*)

Kirk/Spock (*Star Trek*)

Furthermore, the survey was posted on the public slash group "The Slash Connection," and the secret slash group "Slash Pairings M/MF/F RPS Yaoi," as these groups are devoted to slash in general and no specific pairing.

Community Recruitment:

Using the researcher's existing facebook.com profile, participants were recruited by posting the survey on the walls of the slash groups and pages listed above. Three posts were made on each of the walls of the slash pages and groups. The first set of posts occurred the day the survey was made public. The following script was used in the first set of wall posts:

"I am a MA student at the University of Louisville and my thesis project is about the slash community. I invite you to take this completely anonymous survey about your own slash habits. The survey will be available for two weeks, from today (date), to (date). Thank you for your participation, and happy slashing!"

The second set of posts occurred exactly one week from the first. The following script was used in the wall posts:

"I am a MA student at the University of Louisville and my thesis project is about the slash community. I invite you to take this completely anonymous survey about your own slash habits. The survey will be available for one final week, until (date). Thank you for your participation, and happy slashing!"

The final posts occurred on the last active day of the survey. The following script was used in the wall posts:

"I am a MA student at the University of Louisville and my thesis project is about the slash community. I invite you to take this completely anonymous survey about your own slash habits. Today (date) is the final day to take the survey. Thank you for your participation, and happy slashing!"

The link to the survey was also attached to each post. When clicking on the survey link, the participants were directed to the survey hosted on surveymonkey.com. The first page of the survey was a consent form, which the participants had to read and accept the conditions before being able to take the survey. Participants were directed away from the survey if they indicated that they were below the age of 18.

Time:

It is estimated that the survey should have taken the participants 15-20 minutes to complete.

Location:

Due to the nature of an online survey, participants took the survey on their own time, at a location of their own choosing. The survey was hosted on the researcher's personal Surveymonkey account.

Dates of Study:

The survey was open to participants at two different intervals, for two weeks each. The survey was launched on "Drarry," "Thor X Loki," and "Kirk/Spock" at 12:00AM on October 14th, 2012, and ended on 12:00AM on Monday, October 29th, 2012. The survey was launched on "The Slash Connection," and "Slash Pairings M/MF/F RPS Yaoi," at 12:00AM on November 18, 2012, and ended on 12:00AM on Monday, December 3rd, 2012. Analysis of survey responses began immediately after the survey closed, and took two weeks to complete.

Research Questions

The survey will aim to answer the following research questions:

- What are the demographics of slash fans on social media communities?

- How involved are they in the slash fandom?

- What are their views about homosexuality in real life?

- How does slash influence their daily interactions with others?

- Why do they participate in the slash fandom?

RESULTS

The sample size of this study was small, and as such the results cannot be said to be statistically representative of the population. However, with that said, these results can still be looked to as a precursor for further research. Of those who accessed the survey, 98% (43) consented to take it, and 89% (39) of those who began the survey completed it. Any percentages were rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages may not always total 100%.

Basic Demographics

Sex and Gender

Regarding sex, most of the respondents (36 out of 40) identified as female, one identified as male, and three identified as other. In regards to gender, most (34 out of 39) of the respondents identified as female, three identified as male, and two identified as agendered. No respondent identified as transgendered or genderqueer.

Sexual Orientation

When asked about their sexual orientation, most (27 out of 40) of the respondents identified as heterosexual, seven as bisexual, three as homosexual, one as asexual, and two as other.

Age

The average age of the respondents is 30.90. The ages of the respondents range from 18 to 64. 49% of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24, 23% were between the ages of 25 and 39, and 28% were age 40 and above. While this shows that

users of all ages are present in Facebook communities, the majority of people in the 18 to 24 category could be due to the fact that Facebook is a tool that is primarily utilized by and aimed at younger people.

Race

Race is an issue that has not been examined much in slash fandom research; therefore there is not any prior research to which this data can be compared. According to this study, the majority of slashers are white. When asked about their race, 77% of respondents identified as white, 13% as Asian, 8% as Hispanic, and 3% as Native American. No respondents identified as African American or black.

Education

In accordance with past research, this study found that the majority of slashers had achieved some form of post-secondary education. Regarding the respondents' level of education, 3% had less than a high school education, 25% had completed high school or had obtained a GED, 30% had completed some college, 8% had an Associate's degree, 13% had a Bachelors degree, 5% had completed some graduate school, 13% had a Masters degree, 3% had a Doctoral degree, and 3% had a Professional degree (MD, JD).

Income

When asked about their total household income, 19% of respondents replied that their total household income was less than $10,000, 11% reported $10,000 to $19,999, 11% reported $20,000 to $29,999, 16% reported $30,000 to $39,999, and 11% reported $40,000 to $49,000.

Relationship Status

Prior research indicates that the majority of slashers are single. This research is in agreement. When asked about their relationship status, 60% of respondents were single, 18% were married to a man, 10% were in a committed relationship, 5% were in a domestic partnership, 5% were separated, and 3% were divorced. No respondents were married to women, in a civil union, or widowed.

Number of Children

When asked about the number of children they have, 83% of respondents reported that they had no children. Among those that did, 3% of respondents had one child, 5% had two children, 8% had three children, and 3% had four children. No respondents had five or more children.

Place of Residence

Not much prior research has been done on the location of slashers, so this research may serve as a starting point. This research shows that the majority of slashers live in the United States, however, the research illustrates that there are slashers all around the world. When asked about the nation in which they currently reside, 51% of respondents currently live in the United States, 13% live in the United Kingdom, 5% live in Canada, 5% live in Thailand, 3% live in Australia, 3% live in Germany, 3% live in Spain, 3% live in Vietnam, 3% live in the Philippines, 3% live in Costa Rica, 3% live in El Salvador, 3% live in Chile, 3% live in Peru, and 3% live in Norway.

Employment

When asked about their employment status, 44% were employed for wages, 10% were self-employed, 5% were out of work and looking for work, 5% identified as a

homemaker, and 3% identified as retired. Additionally, 46% of respondents were

students. No respondents were out of work and not looking for work or unable to work.

When asked about how they would describe their work, 38% of respondents were

an employee of a for-profit company or business or of an individual, for wages, salary or

commissions. 21% were self employed in their own not-incorporated business,

professional practice, or farm, 17% were employees of a not-for-profit, tax-exempt, or

charitable organization, 10% were state government employees, 7% were local

government employees (city, county, etc.), and 7% responded that they were working

without pay in a family business or farm. No respondents were federal government

employees, and none were self-employed in their own incorporated business, professional

practice, or farm.

Religion

Religion is another topic that prior research has not covered in regards to the slash

communities. When asked about their religious affiliation, 26% of respondents identified

as having no religion/ religious affiliation, 24% identified as atheist, 13% as Protestant,

13% as Catholic, 8% as Buddhist, 8% as Wiccan, and 8% as agnostic.

Political Views

Description of political affiliation is another contribution this research makes.

When asked about their political views, 6% identified as conservative, 6% as slightly

conservative, 19% as moderate, 17% as slightly liberal, 42% as liberal, and 11% as

extremely liberal. No respondents identified as extremely conservative. Again, it is no

surprise that the majority of respondents are liberal, as liberal minded people are typically

more tolerant of homosexuality.

Slash Habits

The following data reflect answers given to questions specifically asking about respondents' habits in regards to slash fiction. Of those surveyed, 41% read slash but do not write it, and 59% both read and write slash fiction.

Slash Writing Habits

When asked how many slash stories they have written, 38% responded that they have written 10 or more stories, 11% of respondents responded that they have written 5-9 stories, 19% responded that they have written 1-4 stories, and 32% responded that they have written 0 stories.

When asked how many hours they typically spend writing slash fiction per month, 33% responded they spend 10 or more hours, 14% responded they spend 5-9 hours, 8% responded they spend 1-4 hours, and 44% responded that they spend 0 hours per month writing slash fiction.

Slash Reading Habits

This research found that the majority of slashers are heavily involved with this hobby. When asked how often they read slash fiction, 16% responded that they read slash fiction a few times a month, 24% responded that they read slash fiction a few times a week, and 60% responded that they read slash fiction every day.

When asked how many hours they typically spend reading slash fiction per month, 19% responded that they spend 1-4 hours reading slash fiction per month, 16% responded they spend 5-9 hours reading slash fiction per month, and 65% responded that they spend 10 or more hours reading slash fiction per month.

Attaining Slash

This study found that those involved in online slash communities typically access their slash fiction more in an online format. When asked what resources they utilize to access slash, 87% of respondents reported that they use Fanfiction. net, 68% use Facebook groups, 65% use Livejournal, 60% use pairing-specific archives or forums, 52% use YouTube, 14% use print zines, 14% use online zines, and 5% use Insanejournal. Respondents could choose multiple sources.

Online Social Interactions

As indicated in previous research, many slashers enjoy being involved in the fandom because of the interactions with other fans. This research was in agreement. When asked about their social interactions in online slash communities, 82% of respondents replied that they enjoy talking with people online about slash, while 18% replied that they prefer not to interact with others in online slash communities. Among active participants in the slash community, 41% replied that it is easy to connect with others in the online slash communities they frequent, 69% replied that they have made friends in the slash communities online, 18% replied that they have met some of their online slash friends in person, and 21% replied that some of their closest friends are from their online slash communities. Two respondents of the survey chose to explain why they did not like to interact with others in the fandom. One who responded explained that many of the fans are younger, and therefore started arguments over trivial things, and another expressed the fear that "imposter" fans would infiltrate the communities and stir up trouble.

Preferred Types of Slash

When asked what types of ratings of slash fiction they read, 46% replied that they read those rated G, 49% replied that they read PG rated fiction, 68% replied that they read PG-13 rated fiction, 81% replied that they read R rated fiction, 87% replied that they read M rated fiction, and 92% replied that they read NC-17 rated fiction. Respondents could respond with more than one choice.

Although most seem to prefer to read the more explicit ratings, the relationship factor cannot be ignored – while many fans indicate enjoying PWP, the majority responded that they like romantic plots. When asked what types of slash genres they enjoy reading, 19% responded that they enjoy genderswap (in which one of both of the main character change genders) fiction, 30% enjoy tragedy/death fiction, 43% enjoy MPREG (in which a male character becomes pregnant), 60% enjoy PWP (Porn without Plot) fiction, 65% enjoy fluff, 68% enjoy action/plot fiction, 68% enjoy angst fiction, 70% enjoy established relationship fiction, 70% enjoy first time (in which one or both main characters are virgins) fiction, 70% enjoy hurt/comfort fiction, 76% enjoy humor fiction, and 89% enjoy romance fiction.

Reason for Reading/Writing Slash

Most research in the past has focused on why women like slash fiction, and as the literature review explained many theories have been posited. Many of the theories do seem to hold up in these results, however, the most ignored theory in previous research is the one with the most standing here; the majority of slashers like slash because it is fun. When asked to identify each of the reasons in which they read and or write slash fiction, 3% responded that they do it to enhance their sex life, 6% do it to rebel, 19% do it to express their political views about homosexuality, 22% do it to act out their own sexual

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fantasies , 33% do it because they feel that male/male pairings are more equal than male/female pairings, 42% do it because it arouses them sexually, 56% do it to relieve stress, 64% do it because they believe the canon material contains slash, 72% do it to relax, 89% do it because they find the characters in their favorite pairing attractive, and 97% do it to have fun. Respondents could choose multiple reasons.

In addition to the choices listed above, respondents were given a chance to write in other various reasons why they read and or write slash. Twenty four respondents chose to utilize this option. The responses were grouped into categories, and the results are that 4% read and/or write slash because they like the relationship dynamic between the pair they slash, 4% say it just caught their interest, 4% admit to fantasizing about the couple, 4% say they slash because there are no strong female characters, 4% say it is an emotional outlet, 4% do it because they like gay people, 4% enjoy the chance to "play" with already established characters, 4% say it is a cure for boredom, 8% do it to forget reality, 8% do it because they enjoy their fandom friendships, 8% do it to practice their English, 8% do it because they don't like any of the canon pairings, 13% do it because they want more stories and specific storylines, and 21% do it to practice their writing skills and because of the feedback they receive.

Disclosure about Slash Habits

When asked if they ever hide the fact that they enjoy slash, 43% or respondents responded that they do, and 57% responded that they do not.

Disclosure to Significant Others

For those who had a significant other, 68% of respondents said that their significant other knows that they read and/or write slash, 21% said their significant other

does not know that they read and/or write slash, and 11% did not know if their significant other was aware of their slash activities. Of those respondents whose significant others were aware of their slash habits, 39% were very supportive, 39% were somewhat supportive, and 23% were neither supportive nor unsupportive. None of the respondents replied that their significant others were somewhat unsupportive or very unsupportive.

Disclosure to Family

When asked if their family (parents, siblings, children) know that they read and/or write slash, 46% of respondents said that their families were aware that they read and/or write slash, 36% said that their families did not know of their slash habits, and 11% responded that they did not know if their family knew of their slash habits. Of those respondents whose families were aware of the respondents' slash habits, 30% responded that their families were somewhat supportive, 35% responded that their families were very supportive, and 35% responded that their families were neither supportive nor unsupportive. None responded that their families were somewhat unsupportive or very unsupportive.

Disclosure to Friends

When asked if their friends know that they read and/or write slash, 62% responded that their friends know that they read and/or write slash, 27% responded that their friends do not know of their slash habits, and 11% responded that they did not know if their friends know of their slash habits. Of those respondents whose friends were aware that the respondent reads and/or writes slash, 39% responded that their friends were very supportive, 17% responded that their friends were somewhat supportive, and 44%

responded that their friends were neither supportive nor unsupportive. No respondents replied that their friends were somewhat unsupportive or very unsupportive.

Attitudes about Homosexuality

Because slash depicts homosexual activity, many may assume that slash readers and writers have a positive outlook on homosexuality in real life. Not much research has been done on this topic, however. Therefore, the data below may be used as a guide for future research on this matter. This research found that the majority of the slash fans in this research had positive attitudes about homosexuality and overwhelmingly supported gay rights.

Familiarity with Gays and Lesbians

Most slashers in this sample have had contact with gays and lesbians in their real lives. When asked if they personally know anyone who is gay or lesbian, nearly all (36 out of 37) of the respondents replied that they do. 26 out of 37 respondents have close friends are gay or lesbian. A few respondents (14 out of 37) said that they have gay or lesbian family members.

Opinions about Same Sex Issues

When asked whether it should be legal for same sex couples to get married, all of those surveyed (37 out of 37) believe same-sex marriage should be legalized.

When asked if they thought that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are immoral, all of those surveyed (37 out of 37) disagreed that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are immoral.

When asked if homosexuals should be able to serve openly in the military, most of those surveyed (34 out of 37) agreed that they should be able to, two neither agreed nor disagreed, and one person disagreed.

When asked if homosexuals should be able to adopt children, most of those surveyed (34 out of 37) agreed, two people disagreed, and one remained neutral on the issue.

When asked if homosexuals should be protected from workplace discrimination, nearly all of those surveyed (36 out of 37) agreed, and one remained neutral on the issue.

DISCUSSION

Many of the results of this survey are not surprising; however, some new insights can be gained. Nearly all prior research indicates that the majority of those in the slash community are female. My research also found that most slashers in the Facebook communities surveyed describe their sex as female. It is interesting to note that more respondents describe their sex as "other" than male. Further, while most respondents noted that their gender was female as well, there were a few respondents who identified as male (more than those who responded with male as their sex), and some who identified as agendered. This deviation of sex and gender is something that has yet to be explored in this field, and is something that should be examined in more depth.

Prior research posits that the majority of slashers are heterosexual. My study also found this to be the case. It is interesting to note, however, that like Davies (2005) found, there is a growing presence of sexual diversity in the fandom with the second largest group (18%) identifying themselves as bisexual. In previous research the bisexual person is nearly non-existent, though it is unclear if this is due to exclusion from the research or if there were truly no fans identifying as bisexual.

The majority of those surveyed were extremely supportive of homosexuals and civil rights for homosexuals. These results are not surprising. The majority of respondents were young, most have some form of post-secondary education, most are atheist or are not religious, and most identify as liberal. These factors, and those listed above, relate with much of the research that has been done on the predictors of attitudes towards

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homosexuality. For instance, LaMar and Kite (1998) found that women are more tolerant of homosexuality than men, and women are the majority in this sample. Also, Hicks and Lee (2006) found that younger people, educated people, those of liberal political orientation, and those who are less religious are more tolerant of homosexuality. Furthermore, the majority of respondents indicated that they knew a gay person, and the majority also indicated that they had close friends who were gay. A 2007 study by Shawn Neidorf from the Pew Research Center found that those who have close friends or family members who are gay are more tolerant of homosexuality than those who do not.

Past research also indicates that most slashers hide the fact that they like slash. Surprisingly, this research found the opposite. Many slashers today seem to be more open about the fact that they enjoy slash.

Do These Results Denote Queerness?

This study depicts participating in the slash fandom as a form of being queer. However, while it is true that the people in the slash fandom read and/or write about homosexual behavior, does this necessarily signify queerness? The majority in this sample are white, heterosexual women, which traditionally is a group that has been afforded a certain level of privilege in society. In relation to the issue of sexual orientation, "straights have had the political luxury of not having to think about their sexuality, in much the same way as men have not had to think of themselves as being gendered and whites have not had to think of themselves as raced" (Thomas, 1999). Heterosexuals do not have the same worries that homosexuals have. For instance, in most states homosexuals can be fired from their job if they are outed as gay. LGBT Americans still do not have the right to marry their chosen partner in most states. Homosexuality still

carries a stigma, and it is not uncommon to hear gay slurs, though this is increasingly frowned upon in public settings.

The majority in this sample may never have experienced or even thought about these hardships because they are heterosexual. This is clearly illustrated in the fact that most of the sample admitted that they enjoy slash because it is fun for them, when in actuality many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals struggle with discrimination as outlined above. Does calling a heterosexual slasher *queer* trivialize the experiences of those who self-identify as queer? Is slash merely a form of eroticizing the other for one's own pleasure? Further, while many in the sample claimed that they do not hide the fact that they like slash, which in itself can be seen as a transgressive behavior, almost as many do still hide the fact that they like slash. If one hides liking slash, can one still claim queerness? If one were to use Thomas' definition of queerness described above, that anything that defies heteronormative ideas is queer, then slashers could perhaps be considered queer. For instance, although most in this sample do not identify as homosexual, their support of homosexuality and equal rights for homosexuals could be a representation of a disregard for the heteronormative regime.

Furthermore, while past research has suggested that most fans are interested in slash because of the relationship dynamics between the characters and not because of the sex, this study found that the majority of respondents read the most explicitly rated fictions much more frequently than the tamer fictions. Could this be a challenge to heteronormativity? Although the respondents may be mostly heterosexual, many of the stories that are being consumed and produced by the fandom are hard, kinky and purely pornographic, a far cry from the soft, vanilla, heteronormative sex that women are

supposed to enjoy. Even if one were to ignore the homosexual themes of the fictions, sexual acts that fall outside of the generally accepted could be considered queer. However, does this act of reading or writing these fictions extend to the participants actually taking on the label of queer? Perhaps for some, it may; for others, it may not. As stated above, many slashers are open about their hobby today, and just as many are not. Those who do not hide their affiliation with the fandom may label themselves as queer. Self-identification aside, can slashers really be classified as queer? To some, "[t]he projection of a queer attitude [is] enough to claim a place in homosexual culture," (Thomas, 1999) but for others this may not be enough.

Slash and a Receptive Audience

When asked why they like slash, the participants' answers make a case for reception theory. Reception theory states that audiences interact with the messages that they receive from the media they consume and are not passively accepting what is given to them. Fanfiction in general is an example of how fans take story lines, characters and themes and interpret them for their own enjoyment. For slash fiction specifically, there is a strong case to be made for reception theory. In this sample, a very small number of participants said that they feel there are no strong female characters in the canon material—it has been opined that writing or reading slash could be a reaction to a lack of female role models in various media—so they are reading or writing to remedy this. Furthermore, some participants claimed that they did not like any of the canon pairings in the media they view, and write/read slash to fix that. A key point in reception theory is the ability of the audience to change the messages they cannot or will not accept, and making up a new pairing is a clear example of this. Finally, over half of the sample

stated that they like slash because they believe the canon material contains slash already. This is probably the clearest illustration of reception theory when applied to the slash fandom—most, if not all, of the shows/books/movies liked by this sample contained no apparent homosexual themes, or at least none that were intended by the creators. Somehow, this audience is seeing homosexual undertones in these media and expanding upon them, exploring them through fanfiction.

Limitations of Study

The major limitation of this study is the small sample size. There were not enough participants to call this a statistically significant representation of online slash communities. For a future study of this nature I would recommend posting the survey to more groups in order to reach more people. It became evident that while many people may "like" a Facebook page, many of those people may not be active participants, and the survey may have gone unnoticed by them. A solution to that may be to only survey those who post to Facebook groups, rather than pages. A group is a more active and closely knit community than a page. It would also be easier to determine a proper sample size if one were to use only Facebook groups. Another solution may be to increase the time range for survey collection. An entire month or two may increase the number of responses. Lastly, due to the structure of posting on Facebook groups, I would recommend increasing the number of times the survey link is posted. Each time I reposted the link my survey had a surge of new responses. The older my post became, the further down on the Facebook page it went, and therefore fewer people were seeing the post with the survey link at all. These recommendations may make future research of this nature more accurate.

Some of the limitations of this study are due to errors made by the researcher. For instance, some of the questions and responses in the initial survey had to be omitted. Question 43, for instance, was worded incorrectly, and the response options contained multiple errors as well. These errors confused some respondents, and therefore the question was eliminated from analysis.

Some of the questions asked should have been rephrased to eliminate ambiguous responses from the respondent. For instance, question 15 states "What is your religious affiliation?" The respondent could choose from a list of 7 predetermined choices, or fill in their own in the other category. Some of the responses in the other category could have various interpretations, and therefore could not be grouped into a category for analysis. The question could be rephrased instead as "When it comes to my religious beliefs, I would describe myself as:" which could lead to clearer answers.

Lastly, upon reflection, some of the questions are quite American-centric. For example, the question about political affiliation included the choices of republican, democrat, and other. Other parties from other countries should have been included for a more inclusive survey.

Lastly, I had some emails from respondents stating that I had listed the same question twice. The questions in question were the ones about sex and gender. It had not occurred to me that some people would not be knowledgeable of the difference between sex and gender, and that should have been made clearer in the survey.

Future Research Opportunities

This survey was only meant to gather basic demographic data about the targeted population, and as such this research reads like a census. If a future study were to be done,

I would be interested in not only the quantitative data I found, but adding a qualitative analysis as well. Instead of listing the reasons why people are interested in slash, I would like to interview respondents to get a deeper understanding of why they enjoy slash, and also why they create slash pairings for media with no overt homosexuality present. Furthermore, a majority of the respondents said that they like participating in the slash community because it is fun, but from these results alone it cannot be interpreted what the respondent defines as fun. It would also be interesting to find out why so many of the respondents are not hiding the fact that they like slash from others. A qualitative approach could add extra dimension to these results. Also, had I more time and more responses it would be interesting to utilize more predictive statistics, such as correlations or regressions. An interesting analysis would be to see how age, sex, race, education, income, etc. relate to one's participation in the slash fandom, or how the level of involvement in slash fandom correlates with opinions about homosexuality in real life.

CONCLUSION

The study of slash fandom began around twenty years ago, with early researchers

such as Bacon-Smith and Jenkins. Most of the studies were of smaller samples, which

could have been due to the fact that slash fans tended to be secretive about their activities,

or of the slash texts themselves. The advent of the internet has made the slash fandom

more easily accessible and increased its presence. This study aimed to profile the slash

fans who utilize slash groups on facebook.com, to gain basic demographic data on slash

fans, to find out why the fans enjoy slash, and to ascertain their opinions about

homosexuality and current homosexual civil issues. This study was in agreement with

many past studies in regards to the population; most were found to be single, white,

heterosexual women. However, the presence of homosexuals, bisexuals, males, and those

describing themselves as genderqueer were present. Future research should be mindful of

these members of the community. Most fans surveyed were from the United States, but

fans from all around the globe were present. Most of those surveyed were liberal minded,

and had no religious affiliation or were atheist. As for their reasons for enjoying slash, the

three most cited reasons were that the participants slash to relax, because they are

attracted to the people in the pairing, but most of all because it is fun. These findings tie

in with the fact that while reading/writing slash is a solitary activity, most find pleasure in

making online friends in the community. The lack of female role models and the fact that

M/M relationships are viewed as more egalitarian were cited by some as reasons for

enjoying slash, but not overwhelmingly so. The most surprising finding of this study is

that most of those surveyed claimed that they did not hide the fact that they enjoy slash, whether it be from friends, family, or a romantic partner/spouse. This could be a reflection of the social climate of today—gay and queer issues are gaining support in the public eye, and as such many do not see homosexuality as something shameful anymore. Furthermore, when it came to gay and lesbian issues, those surveyed were overwhelmingly supportive— although it cannot be determined if being a slash fan is actually a form of queerness, it would seem that heteronormative attitudes have little to no place in the slash fandom, if not in slash fans' real lives. Though the sample of this study was small, new findings that were unearthed can act as a basis for future study.

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             Undergraduate Statistics (Fall 2010, Spring/Fall 2011, Spring 2012)

             Graduate Research Assistant- University of Louisville
             (Spring/Fall 2011, Spring 2012)

LEADERSHIP: President of the Sociology Graduate Student Association (SGSA)
             University of Louisville (Fall 2011, Spring 2012)

PRESENTATIONS:

Bruner, Janidean (2009). Socio-demographic Factors Influencing Perceptions of
Homosexuality. IU Women and Gender Conference, Indiana University Southeast, April
2010.

Bruner, Janidean (2008). Agenda Setting: They Report, They Decide. IUS Undergraduate
Research Conference, Indiana University Southeast, April 2008.

AWARDS AND HONORS:

IUS Dean's List three times
IUS Chancellor's List two times
Initiated into Omicron Delta Kappa (Spring 2010)