

The Broads Who Blog: Gender and Fannish Expression in the Buffyverse fandom

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While the concepts of “fan” and “fandom” have been around for some time, agreement on what constitutes either term is not a settled issue. As is true for most groups, who is a member, what is a community, and what signals are used to denote membership are issues of continual negotiation (Cusack and Kavanagh, 2001). Although a dictionary definition of fandom means “All the fans of a sport, an activity, or a famous person” and fan as “An ardent devotee; an enthusiast” (American Heritage, 2006), this definition falls short in suggesting distinctions that mark the “ardent devotee” from someone who, for example, merely enjoys watching certain shows on T.V. There is, for example, no mention of unusual *knowledge* of the fandom object. This in-depth knowledge both allows for certain avenues of conversation, and signals fandom membership to others who claim to share that interest. Knowledge marks those who have a passing interest from those who are truly enthusiastic.

There is another fan attribute that is important in signaling enthusiasm and interest. This signal is the active response of the fan to their fannish object. The response could be the seeking of information, the collecting of ancillary material about the object (e.g., t-shirts, cards, collectibles), or the creation of new material derived from the fan object. This creative activity can have many avenues such as model building, the creation of websites and databases, the writing of songs, or the painting of art. What is unusual in this creative response is how gendered certain activities have become. The writing of fan fiction (fanfic) for example has since its beginning been dominated by women (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995). Numerous academic papers have explored aspects of fanfic writing (“Theorizing Fandom”, 1998; “Fan Fiction...”, 2006), as well as the literary aspects of fanfic itself (Pugh, 2005). However, despite the time that has passed the physical segregation of fanfic writers that Bacon-Smith first observed in the 1980s is now found in virtual spaces as well. Because so many fanfic writers are women, this segregation by activity has also led to numerous gender segregated online fan spaces.

Not all online fan spaces are segregated by sex. Numerous online sites exist that combine discussion, news, and creative works, and the balance of male and female users may vary by site and topic. If the site focuses on fanfic production and archiving though, the readership tends to be overwhelmingly female, even though recent studies have shown that the balance of men and women online is now nearly equal (Pew, 2006). In “Cyberspaces of Their Own,” Bury traces the migration of women from fan newsgroups to more restricted mailing lists and posting boards during the 1990s (Bury, 2005) and argues that this segregation was intentional. More closed online environments allowed women to converse and share work separate from what they felt was the hostile

environment of more public and almost always more male dominated forums. But was this due to their sex or because those who write fanfic are different in some way from other fans?

The Buffyverse fandom, composed of fans of the television series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Angel", is a particularly interesting case study for this sort of segregation. By the nature of the series' texts and their feminist philosophy and depictions, one might expect the shows to attract viewers and fans who respond positively to women's contributions and participation in its fandom. The question for the fandom as well as the series, however, is whether the show distinguishes between valuing women, and valuing women's culture and activities. One can certainly make the argument in viewing Joss Whedon's best known creation, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" that Buffy herself is a heroine who acts within a masculine culture. She represents masculine traditions of violence, force as a means of resolving disputes, and heteronormative displays of gender pleasing to a masculine audience (Bodger, 2003). The show, after all, focuses from the start on Buffy, the blonde, physically superpowered cheerleader, not Willow, the shy self-effacing, fashion challenged, and intellectual "nerd" (who was also recast after the pilot to feature a more conventionally pretty woman). Buffy's spinoff "Angel" focuses on the male version of Buffy (albeit a less quippy one) and his character is indistinguishable from a long tradition of tight lipped, antisocial and mysterious male heroes. Buffy's uniqueness comes largely from being a female character playing out the role of the male hero, rather than being a female character whose traditionally female role is depicted as heroic. This masculine focus may be a bow to the realities of network television in the late 20th century or an inevitability in a culture that devalues or ignores female dominated activities. Whatever the reason, it remains that Buffy is a hero who men do not have to stretch too far to understand and appreciate. The relative uniqueness of a female action hero at the time when the series started, as well as the multiple depictions of female characters in other supporting roles, served to appeal to a range of women as well.

Given the history of fanfic writers thus explored in other academic works, and the female-positive texts of the Buffyverse fandom, this essay explores three issues. Who it is that calls themselves a fan of the Buffyverse? Who becomes a fanfic writer? Lastly, what activities do they engage in and what experiences do they have within the fandom? The following sections will discuss the results of a fandom survey conducted in November 2006 to discover the answers to these three questions.

Methodology

A comprehensive survey of fans for any series would be extremely difficult to conduct. The first problem is the issue of who qualifies as a fan. As was stated at the start of this article the terms "fan" and "fandom" are somewhat contested as to whom exactly they apply to. External definitions however seem to be less important than internal ones. If an individual self-identifies as a fan of something (and, one might add, is interested enough in the topic to respond to a survey request) then this response should be taken as valid. Certainly a continuum of "fannish interest" can be posited to account for a variety of behaviors and motivations, some of which a survey could be designed to

explore. Studies of fan groups and the potential diversity of participants would seem to be one of the better ways in which to explore definitions of “fan” and “fandom.”

The definition problem is important, however, in that isolated fans who do not share their fannish interests with others become extremely difficult to locate and ask questions of. Studies of “fans” often turn into studies of social fans, or those who make their presence known in some way. The survey problem then is how to target the many different groups who may make up a fandom. The most obvious locations to conduct surveys would result in clear demographic skews. At conventions, for example, a survey would likely have both a geographic and an economic skew, favoring residents from the immediate area as well as those wealthy enough to have both the time and finances to travel. An online survey is also likely to produce an economic and educational skew. The most recent surveys still show that those using the Internet are more likely to be from higher education households and those that have above-average household incomes (Pew, 2006). Neither location for fan gatherings is likely to include the more casual fans who do not interact with the larger fandom but pursue their interests alone or with a few members of their family and friends. Lastly any survey or series of interviews will include only those who wish to take the time and trouble to respond. So to produce a profile of the “typical fan” is necessarily going to be incomplete and to favor certain characteristics. Knowing that any data gathered will be incomplete does not mean that the study can not reflect the true circumstances of many individuals or present at least a partial portrait of the group as a whole. It is important to keep in mind though that the results of this survey reflect fans who have pursued their fannish interest online and who thus have at least some awareness of the fandom that resides there.

This fandom survey was conducted online over the period of four weeks. Announcements of the survey were posted at several general Buffy and Angel fansites online. The announcements explained the survey data was for a doctoral thesis and, once the survey closed, a link was posted to the completed results. There were 1541 completed surveys and 122 partially completed surveys for a total of 1663 responses. The survey software was designed to block multiple responses from the same IP address. The survey was in four parts with a total of 65 questions.. Depending on their answers to earlier questions, not all survey takers were given all four parts. The questions were multiple choice, although open ended answers were possible for a quarter of them. Survey takers were also given the opportunity to add comments at the end of the survey. The basic survey results were available online for six weeks after the survey closed and discussion of the results was invited at some of the forums where the survey had been announced.

The four parts of the survey focused on (1) Demographic information, (2) Questions about writing fanfic, (3) Questions about reading fanfic, and (4) The individual’s experience in fandom. Questions for parts 1 and 4 were intermixed throughout the survey and answered by all survey takers. Parts 2 and 3 were offered only to those who had experience writing or reading fanfic. The overall results were cross tabulated to identify a variety of demographic factors in behavior and filtered to contrast particular groups of respondents. All survey takers were anonymous and no identifying data was available. Respondents were required to pass through a form verifying that they were 18 or older and consented to the use of the data for research purposes.

In addition to the survey data, Part 4 of this essay will also contribute interview and observational data collected from Buffyverse fanfic writers as part of broader work done for a dissertation on fanfic writing communities and the effect of technological platforms on communities of practice.

Part 1. Basic demographics

In this section, portions of the survey will be examined to identify key demographic characteristics of Buffyverse fans, as well as those of Buffyverse fanfic writers. A profile of the online Buffyverse fan will be developed by looking at factors such as education, income, location, geographic mobility, sex, and age. These same factors will then be looked at a second time to see how fanfic writers compare with the larger fandom in terms of the demographic profile. As this essay's focus is on identifying reasons for the separation between these two groups in online spaces, looking at demographic factors is one way to begin examining what characteristics each group has that may influence the formation of different groups. As stated previously in the methodology section, these profiles reflect the overall characteristics of individuals who responded to this survey and cannot be extrapolated to represent *all* fans of this or other fandoms, nor can it be used to predict the characteristics of any given fan.

1. The online Buffyverse fan

Young, white, heterosexual, middle-class, college-educated American women

While there were notable exceptions to the above phrase, overall the survey respondents fit this description. First of all, the majority of the respondents were from the United States (67%). Other English speaking areas such as the U.K. (11%), Canada (7%) and Australia and New Zealand (5%) had sizable representation. The remainder of Europe had 8% and other global regions had less than a 1% response. Although the forums where the survey was advertised were international in membership, language barriers are a likely factor for the minimal response of non-English speaking areas. It is also likely that, although Buffyverse fans exist in all parts of the world, the two series are the most popular in English speaking countries. There is a skew toward U.S. responses since, in terms of overall population, the U.K. has 20% of the U.S.'s population and Canada has 11% (Statistical Abstract..., 2003). Both were thus underrepresented in the overall survey.

By contrast younger people were over-represented, as 52% of respondents were under thirty, most of them college-aged. Only 20% of participants were over 40. What is not known is how many in the fandom are actually under 18. Due to regulations for the protection of human research subjects, the survey consent form specified only those 18 and older were to take the survey, and there was no option given for those under 18. It's possible that had there been, the mean age might have dropped. With the Buffy series reaching its 10-year anniversary at the time of the survey however, most of the "18-24" respondents were likely at least 18.

The education level for the group as a whole was quite high. While 32% in the U.S. general population report high school but no college, only 7% of the survey respondents reported the same. In contrast, 27% of the overall fan group reported having a graduate degree or higher. Given that in 2003, the U.S. census reported 9.3% of the U.S. population as holding at least a master's degree, the fan portrait is of an educational elite. Additionally, given comments to the survey, at least some of the 34% who have completed an undergraduate degree are in or planning to pursue a master's program at the present time.

Economically the responses were more diverse. When asked about employment, 12% identified themselves as full-time students, the largest "occupation" response. Students were followed closely by those working in the educational field (11%); in IT, web design or programming (9%); in the writing/publishing fields (7%); and those in arts and entertainment (6%). Some typical student occupations such as clerical, retail and food service occupations (13%) were also well represented. A different survey question asked whether the respondent's current job was the one they had sought and trained for. A majority (54%) said yes. It seems likely given these answers that many respondents over 30 are in their desired field of work. A good number are in the legal and health fields (9%), librarianship (5%) and other occupations that would account for the high number of graduate degree holders.

Therefore when the income statistics for the group show that 52% of respondents fall below the U.S. national average in income (\$35,000), this is likely due to the currently diminished earning capacities of the many college students who appear in the survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). As one survey taker noted in comments, "I have negative income due to student loans." Overall though, the reported income in the survey peaked at \$50-75,000 with 10% reporting over \$100,000 a year.

The young age of respondents is also reflected in the marital and parenting status of most survey takers. Only about a third of respondents were sharing their home with a spouse, partner or children. 51% of respondents reported they were not currently in a long-term relationship and 80% were childless.

Overall 23% of respondents considered themselves a member of a minority group. Of this 23%, 15% were minorities due to sexual orientation. While estimates of GLBT individuals have varied, the more recent estimates in both the U.S. and Canada have ranged between 2 and 4% of the population (Black et al, 1999; Carpenter, in press). The 15% of such respondents is thus a significantly higher number than would likely be found in a general population sample. By contrast the survey has a comparatively low figure for combined racial (5%) or ethnic (7%) minorities among the respondents compared to the general U.S. population. Blacks and Hispanics each make up over 12% of the population and Asians and other racial groups are an additional 10% (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001). Although the international response may have affected the interpretation of this question, 2 out of 3 respondents were from the U.S. At least one comment to the survey noted that fans from non-Anglo nations share the feeling of being minorities within the fandom. An insignificant percentage also declared themselves as being a religious minority, disabled, or in more than one minority group.

Geographic mobility for online fans had 85% of respondents living in at least 2 different populated areas and 17% having lived in more than 7. This is somewhat high when compared to mobility in the U.S. population as a whole (Hansen, 2001). The

mobility statistic becomes even more interesting when looking at international results. According to U.S. estimates, slightly under 2% of Americans live abroad, many of them in military service (Statistical Abstract, 2003). Although this is 2% at any given time, 27% of survey respondents have lived in another country at some point, with Europeans (22-26%) having done so more often than Americans (18%).

When this survey's results were released for discussion to the groups who had filled it out, three issues accounted for virtually all the comments. Two of them, voting statistics and reading rates, will be discussed later. The result that engendered the most discussion had to do with the number of male and female respondents. Overall 74% of respondents were women and 26% were men. A gender bias in survey responses is not uncommon, with women often being more likely to answer survey requests than men (Braunberger et al, 2003; Cull et al, 2005). However, where the bias exists it's been shown to vary results by less than 5% (Dixon, 2002). Therefore if the online Buffyverse fandom was made up of a majority of men, or gender balanced, it's very unlikely that the total over a four-week survey period would show this much of a difference.

2. The Buffyverse fanfic writer

Younger and more female than the overall survey group

This essay's focus is on identifying types of fannish involvement within the online Buffyverse fandom. Fanfic writing has been a recurring object of academic study and, apart from discussion and analysis, is also the most visible fan activity online. For example, the largest current multifandom fanfic archive, Fanfiction.net, attracts 4 times the number of visitors to its site per month as the multifandom discussion site Television Without Pity and 20% more than the popular multiplayer game site World of Warcraft. Fanfiction.net also ranks among the top 2000 sites on the web in overall use, unlike either of the other two (Compete.com, 2007). Fanfic writing/reading is one of the dominant forms of creative fan activity and one of the clearest in terms of tracking fan interest.

Demographic factors are one way to begin examining what characteristics each type of fan participant has that may influence the formation of different online fan groups. In many questions throughout the survey, fanfic writers differed little from the overall respondents. Fanfic writers were, as in the overall fandom, mostly young, white women. The most significant contrast comes when one looks at Buffyverse **fanfic writers** compared to those in the fandom who have never written or even read fanfic (**non-ficreaders**).

Fanfic writers do, however, skew younger and more female than the rest of the fandom. In confirmation of early ethnographic studies of fanfic writers, it is largely a female practice (83% women, 16% men) (Bacon-Smith, 1991; "Theorizing Fandom", 1998). The gender split among non-ficreaders is much smaller but still noticeable. If one is a woman in this fandom, there is only a 7% chance that she has *never* tried reading any fanfic; for a man, it is 25%. Similarly, there is a 39% chance that a woman has written fanfic, and only a 7% chance that a male Buffyverse fan has ever written fanfic for any fandom.

A different survey question addressed the frequency of fanfic writing. Most fanfic writers (68%) had written fanfic in the past year. However, the most frequent writers

were likely to be women, since only 44% of male writers had written in the past year, compared to 73% of women. In response to the question "have you ever written fanfic," one respondent noted that the answer was "yes" only because he/she had written one story ever. Given their lower writing frequency, men were more likely have dabbled with fanfic whereas women were more likely to write recurrently.

Fanfic writers tend to be young. Although all age groups were represented, more of the young respondents had written fanfic than older respondents, with 34% of the writers falling into the 18-24 year-old bracket. Only 7% of those over 50 had written fanfic. However, the youngest and oldest respondents were the most likely to have read fanfic, with over 90% in both the 18-24 and Over-50 group having done so.

Asked how often the survey takers read fanfic, older readers were the most likely to read fanfic daily. Those between 25 and 35 were the most likely to read fanfic infrequently. Leisure time thus seems to be a possible factor in fanfic reading frequency. However, when asked about commercial fiction reading habits, a different picture emerges. Fans between 25 and 35 were the *most* likely to read fiction daily and those 18-24 the least likely. Why would this be the case? There are two possible explanations. One is that younger college-age readers are already utilizing what free reading time they have with fanfic in addition to reading school assignments. This group still reads frequently, just on a weekly rather than daily basis. The second issue has to do with portability. Whether short or long, many fanfics are not well formatted for easy printing, particularly those posted and archived on blog sites such as LiveJournal. Printing is also time consuming and costly when done frequently and, at the time of this survey, the use of ereaders was not common in either the population at large or in fanfic circles. Most fanfic is thus read online. Commercial fiction, on the other hand, is portable, making it easier to fit in reading time during an otherwise busy and mobile day. In summation, the more leisure time respondents have to be using a computer, the more likely they are to be reading fanfic.

Fanfic writers are, as a group, less likely to be highly educated than the average Buffyverse fan. The young skew for fanfic writers accounts for part of this difference. Age and education level are closely correlated in the survey -- the older the respondent, the more likely they are to be highly educated. With 1 out of 3 fanfic writers being 18-24, the likelihood that they have completed college is lower than among overall survey takers. However, when the fanfic writers are compared to other survey takers in their *same* age bracket, fanfic writers are actually more likely to hold graduate degrees. Of fanfic writers 18-24, 8.3% are likely to already hold graduate degrees compared to only 2.9% of non-ficreaders. Similarly, among those 25-30, 36% of fanfic writers hold graduate degrees, compared to 24% of non-ficreaders. Thus, while the typical Buffyverse fan is likely to be a college-educated young woman, the typical fanfic writer is even more likely to have completed at least some college. This suggests that people who are interested in leisure writing also have a greater interest in higher education.

It also appears that fans who are GLBT may be more attracted to reading or writing fanfic. Those writing/reading fanfic were twice as likely to list themselves as being a sexual minority than those who did not. It should be clarified that although sexual minorities are more likely to be fanfic writers, a given fanfic writer is not more likely to be a member of a minority group. Regardless of category, 77% of the survey respondents did not consider themselves to be part of *any* minority group no matter how

broad the definition. The attraction of fanfic to those who are minority members of the fandom is an issue that will be returned to later in this essay.

Fanfic writers are significantly less likely to be married or living with a partner than non-ficreaders and slightly more likely to be divorced, widowed, or in a long-distance relationship. One question is whether or not this has to do with leisure time. Writing is often absorbing and most easily done with blocks of uninterrupted time. However, when breaking down the figures by relationship status and writing frequency, those who were married or living with a partner were actually slightly more likely to have written fanfic in the past year than those who were single, in a long-distance relationship, or in a long-term relationship. Also those who had children living at home were distinctly more likely to have written in the past year than those who did not have children. Time constraints within the household then would not seem to be a strong factor in terms of who writes and who doesn't.

Another potential time factor influencing writing may be employment. Those with demanding careers may have less writing time than those who are in more temporary types of jobs. Because of the open-ended question used for employment information, it was not possible to correlate type of employment with whether or not the respondent wrote fanfic. Yet the question asking whether survey takers had the job they wanted and trained for indicated that fanfic writers are less likely to be satisfied with their jobs (49%) than non-ficreaders (63%). Again, this is probably due in part to the fact that most college students have jobs of a temporary nature. In a correlation of education and job desirability, those with graduate degrees or higher had an 80% positive response to this question compared to high school graduates who had a 77% negative response. So fanfic writers may simply have more time on the job to write or may simply be working fewer hours than those who don't.

Income and education tend to be closely correlated factors in demographic surveys. Given that fanfic writers are younger and more likely to still be in school training for the job they hope to get someday, their income is also lower. Although income peaked at the \$50-75,000 levels for fanfic writers just as it did with the overall survey group, fanfic writers were over-represented in lower income categories and non-ficreaders were over-represented in higher income categories. A cross-tabulation of sex and income resulted in negligible differences but age and income proved significant. A cross-tabulation showed that those in the 18-24 age bracket are dramatically over-represented in the lowest income bracket.

Part 2. Activities Within and Outside of the Fandom

In Part 1, a basic demographic profile was made of the online Buffyverse fan. This profile was then examined more closely in terms of two groups within the fandom – those who wrote fanfic and those who neither wrote nor read fanfic. Some distinct differences were found centering on both sex and age. The lower skewing age group of fanfic writers influenced other differences in terms of educational achievement, income, and marital and parental status.

In this section activities will be examined, first for the overall group, and then again between fanfic writers and non-ficreaders. It seems likely that the demographic factors seen in Part 1 will have an influence on individual behavior.

Tastes in Entertainment

Given that this is a fandom that centers on a media text, some of the survey questions focused on the respondent's interest in reading, television viewing, and entertainment genres.

1. The online Buffyverse fan

One of the most discussed questions from the survey was the one asking whether or not the survey taker preferred reading a book to watching television. This question was actually drawn from a 2004 "Angel Magazine" online reader survey, which found that most fans preferred watching television by about 60 to 40%. In the 2006 survey however the reverse was true -- 57% of respondents chose books -- perhaps because the overall age group of the respondents was higher. In cross-tabulating by age, the older the respondent, the more likely they chose books, with 71% of those over 50 doing so compared to 50% of those 18-24. Another factor in the response was gender. 63% of women preferred books compared to 41% of men. These two factors bear out larger trends in the U.S. In the 2004 report of "Reading at Risk" the average rate of fiction reading in the U.S. was declining most steeply among young people and men (xi, NEA, 2004). Overall though, Buffyverse fandom is made up of heavy readers regardless of age or sex.

The developing statistical picture of an educated, middle-class female group is not unlike that of the typical reader or library user. Asked how often they read fiction, nearly a third of all respondents said they did so daily, with only 6% doing so once a year or less. Female respondents were slightly more likely to read fiction frequently. According to "Reading at Risk," 75% of the survey respondents would be classified as "frequent" or "avid" readers, putting them in the top 16% of the overall reading public (4, NEA, 2004).

When it came to library use, a gender split was apparent. Although 98% of all survey respondents had first used a library before the age of 12, men were 10% less likely to use a library regularly than women, and the most likely not to have used one at all in the past year. Given the relatively small number of parents in the survey, children's use of the library is not a factor in this discrepancy. Overall 76% of respondents had used a library's materials or services at least once in the past year. Age is also a factor in library use, with those 18-24 being the heaviest library users, perhaps because they are in school. Cross tabulations of education levels with reading rates and library use, show a close correlation. A cross-tabulation of age and sex of all survey takers shows that there are virtually equal percentages of male and female respondents in all 6 age brackets. Age and gender therefore seem to be independent factors in library use.

Respondents showed clear preferences in certain genres of entertainment, whether it came to books or other media. Most respondents chose fantasy (74%) and science fiction (86%) as favorites. Least popular were romances (31%) and westerns (10%). Both men and women enjoyed suspense/thrillers in relatively equal proportions, but otherwise, tastes tended to fall in line with historically gendered preferences. Men were distinctly more interested in horror and westerns, and dramatically less interested in romances (12%). Women were least interested in westerns (7%), slightly more interested

than men in mysteries, and slightly less interested in science fiction. Age seemed a factor in only two genres. Those under 35 had a marked preference for romances compared to those over 35, and the oldest respondents had the most interest in mysteries while the youngest had the least.

2. The Buffyverse fanfic writer

Not surprisingly people who enjoy writing are much more likely to prefer a book to television (65 to 35%) than are other respondents. Those who are not fanfic readers are the least likely to opt first for a book, indicating that at least part of the reason they do not read fanfic is because they do less reading in general. The difference, however, is mostly by comparison since non-ficreaders are almost evenly split between books and TV. Responses to fiction reading habits however bear out that fanfic writers are the mostly likely to read daily and non-ficreaders are the least likely. Nearly 20% of non-ficreaders indicate they either never read fiction or read it once a year. The same is true for only 7% of fanfic writers. The survey question distinguished between reading fanfic and reading published fiction.

There is no difference between the groups in terms of library use, although there is a difference in behavior by age. Older non-ficreaders were more likely to be using the library than older fanfic writers. However 18-24 year old fanfic writers were more likely to be using the library than 18-24 year old non-ficreaders. As suggested in the previous section it would seem that this heavier library use by young fanfic writers is due to them being in school and thus using a library for a variety of purposes other than leisure reading.

Sociability

Having looked at some of the entertainment habits and interests of Buffyverse fans, some traditional elements of media fandom emerged such as an interest in science fiction and fantasy texts over other popular genres. In addition both the group as a whole and the fanfic writers are frequent readers. Having these tastes in common, we next look at the frequency and range of social interaction by those participating in online fandom.

1. The online Buffyverse fan

The very first survey question asked respondents to rate their own fannishness. Survey takers chose how many different things they felt they had been a fan of during their lifetime. The answers showed that survey takers were very “fannish” people; that is, people who were likely to become quite taken with particular activities or forms of entertainment. The general concept of a fandom and its activities were not likely to be new to them. 67% had had five or more fannish interests during their lifetime. Only 2% of respondents had never become fans of anything before encountering the Buffyverse. Since the definition of “fan” was left up to the respondent it is possible that some survey takers might be considered fans of more things than they listed. Part of what we will look at in the survey is how the definition of “fan” gets defined through interaction and activities. Are the survey takers primarily lurkers or active in the fandom? Are they new to fannish practices or not? How often do they participate?

Being social in offline fan groups was not particularly common. 72% had either never done so or done so only once or twice. A minority had done so over 10 times (9%). However 3% of respondents had never shared their fan interests with *anyone* offline, even though some of these individuals had been fans of various things.

Meeting in person is a more difficult thing than meeting online since many factors are involved in attending group events. Time and cost can be a deterrent, and meeting a large group of fans may simply be intimidating if one is attending alone. By comparison meeting others online is cheap, convenient, and easier to abandon if one is uncomfortable. Clearly most of the respondents found online interactions easier in some way. Only 10% of all survey takers were chronic lurkers, stating that they never interacted with other fans online.

Conversely 19% of respondents were quite experienced in navigating online fandom, having been involved with 5 or more different fan interest groups. 51% of respondents had been involved in 2 to 4 online fandoms.

Easy access to a computer and Internet service would have an effect on the frequency of online interaction. Asked how many hours survey takers spent online engaged in recreational pursuits, 81% spent at least an hour a day doing so. While it seemed 2 hours a day was common for most participants, 16% of respondents spent over 30 hours a week online for entertainment purposes. This is nearly as much time as they might expect to be working. Students, IT workers, and the self-employed were examples of occupations with more flexible schedules and lack of administrative oversight which might allow for such a high amount of recreational time online. Another 4% of survey takers indicated they were unemployed, retired, or disabled. Only 2% of respondents spent just an hour or two a week online for entertainment, which suggests that either fan activities or discussions were their sole recreational use of the Internet, or else they didn't interact largely due to lack of opportunity.

A different survey question sought to determine how important fan activities were to online use. Although 57% had already been online prior to taking part in a fandom, for 43% fan interests were one of the first things they used the Internet for. The majority (77%) also visited several Buffyverse sites regularly, most choosing "2 to 4" sites, but 12% choosing "9 or more." The question asked respondents to identify large multi-site domains such as LiveJournal as 1 site. Thus the 23% of respondents who cited "Only 1" may actually be interacting a great deal, but just in one place. Additionally, visits are not equal to interaction. For example, someone looking for news or desktop wallpapers may visit numerous sites without actually talking to anyone. The question then becomes what sorts of sites is the fandom using for all this activity? Are they primarily discussion sites or static informational sites? The answer is most of them *are* websites, but a lot of them are discussion oriented sites as well.

A number of technologies were in current use, with 69% listing blogs, 56% naming posting boards, 28% naming mailing lists and 11% naming newsgroups. Also in frequent use were technologies used to communicate directly with individuals such as email (48%), chat and instant messaging (20%) and text messaging (3%). Since respondents could add their own categories, a few formats such as "Podcasts" and "RSS feeds" were included.

Given that two of the most active sites for the fandom, *Whedonesque* and LiveJournal, are blogs, one would have expected nearly 100% of respondents to have

identified blogs as a visited site. Instead 97% responded they used websites. There has been some notable confusion demonstrated among *Whedonesque* users regarding what type of site it is, as many seem not to realize that a community blog is still a blog (Whedonesque, 2006). There is often a similar reaction to sites like LiveJournal, which are not classified as blogs by some academics or online users because they are considered “journals” or online diaries (Herring, 2004). Thus the 97% who replied they used “Websites” regularly may be confounding the two mediums. This confusion would also seem to be borne out by many of the respondents (5%) who named LiveJournal specifically, or named specific websites in answer to the question.

What this diverse group of responses indicates is that survey takers are visiting numerous online sites. A sizable number of them are also engaging in discussion at a number of locations as well, using everything from the oldest to the newest Internet tools and formats.

Two final questions were included in the survey to gauge the respondent’s tendency to get involved in issues of importance to them. The first question asked whether or not the survey taker had voted in either of their last 2 national elections. As the survey launched on the heels of the 2006 U.S. midterm elections, this was a recent issue for many respondents. The reported voting response of 85% is quite high compared to the typical U.S. election turnout. Although party affiliation or candidate preference was not asked, observations of the Buffyverse fandom show a liberal slant, especially as regards social policy. This is supported by the overall educational status of the respondents (Gill, 2005).

In countries where voting is compulsory however, this statistic would not mean much. A second question asked whether the survey taker had taken part in an organization focused on political or social issues. While 51% of the respondents answered “yes,” both of these political activity questions had a clear age bias in the response. Although 85% of respondents claimed to have voted, this ranged from 49% for those 18-24 to a high of 92% for those “Over 50”. Given that all respondents should have been of age to vote and the question asked about *either* of the 2 most recent elections, age restrictions should not be a factor in the voting difference. Similarly when asking about organizational activity, those 18-24 showed the lowest participation at 44% and those over 50 the highest at 70%. This age bias is reflected in other voting surveys such as those reported by the U.S. Census (Cassata, 2007).

When looking at *fandom* participation however, age seems to have no bearing on who has or has not taken on community roles. Asked about a range of positions (and offered the chance to add their own), 67% had not taken on any roles. The most common volunteer activity was moderating a community (20%). Other responses ranged from the 12% who reported being a website designer or maintainer to the 1% each who listed convention volunteer or website contributor.

Taking on community roles has relevance not only to a fan’s level of interest in the fandom but also in their opportunities to socialize within the fandom. Although the people who take on such roles are not necessarily more sociable than other fans, their roles do give them an opportunity to be better *known* by other fans, even if this is due solely to username recognition. Overall, about a third of the respondents had volunteered in some way. What about the rest of the respondents? Aside from merely interacting with

one another, do they make friends? Is fandom something respondents share with others offline?

The answer is yes, but it seems there is often a divide between having fannish interests and sharing those with the people closest to them. Most respondents have someone in their life who also shares fannish interests. These people are, however, more likely to be close (51%) or casual friends (37%), not family members. At least 1 out of 5 respondents didn't know any other fans at all. Those 20% offer a good example of why some individuals may go online for fannish interaction. The relative lack of family members who are fannish (25% of siblings, 14% of parents) means that many individuals who have long been fans of something have had no one at home to share those interests with. When asked whether or not respondents felt closer to those friends or family members who shared this part of their lives, the majority said no, but a significant number (44%) said "Yes." Fortunately for most participants at least someone they knew, whether spouse or partner (20%), or other relative (12%), was also a fan. The smallest response was for children (7%) but considering the small number of parents in the survey, this could be expected.

How successful are online interactions in generating new friendships? The majority of respondents have not made a friend through online fandom, but a significant number (46%) have. A final question explored whether or not feeling comfortable with others online affected the development of friendships. Asked "Do you feel that your fandom is a safe place in which to express yourself?" 41% said "Yes", 4% said "No" and the majority responded that it depended on the online site (56%). These figures will be looked at in more detail when discussing the responses of fanfic writers.

2. The Buffyverse fanfic writer

Although there is a slight tendency for fanfic writers to have more fannish interests than non-ficreaders, overall differences were minimal. In general, fanfic writers are not markedly more "fannish" about things than other fans. They are, however, distinctly more social in their fan behavior. While 52% of non-ficreaders had never gone to fan gatherings, the same was true for only 37% of fanfic writers. Fanfic writers were also the most likely to have gone to 10 or more events. This same sociability translated to online behavior. Although equal numbers of fanfic writers and non-ficreaders called the Buffyverse their first online fandom, fanfic writers were the most likely to have interacted with other fans online in 7 or more fandoms. Given such involvement, they were also 3 times more likely to be spending over 30 hours a week online than non-ficreaders. It should be mentioned again that this question asked about *all* recreational uses of the Internet, not merely fan activities. Fanfic writers were clearly comfortable online, they spent a lot of their leisure time there, and Internet access would not seem to be a significant problem for most of them.

When asked what first brought them online, fanfic writers were more than twice as likely as non-ficreaders to say it was a fan interest. When this question was broken down by age, younger respondents were much more likely to have cited fan interests than older survey takers. The overall youth of fanfic writers may thus be influencing this statistic. Having been in college or in the workforce during the growth of the Internet,

older respondents are more likely than younger ones to have first encountered the Internet for work or research purposes.

Fanfic writers clearly get around in the fandom. Most fanfic writers and non-ficreaders (47% of each) visited 2-4 sites. Otherwise, non-ficreaders are the most likely to visit only one fandom site, and hardly any such respondents claimed to visit 9 or more sites. Fanfic writers are more likely to use all technologies than non-ficreaders, sometimes dramatically so. For example, fanfic writers are 30% more likely to use blogs than non-ficreaders, 34% more likely to use e-mail, and 26% more likely to use IM in their fan-related activities. Although “Websites/Archives” use is relatively identical between the two groups, the reasons may be different. Fanfic writers are the most likely to visit “9 or more” sites. It’s possible many of these are fanfic archives. As the content of each archive varies, it’s quite likely that fanfic writers (and readers) visit a variety of archives from time to time to see what has been added.

The only technology in which fanfic writers do not exceed the average use is with newsgroups, where they are 2% behind non-ficreaders. This statistic seems to bear out claims about the early migration of fanfic writers away from newsgroups back in the early 1990s (Bury, 2005). In general, the more personal commitment and involvement required for a technology, the more likely fanfic writers are to use it compared to other fans. Why is their usage at the high end of the fandom?

When it came to the political activity questions there was little to no difference between fanfic writers and non-ficreaders. When it came to fan activities however, the difference was dramatic. 89% of non-ficreaders have never served in any kind of fandom support position. By comparison, only 50% of fanfic writers have never done so. They are in fact, the group *most* likely to have done support work, most notably as community moderators, but also significantly as website designers and maintainers, and event organizers. Some activities are biased towards fanfic work, such as awards sites, fanfic archives, or fandom newsletters. One might expect fanfic writers (and readers) to take on these activities, which they do. However within any given fandom there are numerous websites and communities that have no relation to fanfic. Respondents were also free to add their own categories to this question. Fanfic writers were the most likely to add categories, and the most likely to do website and community work.

At least part of the reason for fanfic writers’ level of volunteer activity may have to do with their interest in connecting with others. The two areas that showed the most difference between fanfic writers and non-ficreaders were between fannish spouses and close friends. Given that fewer fanfic writers are married or living with someone, it's not surprising that non-ficreaders were almost twice as likely to have a fannish spouse (32% to 18%). Fanfic writers, however, had distinctly more close friends who were also fans (56% to 43%). The significance of these differences is difficult to interpret. A study of friendship in the U.S. showed an increase in married individuals who claim their spouse as their sole friend (McPherson et al, 2006). The survey results here may have as much to do with the respondent’s marital status as to their fan connections offline.

Fanfic writers do seem to value fannish connections among their family and friends more than non-ficreaders by a 10% margin. It is possible that fan interests are closely related to emotional bonds for this group. This interpretation is also supported by the finding that fanfic writers are nearly *4 times* as likely to say they have made “a good friend” online than non-ficreaders. While 32% of fanfic writers do not claim a close

online friend, 82% of non-ficreaders don't. Clearly many fanfic writers are finding not just social contact, but positive relations in their fannish activities. When asked "Do you feel that your fandom is a safe place in which to express yourself?" fanfic writers were more likely to say yes (44%) than non-ficreaders (35%), with only 2% saying "No" compared to 11% of non-ficreaders. Along with the gender gap, this gap in terms of fannish friendships is one of the most dramatic differences between fanfic writers and non-ficreaders.

Given the responses to these varied questions it can be said that fanfic writers are more actively involved online in part because they are interested in making connections with other people. There are two possible factors involved. The first is that they have a dearth of social connections offline and are thus attempting to find them online. However, the question about family and friends who are fans seems to diminish this possibility. A second explanation is that fanfic writers simply have a greater level of fannish interest and this leads to more activities with others. The next section will look at this possibility.

Fandom Involvement

In the previous section questions pertaining to sociability and fandom involvement produced different levels of activity for different groups. While it would seem likely that sociable people would be more involved in a fandom, this does not mean that less sociable people would automatically be lurkers. Those who don't interact much with others have numerous ways of contributing to a fandom. Websites, technical support, or creative works are just a few examples. What this section will focus on is whether it is generally the *same* groups who are both socially active as well as contributors of fandom resources.

1. The online Buffyverse fan

Besides fanfic writing, two other questions addressed creative fan works. The first asked if participants had ever made a fan video and the second whether they had created graphics. Not surprisingly only 9% answered "Yes" to the video while 45% said "Yes" to graphics. Although fan vids have been made since the introduction of the VCR, common computer programs have simplified the work enormously, allowing a boom in fan video making. Vids have spread to large public video archives such as YouTube and iMeem. Despite technological advances vids demand a great deal of time and effort, with often very little feedback in return. Legally, they are also the riskiest sort of fan production with their use of copyrighted clips and music. Although the majority of U.S. Internet users now have high-speed access, for many others downloading is still slow and vid storage can add up quickly (Pew Internet...2006). The number of people making vids may be growing, but as of the time of this survey, they were still a minority in the fandom. Only 10% of women and 6% of men reported they had made one. These numbers continue to show a strong gender skew.

Graphics are most often made to decorate and personalize online spaces, whether they are story banners, user icons, or photo manipulations and they can be found on even

the plainest of websites. A fairly high number of respondents, 45%, have tinkered with visuals at some time. Interestingly, they have not been creating website banners (18%) or computer wallpapers (21%) as often as icons (35%). A gender skew is evident when it comes to graphic making with 49% of women and 32% of men having made some. This is still a small difference compared to the 80/20 split in fanfic writing. It also may have something to do with the value of graphics to the two genders. Men were slightly more likely than women to say that the visual appeal of an online location was “not very important” although a minority of both sexes said it was “very important” (20%).

Survey takers were also asked if they felt they were collectors of anything. 66% said "Yes" and 44% said "No." The result had a distinct gender skew in that 71% of men but only 63% of women considered themselves collectors.

A final question about fandom involvement asked the survey taker if participating in fandom had “broadened your horizons in some way.” Seven options were given as well as a write-in option to add a response in their own words. Only 15% of respondents said "No." Most respondents replied that they had different views of the “Buffy” and “Angel” series (48%) or claimed to have met a wider spectrum of people than they had known before (43%). Other responses had to do with learning more about different topics (39%), gaining different views of other fans (37%), or changing their views on issues (28%). Central to the question of fannish involvement was “taking on new roles/activities” (22%) and feeling less inhibited in having “discussions with strangers” (25%).

2. The Buffyverse fanfic writer

Fanfic writers were, somewhat surprisingly, the most likely in the overall group to have also created fan videos and graphics. Only 3% of non-ficreaders had created a fan video while 14% of fanfic writers had done so. 33% of non-ficreaders had created graphics, compared to 62% of fanfic writers. Fanfic writers had in fact created more of every kind of graphic, with 50% having made icons. Although fewer had created photo manipulations, which take a high level of skill to do well, virtually no non-ficreaders had done so. In short, it appears that writers do not simply write, they create a variety of works and, as a group, they are doers in the fandom.

What is also interesting about the vid statistic is that it sheds light on the graphics results. Many fanfic writers like having icons, banners and other graphics to advertise and illustrate their stories. It would not be unexpected to see writers creating visual works as a means of self-promotion. However, vids do not serve as advertising, yet fanfic writers are still more likely to have created them. This seems to indicate that the graphics results (as well as the fandom support positions result) are not due solely to writers’ efforts at “marketing” themselves and their work. Rather, fanfic writers are interested in becoming involved, and are motivated to be creative. There was no significant difference between fanfic writers and non-ficreaders in terms of being collectors, a non-creative form of fan activity.

A final question asked all respondents outright – how involved in the Buffyverse fandom did they consider themselves to be? Only 18% considered themselves to be “Very Involved.” The majority was equally split between “Somewhat Involved” and “Occasionally Involved” (35% each). A minority (12%) said it was a fan interest that

was mostly in the past for them and they no longer actively kept up with it.

While this “middle range” of responses is to be expected, what is interesting is the split between fanfic writers and non-ficreaders. Only 9% of non-ficreaders considered themselves to be “very” involved in the fandom, compared to 22% of fanfic writers. As a group, non-ficreaders are the most likely (52%) to say they are only occasionally involved in the fandom. It is impossible to determine what any individual survey taker means when they say “Very involved” as opposed to “Occasionally involved.” However, other questions in this survey focusing on site visits, interactions with others, fandom roles, and fan activities have all shed light on the self-reporting in this question. All along, responses have indicated that *as a group*, fanfic writers are very active and non-ficreaders are among the least active in the fandom. When asked to report on their own involvement the two groups would seem to agree with this assessment. The question discussed earlier that asked about “broadened horizons” tied together involvement and personal benefits. Only 7% of fanfic writers say that their fandom involvement has not stretched them in some way. 33% of non-ficreaders claim no benefits. Fanfic writers are also nearly twice as likely to have provided a write-in response citing additional personal benefits.

Looking at the different choices in the “broadened horizons” question, only 5% of non-ficreaders said they had taken on new roles, and 9% said they felt less inhibited in having discussions with strangers. By comparison 33% of fanfic writers had taken on new roles, and 33% also reported feeling less inhibited about chats with strangers. Also of note were responses to “I have contact with a broader spectrum of people.” Only 16% of non-ficreaders said they had versus 55% of fanfic writers. In all the responses to this question, fanfic writers were twice as likely to say they had had the benefit as non-ficreaders. The write-in responses to this question tended to fall into two groups – people feeling they had made rewarding contact with others, or a feeling of liberation in doing new things such as traveling and overcoming technology fears (3%), or citing writing related benefits specifically (2%)

Summary

Along with sketching out a profile of what may constitute active or occasional involvement in the fandom by a typical online fan, Part 2 has also provided a telling profile of the differences between fanfic writers and non-fanfic readers. When it comes to tastes in their entertainment, fannish sociability on and offline, and participation and contributions to the fandom, there are skews in the behavior of the two groups. There are also differences between the two groups in benefits they've derived from their fandom involvement. Compared to non-fanfic readers, fanfic writers seemed to be more emotionally committed to participating online and interacting with others, whereas non-fanfic readers seemed to be more infrequent participants with a lower level of commitment and less interest in emotional or social aspects of the fandom.

What we have not yet examined is how these two groups came to be, and whether they even recognize each other as separate parts of the fandom. The question has become not “Are fanfic writers active people” but rather, “Which came first?” Are they active online *because* they are writers, or are they writers because they are active participants in online fandoms?

Part 3. Writers by nature, or writers by fandom?

In Part 1, the demographic characteristics of the Buffyverse fandom were examined and compared, as a whole, to the characteristics of the subgroup of fanfic writers. This review revealed several notable differences between the two groups. The Buffyverse fandom as a whole is made up of younger individuals who are heavy readers, interested in the science-fiction and fantasy genres in various mediums, highly educated, politically active compared to the general public, and largely female. They are more likely to be a sexual minority than the average member of the public but less likely to be a racial or ethnic minority. They are most likely to be students, educators, IT workers or in the writing/publishing field, and slightly more likely to have above average incomes.

The subgroup of fanfic writers in the fandom are highly likely to be female and more likely to be in demographic categories that have aspects of leisure time such as being young, single, childless and not building a career. In fact, the 18-24 age bracket is the only one in the survey where respondents are more likely to be fanfic writers than non-writers. This also leads them to have lower income and education levels than the other fandom participants, despite being quite academically inclined. They are very likely to be volunteer workers within the fandom (50%).

What is true for writers is not, however, true for fanfic readers as a group. Fanfic readers are equally represented in all age brackets, all income levels, and all educational levels. They are less likely to be married but slightly more likely to be divorced or be in a long-distance relationship, situations that could contribute to greater freedom over personal activities. After fanfic writers, readers are the most likely group to be working in fandom support positions (36%). By comparison only 11% of non fanfic readers are likely to be working in such volunteer positions. Their lower percentage of volunteer activity compared to writers may in part be due to less leisure time or it may simply reflect a more casual interest in fandom as a leisure activity. There was also an interesting correlation between those who started to write fanfic before the age of 12 and those who volunteered in fandom. Only 38% of the early writers had never taken on any community roles, as opposed to 50% or more of later fanfic writers. This statistic may come from two factors. Because there is a growing awareness in the general public about fanfic thanks to its online visibility, it could be it's a more easily shared pastime among younger fandom participants who are then also taking on volunteer roles due to their greater leisure time. Alternately, it's possible that those who have been interested in fanfic the longest, since they were quite young, are the most likely to enthusiastically take on roles in fandom communities.

This issue of participation leads to the third area of the survey: what is it that motivates the survey respondents to get involved in fandom and what avenues does that involvement take? And when it comes to fanfic writers, are they writing because they are also writers outside of fandom, or is it their fan involvement that motivates them to write?

Writing in different contexts

When asked whether or not they had *ever* read fanfic, 68% of survey respondents said "Yes." When asked if they had ever written fanfic (for any fandom) only 54% said

“Yes.” While that is still over half the survey takers, it doesn’t say much about why those respondents tried their hand at fanfic as opposed to the 45% who had not. Earlier parts of the survey showed that the group as a whole read fiction frequently. Another series of questions thus addressed how much interest survey takers had in writing fiction.

1. The online Buffyverse fan

Overall there is a slight tendency for those in the Buffyverse fandom to have experience writing. When asked about employment, writing and publishing professions had strong representation, as did the educational field and other jobs where writing might be involved. One survey question asked specifically if writing had ever been part of the survey taker’s professional duties. A slight majority (55%) said “Yes.” An addendum to “not count schoolwork” was added to this question as the survey was in progress so some of the respondents may have counted school papers as professional writing. (Of course, given the number of students who indicated a future in academia this may yet be accurate). It seems fair to conclude that a sizable number of respondents do writing of some kind on a regular basis. Interestingly, a different survey done by “Angel” magazine in 2004, had 54% of respondents saying they considered themselves to be writers. Given that nearly half of the respondents were of high school or college age it seems likely that schoolwork was again influencing responses to this question.

A different question asked about writing original fiction to determine whether respondents were *interested* in writing. There was definite interest as 62% replied that they had done some kind of fiction writing. A second question asking when they had first written original fiction showed that 55% had done so before the age of 12. Only 5% first attempted this after their college years. These answers may explain why so many fanfic writers are young. It is simply because writing is most often done when one is young, regardless of the content. Leisure time and the interest in experimenting with new activities or creative expression may be part of this. School assignments may also lead people to try their hand at writing, since over half did so before the age of 12. The question did not ask how many are still writing, but if fanfic writers are any indication, the likelihood that they will continue doing so after 30 is small.

2. The Buffyverse fanfic writer

Although fanfic writers are obviously interested in writing, they don’t necessarily do it as part of their work. Non-fanfic writers are actually *more* likely to write in some professional capacity (62%) than fanfic writers (56%). A previous factor must be considered however, which is that the majority of fanfic writers are younger and in school. Many of them are either not working at all, or doing so in jobs that do not include writing. Older respondents are much more likely to be working in a job of their choice, or to have had past jobs that involved writing (as per the question wording). So the small differences between the two groups may not be a matter of choice or interest.

One of the claims made by some original fiction writers regarding fanfic is that fanfic writers turn to fanfic because they can not develop their own characters and worlds (Kadiz, 2004, Jane, 2006). While this claim may have some relevance, it doesn’t appear to characterize fanfic writers as a whole. 82% have at least attempted original fiction at

some time, and are twice as likely to have tried writing original fiction than those who have not read or written fanfic at all. There were only small differences among the groups regarding the age at which they first started writing. However fanfic writers were the most likely to have started young, and were also the only ones who first tried their hand at writing after college (5%). Interviews done with participants of a fanfic writing convention indicated that at least some later writers became involved due to their experiences in fanfic writing communities (Rebaza, dissertation in progress).

Since fewer non-fanfic readers write at all, it would seem that having an interest in writing any kind of fiction is partially responsible for someone to become a fanfic writer. It's also possible that because they can not only enjoy the fandom, but also have an opportunity to exercise their writing interests, they become more involved than those who are not simultaneously enjoying two hobbies. Nevertheless, some people who write do not become fanfic writers. Why is it that certain people (usually women) end up expressing their fannish interests in this way?

What prompts fanfic writing

Two questions asked survey participants what sorts of texts and what sorts of textual responses were associated with fanfic creation. A majority of respondents (68%) agreed that there were certain types of texts that had more fanfic written about them. Not surprisingly, respondents who wrote fanfic were 25% more likely to believe this. The non-fanfic readers were the group least likely to think so (53%). An open-ended text box was provided for survey takers to suggest reasons for this. These answers were compiled and fell into three broad areas: characters, story settings, and type of writing. The most frequent responses had to do with story characterization. Most respondents felt that texts with characters who were complex and had unexplained histories (19%) as well as a variety of compelling characters in the story (18%) were the most likely to have fanfic written about them. A smaller number of responses discussed the appeal of character relationships (11%) and having attractive actors in the roles (3%).

The second group of responses had to do with story setting. There was a strong belief that science-fiction/fantasy texts were more likely to provoke fanfic due to the myriad story possibilities they provided, and the built-in appeal to a cultish audience (12%). Also mentioned were stories with rich settings and an interesting mythology (10%). A third set of responses centered around the type of writing found in the text. Layered stories that had continuity over time were thought to be the most appealing (12%). A lack of closure in storylines or for characters was also thought to be a major factor (11%). Lastly, stories that lent themselves to analysis and various interpretations also held appeal (4%).

The next question asked if the survey taker believed that "fan fiction writers or readers relate to a fandom's central text differently than non-writers/readers." In other words, did the survey takers themselves feel that there were different groups within fandom who saw the shows differently from one another? A slight majority (55%) said "Yes." A closer look showed that fanfic writers strongly believed that there were differences (67%), while a minority of non-fanfic readers agreed (40%). These responses may be skewed by the fact that fanfic writers (and readers) may have pondered this question before, whereas non-fanfic readers probably hadn't. Inevitably for a fanfic

writer to write a story they must be thinking about the text with a great deal of attention, and have likely become aware of their own approach to it. It is common for views on the text to be a topic of conversation at fanfic sites as well as at non-fanfic sites. However, there may be other factors at work here which relate to gender.

Asked what survey takers most liked about the Buffyverse, they responded to six options. The most common response by far was “Characters” at 42%. Next came “Dynamics among the characters” at 22%, “Layers of meaning” at 16%, “Mix of genres” at 8%, “Storylines” at 7%, and “Philosophy of the show” at 6%. A majority of the fandom thus found character issues the most appealing. Much farther behind were analytical reasons, such as the layers of meaning in the show, or philosophy of the show. Other minor responses included more typical reasons for viewing shows, such as the storylines or the variety of elements in the show (e.g., action or comedy).

Fanfic writers had distinctly different responses from non-fanfic readers. More fanfic writers are attracted to the characters in the show and relationships among the characters than non-fanfic readers. In fact, these are overwhelmingly their main interest in the texts. Non-fanfic readers also frequently choose the characters as their main attraction, but are nearly twice as likely to choose analytical reasons such as “layers of meaning” (20%) and “philosophy” (9%) or “storylines” (10%) than fanfic writers. “Mix of genres” received similar responses between the two groups.

In one sense these results seem self-evident. If fanfic writers are going to rework material from the shows, they are likely to be more interested in the characters and their relationships than the plot or its metaphorical devices, since they must devise *new* plots for the characters rather than repeat what has already been seen. The answers may also reflect a gendered attraction to the text. When this survey question was cross-tabulated by sex, men were *over 3 times* as likely to choose “Storylines” as their principal attraction to the shows than women were. Otherwise the differences were much smaller, with men and women nearly equally likely to choose “Layers of meaning” or “Philosophy of the show” and women slightly more likely to choose “Characters” and their relationships or “Mix of genres” as main attractions. It is only in the storylines where this difference lies. Why should this be?

The answer was suggested by some of the survey takers themselves, as well as fanfic writers' discussions in other venues (Rebaza, dissertation in progress). Women may simply be more dissatisfied with the way that stories have taken place than men are. They enjoy the characters and their interactions with one another. They also like the variety the show has to offer, and are just as interested as men in the more analytical elements of the show. But for whatever reason, they are not as happy with the stories themselves. And perhaps this is why they want to see them changed.

Returning to the question previously discussed in Part 3 of this essay, survey takers were asked whether fanfic writers (and readers) approached the series text differently. Non-fanfic readers tended to disagree whereas fanfic writers agreed. Again, if we look at this question by cross-tabulating it with the sex of the respondent, there is once more a notable skew. Only 38% of men believed that fanfic writers basically “saw” the show differently than other fans, whereas 60% of women thought this was true.

This survey question also provided a text box for survey takers to offer their reasons why they felt this difference between fanfic writers and others in the fandom

might exist. The answers were compiled and are shown in Table 1 below, but can be summed up by this quote:

“Fan fiction writers and readers (and vidders) relate to the central text in [sic] typically more analytical way, but also a more emotional way.” – Survey participant

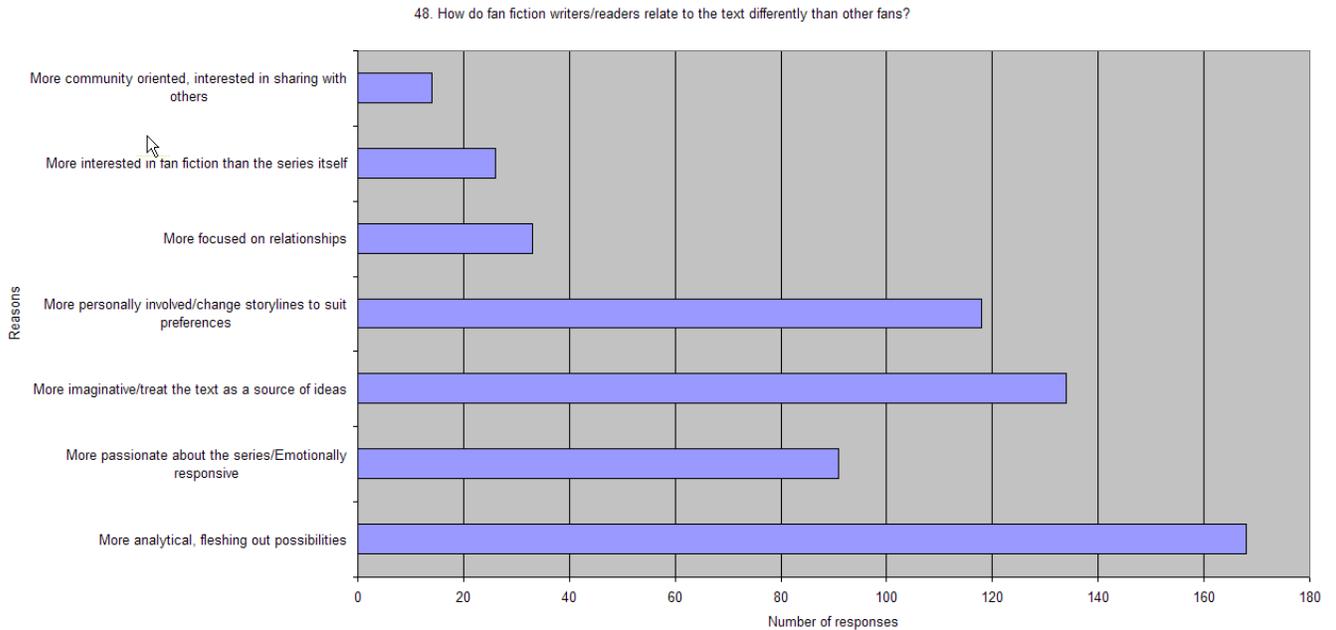


Table 1: How do Fan Fiction Writers Relate to Texts Differently

There was a surprising amount of consensus on how fanfic writers and readers approach texts differently from the rest of fandom. The most common answer was that fanfic writers are more analytical (29%). They don’t just view the text, they are interested in details and interpretations of the text, and are interested in fleshing out the possibilities of empty spaces. Fanfic to them is simply a different way of presenting a critique. A somewhat opposite approach was that fanfic writers respond more personally to the text (20%). Fanfic writers are personally invested in the characters and stories and don’t want them to develop the way they saw on screen, or simply want to see them continued past the point where they ended. A middle approach is that fanfic writers don’t see the text as an absolute. Rather, they see it as raw material or a jumping off point for other possible stories (23%). Other explanations are that fanfic writers are simply more passionate about the shows and emotionally invested in the stories (15%) or that they are more focused on the relationships in the show (6%). Lastly there were suggestions that fanfic is simply an end unto itself, and that fanfic writers were more interested in writing fanfic than simply watching the shows (4%) or that they were more community-oriented, and more interested in interactions with other fans (2%). Some answers to this question encompassed two or three of these responses. In short, fanfic writers see themselves (and to some degree are seen) as more analytical, emotionally involved, and creative than others in the fandom.

It is particularly interesting to see the issue of analysis raised as the most prominent reason for fanfic writing. Media scholar Henry Jenkins came to the same

conclusion when discussing how fanfic serves as an alternative form of critique, one that does not strive for objectivity, as in the academic approach, but rather extends subjectivity to the point where it critiques the work in question through the very same medium in which it exists (Jenkins, 2006). The suggestion that fanfic is a largely analytical approach to the text would probably be a surprise to non-fanfic readers. When asked why they did not read fanfic, the responses indicated nonreaders found little merit in doing so. Although a few respondents listed reasons that had nothing to do with fanfic itself but rather indicated a lack of time (11%) or interest in reading in general (7%), the majority of respondents said they felt fanfics were of low quality (40%). Other respondents indicated that fanfic simply didn't hold their interest (9%) or that they simply hadn't come across the right kind (12%). But the second highest figure (22%) stated that the mere existence of fanfic provoked a negative reaction.

Fanfic reading habits among those who write fanfic and those who only read fanfic

To better understand these responses we need to find out what fanfic reading habits exist among the survey takers. Are most readers occasional readers, rarely finding something that suits their interests? Or do most read fanfic as avidly as commercial fiction?

Out of those who had read fanfic, 20% hardly ever did so. These respondents are likely to be among those who have tried fanfic and have been bored by it, or who have generally not found any to their taste. An additional 18% read it only a few times a year. These may be the individuals who are still open to reading fanfic but simply don't find much that interests them, or who are too short of time to do much reading. A smaller number read regularly but infrequently (11%) and then there are the heavy readers, who constitute the 51% of respondents reading either weekly (21%) or daily (30%). We now look at what percentage of these fanfic readers are also fanfic writers.

Only one 1 of 10 fanfic writers are essentially non-readers. Most of these are writers who have written in the past and stopped, or who also write infrequently. By comparison nearly 40% of writers read fanfic daily. So when it comes to one's readers, a writer can expect another writer to be in the audience more frequently than a non-writer. As we will see below, someone who reads fanfic for the first time is most likely to either continue doing so infrequently, or to try their hand at writing themselves.

About 1 out of 10 of people who had tried reading fanfic have not read it again. Of the ones who are still reading, many are reading widely. Though some read fanfic only for the Buffyverse (25%), the majority are reading work in 2 to 3 different fandoms (40%) and 26% have read in 4 or more fandoms in the past year. For these heavy readers, fanfic is not tied solely to their interest in a show, book, or other text. Rather fanfic is enjoyable for its own sake. Just over 37% of fanfic writers read in 4 or more fandoms. Fanfic readers who do not also write most often read in 2 to 3 fandoms (44%).

The typical survey taker was new to fanfic reading, perhaps because many readers are also writers, and many writers are young. The majority of survey takers (62%) had only been reading fanfic for five years or less. While a few had been reading fanfic most of their life (11%), most people had come to it recently. This is an interesting fact since the Buffyverse shows had been around for nearly ten years at the time of the survey and its fanfic had been around almost from the start. Yet the majority of fanfic readers appear

to have been around for only part of that time. Although some readers may have been fans from the beginning and have only come across fanfic recently, another explanation is that there is a great deal of turnover in fandom, with people joining and leaving in a constant flow. Fanfic writers, however, seem likely to stick around. They are twice as likely to have been reading fanfic over 6 years (48%) compared to non-writers, (25%). Given that fanfic writers are among the most active groups in fandom, this statistic may indicate they serve as a sort of backbone, with those who only read or engage in other activities coming and going more frequently. A cross tabulation done of fanfic reading frequency and length of exposure to fanfic, shows a positive correlation. Those who continue to read fanfic over a long period of time are most likely to do so often. By comparison, 36% of those who have encountered fanfic in only the last year or two, have not gone back to it.

This positive correlation between time in fandom and fanfic reading may be biased by the fact that participants who have been around a long time must be somehow motivated to do so. They are more likely to be deeply involved in the fandom (and to answer a survey). By comparison those who have been around only a few years may be on the peripheries of the fandom, and the most uninvolved wouldn't have answered the survey at all. So while the image of writers as a backbone of the fandom has some support, at this point it only remains a possibility.

Why though, do some readers become writers and stay involved in fandoms while others stay on the fringes and eventually leave? Because people have limits to their leisure time, a cross-tabulation was done of frequency of fanfic reading and frequency of commercial fiction reading to see if it was a relatively lower interest in fanfic that kept some readers on the borders.

The finding was that heavy readers are heavy readers regardless of the material. The majority of those reading fanfic daily are also reading published fiction daily (30%). Infrequent fanfic readers are also more likely to be reading published fiction irregularly, indicating that time may be the central issue in lack of reading. Though some respondents read little of one but a great deal of the other, more often than not respondents read both as often as time permitted. In general then, reading time tends to be correlated with how often participants read fanfic.

Along with time for reading comes time to *find* things to read. While some readers may enjoy the experience of browsing bookshelves or online archives for reading material, those strapped for time would find hunting for reading material cuts into time spent reading. However the majority of respondents did not report this to be a problem. While a significant number (42%) agreed that finding fanfic was problematic, they were slightly more likely to be writers than just readers. On the face of it this seems counter-intuitive. If writers form a sort of involved, connected group, wouldn't they be more likely to know where the fanfic they want to read is? Wouldn't the novice readers be the ones having more trouble? Although the differences are small (44% of writers say finding fanfic to read is difficult compared to 39% of non-writers) perhaps it is because the types of materials both groups are looking for are different, and that non-writing readers are simply easier to please when it comes to reading material than those who also write.

Asked what might improve fanfic searching capabilities, the answer was that finding useful recommendations for reading material would help 60% of the respondents.

While many of them expected other fans to be a good resource (56%) slightly more favored the idea of a website providing recommendations (61%).

The second most important issue for searchers was navigating archives (61%) as well as having more topic-specific archives (33%) and simply more archives in general (18%). Nearly 1 out of 2 respondents also agreed that having better fanfic descriptions (45%) would be helpful. Given the chance to add their own suggestions, 2% of individuals said they weren't looking for fanfic at all, 3% suggested that the fandom community could be a better resource, 1% complained that finding fanfic was difficult because what they wanted to read wasn't being produced often enough, and a handful mentioned a lack of time. Lastly, 1% made dismissive comments about wanting to read fanfic. Presumably these respondents were among those who had tried fanfic but found it wanting.

Although writers and readers had minor differences when it came to the options they chose, the one area where there was no difference of opinion was for a recommendations site. Otherwise writers were distinctly more likely to choose all the options offered, and the largest difference (22 to 13%) was in writers preferring more archives. Although, again, one would presume those who were solely reading to be more concerned about ways to find materials, writers were also concerned about finding readers. Especially when it came to archives, the distinct preference for more archives was likely because writers want more sites at which to place their work to increase readership. Archives are expensive and time consuming to maintain, even those that are largely automated, and having people willing to front the costs and time to do so is difficult. Indeed, it is surprising that they exist in such numbers (approximate figures do not seem to be available but internet searches for them will turn up thousands of results). Writers' concerns may also be centered not just on story placement, but preservation of fanfics. When archivists abandon their sites often the entire content can be lost. There have also been numerous cases of archives being hacked and then never restored. There is also the possibility that archives will be slapped with cease & desist orders from copyright owners and be forced to take down the site or have an ISP do so without notice. The more fanfic archives that exist, the more likely copies of fanfics will survive. It is not uncommon for people to hunt for a favorite fanfic or a recommended story and discover that it is no longer online.

Fanfic authors themselves may appear and disappear online along with their work. But they are generally very interested in hearing from readers, and many readers are motivated to join communities because they are able to get in touch with and keep tabs on favorite authors. The next survey questions dealt with the issue of social contact among readers and writers, the first asking if readers had favorite fanfic authors.

What was interesting about the responses was how they broke down between writers and non-writers. A clear majority of both (61%) indicated they had favorite authors. Those respondents presumably had read enough fanfic to develop a preference for some people's writing. What's striking however is that it is writers who are overwhelmingly more likely to have favorite authors, by 77% compared to 42% of non-writers. A cross tabulation shows that those who do not have favorite authors are not likely to have written fanfic recently, with 88% of current authors claiming favorites compared to 53% of infrequent authors. This suggests that the work of other writers may be a motivation in keeping writers writing.

A follow-up question asked about social contact with those authors. The vast majority had given their favorite authors some sort of feedback on their work; 33% of those respondents had gone on to correspond extensively with those authors; 37% had collaborated with the author by serving as a beta reader (editor), and 14% had gone on to co-write with the author. Lastly 23% had even met in person. But nearly 1 in 5 fanfic readers had never given any response to the author at all. One might expect that these were more occasional readers, pressed for time who did not take the extra step to email or post a comment to the writers. This was not actually the case however. A cross tabulation of frequency of fanfic reading with author contact showed that 10% of those who read fanfic daily and 15% of those who read weekly *never* contacted the author. Although a larger proportion of infrequent readers had never given feedback, those who “hardly ever” read fanfic, were actually more likely to have given feedback (74%) than those who read monthly or a few times a year. This and the fact that those “hardly ever” readers were represented in all the contact options suggests that these readers are no longer very involved but had been at one time.

What is also interesting is breaking down the contact question between writers and readers generally. Authors were 3 to 4 times more likely to have made all of the suggested types of contacts with other authors, the exception being “given feedback” where non-writers did so more often. Interestingly, 12% of authors had also never contacted another author. One possibility that these replies raise is that readers who end up making close contact with authors may become authors in the process. In interviews with writers at a fanfic writing convention, several respondents revealed they began writing due to the encouragement of other authors and readers (Rebaza, dissertation in progress). This explanation seems to have some statistical support in the survey, since a third of those making contact with authors went on to involve themselves more deeply in writing with those writers.

Male and Female fanfic reading habits

One last issue needs to be raised about fanfic reading habits. There is again a strong gender skew in the responses. Men were overwhelmingly likely to say they “hardly ever” read fanfic (41%) or did so a few times a year (29%). By comparison women were overwhelmingly likely to say they read fanfic daily (36%) or weekly (22%). Hardly any men read daily (6%) though a few more did weekly (13%). Virtually equal numbers of both sexes read monthly. Men were just as likely as women to have tried fanfic from 2-3 different fandoms in the past year (40%), although more women had tried 4 or more (30%) compared to men (12%), and very few women hadn’t read fanfic recently (6%) compared to men (18%).

It was also interesting to see that more men had read fanfic over 25 years ago (4.5%) than women (2%). More men had also read fanfic only in the last year or two, (24%) compared to women (19%). Virtually identical numbers had first done so in the last 3-5 years. Doing a cross-tabulation of recent fanfic reading compared to number of fandoms read in, it was apparent that most men did not simply read one fanfic only and then stop, but had tried reading in a variety of fandoms. Although their general reading frequency was much lower than women’s, they made numerous attempts at doing so.

When it came to contacting the authors however, there was a dramatic difference in response. Perhaps because most men read infrequently they were also unlikely to have a favorite author (24%) compared to women (70%). When they had a favorite author they were slightly more likely not to have contacted him or her at all (22%) than women (17%). They were also less likely to have interacted in multiple ways, whether giving feedback or meeting in person. The most interesting difference was when it came to beta reading (editing) for the author. Only 16% of men had done so compared to 27% of women, although they were equally likely to have co-written with that author (12%). This series of responses seems to have a correlation with the likelihood of men versus women in taking on volunteer positions in the fandom as 79% of men had not done so compared to 63% of women. When men did volunteer, their most likely roles were as community moderators (8%) or website designer/maintainer (8%). Combined with the relative lack of supportive responses to authors in the fanfic reading question, this may suggest that men are simply less interested in service roles, but prefer to promote their own agendas, whether that be in creating a website, controlling a forum, or writing a story.

When asked why readers did not contact their favorite author(s), men were overwhelmingly likely to say that it simply didn't occur to them (53%), and much more likely than women to say that they didn't think it was possible (11%) or that there was no contact information (11%). These last two responses seem curious, since only 2% of women didn't think it was possible and 5% said there was no way to contact the author. Since most archives include some sort of contact information, if not an explicit request for feedback, one wonders if men and women differed somehow in where they located reading material. While men and women were almost equally likely to blame procrastination (25%) or previous bad experiences online (7%), women were much more likely (53%) than men (14%) to cite shyness as a reason for not contacting authors.

Having looked at fanfic reading habits in these previous two sections, Part 3 will conclude by looking at what the survey results revealed about writing habits among Buffyverse fanfic writers, and whether these habits could provide clues to their motivation for being writers.

Fanfic writing habits

Most fanfic writers responding to the survey had not written solely Buffyverse fanfics (61%). Most were still writing, although a sizable number had not done so in the past year (31%). Some write prolifically, either over a long period of time or with great frequency (14%) with 96% of those having written in 5 or more fandoms in the past year, compared to 55% who wrote only for 1 fandom. These results would indicate that those who wrote for many fandoms either had been doing so a long time, and thus writing was a constant activity in their life, or that they were very enthusiastic about writing and did a great deal of it. This creates a picture of two kinds of fanfic writers. One group writes with less frequency, and mainly in response to issues and interests within their main fandom. They write, in short, because they are fans. A second group is writers by nature, who write in response to many things.

One question asked the age at which fanfic writers had first written fanfic. Overall the answers were quite different from the same question about writing original

fiction. That question showed 55% had done so before the age of 12, with a steep drop after 18. Most fanfic writers however, started writing during the teen and college years (54%) and showed a gradual drop at higher ages. There was no correlation between those who had started writing fanfic earlier, and those who had written fanfic recently. There was, however, a strong correlation between first age of writing and writing both fanfic and original fiction. The majority of people who had done both, started writing original fiction before the age of 12 and began writing fanfic in their teens.

The one certainty was that if one began writing original fiction early, one was very likely to one day write fanfic, whereas the reverse was not true. This again seems to confirm the idea that fanfic may attract writers who have something to say about a particular issue or interest, but do not have the urge to write in general. Those who truly want to write, write about everything. There was a significant gender difference in how many respondents tried writing original fiction and when. Unlike the 80/20 female/male split among fanfic writers, nearly as many men (55%) as women (63%) had tried writing original fiction. They had, however, tried doing so at notably older ages than women, with twice as many first doing so in college. The difference between men and women writing in a professional capacity is negligible. Thus with men writing nearly as much original fiction, and as much professional writing, as women, the difference between men and women as writers among those surveyed seemed to have more to do with the purpose of the writing. Fanfic is a non-commercial form of writing for legal reasons, so unlike original fiction or professional work, it is limited when it comes to financial remuneration, though not necessarily pleasure in writing. Women appear to want to write to address the original text in some way, and simply for the enjoyment of writing. Men seem less likely to be in opposition to the text, and also seem less likely to want to write for leisure purposes.

So how is it that all these women begin writing fanfic? Asked for the first fandom they ever wrote in, the responses were compiled by media category. This produced some very clear results. While a variety of mediums prompt fanfic writing, almost all of them are visual in some way. Although 12% of respondents reported that their first fanfic was based on a book, most of these responses listed Harry Potter. Since the films are immensely popular and much Potter fanfic is clearly drawn from the films, book influence is probably much lower than the 12% would indicate.

Live-action television rather, was the overwhelming influence, prompting 66% of first fanfics. Of these, 38% of respondents had written their first fanfics for the Buffyverse fandom. This also means that nearly 2/3 of all respondents had written fanfic before ever encountering the Buffyverse. Although the responses to this open-ended question could not be cross-tabulated with age of first fic, the age of the canon texts (such as Star Trek, the X-Files or the Star Wars films) indicate that most of them predated the airing of “Buffy” or “Angel”.

It is interesting to see that the constancy of a medium was also important in inspiring fanfic. Although the Star Wars films were influential to writers (2%) comprising nearly half of all film responses, film as a medium only accounted for 5% of the first fanfics respondents wrote. Since television and film are very similar mediums and occasionally cross over into one another, an important factor would seem to be how much of the canon text existed. Cartoons/anime (6%) is a more influential category than films as well, most likely due to their frequency of broadcast.

These individual histories seem to support the explanations survey takers volunteered when asked what texts provoked fanfic. At least some of the answers suggested that continuity in storytelling and cultish sorts of stories were the most likely to inspire fanfic. This was borne out by the fanfic writers who reported their early inspirations were mostly science-fiction/fantasy texts, whether the medium was books, films, movies or comics. Although the Music category (4%) and actor, sports, and video game categories were notable exceptions (4%) one would have to say that the lives of musicians, actors and sports figures are rather out of the ordinary as well.

One survey question addressed the reasons for writing fanfic directly. The strongest response was “I just like to write” (24%). As seen in earlier discussion, there is a clear core of (usually early) writers who do indeed write fanfic simply because they enjoy writing. Some of them also plan to write professionally (8%). They are, however, in the minority. Despite the interest in “compelling” characters and people’s personal attraction to the texts, only 14% said they wrote to fulfill their enjoyment of the characters. Also, despite the majority responding that fanfic was a way of analyzing the canon texts, only 14% said they wrote fanfic because they had something to say. A total of 18% said fanfic writing was part of their overall participation in a fandom. And while only 2% stated outright that their main reason to write was to socialize with others, 21% said that the writing of others had influenced them to contribute their own work. So one might say that the most common reason for writing fanfic (a combined 41%) was social in nature.

What can be distinguished from the survey results are three groups of writers: (1) Those who write as part of their social involvement in a fandom, (2) Those who write because they are writers, and (3) Those who write as a response to something in the text. These three groupings are not mutually exclusive, but often overlap. We might call group 2 the 23% of respondents who said that fanfic writers were motivated by creative impulses. The 29% of respondents who said that analysis of the texts was a principal reason for writing fanfic would seem to fit into group 3. Lastly, those who were more passionate about (15%) or personally involved in the series (20%) would fall largely into group 1, though possibly group 3 as well.

A writer’s sex also affects who falls into these different camps. Men were twice as likely as women, (40% to 21%) to say they wrote fanfic simply because they enjoyed writing. By comparison women were twice as likely to say it was because they enjoyed spending time with the characters (15% to 7%) and more than 3 times as likely to say they wrote fanfic because they had been inspired by the writing of other fanfic writers (23% to 7%). Therefore, many men fall into the “lifelong writers” camp and many of the women fall into the “social writers” camp, with equal numbers making up the third group of “fandom writers.”

Given the importance of the social factor when it comes to fanfic, do fanfic writers share their writing with those in their offline lives as well as their online ones? Writers were asked if there were any members of their immediate family or close friends who did *not* know they wrote fanfic. The answer was overwhelmingly “Yes” (73%). A cross tabulation showed no real differences among those who had started writing fanfic young and those who took it up later in life, or between men and women. There was a difference however, between those who had fannish friends or family members and those who did not. Those who had no one offline who was also a fan were twice as likely not

to have told someone close to them about their fanfic than those who did. Also, those whose spouse was also a fan were half as likely to have concealed their fanfic writing from someone offline. Those who had a fannish child were the most likely of all to have everyone close to them know about their writing.

When asked about reactions from the people they had told about their writing, the most common response (49%) was that the individual had been a bit puzzled but otherwise had no negative reaction. Other common reactions were supportiveness (32%), disinterest (35%) curiosity (35%), or familiarity with fanfic (36%), all generally positive or neutral reactions. At least a third however had experienced a negative response (35%). While a small number of these responses were highly negative (4%) a common question was to ask why the writer did not write professionally (20%). Given an option to add “Other” responses, over half of them (7% of all respondents) said they couldn’t answer because they’d never told anyone. The remaining answers duplicated the options already offered but tended to describe hostile, dismissive, or indifferent responses.

Between men and women, the women reported more of every kind of response except for “they were curious to read it” and “they’re uninterested” which was virtually the same for both. This may indicate that the female writers simply had more people to tell and had thus gotten a greater variety of responses.

Although the majority of fanfic writers had received positive or neutral reactions from others with whom they shared their work, sharing it with those in one’s offline circle did not seem to supplant sharing it online with other writers and readers. One possible reason for this is the level of support possible from a writing community where many others are engaged in the same activities. This was a frequently noted issue in the fanfic writer interviews referred to earlier (Rebaza, dissertation in progress).

Summary

Having contrasted fanfic writers to the rest of their fandom in Parts 1 and 2, Part 3 has explored the differences between fanfic readers and writers. In asking respondents about their fanfic reading and writing experiences, some distinct groups began to emerge. First, those who read fanfic frequently yet do not write are a small group. Infrequent readers may simply have less leisure time to read. Most readers either read occasionally and do not write, or else read frequently and begin to write themselves. This development was also indicated when 21% answered that their main motivation in writing fanfic was the inspiration of other writers.

Many fanfic writers began writing both fanfic and original fiction early in life and those who are the most active are the ones who started the youngest. In both the questions that asked how fanfic writers approach their canon text, and in questions where fanfic writers described their own motivations for writing, three groups of writers emerged. These are the social writers, the lifelong writers, and the fan writers. These groups are gendered to some degree, with men more likely to count themselves as lifelong writers and women more likely to count themselves as social writers.

With demographics, fandom behavior and experience, and writing and reading experience now explored, the final part of this essay will apply these findings to the question of why fanfic writers appear to be mostly female, and how this factor as well as

their writing practices tend to lead to segregation in online spaces from other members of their fandom.

Part 4. Gender and self-segregation in online spaces

The questions that began this essay focused on the varying forms of participation by fans in their fandom, particularly as regarded gender segregated groups such as fanfic writers. Through the use of a lengthy online survey, Buffyverse fans spelled out their own basis of attraction to the series, their general fandom behaviors, their reading and writing proclivities, and their level of social interaction. They also provided some demographic statistics which allowed a profile to be assembled of a typical online Buffyverse fan, as well as what sorts of behaviors may be considered part of high or low levels of involvement in a fandom. Lastly the survey respondents provided an idea of whether they perceived there to be different groups within the fandom and what some of the characteristics of those groups might be. Although there are certainly a fair number of men participating in the fandom, overall the Buffyverse is a fandom that is predominantly female. It is also women who, by and large, take up the various roles in creating the fandom, whether by forming locations for fan interaction, providing content for those sites, or in providing support to those who host the sites and create the content. Lastly, women are simply more likely to make themselves available for the social interaction which lies at the heart of every fandom. In Part 4, a final review of the survey data will be conducted to try and answer a central question. Why may fanfic writers be segregated from the rest of the fandom? What are the factors that contribute to this separation?

In Parts 1, 2 and 3 a profile was created of Buffyverse fanfic writers and how they differed from others in their fandom, as well as how they differed among themselves. One of the clearest differences that emerged was the predominance of women as writers even within a fandom that was largely female. Comparisons between fanfic writers and those who neither wrote nor read fanfic showed only minor differences in most cases. But in the areas where notable differences existed, gender seemed to be an important factor.

The survey results that have been discussed in this essay were collected as part of a dissertation on women's writing in fandoms and how it is mediated by the use of particular technologies. In addition to this survey, qualitative data was gathered through both personal interviews and several years of observation at the LiveJournal blog site. Some of this data will be presented in this final section to further explore the survey results. Part 4 is going to return to the research questions that opened this essay. How is gender an issue when it comes to fanfic writers' interactions among themselves and with others, and why may they end up self-segregating in online spaces? How do the insider/outsider factors get played out in the community and in the fandom, and how does gender play a factor in where those boundary lines get drawn?

Declarations of membership by fanfic writers and non-fanfic readers

When this study began I was looking at two sites, the increasingly popular Buffyverse community news blog, *Whedonesque* and the amorphous confusing tangle that was LiveJournal (LJ). Although my focus shifted to LJ as my study developed, I was

continually struck by the differences in the two blog sites, even though both were expanding rapidly and had enthusiastic, interesting participants. When it came time to develop this survey, I knew that to examine the boundaries of the LJ writing group it would be helpful to contrast them with an outside site. If there is only one tool/site in use, it is difficult to know how its elements benefit or hinder participants in what its users want to do. If you contrast two similar sites however, these differences become more apparent.

Two questions on the survey addressed *Whedonesque* and LJ specifically to discover how many participants were coming from each site and what, if any, overlap there was between the two groups.

Do you have a LiveJournal account?			
	Total*	Are you a member/trying to become a member at Whedonesque?	
		Yes	No
	1522	653	869
Yes	838 55.1%	314 48.1%	524 60.3%
No	684 44.9%	339 51.9%	345 39.7%

Table 2: Members of Whedonesque and LJ

Table 2 shows that 20% of all survey respondents participated at both LJ and Whedonesque, 22% participated only at Whedonesque, and 36% participated only on LJ. Lastly, 22% did not frequent either site. This does not mean that those 22% did not *visit* or know of the two sites, merely that they neither opened an LJ account, nor were they trying to participate at *Whedonesque*. In fact the number of those on LJ who read *Whedonesque* is likely much higher than the 20% in the table indicates, since many LJ users receive *Whedonesque* through RSS feeds. The question however, was designed to find out who *participates* at either site as opposed to the occasional visitor. There is little doubt that both online sites are major centers for Buffyverse fandom activity given the amount of posting, commenting, and traffic that has been observed in both locations. Are there any differences between people who participate at one site but not the other?

Are you a member/trying to become a member at Whedonesque?			
	Total*	What is your sex?	
		Male	Female
	1518	364	1149
Yes	653 43.0%	176 48.4%	477 41.5%
No	865 57.0%	188 51.6%	672 58.5%

Do you have a LiveJournal account?			
	Total*	What is your sex?	
		Male	Female
	1523	365	1153
Yes	838 55.0%	93 25.5%	743 64.4%
No	685 45.0%	272 74.5%	410 35.6%

Table 3: Membership of Whedonesque and LJ by Sex

As Table 3 shows, one difference is the sex of the participants. LJ is an enormous site composed of millions of personal and group blogs, most of which have nothing to do with fans or fan activities. In theory, there would be no reason why a Buffyverse fan uninterested in fanfic could not open an LJ account for other sorts of activities. Some such fans do. However, at least one factor becomes apparent when looking at the membership breakdowns by sex. Despite the smaller number of male respondents in the survey, men were overwhelmingly more likely to be members of *Whedonesque* (48%) than LJ (25%). The split of male to female LJ members (25% to 64%) resembles the male to female demographic split in the overall survey. While *Whedonesque* may well be a gender-balanced site, apparently more men than women from there answered the survey.

Do you have a LiveJournal account?			
	Total*	Are you a member/trying to become a member at Whedonesque?	
		Yes	No
	724	247	475
Yes	539 74.4%	163 66.0%	374 78.7%
No	185 25.6%	84 34.0%	101 21.3%

Table 4: Membership filtered by Writers

The gender difference shown in Table 3 has an interesting bearing on the types of activities at both sites. Table 3 shows that 55% of respondents have an LJ account. When those responses are filtered only for those who write fanfic, as in Table 4, the

numbers change noticeably. Of those who are fanfic writers, 74% have LJ accounts. Only 34% are members of *Whedonesque*, and 22% are members of both.

Do you have a LiveJournal account?		Are you a member/trying to become a member at Whedonesque?		
	Total*			
		Yes	No	
	183	94		87
Yes	38 20.8%	23 24.5%		15 17.2%
No	145 79.2%	71 75.5%		72 82.8%

Table 5: Membership filtered by Nonfanfic Readers

By comparison non-fanfic readers are unlikely to participate on LJ. As seen in Table 5, of the 183 people who have never read fanfic, only 21% have LJs. On the other hand 51% of them are members at Whedonesque. A small number (12%) are members of both. Tables 4 and 5 also show that non-fanfic readers were the most likely survey respondents not to be members of *either* site (39%). By comparison only 14% of fanfic writers did not participate at either site (Table 4).

It was already shown in earlier sections of this essay that women are much more likely to be fanfic writers, and also more likely to be fanfic readers. What the membership results for these two sites reveals is that LJ has a distinct gender bias when it comes to Buffyverse fan participation there. Participants are overwhelmingly more likely to be women, and equally likely to be fanfic writers.

The possibilities that LJ offers for fanfic writing make its use by writers understandable. For one thing, *Whedonesque* does not permit the posting of fanfic and indeed fanfic discussions are rare. Anyone wanting to read or post fanfic would certainly not have been able to do so at *Whedonesque*. Second, the ability for writers to host their personal blogs as well as to launch or post to group forums while using the same software and online domain is much more convenient than having to maintain multiple accounts at several locations and check each one individually. A one-stop shop like LJ makes it much simpler for writers to get their work read, to keep track of their work and feedback, and to begin dialogues and friendships with readers and other writers that will not be considered “off-topic.” Lastly, the lack of any overseeing moderator controlling discussion among the thousands of blogs in the community means that LJ users can fashion their communities and interactions as they wish, thus allowing the development of subgroups and personal social circles. Given what we have seen earlier about fanfic writers – that they are organizers and “doers” in the community, and that they are particularly interested in social interactions -- the opportunities that the LJ software offers them merges well with their interests and priorities. But the question still remains why male Buffyverse fans are so much less likely to have LJ accounts than women, regardless of whether or not they are interested in fanfic? And why are fanfic writers less likely to participate in the general fandom discussions that take place on *Whedonesque*?

The broads who blog

Part of the answer may be the technology itself. Women are more likely to start and maintain blogs than men. In a random survey of 3634 blogs on eight different hosting surveys (including LJ) the results showed that “males were more likely than

females to abandon blogs.” The survey also concluded that “those who enjoy writing stick with blogs longer” and that “LiveJournal has the lowest abandonment rate” (Perseus Development Corp, 2004). One important distinction about the Perseus survey is that they did not examine blogs that individuals hosted on their own servers as those blogs “require more work to set up and will be characteristically different than those blogs created using hosting services.” Had such blogs been included the demographics and abandonment rates might be quite different, but in terms of site-hosted blogs the survey report concluded that blogging was essentially done by teenage girls as a “persistent messaging for young adults” or an archived sort of webchat.

Two important factors the Perseus survey reveals is that blogging is a social activity (at least for women) and that an owner’s facility with and interest in writing is key to a blog’s success. One might then gather, given its low abandonment rate, that LJ is a site for writing women. In saying this I again want to be careful to distinguish LJ as a whole, with its millions of accounts, from a particular group of Buffyverse fanfic writers who number in the thousands. The survey results are, however, helpful in revealing both a possible reason for the migration of fanfic writers to LJ as a blogging platform, as well as its general female friendliness in terms of offering features that allow women to use it effectively for their own purposes.

Thus a short answer for “why are fewer male Buffyverse fans blogging on LJ” may simply be “because fewer men are blogging on LJ or anywhere else.” Although male written blogs may be featured in news stories and be particularly visible in the political arena, as noted in the Perseus survey “These make up the tip of a very deep iceberg: prominently visible, but not characteristic of the iceberg as a whole.” As Susan Herring points out, the popular notion of a blog has become more defined by its (often male) uses rather than the common underlying technology that makes a blog a blog, and that gender bias in reporting on blog activity is largely behind this (Herring, 2004). Numerous technology-using activities continue to be popularly depicted as male pastimes regardless of evidence to the contrary -- Internet use and video game activity among them. (Binks, 2006, Brightman, 2006, Nauert, 2006). In part this may be due to a bias in defining most technology by focusing on high end users where a higher proportion of men predominate, rather than in the more common popular use where women predominate.

While these study results suggest why female fanfic writers are more likely to participate on LJ, it does not explain why they may be less likely to participate at news discussion sites such as *Whedonesque*, at least in proportion to their overall numbers. One way to approach this is to see how their activities – reading and writing fanfic – are received and spoken of in such locations.

Where did all these women come from?

In one discussion observed on LJ, the poster wrote of an occurrence within the Highlander fandom when a newsgroup for the show suddenly began receiving numerous posts from women discussing their interest in Highlander. Puzzled by the activity, one of the male participants posted “Where did all these women come from?” as he was at a loss to explain why so many women would show an interest in what the male posters perceived as a male-centered show.

Something similar occurred when I released the survey results discussed in this essay to the *Whedonesque* and LJ communities where I had solicited participation. After the survey closed I posted an announcement to LJ that the results were available. One of the moderators at *Whedonesque* also posted a link to the survey results. The survey results seen were just numbers, devoid of any comments or introduction. Only two individuals commented to my LJ post. One, a woman, was focused on the voting activity reported in the survey. The second, a man, was focused on, not only the implied leftist political views of respondents, but on the fact that as a male fanfic writer on LJ he was in a very small minority. Summing up he said, "I wonder what I'm doing here."

At *Whedonesque* the mod reported the results were in but also suggested there were some interesting findings, adding "Hello to our female fandom." Although the founding moderators of *Whedonesque* are a man and a woman (along with a male webmaster), the two associate moderators who were since appointed were both men. The female moderator is infrequently seen posting. As one commenter pointed out (in a joking fashion) the frequency of the male moderator's presence on *Whedonesque* might be seen to suggest a largely male readership. The comments on the post were split between discussing gender issues and discussing Question 4, which asked respondents to choose a preference for reading or watching television. Many people seemed quite surprised that the fandom was so largely female but no one speculated as to why their particular site would show such a difference from the overall fandom in male/female participation (Whedonesque, 2006).

On LJ however there was a common assumption that more men frequented *Whedonesque* (albeit without any numbers for validation) just as the preponderance of women on LJ was equally assumed. And while the presence of men online is hardly unusual, what it could mean in terms of comfort levels may be seen in this quote:

I pretty much only go to Whedonesque when there's a Joss post or some other kind of Crucial Information. So I'm not any kind of authority on their goings on there so I'm only speaking about vague feelings that I get. I'm not even registered there. But I had a weird thought earlier about how I don't know if I would register as "(her username)" were I to post there. Because there definitely seems to be a lot of non-ficcers over there. The OTHER kind of Joss devotees. The canon freaks. *I know that there are some of "us" over there too* and maybe I'm being paranoid but I don't know that I'd want my smutty Spike porn writin' *self to be exposed in that way*. Which is interesting since I'm neither ashamed of my fic writing (although I cringe about some of my fic) nor do I have any other net identities to date... *I just like my playground to be safe* and secluded to some degree. Which is also why I only tell select people in my "real life" what my screen name is.

...

Anyway, I was also thinking about *how there seem to be more men posting over at places like Whedonesque than there are in my corner of the Buffy fandom...* perhaps that's also a factor in how fansites like Whedonesque seem like separate territory than what we've got going on around here...

I'm not saying that I think that all men are threatening, potential fangirl mockers (although some of them are, and so are some women) or that I don't think that some men read fanfic (I know that some of them do), I'm just sayin' that *I was ruminating on the way that internet space can be gendered*. [Anon 1] (emphasis mine)

This discomfort with significant gender differences in particular online spaces may relate to the earlier question of why women are so much more likely to write fanfic as a social activity than men are, and why fanfic writers are less likely to participate in discussions at *Whedonesque*. The following excerpted exchange comes from a discussion at *Whedonesque* between two men and a woman. It is used here because it

sheds further light on the contrast between men and women, discussed in Part 3, when they were asked how fanfic writers approach the central text of their fandom.

“What frustrates me about Buffy fanfiction is that the majority of those contributing their work are not in the least bit interested in capturing the essence of the series. They incorporate their own fantasies into the story, which makes me wonder why they don't just invent their own characters and environments and tell stories outside the BuffyVerse. When I try to read Buffy fanfic and the piece spirals into slash, I'm just disappointed that I was tricked into wasting my time.”
[Anon 2]

People write fanfic so that they *can* fulfill their own fantasies. If we didn't wish things went differently, continued, progressed, etc, we wouldn't write, we'd just watch the show. We don't invent our own characters because we want *Spike* and *Buffy* to get together, for example. And we want it to happen inside the Buffyverse. That is the point of fanfiction. To let the writer make it go how they wanted it to go, or how they think would have made a good story.
[Anon 3]

I think you're absolutely right, [Anon 3], about the reasons why people write (and read) fanfic. Which is why I neither read nor write it. I enjoy watching the show, and thinking about how it went and what it all meant. I have no interest in changing it, and have never really thought too much about how it "should" have gone. [Anon 4]

This discussion should not suggest that men never read or write fan fiction, nor that all women wish to do so. The survey results show that there are clearly men and women on both sides of this issue. The above discussion took place years before, and quite separate from the survey being reported on in this essay, yet it revealed a central division between fanfic writers and readers and those who did not read and write it. The division focuses on both (1) A frustration with elements of the central text that they wished to alter or “fix”, and (2) A view that the central text is neither authoritative nor immutable, but is composed of elements that can be rearranged to tell further or different stories which may deviate considerably from its original basis.

Questions 47, 48 and 60 in the survey showed distinct differences between men and women in how these questions were answered. In question 60, respondents were asked which of six elements was the *most* significant source of their interest in the series. Appealing characters was the most likely response for both sexes and the gender differences for four of the other options were negligible. However men were much more likely to say it was the story plotlines that attracted them. Only 4% of women chose this response among the six options. Since what makes a story distinct is essentially what *occurs* in the story (and in what order), women seemed to be attracted to the text mainly as an introduction to the characters themselves. To the women, the plotline's central purpose was for character development -- revealing who the characters were rather than telling a particular type of tale. For about 1 out of 6 of the men, what happened in the story was the main reason they were tuning in.

This greater focus on plot versus character for the two groups may also explain the differences between men and women in what they thought prompted fanfic writing. Question 47 asked whether certain texts were more likely to be written about in fanfic. Although the majority of both men and women answered yes, distinctly more men answered no than women. Question 48 then asked if fanfic writers and readers somehow interpreted the text differently than non-readers and writers. The gender skew became even more pronounced. Only 38% of men believed there was a difference versus 60% of the women. Many of those agreeing there was a difference felt that the text was seen by fanfic writers as being a malleable object, able to be refashioned by the viewer/writer, or in some cases serving as nothing more than inspiration for new sorts of stories.

Presumably those who felt there was no difference between writers and non-fanfic readers would not agree with this explanation or, at the very least, would not have thought much about the issue.

In all these examples – the excerpted quote from *Whedonesque*, and the results to Questions 47, 48 and 60 – there is a difference demonstrated between men and women as regards the significance of and uses for the central text of the series. For women it tends to be a starting point for discussion, exploration and alternative views. For men it seems to be a more fixed object, something they are more likely to assume is approached in the same way by all viewers – with disagreement perhaps, but not alteration. One final question may provide additional evidence for this conclusion.

What types of fan fiction have you ever read? (Check all that apply)			
	Total*	What is your sex?	
		Male	Female
	1332	266	1062
Gen (close to canon)	1227 92.1%	241 90.6%	983 92.6%
Het (Focuses on a heterosexual pairing)	985 73.9%	110 41.4%	872 82.1%
Slash (Focuses on a male homosexual pairing)	804 60.4%	72 27.1%	729 68.6%
Femslash (Focuses on a female homosexual pairing)	606 45.5%	91 34.2%	512 48.2%
Crossover (Includes characters from more than one fandom)	863 64.8%	127 47.7%	733 69.0%
AU (Alternate universe)	948 71.2%	125 47.0%	820 77.2%

Table 6: Types of fanfic read by men and women

Survey questions 34 and 35 addressed both what types of fanfic respondents have ever read and which kind they most preferred reading. Although arguments could be made about how many categories exist and what type of writings would belong to each category, six categories are commonly accepted as typical in fanfic. Fanfic forums and archives are organized around these categories, and fanfic labeling often includes these categories in their descriptions. They are Gen, Het, Slash, Femslash, Crossover, and AU. Question 34 asked which of these categories of fanfic respondents have ever read. The most common kind of fanfic read is Gen. Gen stands for “General” as in fiction that can be read by anyone interested in the show. Definitions vary but most would agree that this type of fanfic is the closest approximation to the stories and universe depicted in the original source text. In other words they are “close to canon.” One would presume most people who enjoyed the show to be interested in something that duplicated their experience, and not surprisingly this is the case, with 92% having read some. Het, Slash and Femslash refer to stories focused on romantic pairings, in Het these are heterosexual pairings, and in Slash and Femslash they are male homosexual and female homosexual pairings, respectively. Crossovers involve stories that use elements from more than one fandom text. AU stands for stories that somehow alter the original canon to tell a substantially different story.

Most respondents had tried fanfic in all the categories. Only Femslash stories had been tried by fewer than half of those answering. The overall response looks very different when one looks at *who* is answering. Among male respondents 91% had tried Gen fic. Fewer than half had ever read anything else (Crossovers being the next most read, by 48%). By contrast, 93% of women had read Gen, but 48% was the *lowest* readership for any of the other categories; 82% had read Het, which also tends to be similar to what appears in the series, since heterosexual relationships are a regular focus of storylines and series events; 77% had read AU, which are stories that branch off from some point in the storyline to follow a completely different path than the original text took, and which may take place in a completely different setting than the one the series'; 69% of women had read Crossovers, 68% of women had read Slash, and 48% had read Femslash.

In other words when men read fanfic at all, it was most often fanfic that was closely based on the original text and sometimes crossed characters and events with other stories *outside of* the original text. By comparison women had read texts of all kinds, including ones which deviated significantly from events and relationships in the original text, and which changed the *internal* reality of storylines and interactions.

Question 45 asked what was the respondent's *favorite* type of fanfic, not just something they had tried but something they presumably read repeatedly. The male/female difference in response becomes even more dramatic.

What is your favorite type of fan fiction?			
	Total*	What is your sex?	
		Male	Female
	1307	261	1042
Gen (close to canon)	533 40.8%	179 68.6%	354 34.0%
Het (Focuses on a heterosexual pairing)	238 18.2%	14 5.4%	224 21.5%
Slash (Focuses on a male homosexual pairing)	299 22.9%	15 5.7%	281 27.0%
Femslash (Focuses on a female homosexual pairing)	47 3.6%	12 4.6%	34 3.3%
Crossover (Includes characters from more than one fandom)	84 6.4%	21 8.0%	63 6.0%
AU (Alternate universe)	106 8.1%	20 7.7%	86 8.3%

Table 7: Favorite type of fanfic for men and women

The overwhelming majority of men cited Gen as their favorite type of fanfic (68%). None of the other categories garnered even a 10% response rate. It was interesting to note that Het and Slash had nearly identical percentages. Clearly any kind of relationship fanfic, regardless of the type of pairing, had little appeal. By comparison, only 34% of women cited Gen as their favorite, Slash was a second choice at 27%, followed by Het at 21%. Less relationship focused stories held a small appeal, and hardly any women were primarily interested in lesbian storylines (3%).

Questions 34 and 35 then support the earlier conclusion that even among male fanfic readers, plot issues and storylines hold the greatest appeal when it comes to how

they relate to the central text, whereas for women there is a much greater interest in relationships among the characters and more character-focused storytelling. What's more men are primarily interested in stories that don't substantially alter the fandom text they are accustomed to.

If you do not read fan fiction, which of the following MOST closely describes your main reason for not doing so?			
	Total*	What is your sex?	
		Male	Female
	396	178	217
I don't do much leisure reading	27 6.8%	13 7.3%	13 6.0%
I don't find the typical fanfic story to be very high quality	157 39.6%	80 44.9%	77 35.5%
I'm interested in it but just haven't gotten around to reading any	42 10.6%	11 6.2%	31 14.3%
Fanfic bores me	34 8.6%	17 9.6%	17 7.8%
I don't like the idea of fanfic	88 22.2%	40 22.5%	48 22.1%
I've tried some but didn't find anything that suited my tastes	48 12.1%	17 9.6%	31 14.3%

Table 8: Men and Women who don't read fanfic

Question 46 asked for a range of possible reasons why people had not read fanfic. Women were twice as likely to be potential readers, saying they wanted to try fanfic but simply hadn't done so yet, and similar numbers of men and women replied that they simply didn't do much leisure reading. The responses between men and women had some interesting differences when it came to judging fanfic however. They were very similar in answering that they simply found fanfic a boring thing to read. However men were nearly 10% more likely to say their lack of reading was due to writing quality and 5% less likely to say that it was simply a matter of not finding fanfic that suited their tastes. In other words, instead of seeing their disinterest as a mismatch in reading taste, men were more likely to think that the material itself was at fault for not being entertaining or engaging (or presumably the writer's, for not producing such a story). Nearly identical numbers of men and women cited the second most common reason for not reading, that they didn't like the very idea of fanfic. This begs the question, what is it about fanfic that makes its existence objectionable?

These two responses – that the material was not good, and that it shouldn't exist at all -- is not solely a gendered response, but there is a gendered aspect to it. Let's return for a moment to the exchange from *Whedonesque* quoted a few pages ago. The discussion was somewhat revealing about the motivations for both enjoying and disliking fan fiction *as a response to the text* rather than a reaction to the literary merits of fanfic itself. Past academic scholarship on fanfic has focused on women's marginalization in mainstream works, and the efforts of female writers to rewrite storylines to reflect their own interests and priorities, even the presence of women, within the canonical text of a story (Harris & Alexander, 1998). A year after that first exchange on *Whedonesque*, another discussion arose about an article that discussed how female marginalization was

countered in fanfic by bringing more to the text than had been seen onscreen. There were only 3 comments, all negatively reacting to the idea that gender was an issue in the rewriting of text. One comment was a single line of unexplained disagreement. In another, the responder said he knew particular women who were as disinterested in the rewriting of text as men. In the third, the commenter agreed that the article might have validity for other fandoms in the past but not for “most modern fan communities” including his own, and added:

“That must be why all of those fiction books, behind the scenes books, interviews, conventions, licensed toys, clothes, etc were sold, right? Because we saw all that we wanted to onscreen?” [Anon 5]

This responder thus equated the acquisition of licensed material, including non-textual forms such as clothes and toys, and even social gatherings of fans, as *equivalent* to the rewriting of the text itself. In none of the responses to this post was there any attempt to explore why the act seemed gendered or what that might say about the ways in which men and women might approach fandom, or indeed media products, differently. (And clearly, given the lack of response, most forum members ignored the article completely). What little response occurred focused on denying that such differences might exist. We may want to again consider the gendered responses to Question 48 where I asked whether or not fanfic writers and readers approached the fandom’s central text differently. Men were 22% more likely than women to say “No.”

Contrary to what Anon 5 stated in his above quoted response, female marginalization, and by extension the marginalization of fanfic writing, is not only a historical issue but one still present today, and most definitely present within his own fandom. On one of the very first fora for discussing Buffy, the newsgroup alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer, arguments about the posting of fan fiction led to the creation of a separate newsgroup for it, alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer.creative within six months. These discussions revolved primarily around the illegality of fanfic, the right of the author to have exclusive control over the use of his property, and the erosion of the original work’s value -- all questions of ownership, control and the commodification of storytelling. The timing was significant since the newsgroup had sprung up within weeks of the show’s debut in March 1997 with fanfic following soon after. The idea that the production of fanfic was illicit and commercially threatening disappeared when two years later in an interview the show’s creator, Joss Whedon, gave tacit approval to fanfic of his creations. Such consent by Whedon meant that in the Buffyverse fandom, ownership/rights discussions could no longer hold as much weight as in other fandoms where such activities were actively discouraged by the canon creators.

This did not mean that arguments against fanfic disappeared. Instead other common arguments against fanfic emerged, namely that any writer whose work is worth reading should be working on their own original (and thus publishable) creations, and that derivative works are an example of laziness in writing. As in survey Question 46, the focus moved away (on the surface) from the issue of legality and rights, and focused instead on the issue of “quality.” The interesting thing about this argument is how closely it is tied to the other “licensing” ones in the way it commodifies creativity. In essence the arguments revolve largely around, not the individual merits of stories, or even of fanfic as a genre, but instead turns on fanfic’s resistance to commercial control.

An example of this can be taken from the alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer newsgroup. It began with a poster voicing his dissatisfaction with the content of fanfic, and went on to focus on fanfic's resistance in conforming to the central text.

"Often, the fanfic reworking is in the service of personal fantasies or due to dissatisfaction with the original ending or plot development."

And went on to add:

"I won't say 100% that people should never ever do fanfic. Giving the devil his due, one area where fanfic can work is as humour/parody...In this case, done as a one-off, it would even be intellectually permissible as a parody, so that issue is eliminated too.

Also, there is a tradition of fanart, where artists provide a rendering of characters in their personal style. That's sometimes interesting, and seems more acceptable (an artist's job it to interpret what they see, so despite the same copyright issues, it appears to have more intellectual/creative validity)." [Anon 6]

This poster's parsing of visual art as being more creatively valid than a written work seems to revolve entirely around its "acceptable" nature, which is to say its lack of challenge to authorial control. He compares this to the fan author being "dissatisfied" with the original text. Oddly he does not consider that the fanfic writer's job may also be to "interpret what they see." To turn his words around, it is unacceptable to be dissatisfied, or at least, to express that dissatisfaction in print. What he does not say, but which has been discussed among fanfic writers, is that unlike fanfic, fan art *can be and is sold* whether online or at conventions. It is also interesting that the poster brings up the issue of humor as a "permissible" form of expression, since when men do write fanfic it is quite often in this vein.

This male alignment with authorial control is often (though not exclusively) found within their arguments against fanfic. The defense by women (again, not exclusively) rests on seeing personal desires expressed through a text whose meanings and values are metaphorical and imbued with a shared passion. As expressed by Anon 3, the fanfic writer's argument against creating an original work is that an original work does not have the power of a shared text. Texts that a fandom gathers around, such as the Buffyverse, are given meaning by their communal familiarity. These common texts can then be rearranged and altered to tell stories or have endings that better serve the interests and concerns of the writers (and readers). Fanfic writers' rejection of the commercialization and "authority" that is imbued within professional publication is something that is neither new, nor something that rests on legal grounds. Instead there is more concern by fanfic writers to use writing as a form of bonding as well as self-realization. This is not to suggest that artistic expression and the desire for community are the sole purpose for any fanfic writer. However it is an aspect of fanfic that non-fanfic readers are generally unaware of. Instead, the outsider, and often male, viewer's focus on commercial respectability tends to rankle the mostly female fanfic writers.

"I resent the label of fanfiction being a waste of my time, or I'm somehow less of a writer because I write it. This is a common reaction that I get from many people. To them, I say, "Fuck you," in no uncertain terms. I love my cousin to pieces, but she once said that fanfic writing "means nothing". I disagree emphatically. It means something to me...Working for free does not constitute a waste of time. In fact, I believe it to be as noble as any other hobby/profession. And it should be done with pride and treated with respect...Money = paper to buy things with. Pride

and respect cannot be bought with money. Be proud of your hobby, I am. I just smile condescendingly at those who don't respect me because I make no money. Because I don't respect those who place such a high value on it. This is my hobby *and* a form of my profession -- writing." [Anon 7]

While there are certainly a number of fanfic writers who wish to become paid writers or who are already published authors, this is not the general ambition for most of those who write fanfic. The gendered aspect of devaluing unpaid work is something that was addressed in the early days of feminism and continues to be a central issue to feminist economists today (Barker & Kuiper, 2003). It is important to note that in the Buffyverse survey results, the only fan activity in which more men participated than women was in calling themselves collectors. Along with their tendency to write parodic works of fanfic, these activities serve to align men and male writing with the "official" canon text rather than to oppose it. The collection of fan artifacts, whatever they may be, is not in any way a challenge to the authority of the text creators or their authorial intent. In fact it is the very *endorsement* of these collectibles by the creators/owners that gives them their monetary value and their non-monetary prestige (the "official" team jersey). Since the motivation for this activity was not explored in the survey I will not speculate further other than to note that in fandoms such as comics and sports which are predominantly male, collecting is not only often competitive but has a monetary aspect to it, and is even regarded by some as a financial investment.

While writing parodic fanfic can not generally be argued to be a competitive or financially rewarding activity, the fact that men choose to creatively pursue genres in which financial reward or recognition might ensue is perhaps not a coincidence. Media scholar Henry Jenkins has noted a gender bias in what is considered creatively "acceptable" fan work, or in fact in which fan works are even acknowledged to exist.

"Several years ago, I sparked some controversy in the Star Wars fan cinema world when I argued that the rules of the official competition hosted by Atom films were gender-biased because they recognized forms of media production -- parody and documentary -- most closely associated with male fans and excluded outright those forms -- most notably music video -- most closely associated with female fans. Many of those angry by these statements asserted that they had never seen any films made by female Star Wars fans and that they were certain such works did not exist. I saw that as validation of my argument because I had seen a large number of music videos produced by female Star Wars fans which had not been able to get into public distribution. Those who had seen some of the music videos argued that they did not belong in the competition because they were "derivative," that is, because they used found footage. In fact, though, "Closer" shows pretty well that these fan media makers can generate original interpretations through their manipulation and recontextualization of these images. Whatever you want to say about it, "Closer" makes a statement about the original material." (Jenkins, 2006)

Here I want to repeat the statement made by the alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer poster to bring a new emphasis to it.

"Giving the devil his due, one area where fanfic can work is as humour/parody...In this case, done as a one-off, it would even be intellectually permissible" [Anon 6]

By his use of "it would even be" legally permissible, it is clear that this is not his first reason for suggesting parody is an acceptable sort of fanfic. In fact, his post leaves it curiously unexplained why a parody is "one area where fanfic can work." Work to do

what? I would suggest the answer is twofold, the first being (1) Work at being entertaining, and (2) Work to provide an objective distance for the writer.

The lack of distance between writer and text is clearly on his mind as shown in the earlier part of his post.

“Often, the fanfic reworking is in the service of personal fantasies”

I would emphasize the word “personal.” This seems a curious thing to object to at first reading. Surely anyone devising a creative work must first imagine or fantasize a scenario, characters, and plot before codifying it in some way. It is perhaps *the nature* of the fantasies that disturb him and instill a desire for creative distance from the text.

In an exploration of why she feels a resistance to reading fanfic, one poster on LJ explains what she discovered when she began reading it.

“I read fan fiction, and holy crap, I recognize some of those monsters there... and that a helluva lot of 'em are about sex, frankly, it's the mommy monster at the bottom of the well...[through writing we] derived a vocabulary to talk about the monsters and rate them and develop a critical structure and a lot of other useful stuff. That the reason some of this is good is because the fandom has agreed that we can talk about it and not be horribly embarrassed, within these constraints, and thus writers actually *practice* and get better at writing about the monsters...My inner nine-year-old, who once wore a track in the backyard daydreaming about some rather shocking things, understands some of these things much, much better than I do. I can only approach them obliquely-- It's interesting to meet some of those monsters again. The waters get murky as we age, and we stop seeing them, except for the occasional flicker of a fin or the flash of an eye.” [Anon 7]

Another LJ poster speculates on the same issue of discomfort that strikes some readers of fanfic given the no-holds-barred status of its non-approved and infinitely varied texts:

“obsession is such a taboo thing in this culture, and sometimes i can't understand why. it's natural, we all do it and it's actually a good thing - obsession and passion is what drives the best accomplishments of the world, what creates successful people. it's just looked down upon so often, i think people are scared of the risk; of dedicating yourself so completely to something. fanfic is an intersection of these two; the climax of awkward things that are just a part of human nature that we as a society have trouble coming clean about.” [Anon 8]

This discomfort is certainly not exclusively gendered. There are many women who also do not read or like fanfic, some of whom were reflected in the survey results. However, the fact that canon texts often keep out the very sorts of things that fanfic writers want to put in, and that these text's producers, writers, performers, network executives and studio heads, indeed virtually all those who have control over the content of such texts are male, is perhaps not a coincidence. Publishing, the natural outlet for professional or professionally-inclined fanfic writers is not much different. According to *Publisher's Weekly*, market share of various forms of literary material in 1999 were as follows:

Science fiction/fantasy: 7.3% of sales
 General fiction: 12.1% of sales
 Mystery/detective/suspense: 25.7% of sales
 Romance: 38.8% of sales

One category has a clearly gendered audience, that of Romance, while two might be considered more gender neutral – general fiction and mystery. Science fiction has traditionally been seen as a more male genre of fiction, although within the Buffyverse survey results the differences in preference between men and women were small. In the same year the following statistics were available about authors of forthcoming books in the sci fi/fantasy field:

373 female authors (31%)
 812 male authors (67%)
 21 authors are of unknown gender (2%)
 Total: 1206

This statistic was roughly the same for manuscripts submitted for publication. The imbalance was about 10% greater for the sex of editors of both book and periodical publishers in the sci fi/fantasy area (“A Tour...”, 2000).

These numbers show that men continue to outnumber women when it comes to professional sci fi/fantasy literary pursuits, yet the amateur expression of it in fanfic appears to be made up largely by women. While some fanfic writers do go on to publish professionally, whether derivative or original work, the point is not to question why women are underrepresented in professional publishing, since this tends to be true for every writing genre save romance. Rather, the question is why are men underrepresented in fan fiction writing since they make up the majority of the readers/viewers and professional writers of those genres? Why do women find this a common form of expression and leisure, and men do not? The answer may perhaps be summed up by this comment from a survey participant on the reason why fanfic writers write:

“I think they're more interested in what isn't said than what is” – Survey participant

Perhaps men are simply more likely to find themselves being told what they want to hear in their fandom texts than women are, and women feel the need to retell those stories to themselves and one another in ways that commercialized and male controlled industries generally will not.

Conclusion

This essay explored the issue of fanfic writing and gender in the Buffyverse fandom by posing three questions: Who it is that calls themselves a fan of the Buffyverse? Who becomes a fanfic writer? What activities do they engage in and what experiences do they have within the fandom?

The Buffyverse fandom, composed of fans of the television series "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Angel", is a particularly interesting case study for examining the sort of gender and activity defined segregation visible in online fandoms. By nature of the series' texts and their feminist philosophy and depictions, one might expect the shows to attract viewers and fans who respond positively to women's contributions and participation in its fandom. The question for the fandom as well as the series, however, is whether the show distinguishes between valuing women, and valuing women's culture and activities. Given the history of fanfic writers explored in other academic works, the

Buffyverse fandom does not stand out as being remarkably different as regards the general fandom's engagement with the female-dominated form of fandom expression seen in fanfic writing and reading. Despite the support offered to the activity of fanfic writing by the show's creator and central author on repeated occasions, the activity remains largely sectioned off from sites where news is shared and general discussions take place, and is as likely to be female in writing and readership as in many other fandoms. Indeed, one of the central surprises of the survey results discussed in this article was that the entire fandom was largely female in composition, at least in many online spaces. This might not be surprising to some, given the greater emphasis placed on women and their stories in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer", which has been shown to decrease engagement by men with such properties (Segel, 1986; Westerberg and Hopkins, 1988; Pinsonneault and Malhi, 2004).

Fanfic writing was shown in this survey to spring from multiple points of engagement with the text and with the surrounding fandom, resulting in three general groups of writers: social writers, lifelong writers, and fan writers. While there were gendered aspects to these categories, these were also overlapping categories as reflected the multiple motivations of writers. Similarly, non-fanfic readers were also seen to have multiple reasons for not engaging in fanfic writing or reading including a lack of time, a lack of interest in reading fiction, and difficulty in finding texts that matched their interests. Of most interest, however, was a dislike of fanfic as a genre of writing and the way this disinterest was often gendered, although it was a viewpoint expressed by both men and women. This particular motivation seemed to have aspects of status concerns through alignment with those who held ownership rights to the canon text, and concerns about anything that would deviate from these accepted viewpoints. It is perhaps among fans who hold these viewpoints where fanfic writers and readers are most likely to encounter negative responses to their own fan activities, and which may promote an intentional segregation from areas of fandom that either promote or tolerate such attacks. Thus a preference for virtual spaces that can be better designed for collaboration, socializing, creativity, and privacy makes it likely that such sites will be future platforms in which fanfic writers congregate, and that these will continue to be separate from other parts of fandom.

Author's Note: Direct quotations from LJ, *Whedonesque*, and alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer users have been anonymized to preserve the participant's privacy.

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[Anon 7] <http://ursulav.livejournal.com/578058.html>