

Amatore et Amatori:  
Queer Participation and Representation  
in Fan Literature

♦ Maria Kolle Ramberg ♦

## Preface

When talking about fanfiction, the word ‘amateur’ gets thrown around a lot. It is technically correct – most fanfiction writers tend to not get paid for their work – but when talking about fan works, it is usually used in the diminishing sense, to imply that fan literature is silly or trivial. What is interesting about the word ‘amateur’, though, is its etymology: It comes from the Latin word ‘amator’, meaning ‘lover’ or ‘one who loves’ and to engage in a creative pursuit simply because you love to do it is something truly special.

When I initially posted the survey for this project, I was not expecting much. I went to sleep that night expecting to wake up to about thirty answers and so it was quite a surprise when I woke up to over a thousand. When that thousand turned into 8307 I was in awe. What started as ‘Maria’s silly little fanfiction project’ had suddenly engaged thousands. Since announcing the project, I have acquired almost fifty different messages and comments of people interested in reading the finished project. I have been sent over eighty thousand words of analysis, including participants who wrote answers at well over a thousand words. I have received messages telling me about sampling techniques, recommending me academic literature, offering me both advice and feedback. Through this project, I have found something truly magical, a supportive community.

I would like to thank my English teacher, Ellen Julie Opdahl, for all her guidance and support as this project truly would not be possible without her help, or the help of our research contact Louisa Olufsen Layne. I would also like to thank and apologise to my family and friends for forcing them to listen to me rant about this project for days on end and, perhaps most importantly, I would like to thank the wonderful community on Tumblr who made all this happen in the first place as they are truly the life and soul of this project.

When choosing the title for this paper, I could not help myself; I am a Latin student after all. ‘Amatore’ means ‘By the lover’, while ‘Amatori’ means ‘For the lover’. Fanfiction is one of the purest forms of passion: It is created by the amateur, for the amateur. By the lover, for the lover.

## Table of Contents

Preface .....	i
Introduction .....	1
Background and Theory .....	1
What is fanfiction? .....	1
Past research and theory .....	2
Method and ethics .....	4
Survey.....	4
Platform.....	5
Ethics .....	6
Data .....	7
Analysis .....	10
Fanfiction: A queernormative space.....	10
The search for representation .....	11
Comfort, escapism, and queer happiness .....	11
Subtle queer themes and explorations of ‘otherness’ .....	12
Representation and amatonormativity.....	14
Reflections.....	14
What could be done differently? .....	14
Future .....	15
Conclusion.....	15
Sources .....	17
References .....	17
Appendix 1 .....	18
Appendix 2 .....	19
Appendix 3 .....	23

## Introduction

In 1966, the first episode of the American science fiction tv-show, Star Trek, aired. It has since turned into a pop culture phenomenon, sparking countless movies, magazines, spin-offs and even theme parks, but in September of 1967, Star Trek would inspire something not-quite seen before. Spockanalia is what is colloquially known as a ‘fanzine’, a fan-made magazine formerly published in New York City. Here, fans would send in fan-written poems, articles, and letters, but, more importantly, they would send in fan stories written about their favourite characters. No one really knows what the first ‘fanfiction’ was, whether it was an early piece of Star trek fanfiction from the 1960s or the Apocryphon of John in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Rosland, 2019), but these early Star Trek fans and their writings are irrefutably the ones who have defined our modern perception of what fanfiction is (Verba, 1996).

## Background and Theory

### What is fanfiction?

For the sake of clarity, fanfiction is a fictional work based on an already existing work of fiction. The author might use copyrighted settings, characters, or other intellectual properties in their writings (Prucher, 2007). Fanfiction writers are rarely ever authorised by the creator of the original work. One could say that earlier transformative works, like for example Jean Rhys’ ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’, a ‘Jane Eyre’ prequel, could potentially be considered fanfiction, but in the context of this research paper only modern fanfiction, in particular digital fiction, will be relevant (Wilson, 2021).

Unlike many other fanfiction websites<sup>1</sup>, Archive of Our Own gives its users access to its statistics due to the site’s comprehensive tagging system. This has revealed some interesting data: Archive of Our Own’s most written about ‘ships’<sup>2</sup> are overwhelmingly queer. In fact, data from 2021 shows that 73% of them are written about romantic relationships between either two female or two male characters (Centrumlumina, AO3 Ship Stats 2021, 2021). This is significant when you consider both past and current trends in most media where queer people are very rarely represented to this degree (GLAAD, 2021), which begs the question:

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<sup>1</sup> Websites used for distributing fanfiction and, occasionally, other transformative works.

<sup>2</sup> A ship, an abbreviation of the word ‘relationship’, is a pairing between two or more people that a fandom desires to be in a sexual and/or romantic relationship.

Why is the queer community so widely represented in these fanfiction environments? And how does queerness affect and relate to fan literature?

The purpose of this research project is to examine the connection and overlap between queer communities and fanfiction communities and especially investigate if, and how, queer minorities might use fanfiction to explore their own identities.

### **Past research and theory**

For many years, fan studies were considered to be ‘unserious’ and most early academic publications on topics like fandom<sup>3</sup> and fanfiction were written in the 1980s, several years after its creation. Though academic studies of fandom and fan literature have become more acceptable, most research is done by individuals already integrated with these fan communities. These studies span a wide variety of topics like the inner workings of fanfiction culture, fanfiction’s impact on literacy, and queer representation, which is what this study chooses to focus on. Several academics before me have pointed out the relationship between fan communities and queer communities, but very few of these have utilised quantitative methods, and even fewer have focused on LGBTQ+ identities in their entirety. Although the amount of academic interest in fandom so far is limited, many fan communities also write ‘Fan-meta’, defined as amateur research done by and about fandom (Organization for Transformative Works, 2023).

The past research project that is closest to this survey is the 2013 AO3 Census, a survey with over 10 000 participants that attempted to help log Archive of Our Own’s user demographic. The survey asked participants about their age, gender, and sexuality, as well as some of their fanfiction preferences, but did have certain limitations like the fact that it was mostly limited to Tumblr users. The survey has brought about a lot of fan-meta analyses and its creator has made a post encouraging people to do further research on queerness in fanfiction communities. (Centrumlumina, 2013).

Henry Jenkins is often considered to be one of the founders of fan studies due to his 1992 book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* where he explores fanfiction as a participatory culture<sup>4</sup> and describes media fans as ‘poachers’ (Jenkins, 1992).

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<sup>3</sup> A subculture of fans who share an interest in the same topic(s). In the context of this paper, it usually refers to fans of media.

<sup>4</sup> A culture with low barriers for artistic expression that encourages creating and sharing one’s creations.

He details how these poachers reclaim ownership of popular media from mass corporate interest and subvert stories' originally intended meanings. Jenkins also states that when it comes to 'slash fiction'<sup>5</sup>, the motivation behind reading and/or writing might be rooted in gender and gender roles. Fandom has historically been a female dominated environment (Bacon-Smith, 1992), and female fanfiction writers seem to have a tendency towards writing male-focused slash fiction. Jenkins believes that this is because it allows females living in a patriarchal society to experience an equal relationship where both parts are on equal grounds:

Traditional romance generally leaves unquestioned its assumptions about gender. [...] The woman must accept her role as wife without asserting demands for autonomy. Slash makes masculinity the central problem within its narrative development and tries to envision a world where conventional sexual identities are redefined in a more fluid, less hierarchical fashion. [...] Both partners retain equality and autonomy while moving into a more satisfying and committed relationship. (Jenkins, 1992, s. 219)

By being predominantly queer, fanfiction allows for disruption of what is normative and therefore allows itself to represent those who have been 'otherised' by society. The notion of queerness as something 'other' is prevalent throughout most of history and in the 1990s French philosopher Michel Foucault would write the works that would later inspire what is now known as queer theory. Queer theory critiques the way certain forms of gender and sexual expression are stigmatised, while others are not. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction*, 1990)

Foucault is also the founder of the concept of 'Heterotopias'. A heterotopia is defined as a space which disrupts order and goes against what is normative (Foucault, 1986). In her academic article "*A Space Where Queer Is Normalized*": *The Online World and Heterotopias for WLW*, Anna Llewellyn employs a Foucauldian theoretical framework to explore fanfiction spaces as digital heterotopias. Llewellyn's research finds that in fandom spaces, being queer, and being 'other', is normalised and disrupts the power dynamics of a heteronormative physical society (Llewellyn, 2021).

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<sup>5</sup> Slash fiction, or just 'slash', is a genre of fanfiction focused on a romantic and/or sexual relationship between two same sex characters. Originally only used for fanfiction written about male same sex pairings but is often also used to refer to relationships between two female characters, often referred to as femslash.

Unlike a great deal of past research, this project seeks to not only find out to which extent queer minorities are represented within fandom spaces and fandom works, but to also go into depth as to why these queer individuals choose to partake in fan culture.

## **Method and ethics**

### **Survey**

This project makes use of a comprehensive survey that seeks to determine a subject's fanfiction preferences, as well as to which degree they feel their sexual or gender identity is represented in both traditional and transformative media. Eleven out of twelve questions are quantitative, with one open-ended qualitative question at the end of the survey. One could probably have done this survey with purely qualitative questions, but as this project seeks to acquire a wide array of information on its participants to better paint a picture of what the general fanfiction community believes, quantitative seemed more fitting.

Most questions were checkbox questions, allowing participants to choose as many answers as they wish. Several questions also had an 'Other' choice, where participants could write in their more specific preferences. This was particularly important for questions regarding sexuality and gender as several consider these to be a spectrum and therefore cannot always be defined by labels. Some of the questions were also equipped with a small text description that further defined phrases or technical terms, like 'fanfiction' or 'transgender', to avoid misunderstandings.

The survey has gone through several changes. Initially, the survey asked participants about both their sexual and gender identity, but after getting over eight thousand answers and doing a thorough review of the general data protection regulations (GDPR), the original survey was closed and deleted, and the best solution ended up being to redo it (See: Ethics).

Not only did this allow me to make sure the survey was in compliance with the GDPR, but it also allowed me to edit certain questions based on initial feedback from the original survey. For example, a few people pointed out that one of the questions used the phrase 'slash fiction' while referring to romantic and/or sexual relationships in fanfiction. This is technically wrong as slash fiction has historically only referred to same-sex, usually male, pairings, and so the question was adjusted to instead use the word 'relationships'. The new survey also made it mandatory for users to read and accept the survey's terms and conditions (See: Appendix 3)

## Platform

A part of what makes this survey's methods so significant is its choice of platform. The survey was done digitally to make it both easier to distribute and analyse, and it was posted solely on the social media platform Tumblr. Tumblr has a reputation for being a popular platform among LGBTQ+ individuals while also hosting many fandom communities and fan works, including fanfiction. By promoting and posting the survey on Tumblr, I have not only acquired a large number of participants who match the survey's participant requirements, but also a large number of participants who are passionate and knowledgeable about the project's topic. The fact that the original survey was taken by over eight thousand users and the newer one was taken by over three thousand truly demonstrates just how relevant this topic is. Not only that, but when given the option to describe why they personally feel they consume fanfiction, several users wrote hundreds of words detailing their thoughts and experiences, including one user who wrote over 1200 words. This topic seems to bring about much enthusiasm.

Tumblr is a microblogging platform, allowing users to post both long and short text posts on their profile that other users may 'reblog'. The site's algorithm is less so focused on which posts you have engaged with previously and more so on which users you have actively decided to follow. What this effectively means is that by posting a survey on Tumblr, one is going to end up employing what is called snowball sampling. Tumblr users who see the post might decide to reblog it, recruiting other users for the survey.

Snowball sampling is very effective for gathering ample amounts of participants, but it also means that there is a certain risk the survey is trapped in the same 'reblog circles'. The survey might have circulated in certain groups of people, almost creating a type of echo chamber. To combat this the promotional post was 'tagged' with different keywords related to, for example, fanfiction or sexuality, to ensure the survey circulated in a vast array of communities. Similarly to the 2013 AO3 Census, one can assume that a large majority of participants came from Tumblr and so it is important to recognise that this might affect results. Other fanfiction readers outside of Tumblr might have answered differently if given the chance, and so one cannot draw definitive conclusions about fandom as a whole. However, Tumblr's large number of fandom communities should presumably justify this, as it seems to be the most effective way to acquire considerable amounts of participants that fit such specific criteria.



The post that promoted the survey specified that the survey was specifically aimed at queer individuals with some form of experience with either writing or reading fanfiction. This means that most of the survey takers will likely be queer in one way or another, although, since the survey is anonymous and does not ask people to specify their sexuality, there is no way to properly verify this.

## **Ethics**

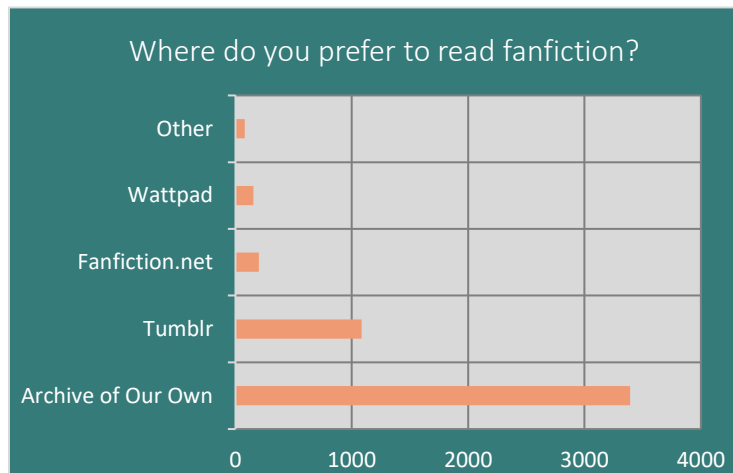
Both gender and sexuality are topics of extremely sensitive nature and so it is especially important that the personal rights of the participants are protected. This survey was conducted through Google Forms and was completely anonymous. Before participating users had to agree to the survey's terms and conditions and were informed of the aim of the study and what their information would be used for.

To further protect the rights and the privacy of the participants, the original questions that asked participants about their gender and sexual identity was removed. This decision was made after much reflection and research on the conditions of the GDPR. We might have applied for special permission to ask questions about these topics, but the Holbergprize competition deadline made this impossible. In addition, the survey specified that participants had to be 16 years or older which means that several participants might be minors. This makes it even more important that the survey's data is handled responsibly and that all users give proper, informed consent.

Though it is undoubtedly a positive aspect that all answers are completely anonymous, this also means that it is impossible to withdraw information from the survey. Participants are informed of this before partaking in the survey and must declare that they accept this as a part of the survey's terms and conditions. The survey's data has only been available to the research group behind the project and all the information will be properly erased by the end of the project, including any information from the original survey. Throughout this project, several direct quotes from participants have been numbered, but none of these numbers threaten the anonymity of participants in any way and are simply a way to distinguish participants.

## Data

Figure 1 shows that about 98% of all participants use Archive of Our Own to read fanfiction.



The second largest platform amongst participants is Tumblr (31,3% of participants), but it is important to note that this survey was published exclusively on Tumblr and so one can imagine that this has skewed the results and that the website's popularity as a fanfiction website is smaller than what is presented in this survey.

Figure 1 (N=3456)

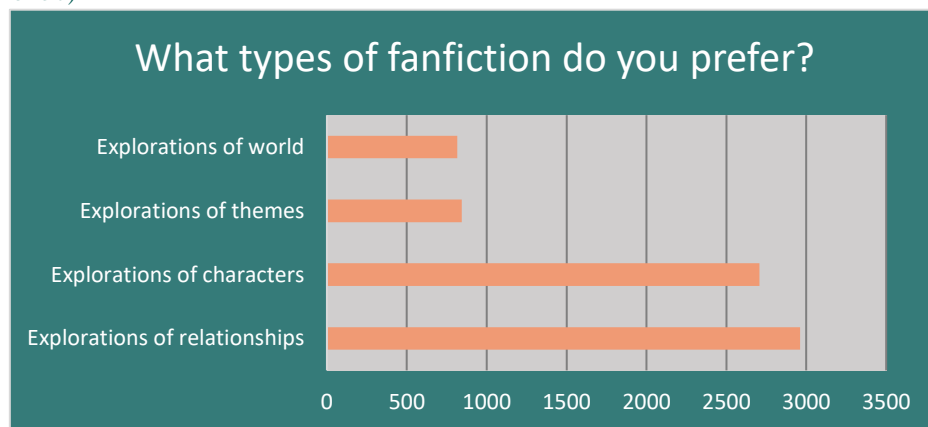
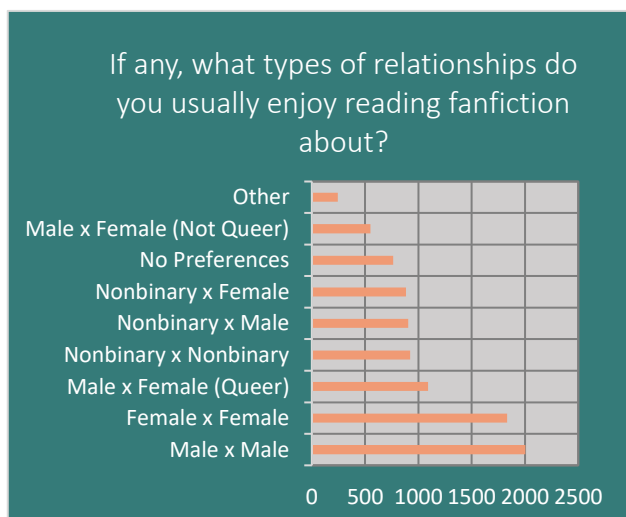


Figure 2 (N=3456)

Figure 2 depicts that 85,7% of participants prefer reading about explorations of relationships in fanfiction while 78,3% of participants prefer explorations of characters.

Figure 3 shows that the most popular relationship type is 'Male x Male' (58% of participants),



with 'Female x Female' (53% of participants) not far behind. Only 16% of participants have answered that they enjoy reading fanfiction about non-queer heterosexual couples and only 6 participants said that they exclusively enjoy reading about non-queer heterosexual couples. 'Other' includes polyamorous relationships, those with a preference for platonic relationships and those who specified that they were willing to read anything as long as it is queer.

Figure 3 (N=3451)

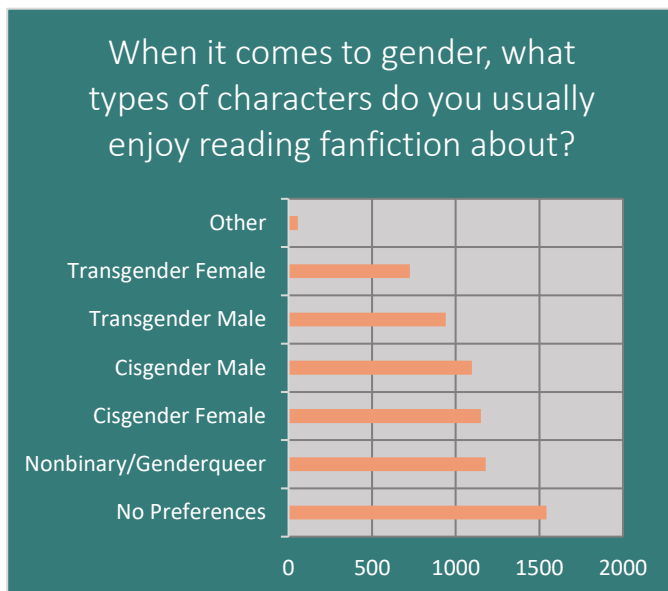


Figure 4 (N=3452)

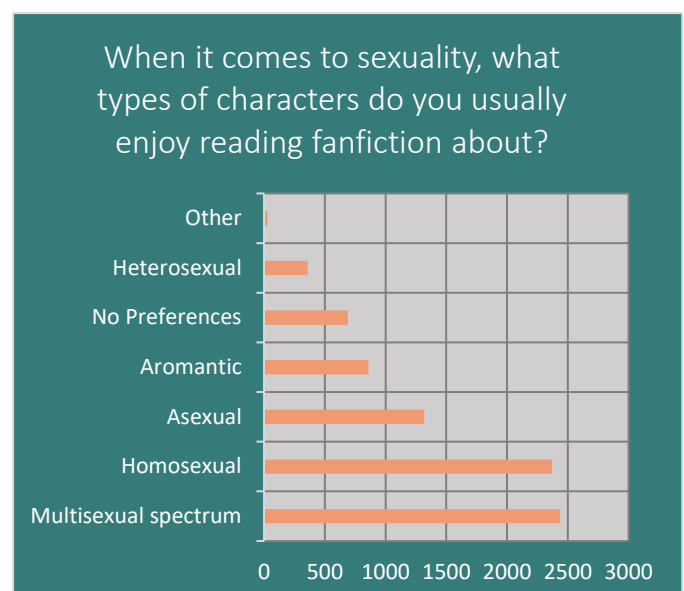


Figure 5 (N=3454)

Figure 4 shows that most people (1543 answers) have no preferences about the gender of the characters they read about. 34,2% of participants enjoy reading about nonbinary/genderqueer characters while 33,3% of participants enjoy reading about cisgender<sup>6</sup> female ones. Figure 5 shows that, contrary to gender, participants have many more preferences when it comes to the sexuality of the characters. 70,5% of participants said they enjoy reading about characters on the multisexual spectrum<sup>7</sup> and 68,6% answered that they enjoy reading about homosexual ones. The least popular answer, except 'Other', is heterosexual (358 answers). In both questions, the 'Other' option has participants specifying that they enjoy reading about any type of sexual or gender identity as long as it is queer in some way.

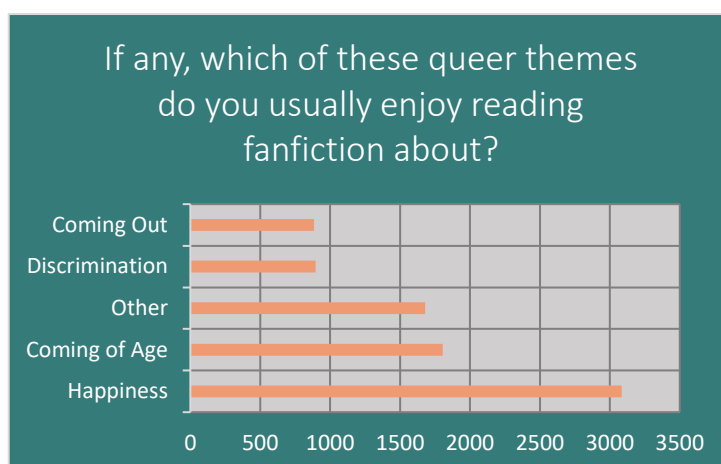


Figure 6 (N=3385)

Figure 6 shows that 89% of all participants prefer reading fanfiction with queer themes of happiness – described in the survey as 'Explorations of queer healing, contentment and/or happy endings'. The least popular themes were themes of coming out (885 answers) and discrimination (897 answers). It is important to note that the 'Other' option (1679 participants) in this

<sup>6</sup> 'Cisgender' meaning having a gender identity that corresponds with one's assigned sex.

<sup>7</sup> A sexuality spectrum consisting of those attracted to more than one gender. This includes bisexual, pansexual, etc.

question does not allow for participants to write in specific answers, but instead represents ‘other subtle queer themes’.

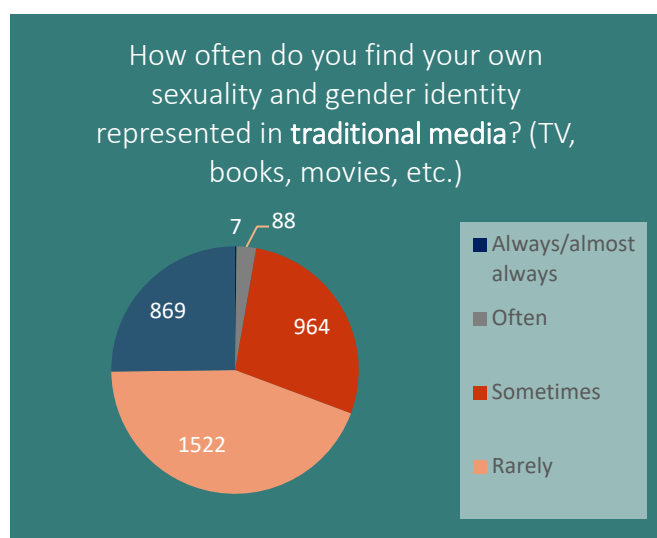


Figure 7 (N=3450)

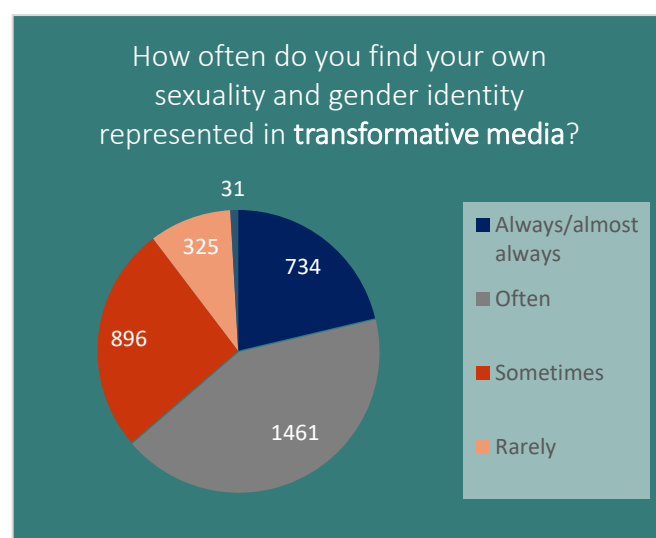


Figure 8 (N=3447)

Figure 7 shows that over half of participants feel they are either never or rarely represented in traditional media, while, on the other side, Figure 8 shows that over half of participants feel they are either always or often represented in transformative media.

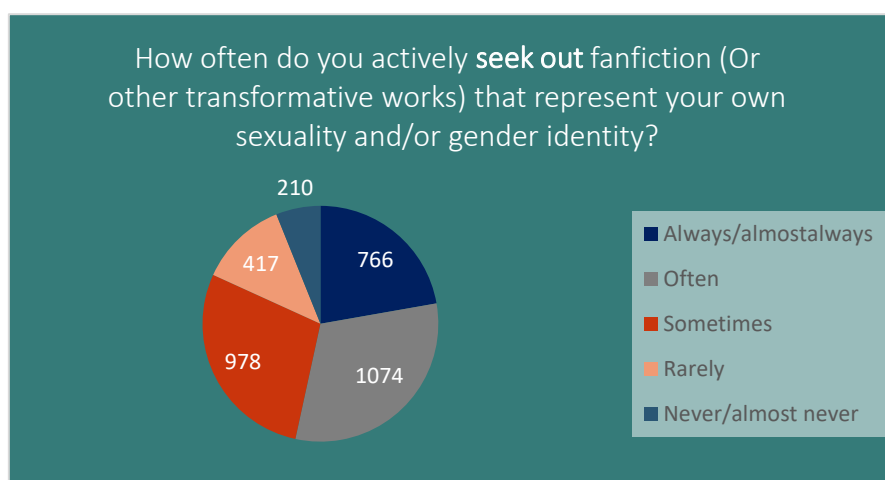


Figure 9 (N=3445)

Similar to the previous question, Figure 9 shows that over half of participants either always or often actively seek out transformative works that represents their sexual and/or gender identity.

## Analysis

### Fanfiction: A queernormative space

The fanfiction preferences in this survey are overwhelmingly queer. It is not a surprise that a queer audience would prefer well-informed media that represents their identity (McInroy & Craig, 2019), but what is surprising is just how much queer seems to be the normative in fan works. Only six participants have answered that they exclusively prefer Non-Queer Female x Male relationships and, of those, half of them specified that they exclusively prefer reading about heterosexual characters.

What is truly fascinating is how several participants said they would enjoy reading about a Queer Female x Male relationship<sup>8</sup>. In fact, several of the participants who answered ‘Other’ specified that they would be willing to read anything as long as it was queer in one way or another. This seems to be, similarly to what Henry Jenkins describes in his 2006 book *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, a form of resistant reading that queer fans tend to employ while consuming content (Jenkins, 2006). They are actively choosing to ignore the heteronormativity of, for example, their favourite TV show, in favour of instead reading characters as queer. This means that even a typically ‘heterosexual’ couple – between a man and a woman – can still be read as queer even though this deviates from the author’s original intention.

To my own surprise, results regarding preferred relationship types (Shown in Figure 3) do not match those of the 2013 AO3 census. Though Male x Male pairings are more popular than their female counterparts, Female x Female relationships, in this survey, the difference is only by about 5%. This is rather little compared to the 2013 study where Male x Male relationships were preferred by 89,7% of participants while only 44,1% of participants answered Female x Female relationships, which is less than those who answered Female x Male (50,7%). The limitations of the 2013 data make it difficult to ascertain if this change is because of this survey’s queer sample size or whether preferences have simply changed since then.

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<sup>8</sup> A relationship between a man and a woman where one or both are, in some way, queer. For example, a relationship between a transgender man and a cisgender woman or a relationship between a bisexual man and a bisexual woman.

## **The search for representation**

Before going into this project, my original hypotheses were rather one dimensional and I had assumed that fan works were simply a way to fill the hole that traditional mainstream media failed to do. However, there is a lot more nuance to this than meets the eye. While comparing if people less represented in traditional media were more likely to seek out fanfiction that represented them, and again comparing these results to those who did feel represented in traditional media, it became clear that this original hypothesis was wrong. Out of those who either never or rarely feel represented in traditional media, 17,6% said that they always or almost always actively seek out transformative works that represents them. On the contrary, out of those who either always or often feel represented in traditional media, 31,6% always or almost always seek out representative fanfiction. There is a multitude of ways one might explain this.

First of all, it is important to mention that very few of this survey's participants have answered that they feel represented in traditional media, meaning that the sample size for this specific comparison is quite small (96 participants), and so there is a higher margin of error. Secondly, those who feel represented in traditional media are more likely to have a more 'socially accepted' queer identity and thus might be more represented in fanfiction as well. For example, a homosexual cisgender man would be more likely to find himself represented in both traditional and transformative media while a nonbinary, asexual, aromantic person will probably not find themselves represented at all. There is, of course, fanfiction written about a character that fits this description, but it is more uncommon. A general lack of representation might discourage someone from spending much energy in order to find the rare fan works that represents them.

## **Comfort, escapism, and queer happiness**

Fanfiction was my escape from the abuse. It was hope that love was not what was shown to me. It was the happy ending I so desperately wanted. Now it is how I process my feelings and trauma. It is how I imagine my sexuality being accepted. [...] There is peace and beauty in fanfiction that I find incredible. To see love everywhere it was missing in my life. It makes me feel seen and not alone. (Participant 176)

91% of participants answered that they enjoy reading fanfiction with themes of queer happiness, which the survey further defines as explorations of queer healing, contentment

and/or happy endings. For several participants queer fanfiction is not necessarily appealing simply because it provides direct representation, but because it provides a sense of comfort. A rough search of the survey's long answer ('Why do you personally feel you consume/create fanfiction and/or other transformative works?') reveals over seven hundred answers mentioning either comfort, familiarity or, perhaps most prominent, escapism as their reasoning for reading fanfiction.

In fact, many participants cite Archive of Our Own's filtering and sorting system as an easy way for readers to know exactly what the story consists of before deciding to read a fanfiction. This, and the fact that fan works are based on already existing media, gives readers a sense of familiarity that appears to feel both safe and comforting to many: "I know what I'm getting into- especially on ao3, between tags and the summary there is an expectation that I know what the story will contain before I read it. This lets me avoid things I don't like [...] as well as search for things I do." (Participant 2)

Fanfiction's accessibility provides a way for queer readers to safely explore their identities, which is supported by the 53,3% of participants who enjoy reading fanfiction with queer coming of age themes. Since queer is the normative in these fanfiction spaces, stories are allowed to focus less on queer themes such as coming out or discrimination and more on normal stories that just happen to be queer:

When you want media with queer characters where their queerness is an integral part but NOT the focus, it is HELL trying to find it. [...] With fanfiction, it's all advertised up front in the tags-- m/m, w/w, other, gen, X character is Y sexuality, X character is Y gender, here are a bunch of tags to give you some details on the type of content in the fic (fluff, angst, au, etc). (Participant 2125)

### **Subtle queer themes and explorations of 'otherness'**

50% of participants answered that they like reading fanfiction with other subtle queer themes while only 26% said they enjoy themes of coming out. Many participants actually mentioned themes of coming out in their long answers as one of the reasons they are not satisfied with queer representation in media.

[Mainstream media] is always focusing on their coming out, their grief, the harassment and abuse they go through; fanfiction allows me to see characters like

me happy and in love and enjoying domesticity or engaging in fights that have nothing to do with their identity. (Participant 55)

When works contain subtle queer themes it allows readers to explore worlds where queer people are allowed to be just as complex and nuanced as non-queer ones. It is also important to note that readers do not always feel the need to be directly represented in fanfiction. One participant mentioned that even though they identify as lesbian, they still enjoy consuming fanfiction about queer male characters because the feelings and themes are similar. Different identities will of course have different experiences, but those subtle queer themes are still present. Just by being ‘other’, different people of different identities can relate to each other and feel a sense of community.

If we look at fanfiction through a Foucauldian lens, fan communities are not just heterotopias for their willingness to explore largely ignored queer themes, but for their general willingness to explore themes of ‘otherness’. As Jenkins mentions in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, an early theory for why fanfiction became popular was because it allowed readers to explore taboo topics and gender dynamics, which several participants seemed to agree with: “There are also some things unique to lgbqt+ culture that I like thrown into the things I read. [...] I also enjoy the different beauty standards represented in lesbian fanfiction, such as body hair being normalised in some works, or certain unconventional features being described as genuinely beautiful.” (Participant 3445)

Even now, fanfiction allows for queer readings of Female x Male relationships where different taboo gender dynamics are explored. One participant mentioned that it is rather refreshing to be able to see healthy explorations of consent and emotional safety between heterosexual pairings in fanfictions.

This focus on ‘otherness’ also allows non-queer marginalised individuals to explore their identities and experiences. For example, several participants mentioned that they use fanfiction as a way to explore their own neurodiversity, while others mentioned that it allows them to safely explore their past experiences with abuse in a way that is not common in traditional media. Fanfiction does not have the same limitations as most mainstream media has, making it easier for transformative works to explore taboo themes.



## **Representation and amatonormativity**

As one can see in Figure 2, a large majority of participants prefer it when the fanfiction they read is focused on relationships. This allows both queer readers and writers to explore worlds where relationships are not defined by queerphobia, but it also might alienate those who do not enjoy reading about romantic and/or sexual relationships. When specifying what sorts of relationships they enjoy reading about aside from the given answers, a considerable number of participants said that they would much rather read about platonic relationships between queer characters than romantic ones. Out of those who answered that they do not usually read about relationships, only 9,3% answered that they always feel represented in transformative media, On the contrary, among the participants who enjoy reading about relationships, 23,3% answered that they always felt represented. The written answers from people with no preferences for relationship focused fanfiction were mixed. While some mentioned that they rarely look for representation of themselves in transformative media specifically because of the lack of it, others mentioned that they have managed to discover specific fandoms which allow them to focus more on platonic and/or familial relationships. Amatonormativity is a problem that affects society to a great extent, even in queer communities, so it seems consistent that this problem also affects transformative works.

## **Reflections**

### **What could be done differently?**

Though this project gave much insight into the queer fanfiction community, there are still many things that could have been done differently. Several of the original survey's problems were revised, but if I were to do this study a second time, I would probably have changed the focus of some of the questions. When deciding what type of questions would be used, it was assumed that most participants would not bother with longer, more qualitative, questions and so only one was included, but the considerable number of answers acquired from the last question disproves this. Perhaps the survey could have inquired more about the motivation behind the participant's choices to eliminate some of the data's uncertainty as well.

As the survey is aimed at queer individuals who read fanfiction there are also very few possibilities for comparison with other demographics. Perhaps if the study had more time, one could have requested special permission to ask participants about their sexual and gender

identity to compare what queer and non-queer individuals answer. This would provide more conclusive results and might showcase how sexuality affects fanfiction.

## **Future**

This project has been a great learning process and now that it is clear just how relevant this topic is, taking this project further seems much more applicable. Fanfiction raises questions about the lack of representations in traditional media and a general lack of spaces for queer individuals, especially queer youths. Further research could reveal the most effective way to provide these safe spaces that queer people are lacking. It could also be nice if future research was to focus on the other sides of fanfiction, for example how fanfiction handles non-normative gender dynamics and sexual content. A form of literary analysis could also give insight about what makes transformative works stand out from their traditional counterparts on a textual level.

## **Conclusion**

This project has shown that not only do fanfiction and other transformative works provide the queer representation that traditional media fails to, but it also provides a safe space for queer people to escape their personal struggles. By transforming already existing works and using a comprehensive tagging and archival system, fanfiction gives readers a sense of familiarity and comfort. Most queer fanfiction readers prefer stories about queer happiness that are not focused on their adversity or the discrimination they face, and fanfiction serves as a tool for them to write the stories they want to see. Fanfiction effectively allows for queer stories written by and for queer people.

The accessibility of fanfiction makes it easier to both write and read about topics that mainstream media tends to shy away from. This can be anything from gender and sexual identity, to untraditional gender dynamics, or to sexual boundaries. It is a subculture that encourages expressing and exploring deviation from the norm and provides writers with the resources to do so. Not only does it allow queer people to explore their own identity, but it also introduces them to digital queer spaces while allowing them to discover likeminded individuals. Several participants cited that fanfiction was the reason they discovered their queerness in the first place.

The community is obviously still affected by more widespread prejudice: The survey result shows that, despite being a female dominated space, male focused stories are more popular than their female counterparts, and that relationship focused stories tend to dominate, alienating for example aromantic and/or asexual readers who would like to see themselves represented. It is also important to note that very few people of colour are represented in Archive of Our Own's most popular characters and ships (Centrumlumina, 2021). Though fanfiction tries to be a space for everyone, there is still room for growth. Those who dare to write stories about inadequately represented groups and minorities are the backbone of this community and those who make this growth happen.

Even though having to redo the survey was stressful, it was still a very educational process. Going into this project, unaware of just how meticulous and extensive data rights are and being able to learn about these requirements was very significant. The knowledge I have acquired here is something that I will take with me for any and all future projects.

To conclude, this project has revealed many things about the relationship between queerness and fan communities, especially how transformative works engage readers by utilising safety and escapism while also being in an accessible format. These works, and the culture surrounding them, provide a space where taboo topics can be explored in ways they are usually not. Hopefully these findings will provide further insight into how to best represent queer minorities in media, while proving just how significant good representation can be for marginalized groups and their sense of belonging.

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## Appendix 1

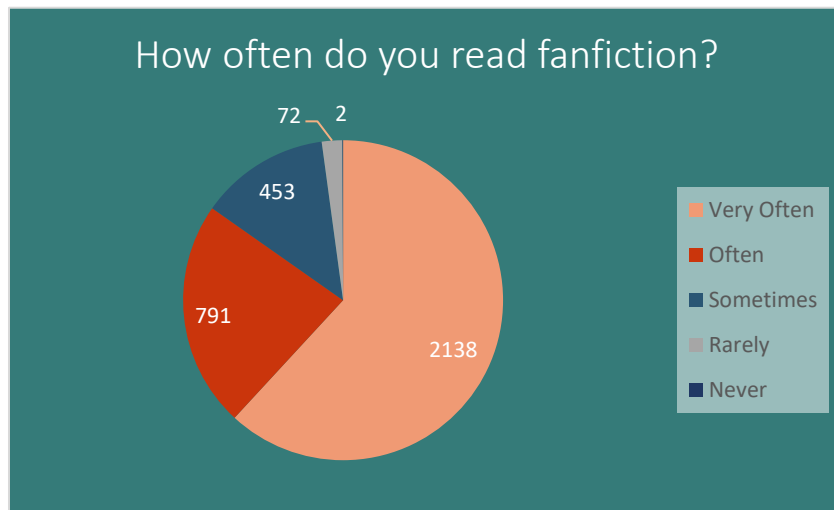


Figure 10 (N=3456)

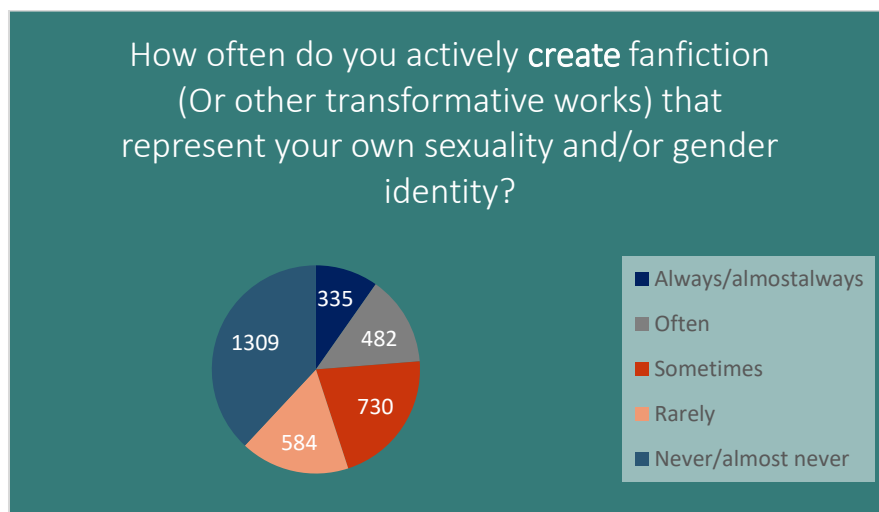


Figure 11 (N=3440)

## Appendix 2

How often do you read fanfiction? \*

'Fanfiction' meaning a fictional work featuring characters and/or elements from a pre-existing form of media.

- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Where do you prefer to read fanfiction? \*

- ☐ Archive of Our Own
- ☐ Fanfiction.net
- ☐ Wattpad
- ☐ Tumblr
- ☐ Andre: \_\_\_\_\_

What types of fanfiction do you prefer? \*

- ☐ Explorations of relationships (Focus on romantic and/or sexual relationships)
- ☐ Explorations of characters (Character studies, certain types of Hurt/Comfort, etc.)
- ☐ Explorations of themes (Fanfictions where relationships and characters might be deprioritized to exploration of a story's themes)
- ☐ Explorations of world (Fanfictions where relationships and characters might be deprioritized to exploration of the story's world/worldbuilding)

If any, what types of relationships do you usually enjoy reading fanfiction about?

- ☐ Male x Male relationships
- ☐ Female x Female relationships
- ☐ Female x Male relationships (Non-Queer)
- ☐ Female x Male relationships (Queer)
- ☐ Nonbinary/genderqueer x Male relationships
- ☐ Nonbinary/genderqueer x Female relationships
- ☐ Nonbinary/genderqueer x Nonbinary/genderqueer relationships
- ☐ No preferences
- ☐ Andre: \_\_\_\_\_

When it comes to gender, what types of characters do you usually enjoy reading fanfiction about?

'Transgender' meaning having a gender identity that **does not** correspond with one's assigned sex, and 'Cisgender' meaning having a gender identity that **does** correspond with one's assigned sex.

- ☐ Cisgender female
- ☐ Cisgender male
- ☐ Transgender female
- ☐ Transgender male
- ☐ Nonbinary/Genderqueer
- ☐ No preferences
- ☐ Andre: \_\_\_\_\_

When it comes to sexuality, what types of characters do you usually enjoy reading fanfiction about?

- ☐ Multisexual spectrum (Bisexual, pansexual, etc.)
- ☐ Homosexual
- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Aromantic
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ No preferences
- ☐ Andre: \_\_\_\_\_

If any, which of these queer themes do you usually enjoy reading fanfiction about?

- ☐ Queer themes of 'coming out'
- ☐ Queer coming of age (Where a character might realize or come to terms with their queer identity)
- ☐ Queer discrimination (Explorations of bigotry and/or prejudice queer individuals might meet)
- ☐ Queer happiness (Explorations of queer healing, contentment and/or happy endings)
- ☐ Other subtle queer themes

How often do you find your own sexuality and gender identity represented in **traditional media**? (TV, books, movies, etc)

- ☐ Always/almost always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never/almost never

How often do you find your own sexuality and gender identity represented in **transformative media** (Fanfiction, fan-comics and other types of fandom works)

- ☐ Always/almost always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never/almost never



How often do you actively **seek out** fanfiction (Or other transformative works) that represent your own sexuality and/or gender identity?

- ☐ Always/almost always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never/almost never

How often do you actively **create** fanfiction (Or other transformative works) that represent your own sexuality and/or gender identity?

- ☐ Always/almost always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never/Almost never

Optional: Why do you personally feel you consume/create fanfiction and/or other transformative works?

Svaret ditt \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Terms and Conditions:**

I hereby declare that I am 16 years or older, and have read all the information below about my personal rights, the aims of this study, and how my information will be handled.

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to answer the questions, or you do not agree to these terms, simply exit the survey. By completing the survey, you agree that you are aware of your rights to give consent, and that you are the only one who can give it. The answers you give are anonymous. Due to the nature of the study being anonymous, data cannot be withdrawn once it is submitted. This means that there is no possibility of deleting your submitted data.

The aim of this study is to explore the connections and overlap between fan literature and LGBTQ+ communities. This is a project conducted by a student at a school in Oslo Kommune. The name of the responsible project supervisor is Ellen Julie Opdahl (information below). You are being asked to participate because you identify as queer, whether that be sexuality or gender identity, and consume fan content and/or participate in fan communities.

If you agree to participate in this project by answering the survey, you will be asked questions about how your gender and sexuality are represented in media and most importantly, about your fanfiction preferences.

We will only use the information to find out how queerness affects and relates to fan literature. We will not share your information with others, and it will only be available to the research group. We will make sure no one can access the information collected, and it will be stored responsibly, and according to the requirements of GDPR. We will make sure your anonymity is secured through all stages of the research project and that no one can recognize you in the published article. We will finish this project by April 1st and will make sure that all of the information is properly erased. If you believe we have treated your private information in an irresponsible manner, you have the right to complain to Datatilsynet.