

Brotherly Love: Remaking Homosociality and Masculinity in Fan Fiction

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Abstract

Studies on fan fiction have traditionally employed ethnographic or literary methods to study the activities of fans. Since the 1980s scholars have focused particularly on slash fiction as unique and subversive, but this has been at the cost of devaluing other genres of fan fiction as less critical of the status-quo. By studying a sample of fan fiction which encompasses a variety of genres, and analyzing the sample using mixed methods of content analysis and textual analysis, similarities between genres emerge, as well as a breadth of both critical and uncritical treatments of the construction of masculinity.

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Introduction

While working on this project, I found myself reflecting on my own history in fandom, and how that affected my position as both a fan and an academic. My initiation into fandom was a quiet, self-initiation that did not resemble the communities of women readers and writers described by Jenkins, Bacon-Smith, and Penley in the early 1990s.¹ My first computer was a Windows 95, a family computer with internet access via a loud dial-up modem. It was in the height of *Harry Potter* fandom—what some *Harry Potter* fans have called “The Three-Year Summer”—that I accidentally fell into reading *Harry Potter* fan fiction on the internet. At first I did not even know it had a name, they were just “stories” which people had written and posted to ease the long wait between the release of the fourth and fifth books, but I soon learned the slang of the fandom, the conventions of reading and writing, and the popular romantic pairings.

In the real world, I was regularly enjoying other television and films that had a large fandom presence on the internet during this time—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, *The Lord of the Rings*—but in cyberspace, I rarely migrated from Fiction Alley, a dedicated *Harry Potter* fandom hub. Fiction Alley offered a mind-boggling array of fan fiction, thousands of forums and threads for discussion on every possible *Harry Potter* topic, and an escape from the boredom of patiently waiting for *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Best of all, it helped me to realize that I was not the only person who had read the books dozens of times; there were other people all over the world who poured over the minute details of the story and they

1 Constance Penley, “Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture,” in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Carey Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992); Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

wanted to talk about it! Mostly, I lurked on message boards or read fan fiction and never left comments but I was left wondering who these people “out there” were.

I gave up my fan fiction habit when I entered university, though I cannot recall if it was a conscious decision or if I simply drifted away from it with the end of *Harry Potter*. I forgot all about internet fandom for several years, until I watched Joss Whedon’s *Firefly*, over a decade after its initial release. Frustrated such a brilliant show could have been cut short so ruthlessly, I turned to fan fiction to amuse myself. This time I did not get so deeply embedded in one fandom but wandered based on the cult shows I was watching. I was struck by the huge range in quality, genre, and style; one thing that was unwavering across all of these elements was the emphasis on interpersonal relationships between characters, particularly male characters.

This thesis argues that fan fiction deals with the issues of power in interpersonal relationships, particularly with regard to constructions of gendered power, in a variety of ways that do not favour one genre of fan fiction as more progressive or subversive than others. In the case of fan fiction, genre can be a slippery definition. Typically, the major genres in fan fiction are considered to be ‘gen’ (non-romantic), ‘het’ (heterosexual romantic relationship), and ‘slash’ (same-sex relationship), based on the early categorizations of fan fiction in zines. Penley notes that zines of the 1980s often had pages advertising other zines in print; these ads had a system of “code designations,” such as “K/S” signifying a romantic relationship between *Star Trek*’s Kirk and Spock, to designate the kinds of fan fiction which a reader would find inside.² Radway explains that genres in novels developed as a response to books becoming “a salable commodity” in the nineteenth century, becoming more widely available to and increasingly literate public. Publishing houses would become known for certain types of stories, replicating aspects of past

2 Penley, “Psychoanalysis,” 480-481.

successes in the hopes of having another best seller.³ Jenkins observes that genre, as conceptualized by Schatz, Altman, Andrew, and Hartly, has the quality of being a contract between the media producer and the audience, favouring the producer, and giving the audience “little more than the right to refuse engagement with a particular media product.”⁴ Derrida suggests genre is not made up of organizational categories, but qualities of an artifact that allow it to *participate* in genre.⁵

In fan fiction, the three major genres, gen, het, and slash, developed as a way for fans to differentiate their preferred material. For the purpose of this thesis, genre will refer to these three categories in reference to fan fiction; outside of fan fiction, genre will refer to the accepted categories developed as a contract between media producers and audiences, such as ‘romance,’ ‘comedy,’ ‘action.’ Sub-genre will refer to second tier categories of fan fiction that can occur in any of the three fan fiction genres; this includes fan constructed categories such as ‘angst,’ ‘hurt/comfort,’ and ‘humour.’ Themes will refer to idea- or event-oriented material in fan fiction that does not contribute to a specific categorization of fan fiction. Distinguishing between sub-genre and theme becomes important when categorizing elements such as ‘hurt/comfort’. Hurt/comfort can be considered a sub-genre when the entire story is devoted to the injury and care of characters, but can be considered a theme when a small hurt/comfort scenario is used as a device to explore character relationships.

‘Masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are perhaps even more nebulous, partially because they are not static and may vary substantially over time and place. This thesis relies on these terms to unravel representations of gender in fan fiction. ‘Masculinity’ refers to a type of participation in

3 Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984): 21-23.

4 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 123-124.

5 Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980):59.

gender identity that is assumed to be characteristic of men. Connell and Messerschmidt define “hegemonic masculinity” as “embody[ing] the currently most honoured way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men.”⁶ This definition reveals that there are many masculinity—that is many ways to ‘do’ being a man—and the gender performances of characters in the fan fiction sample reflects that. When referring to masculinity, my thesis is referring to performed traits that are more strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity than alternative or subordinate masculinities. ‘Femininity’ refers, similarly, to a type of participation in the female gender identity that is in particular contrast to masculine shows of strength and power; indeed, femininity may serve to enhance images of masculinity by contrast.⁷ The difficulty in defining these terms is the variation over time and place: the fandoms discussed are products of the English-speaking world, but that offer a great deal of variation, particularly when time is a factor. Additionally, they exist in virtual space, with contributions from writers around the world. These factors make the terms somewhat arbitrary when discussing gender.

The starting point for this research was male homosociality. Lipman-Blumen defines homosocial as “the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex. It is distinguished from homosexual in that it does not *necessarily* involve [...] an explicitly erotic sexual interaction between members of the same sex.”⁸ I chose to investigate homosociality between brother characters as I had been intrigued particularly by the treatment of ‘biological’

6 R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–59. doi:10.1177/0891243205278639, 832.

7 Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1984), 16.

8 Jean Lipman-Blumen, “Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions,” *Signs* 1 no. 3, (1976): 16.

brotherhood in fan fiction. What I found has much less to do with fantasies of the male homosocial bond than the reconstruction of gender in fan fiction.

This begs the question, what is fan fiction? Media fandom of the twentieth century is traditionally considered to have started with *Star Trek* (1966-1969) and the communities of *Star Trek* fan fiction writers that appeared in the 1970s.⁹ Fan fiction can be loosely defined as stories written by fans who borrow the characters from a source-text to create unlicensed works of fiction about said characters. Fan fiction was typically shared via fan-made magazines (zines) from the 1970s to the 1990s, but migrated to the internet in the 1990s. In 1998, the fan fiction mega-archive FanFiction.Net was created by *X-Files* fans to host fan fiction across a variety of fandoms.¹⁰ The mega-archive was a move away from static web-pages where all posted fan fiction had to be hand-coded and was typically hosted by fans who worked day jobs as system administrators.¹¹ There are several mega-archives currently operating on the internet which host fan fiction from hundreds of fandoms in many languages. This thesis typically refers to the mega-archives FanFiction.Net (FF.Net) and Archive of Our Own (Ao3),¹² both of which allow fan fiction to be uploaded instantly by fan fiction authors. The changes in the ease of access to fan communities producing fan fiction may account for some of the discrepancies between earlier studies of fan fiction and lived experience of fans in the twenty-first century.

Previous academic work has focused heavily on slash and made it the canonical genre of fan fiction to be studied.¹³ Slash fiction is the fan fiction practice of pairing two same-sex

9 Anne Jamison, *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World* (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), 26-27.

10 *Ibid.*, 120.

11 Francesca Coppa, "An Archive of Our Own: Fanfiction Writers Unite!" *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World*, Ed. Anne Jamison (Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013), 303.

12 Fanfiction.net; archiveofourown.org.

13 Joanna Russ, 'Pornography for Women by Women, with Love', in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014); Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith, 'Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines', in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, ed. Karen

characters, typically male, in a romantic or erotic relationship. The emphasis on the academic study of slash as a uniquely resistant genre of fan fiction has been at the cost of devaluing other genres as somehow less thoughtful or less critical of societal power-relations. Matt Hills notes that “when scholar-fans represent and mediate their own embeddedness in a fan culture, the other side of the coin is that they effectively ‘other’ fan activities falling outside of their fandom experiences.”¹⁴ I noticed early on in my research that a great deal of the work has been interested in how fan fiction, particularly genres like slash, resists and subverts societal norms. More recently, theorizing slash has hinged more on how fan fiction writers mobilize latent textual readings. I would not disagree with either of these stances, but I found my experience reading fan fiction to be even broader, encapsulating fan fiction that fits within both of these readings, but also fan fiction that seems to resist the text itself. In all of these cases, I was drawn to the many instances of the homosocial male bond in fan fiction, which has been explored mostly through slash, but extends into other genres as well.

In order to highlight the similarities and differences in genres I decided to take an approach which might seem antithetical to the study of written fan artifacts, but has yielded some interesting conclusions. This research differs from other research on fan fiction, as it employs a mixed-methods approach using primarily qualitative methods supplemented with statistical analysis to analyze 43 pieces of fan fiction focusing on brother-relationships for the power-relationships that appear in the texts. This method is an uncommon choice for fan fiction research, which often employs semi-ethnographic methods to explore the communities of

Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014); Penley, “Feminism”; Bacon-Smith; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*.

¹⁴ Matt Hills, “‘Proper Distance’ in the Ethical Positioning of Scholar-Fandoms: Between Academics’ and Fans’ Moral Economies”, in *Fan Culture: Theory/practice*, ed. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 21.

writers, or more literary textual analysis of smaller samples. Utilizing the content-analysis across a larger sample offers a glimpse at the wider thematic trends in fan fiction that are common across genres.

Based on my analysis, this thesis further argues that masculinity, as a component in the representation of power, is re-interpreted across all genres. The analysis of the sample suggests that masculinity in fan fiction is rewritten to incorporate more traits coded as feminine. These traits range from positive values like healthy emotional intimacy and cooperation, to stereotypical portrayals of love and obsession, to concerns that are more typically associated with women than men, such as eating disorders and rape.

Chapter One tackles the topic of slash as a starting point to examining characterizations of emotional intimacy in fan fiction as a whole. It argues that slash has typically been lauded as both progressive and resistant, but in many cases, the sample turned up evidence of embedded heteronormative structure, suggesting that a diversity of slash exists, and it is not more or less resistant or critical than any other genre. Chapter Two covers an analysis of three canon-divergent alternate-universe fics from the *A Song of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones* (*ASOIAF/GOT*) fandom. The strength of brotherhood and cooperation is at the centre of these fics; this chapter argues that these ideals are valued in fan fiction, along with negotiation, as an alternative to war and the lone man in hierarchy. Chapter Three takes a serious look at the hurt/comfort sub-genre, which has often been denigrated by both researchers and fans as a younger brother to slash: less resistant, thematically similar, and even as slash for people who find the content of slash offensive. This section argues that very similar elements are at work in the hurt/comfort genre as in slash and a variety of other genres, and that these elements often constitute a re-making of masculinity the way any other genre does. By exploring these

genres—which are thematically bound by homosocial constructions of brotherhood—treatments of power, gender construction, and emotional intimacy can be examined, and it becomes apparent that these topics are not limited to slash or even substantially different than slash, but are common in all genres of fan fiction.

Review of Literature

Fan fiction, particularly slash fiction, has been of special interest to academics studying the topic since the 1980s, but came to particular light after the 1992 publications by Penley, Bacon-Smith, and Jenkins. These three academics are typically considered to have founded the field of fandom studies with their ethnographic approaches to fandom. The earliest academic works on fan fiction of the 1980s paid special regard to *Star Trek* slash fiction. Slash is a genre of fan fiction that began in the *Star Trek* zines of the 1970s; its primary identifying attribute is that it paired the characters of Kirk and Spock in a romantic or erotic relationship. The term 'slash' comes from the punctuation in "K/S," which was used as an abbreviation to denote that a specific fic or an entire zine would focus on the aforementioned relationship. This literature review exposes how studies of fan fiction transitioned from slash being considered a unique and resistant genre, to a fuller assessment of fan fiction including and beyond slash as an interpretive process by fans.

Pre-Fan Studies

Two of the earliest papers on slash were published in the mid-1980s and focus on the qualities of K/S itself. Joanna Russ asserts in "Pornography for Women by Women, with Love" that, as the title suggests, slash is non-commercial pornography for women. She compared popular themes from the K/S genre to those that recurred in commercial paperback romances. In her comparison she found that "though Spock is not literally female, his alienness is a way of "coding" into the K/S fantasies that their subject is not a homosexual love affair between two men, but love and sex as women want them, whether with a man or another woman."¹⁵ Russ

¹⁵ Russ, 85.

notes that she was put onto this idea by Lamb and Veith's then unpublished, manuscript "Romantic Myth, Transcendence and *Star Trek* Zines."

Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith note the "mythic" and "transcendent" qualities of K/S fiction. Like Russ, they investigate a number of K/S zines and draw comparisons to literature, particularly comparing slash to the romance genre, as a means of exploring more sociological issues surrounding the authorial intent and consumption of K/S slash fiction. They also explore how the K/S fan fiction simultaneously replicates and contradicts characteristics of both the American literary tradition of men (typically, one white, one not) bonding in the wilderness and the romance narrative. Lamb and Veith write:

The K/S stories constitute an extension of the American literary tradition as described by Fiedler and also possess as defining characteristics and intense romanticism, science fiction settings, and the explicitly sexual union of the two protagonists. Thus they develop to its ultimate logical conclusion the male-male bonding theme is a way that subverts the original intents of such novelists as Cooper or Twain.¹⁶

The male bonding aspect of fiction in which Fiedler had already invested a 'queer' reading, stands in direct opposition to the romance narrative, which accentuates the power imbalance of the heteronormative relationship. However, the characteristics of these stories emphasize love and psychological and emotional connections as well as physical intimacy, all of which are characteristics of K/S fiction.¹⁷ Lamb and Veith assert that "unlike the romance novel, the message of K/S is that love and authentic intimacy can exist only between equals."¹⁸

It is not surprising that both Russ's and Lamb and Veith's research focus on slash from a literary perspective, as they come from that discipline. They were certainly not the last to examine the textual features using aspects of literary analysis, but in 1992 the study of fan communities became more ethnographic. The year 1992 is considered to be the birth of fan

16 Lamb & Diana L. Veith, 98.

17 Ibid., 99.

18 Ibid.

studies, though the 1980s had several studies of audience reception which influenced fan studies, such as Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas*, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, and John Fiske's work on television audiences.¹⁹

Early Fan-Studies

In 1992 Henry Jenkins published *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.²⁰ This text is widely considered the foundational work in fandom studies. Jenkins's treatment of fan fiction in *Textual Poachers* covers two chapters. The first is on the act (and activities) of writing and reinterpreting television through fan fiction; it covers zines,²¹ different ways that fan writers rework television through fan fiction,²² and a case study on an epic-length, classic *Star Trek* fan fiction.²³ The second chapter is devoted to the topic of slash fiction. Jenkins revisits Russ's argument that slash is female pornography,²⁴ Lamb and Vieth's contention that slash is "androgynous romance,"²⁵ as well as Penley's assertion that women fan fiction writers are committing fantasy identification through two male characters²⁶; he expands their arguments beyond the focus of K/S to fandoms outside of *Star Trek*. Jenkins takes an ethnographic approach to the practice of reading and writing slash fiction, rather than just looking for the meaning. He attempts to give a voice to the fans who enjoy slash fiction by examining how slash fans are both critical and uncritical about the genre, as well as recognizing that fans themselves discuss slash and what it means within the context of the fandom rather than

19 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. Deborah Couling (London & New York: Methuen, 1985); Radway; John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London: Methuen, 1978); John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1987); John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

20 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*.

21 *Ibid.*, 158-162.

22 *Ibid.*, 162-177.

23 *Ibid.*, 177-184.

24 *Ibid.*, 191.

25 *Ibid.*, 193.

26 *Ibid.*, 198.

simply reading and writing it without any mind to the pleasures and perversities of it. He emphasizes that the meaning of slash to fans is not uniform.²⁷

Lending a voice to fans is a recurring theme in Jenkins's work. In a later research, Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins, and Henry Jenkins made an unusual methodological decision to follow the discussions of slash in two amateur press associations (apa) in which they participated, and redistribute the paper they were writing to the participants of the apas as part of the writing process.²⁸ They thought this was a way to make sure that fans' understanding of slash could be represented more accurately in a period when non-fan academics were drawing sometimes harmful conclusions about fan fiction and its sub-genre of slash.²⁹ Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins's examination of the fan discussion on slash led to several conclusions that are still an important reminder to academics studying fan fiction today; it points out the divergences between fan and academic readings of slash. In the early period of fan studies, studies on fan fiction tended to revolve around K/S, though fans know that slash extends beyond this classic pairing and permeates every fandom. Academics tend to view slash as an isolated genre while fan understanding of slash is "in relation to many other re-readings and re-writings of program material." Additionally, Green *et al* assert that academics have traditionally seen slash as a static genre, but fans can observe that slash changes and evolves, for example in its construction of sexuality. Academics have searched for some unifying theory for the production and consumption of slash, but fans' reasons for enjoying slash are multifaceted and sometimes contradictory.³⁰ Their research honours the contradictory nature of fans' love for the genre, the

27 Ibid., 219-221.

28 Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins & Henry Jenkins, "'Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking': Selections from the Terra Nostra Underground and Strange Bedfellows," ed. Henry Jenkins, Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture (New York & London: New York University Press, 2006).

29 Henry Jenkins, Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture (New York & London: New York University Press, 1996), 61-64.

30 Green, et al, 64-65.

discussion of what constitutes the genre, and the appreciation and criticism of recurring themes in the genre.

Constance Penley's 1997 work *NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America*, is broken into two sections titled 'NASA' and 'TREK', the "/" between suggesting an erotic—or at least sexy—interrelation between the two.³¹ This first half is dedicated to NASA's publicity in which *Star Trek* did indeed play a part. Penley notes that there are many connections between NASA and *Star Trek*, even a period in the 1970s where the space agency hired *Star Trek* actor Nichelle Nichols to help recruit women and visible minorities into the agency.³² The second half takes up the topic of *Star Trek* fandom and K/S. In Penley's 1992 work on K/S she claims "[K/S] begged to be analyzed and theorized because so much could be learned from it and about how women, and people, resist, negotiate, and adapt to their own desires in this overwhelming media environment we inhabit."³³ In *NASA/TREK*, Penley acknowledges that the reasons fans enjoy slash vary widely:

The K/Sers are constantly asking themselves why they are drawn to writing their sexual and social utopian romances across the bodies of two men, and why these two men in particular. Their answers range from the pleasure of writing explicit same-sex erotica to the fact that writing a story about two men avoids the built-in inequality of the romance formula, in which dominance and submission are invariably the respective roles of men and women.³⁴

Penley's treatment of slash asks similar questions to Russ and Lamb & Veith, about the inherent meanings of slash in relation to the women writing slash. She explores the facets of writing masculine representations,³⁵ imagining utopian romance,³⁶ and overcoming misogyny in slash.³⁷ Ultimately, she concludes that this genre is a product of the early 1970s, in a period when many

31 Constance Penley, *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America* (London: Verso, 1997).

32 Ibid., 18-19.

33 Constance Penley, "Feminism," 484.

34 Penley, *NASA/TREK*, 125.

35 Ibid., 128.

36 Ibid., 125.

37 Ibid., 141.

amateur women writers spontaneously began to write “their sexual and social utopias through a futuristic and technologized version of [Fiedler’s] Sacred Marriage of males.”³⁸ Though Penley acknowledges the many reasons for reading and writing slash, this treatment of the topic displays the desire to unify theories of slash into a single conclusion, that women are writing “sexual and social utopias” in K/S.

Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* was published in 1992, along with Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers* and Penley’s “Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture.” Unlike Jenkins and Penley, Bacon-Smith distanced herself from the fan identity, seeing herself rather as the excited ethnographer, who has discovered a community of women who create away from the restrictions of male society.³⁹ *Enterprising Women* is a true ethnography, covering the practices of consumption of programmes and texts, the production of fan made materials (eg. fan fiction), and the different gatherings of fans.

Bacon-Smith does not focus solely on slash in her analysis of fan fiction, but she notes its significant place in the fan writing community.

Homoerotic literature *is not* the heart of the community, but my introduction to the genre came late in my study with all the symptoms of being headed off at the pass [...]. That does not mean K/S—generically, slash—is insignificant. In fact, for me understanding the genre was a necessary precursor to my understanding of the community.⁴⁰

Bacon-Smith’s analysis of slash recounts the observable sub-genres,⁴¹ the relationship between slash fiction and the source text,⁴² and how slash fans relate to the genre.⁴³ However, she does not see slash as being the most important genre of fan fiction as so many other academics portray

38 Ibid., 145.

39 Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 3.

40 Ibid., 226.

41 Ibid., 229-231.

42 Ibid., 231-232.

43 Ibid., 238-240.

it; instead, Bacon-Smith sees the genre of hurt/comfort⁴⁴ at the heart of fan fiction.⁴⁵ Other authors have noted that hurt/comfort in slash is often treated only as a device to achieve the end goal of slash—admission of romantic feelings and sexual union.⁴⁶

Bacon-Smith's analysis of hurt/comfort fiction offers a more radical rewriting of masculinity than homoerotic fan fiction can achieve on its own. She notes:

Sex and pain are the two situations in which masculine culture allows physical and emotional intimacy between adults of the opposite sex. If sex is prohibited by the social constraints under which the writer works, either because the participants are not of opposite sexes or because the writer feels constrained to limit sexual material of any kind in her work, she may substitute the only symbolic alternative to sexual intimacy available to her.⁴⁷

Though hurt/comfort fiction encompasses both same-sex and opposite-sex pairings, inside or outside of the context of a sexual relationship, Bacon-Smith notes an important aspect of hurt/comfort. "Hurt-comfort fiction, as constructed in the fan community is a complex symbol system for the expression of strong feelings that masculine culture defines as unacceptable."⁴⁸ Hurt/comfort shares a similar preoccupation with emotional intimacy between men to the slash genre, which is probably why the sub-genre is discussed so often in relation to slash.

Fan Fiction on the Internet

Early studies on fan fiction focused on fan-produced magazines (zines), but during the 1990s fandom began to migrate to the internet and expand. Bury notes that, though early cybertheorists believed that the anonymity of cyberspace would preclude the existence of women-only cyberspaces, yet these came to exist around fandom as women wished to avoid the

44 Hurt/comfort is both a theme and a device in fan fiction. As the name suggests, it focuses on the tension between pain and comfort, usually between two male characters who share a harrowing experience which ultimately improves their interpersonal relationship through intimate emotional revelations which come about as a result of the event.

45 Bacon-Smith, 268-270.

46 Lamb & Veith, 107; Russ, 84.

47 Bacon-Smith, 256.

48 Ibid., 270.

harassment that typically accompanied male-dominated cyberspaces.⁴⁹ Bury studied these women-only cyberspaces and their discussions of aspects of participatory fandom, including fan fiction, particularly slash. Like Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins, Bury includes segments of email correspondence with her respondents to elevate the critical fan discussions on the topic of slash. Unlike previous works on fan fiction, Bury notes that her respondents do not try to distance sexuality from slash and use textual evidence to support why they believe characters might be gay or bisexual.⁵⁰

This type of interpretation of the source-text represents a shift in thinking about fan motivations for writing fan fiction. Abercrombie and Longhurst use the incorporation/resistance model to highlight a “debate” that occurs, with the audience negotiating to accept or reject the ideological paradigms presented in the media.⁵¹ Early writers on fan fiction use a similar framework to examine slash fiction, discussing it in terms of resisting heteronormative gender roles. Jones finds this theoretical paradigm to be a little clunky because it “does not account for the deeper textual strategies of cult television, for its engagements with the fantastic, its function as a species of virtual reality, its emphasis on the implicit, or its invitation to immersive and interactive engagement.”⁵² Jones observes that slash occurs in cult television because the fantastical and adventure requirements of the plot necessarily thwart the social processes of heterosexuality and prevent the protagonists from settling down.⁵³ For Jones, Bury, and others who submit to Alexander Doty’s notion that queer readings of film and television are inherent,

49 Rhiannon Bury, *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2005), 3-4.

50 Bury, 90.

51 Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 9.

52 Sara Gwenllian Jones, “The Sex Live of Cult Television Characters,” eds. Karen Hellekson & Kristina Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 118-119.

53 *Ibid.*, 127.

slash is not considered resistant of the text because it relies upon elements that are already embedded in the source-text.⁵⁴

Elizabeth Woledge challenges the “tradition of viewing slash fiction as both unique and renegade form of literature.”⁵⁵ Instead, she views slash as a part of what she calls “*intimatopia*, because its central defining feature is the exploration of intimacy.”⁵⁶ While Bury suggests that is not a crisis of masculinity but of heterosexuality,⁵⁷ Woledge distances slash from any real representations of sexuality, saying instead that it is about intimacy between men being represented in a manner that is not allowed in the everyday.⁵⁸ Woledge acknowledges that this kind of intimacy is already embedded in source-texts, when they depict interaction between men as “face-to-face” rather than “side-by-side”.⁵⁹

Jones, Bury, and Woledge have slightly different conclusions about the meanings of slash, but all seem to agree that there are latent elements in the source-texts that permit, or even encourage a queer reading. Deborah Kaplan uses literary theory to probe the text of fan fiction itself instead looking at the fan communities.⁶⁰ Kaplan asserts that fans actively interpret and analyze the source texts in fandom through discussion, but also through the creation of fan fiction.⁶¹ Kaplan preforms a close-reading on three novel-length pieces of fan fiction, one from each of the three major genres: gen, het, and slash.⁶² She suggested that “close character

54 Ibid., 128.

55 Elizabeth Woledge, “Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream,” eds. Karen Hellekson & Kristina Busse, (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 98.

56 Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 99.

57 Bury, 80.

58 Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 102-103.

59 Elizabeth Woledge, “From Slash to the Mainstream: Female Writers and Gender Blending Men,” *Extrapolation* 46, no. 1 (2005): 56.

60 Deborah Kaplan, “Construction of Fan Fiction Character through Narrative,” eds. Karen Hellekson & Kristina Busse, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 134.

61 Ibid., 135.

62 See Appendix B for fandom definitions.

focalization allows fan fiction authors to explain the underlying reasons these non-canon relationships might be happening despite the text as on screen.”⁶³ Kaplan’s treatment of fan fiction steps outside of concerns about representing and resisting gender, but speaks rather to characterization and the ‘fannish’ interpretive work which relies heavily on sub-textual readings of the source-text.

Sheenagh Pugh also focuses on the literary aspects of fan fiction. She notes that the idea of ‘quality’ in fan fiction is not based on the same standards as literature and that there is a huge variation in terms of “literary achievement” in fan fiction both on the internet and in zines. Pugh dislikes the notion that fan fiction is considered to lack ‘quality’ compared to the work of paid spin-off writers.⁶⁴ While she does not talk about fan fiction being written in the context of resistance, Pugh notes that fan writers tend to be more in tune with zeitgeist than television writers—this is arguably even more true now than at the time Pugh was writing, given the increase of internet-access—and readily scrap elements of the source-text that do not fit. For example, the “70s bimbo” character was written out of fan fiction long before she was written out of television.⁶⁵

Francesca Coppa has written a great deal on the practice of ‘vidding,’ which is the fan practice of cutting and compiling video clips of television shows and movies and setting them to music to highlight aspects of story and character. Coppa’s “Writing Bodies in Space” views fan fiction as a “response to dramatic rather than literary [mode] of storytelling and can therefore be seen to fulfil performative rather than literary criteria.”⁶⁶ Unlike interpretations that rely on an

63 Kaplan, 139.

64 Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* (Bridgeland UK: Seren, 2005), 11.

65 *Ibid.*, 21.

66 Francesca Coppa, “Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance,” in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 218.

incorporation/resistance model or treat fan fiction as literature, Coppa notes that the fan relationship to characters is complex, and “fan fiction articulates that characters are neither constructed or owned, but have [...] a life of their own not dependant on any original ‘truth’ or ‘source’.”⁶⁷ This treatment appears to be unique, focusing on the stylistic aspects of fan fiction that emphasize the body and physicality of characters, rather than more literary authorial intent. This work emphasizes aspects of fun and playfulness as motivation for writing fan fiction.

The treatment of fan fiction has shifted in the last thirty years from models that stressed incorporating or resisting dominant cultural values, to focusing on the latent textual elements upon which fan fiction is built and a focus on the physical and visual qualities of fan fiction. One thing has remained clear: slash is still an area of interest in fan fiction studies, perhaps because neither academics nor fans themselves can adequately express a unified reason why a community of women is still reading and writing stories about intimate romantic relationships between men. While there are many smaller essays that focus on fan fiction that is either a subset of slash or outside of slash, the interest in slash and the myth that slash is unique among fan fiction remains. This literature review has focused on the topic of slash because of its prominence as a topic of study within the sub-discipline of fan fiction studies, but also because the scholarship on slash provides an important starting point for talking about male homosociality in fan fiction.

67 Coppa, “Writing Bodies,” 223.

Methods

According to Evans and Stasi, a search through major cultural and fan studies journals yielded almost no explicit reference to methodology or research methods, even though they had been expecting reference to the qualitative methods typically employed in fan studies, such as textual analysis or reference to lived experience.⁶⁸ The illumination of this apparent lack of overt methodology in fan studies has led me to conduct what is an unusual type of project, utilizing mixed methods rather than solely qualitative methods, which is a more typical (though not overtly discussed) choice for fan studies, and particularly fan fiction studies.

This project examines the recurring themes, tropes, and genres characteristic of fan fiction centring on the relationships of fictional brothers to probe the power relationships inherent in the texts. Examination of these themes in fan fiction is not unusual, though it is often undertaken qualitatively, typically close reading and textual analysis. This is not always clearly stated, but it is usually evidenced in the use of quotations and analysis of passages from fan fiction.⁶⁹ While most study of the content of fan fiction has traditionally focused on slash fiction, this project seeks to extend the understanding of how the gender representations of male characters are reshaped by women writers' fan fiction in both romantic and non-romantic genres. The data-set does contain some slash, but it was not focused strictly on the genre, which was once considered unique and subversive, but is now ubiquitous and frequently rather conservative in contemporary fan fiction. Instead, the focus chosen for this project is a cross-section of fics which emphasize the relationships of fictional brothers in order to examine how masculine and

68 Adrienne Evans & Mafalda Stasi, "Desperately Seeking Methodology: New directions in fan studies research," *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 11 no. 2 (November 2014): 5.

69 Two examples of papers that use textual analysis of Supernatural fan fiction which have informed both my research and the style of this project are Berit Åström's "'Let's get those Winchesters pregnant': Male pregnancy in 'Supernatural' fan fiction." Monica Flegel & Jenny Roth's "Annihilating love and heterosexuality without women: Romance, generic difference, and queer politics in Supernatural fan fiction."

feminine characteristics and concerns are blended in the reformation of these characters in fan fiction.

Methods and Sample

Much of the work on fan fiction appears to use more practices of textual interpretation or close reading to analyze the texts. Given the interpretive possibilities of textual analysis, I have opted to pair textual analysis with content analysis. Textual analysis is an important method for fan fiction studies, as it offers an approach that allows the ambiguities of the text to be probed, as well as offering a more complete understanding of the text. The addition of a content analysis gives a broader understanding of recurring themes and features in the sample and frames the textual analysis within the context of those thematic features, particularly when examining various genres across several fandoms. Mixed methods is a methodological departure for fan studies and perhaps even more so for studying fan fiction, as it is typically treated similarly to literary texts when examining the content and meaning, but combining textual analysis with content analysis allows the researcher to probe not just the differences of the texts, but also the similarities.

The project began with a non-random purposive sample of fan fiction which was selected from publicly accessible fics from Archive of Our Own (Ao3). Ao3 is a fan fiction archive that hosts any and all submitted fan fiction with no restrictions on topic, editing, or content.⁷⁰ There are many fan fiction archives on the internet but Ao3 is unique as it is funded through the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), a non-profit organization, which maintains that all fan fiction has a legal status as transformative work and is therefore not in violation of

⁷⁰ This is in contrast to another large fan fiction repository, FanFic.Net, which has refused to host certain works, such as fan fiction based on novels by Anne Rice or Real Person Fiction. These restrictions are listed in their rules of submission and will be explored in more depth in Chapter 2.

copyright law.⁷¹ Additionally, Ao3 has the option to upload fan fiction privately—making it accessible only by members of the Ao3 community who have logins—or to upload publicly—that is, accessible without a login. The sample was selected strictly from publicly accessible fics. As Ao3 has a sophisticated tagging and filtering system for searching the archive; the search allows for a search of tags associated with fan fics, as well as a parameter search that filters fics based on conditions such as word count.

The initial sample of 52 fics was chosen based on tag searches of “brothers” which then captures the similar tags of “brother,” “brotherly love,” “brotherly bonding,” and a word count parameter of 10,000 to 60,000 words. The word count parameter was imposed to target fics that would have substantial interaction between characters, and typically featured a plot; shorter fics often focus on moments or events that occur “off screen.” While these smaller fics may offer profound but compact character reflection, they do not offer as much material for analysis, which is the reason for the 10,000 word minimum. The 60,000 word maximum was imposed as a way to narrow the sample for consistency.

A search of the tag “brothers” on Ao3 with the word count parameter of 10,000-60,000 yields more than 1400 results. The initial 52 sample fics were chosen from this pool with the additional criteria of: being written in English, having a coherent summary, and being a product of a fictional source-text. This meant that fan fiction based on television programmes, films, or books featuring fictional characters were used for the sample. In an effort to narrow the scope of the project, real person fiction (RPF)—fan fiction written about bands, hockey players, real brothers, or non-brother actors who play brothers on television—was not considered for the project. The initial choice of 52 fics was based on these search criteria; as well, I tried to avoid

⁷¹ Archive of Our Own, “About Us,” <https://archiveofourown.org/about>.

using more than one fic from a given author. I also attempted to avoid overloading my sample with fics from larger, well-studied fandoms by limiting the inclusion of fics from these fandoms to less than ten. For example, fandoms such as *Supernatural* were over-represented in the initial search, but have already had a substantial amount of work written on the fandom, the fan fiction, and the television show itself, so only 9 *Supernatural* fics were selected out of a possible 1000+ that also featured iterations of the tag “brothers.” Other fandoms such as *Bonanza* and *Enlisted* are extremely niche fandoms, but have a strong focus on biological brotherhood in the source text; the inclusion of at least one fic from each of these fandoms seemed important for comparison. The sample was further reduced from 52 to 43 when issues of thematic fit became apparent upon a reading of the actual texts rather than just the summaries. The average word count of the 43 remaining sample fics was approximately 18,600.

The sample fics come from nine fandoms that feature brothers prominently in the fandom, if not in the source text. The featured fandoms are: *Game of Thrones/A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Harry Potter*, *Supernatural*, *The Hobbit*, *The Almighty Johnsons*, *Enlisted*, *Bonanza*, *Sherlock*, and *The Lord of the Rings*.⁷² The selected fics focus on the relationships of biological or adoptive brothers from source texts. In some cases the brothers were the focus of the main texts, as in the television series’ *Supernatural* and *The Almighty Johnsons*, while others had brother relationships that featured more peripherally in the source texts such as the relationship between Boromir and Faramir in *The Lord of the Rings* or a variety of brothers from *Harry Potter*.⁷³

⁷² For more information on the source-texts, see Appendix A.

⁷³ The temporality of internet-postings became a concern when I noticed weeks after the completion of my content analysis that one of the fics had been pulled from Ao3 by the author. This came about coincidentally when I was calculating the number of hurt/comfort tags featured in certain fandoms; the fandom in question was particularly tiny, with fewer than thirty fics between Ao3 and FF. Net. Ao3 offers the option to download fics to devices in MOBI, EPUB, HTML, or PDF formats. The archive FAQ states that this is to allow users with accessibility issues to enjoy fics offline. I had taken advantage of this feature in order to perform the content analysis and

In the Interest of Protecting the Privacy of Fan Fiction Writers

During the early stages of this project I decided to take fan fiction samples from Ao3 rather than another large repository. Ao3 is unique for many reasons, but was particularly useful because it offers the option for fan fiction writers to upload their material as either ‘public’—accessible to anyone on the internet—or ‘private’—accessible only to those who hold Ao3 accounts. Samples were taken only from publicly posted stories: those that could be viewed by any interested party on the internet. The analysis focused on features of the text and did not involve contact between the researcher and the authors of the publicly posted sample fics.

How the study of fan fiction should be approached in academia, particularly with concern to the privacy of fan fiction authors, is an important issue. Busse and Hellekson suggest that fans should always be contacted when using fan fiction or fan art examples in a paper. They claim a perception of privacy exists among fandom groups, even on the internet. Contacting fan fiction writers is not common practice with the exception of the *Journal of Transformative Works and Culture*, a journal with which these authors are closely involved.⁷⁴ Busse and Hellekson make two further suggestions, which are observed in this thesis. They suggest ensuring only pseudonyms are used in papers—rather than real names—to avoid ‘outing’ fan fiction writers.⁷⁵ Another suggestion is to avoid direct hyperlinks to fan fiction in bibliographic referencing as “this inconvenience means that readers have to be interested enough to do a little work to find the texts.”⁷⁶

mark-up passages for more in-depth textual analysis. For these reasons I will not be featuring any textual information from this fic outside of statistics in which it was included.

74 Kristina Busse & Karen Hellekson, “Identity, Ethics, and Fan Privacy,” Eds. Katherine Larsen & Lynn Zubernis. *Fan culture: theory/practice*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 44-45.

75 *Ibid.*, 39.

76 *Ibid.*, 45.

The importance of ensuring the privacy of fan writers is paramount because the nature of the material can be damaging to real-world reputations. Bury notes that one of her respondents faced real-world consequences in both her personal and professional life, first when her husband found out about her involvement in reading and writing slash and attempted to divorce her and use her involvement in fandom as leverage to gain custody of their children; secondly, when a fandom rival sent her former employer her online activities, for which she could have been fired.⁷⁷ Typically, fan fiction writers employ pseudonyms to avoid compromising their real-world identities. Following this guideline, I refer only to pseudonyms and do not include hyperlinks in my bibliography.

Content Analysis - Understanding Coding

I performed a content analysis, looking for recurring attributes of genre, tropes, spaces where stories are set, and statistics on siblings to frame the closer readings of the text. I used a simple present/absent system to determine whether or not fics had the recurring characteristics where 1 = presence of a characteristic, 2 = absence of a characteristic, 3 = present but irrelevant, 4 = absent and irrelevant. ‘Presence’ and ‘absence’ are straightforward responses, but sometimes the sample fics were not so straightforward. The answers ‘present but irrelevant’ and ‘absent and irrelevant’ came up most frequently in the category of ‘same-sex attraction has societal context’. This category was not pertinent to every fic, but as several fics within the data-set are slash, it is important to note that there is a history of early slash being interpreted as ‘female sexual fantasy’ that has nothing to do with male homosexuality.⁷⁸ These fics typically take place without any contemporary societal context as in the imagined future of *Star Trek*.⁷⁹ However, my experience

⁷⁷ Bury, 96.

⁷⁸ Interpretations of slash as ‘female sexual fantasy’ are particularly prevalent in (but not limited to) Russ and Lamb & Veith’s work.

⁷⁹ Russ, 85-86.

with slash in the twenty-first century cannot be reduced simply to ‘sexual fantasy’, and even within the data set, context is inconsistent. In an effort to illuminate the decisions to include ‘3’ and ‘4’ as a part of the coding process, I offer these examples of each of the four codes.

In “Caring is Not an Advantage,” teen-aged Sherlock Holmes refuses to attend a party because he has a suspicion his mother is trying to set him up with one of the local girls who is to be in attendance. Sherlock claims that she is placing this pressure on him as a result of her suspicion that Sherlock’s older brother, Mycroft Holmes, is “an inveterate pervert,” though Sherlock claims he himself is unconcerned about Mycroft’s sexual preferences. Mycroft has been unwilling to speak about his sexual preferences with his parents and is stunned to an angry silence by his brother outing him so callously.⁸⁰ This is coded as a ‘1’ as there appears to be a larger societal context where Mycroft is uncomfortable confirming his mother’s fears that he is not interested in women. The discussion takes place in the societal context of the gay son disappointing his mother by not following a heteronormative ideal of marriage and reproduction. Notably, this particular fic is not categorized as slash as the focus is not on Mycroft’s romantic life, but rather the interpersonal relationship between the two brothers.

“Growing Up With The Ri Brothers,” offers a contrasting example, where the male dwarf Ori is attracted to another male dwarf Dwalin. Ori’s older brother, Nori, is furious that Ori and Dwalin have consummated their love. This resentment stems from his own personal hatred of Dwalin which informs Nori’s impression that Dwalin is a ‘love ‘em and leave ‘em’ type of dwarf and his over-protectiveness of his little brother, convincing him that Dwalin will break his younger brother’s heart. This is not the case, and Nori eventually revises his opinions when

80 dioscureantwins, “Caring Is Not an Advantage,” Archive of Our Own, July 1, 2014, accessed 10 January 2016.

Dwalin and Ori are married at the end of the story.⁸¹ The setting J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy setting of Middle-Earth, but offers no explanation as to why the characters are completely unsurprised and unresistant to the idea of two male dwarves openly expressing their love. This is coded a '2' and it follows the representation of slash that Russ observed in the K/S zines of the 1980s where a societal context is not included—or is considered necessary—in 'sexual fantasy.'

"Brothers" is a fic that is tagged as slash, but does not place much importance on the romantic relationships of Mycroft Holmes (with his partner, Detective Greg Lestrade) or the somewhat more ambiguous but erotically-charged relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. The focus of the story is instead on the relationship of the Holmes brothers as they try to re-acclimate to the world where Sherlock has dealt with Moriarty and no longer needs to pretend to have died.⁸² The story itself makes no reference to sexual preference or reference to how sexual preference is situated in society; it is conceivable that this is simply unnecessary because to be openly (or quietly) gay in contemporary London is not particularly controversial. There is, however, a total lack of reference to heterosexual relationships outside of a brief reference to Mrs. Hudson's deceased husband, seemingly contributing to a general lack of context that earned this particular fic a designation of '3' signifying 'present but irrelevant'. This lack of context is fairly typical when the 'everyone is gay' trope is present; a trope which typically effaces female characters and focuses on several same-sex relationships between a community of men.

Many fics in this category received a '4' signifying 'absent and irrelevant'. Typically these fics were not slash but gen (or 'general' meaning they were not concerned with romantic

81 DwarvishWarriors, "Growing Up With The Ri Brothers," Archive of Our Own, April 23, 2013, accessed 10 January 2016.

82 SoonerOrLater, "Brothers," Archive of Our Own, June 12, 2012, accessed 10 January 2016.

pairings) and may have existed in a world in which same-sex attraction has a societal context, but as romantic entanglements were not at the core of the stories, it was simply not referenced. For example, in "Aghast," the four Johnson brothers are injured in a car accident and become entangled in the machinations of a fanatical Christian sect that seeks to purge Pagan gods from New Zealand.⁸³ There are a few brief references to heterosexual relationships, and no references to same-sex relationships; however, the programme is set in contemporary New Zealand where same-sex marriage is legal, but is not relevant to the fic. The lack of reference to same-sex couples or the societal context of homosexuality in contemporary New Zealand earns this fic—and the majority of gen fics—the designation of '4' for the *non-existence* or total irrelevance of a characteristic within a fic.

Content Analysis – Definition of Terms

Each fic in the sample was coded for whether or not they met each of the 60 characteristics using the parameters of 1 = presence of a characteristic, 2 = absence of a characteristic, 3 = present but irrelevant, 4 = absent and irrelevant. Additionally, each sample fic was marked as complete or incomplete, and given a numeric designation to identify the fandom to which they belonged. The characteristics were developed through a round of open coding to account for all possible iterations of categories; for example, the sub-genre of 'hurt/comfort' developed eleven characteristics to categorize the types of suffering that were being portrayed.

The number of brothers, whether there were multiple families of brothers, and whether or not sisters were mentioned or involved in the story were also included. Each fic was categorized by the presence or absence of fan-fiction generic features; the three major 'genres' of fan fiction are typically considered to be 'gen,' 'het,' and 'slash.' These three designations existed prior to

83 SpyderzW3b, "Aghast (Walking Together)," Archive of Our Own, April 7, 2014, accessed 10 January 2016.

internet fandom and are still considered important. Ao3 uses four categories for each fic: rating, content warning, complete/incomplete, and relationship/pairing/orientation; slash, gen, and het—as well as subsets like femslash—still figure prominently into the categorization of fics.⁸⁴ These categories determine whether the fic is considered general, or having a non-romantic focus; het (likely standing in for heterosexual), having a romantic focus between a male and female character; or slash, having a romantic focus on two same-sex characters.⁸⁵ The generic features of slash were particularly emphasized in the analysis, for example, tropes of ‘everybody is gay,’ ‘same-sex attraction has a societal context,’ whether or not consensual sex was featured, and whether or not a story was about incestuous relationships.

Sub-genres of ‘romance,’ ‘fluff,’ ‘hurt/comfort,’ and ‘PWP’⁸⁶ were treated as categories, as well as the features of these sub-genres; particularly the popular sub-genre of ‘hurt/comfort,’ for which eleven options on the nature of physical, mental, and emotional injuries were recorded. Whether or not the characters shed tears in the stories also seemed to be an interesting category, as tears are a specific signifier of vulnerability whether they are being employed in emotional distress, joy, or physical pain.

The next section records nineteen thematic features that are independent of fan fiction genre, such as whether or not characters are adults in the sample fics and/or the source texts, employ flashbacks, feature women, include older brothers behaving in a manner that is excessively protective, contain feelings of brothers having failed in the care or protection of each other, and evidence of rifts between brothers reconciled. These themes probe the tropes of

84 Archive of Our Own, <https://archiveofourown.org>.

85 Slash is sometimes a catchall term for both same-sex male and female pairings, though it is often used specifically as a descriptor of male sexual pairings in fan fiction. The term femslash is used to specify female pairings.

86 Stands for both “Porn Without Plot” and “Plot? What Plot?”.

Four Categories of Content Analysis Characteristics			
Sibling Information	Characteristics of Genre	Themes and General Features	Spaces
Two brothers	Gen	Adults in source-text	Home
Three brothers	Het	Adults in fic	Hospital/healer
Four brothers	Slash	Brothers of circumstance	Inn/Hotel/Motel
Five+ brothers	Brother romantic pairing	Warding/fostering	Work
More than one set of siblings	Guilt for lusting after brother	Older brothers raise younger siblings (source-text)	Travelling/ On the road
Sisters mentioned in fic	Brother rejects brother's advances	Older brothers raise younger siblings, absence of parents (fic)	Dungeon/ imprisonment/ capture
Sisters featured	Older brother "on top"	Women mentioned in fic	
	Consensual sexual encounter	Women featured prominently in fic	
	"Everybody's gay"	Flashback to childhood (in fic)	
	Same-sex relationships have societal context	Mention childhood (not flashback)	
	PWP (Porn Without Plot/ Plot What Plot?)	Unwanted interference in life from brother	
	Hurt/Comfort	Overprotective brother	
	Sexual assault	Brother fails in care of siblings	
	Illness	Male bodies treated as female	
	Harmful drug/ alcohol use	Masculine and feminine behaviours in characterizations	
	"On screen" torture	Age switching	
	Suicidal thoughts	Clothes sharing	
	Battle weary/ War-related PTSD	Featured brothers are main characters of source-text	
	Other uncategorised physical injuries	Reconciliation between brothers who have not gotten along	
	Severe mental illness	Fandom	
	Injuries from torture	Complete	
	Depression/Anxiety/ Event-related PTSD		
	Battle wounds		
	Tears/crying		
	Fluff		
	Romance		

Figure 1

brother-centric fan fiction as a whole rather than looking at the features of genre. The final section accounts for the space in which sample fics take place. Åström and Flegel & Roth both bring up space (particularly the domestic space) in their respective analyses of sub-genres of

Supernatural slash fiction.⁸⁷ This section was included as a result of these assertions, to see if the settings in slash fiction are comparatively different to other brother-centric fics. It includes six categories which are inclusive of multiple time-periods.

Mixed Methods

My research offers a valuable look into the reconstruction of masculinity by women and negotiating gender roles in non-commercial fiction. Fan fiction studies have always been preoccupied with portrayals of gender, however in the past it has largely been treated as literature or ethnography. This thesis seeks to depart from these understandings of fan fiction in order to look at the differences and similarities in representation of fictional characters by tracking the presence and absence of characteristics of the fan fiction texts. In addition to the content analysis, the project uses textual analysis to probe the subtleties of the fics that are not quantifiable. The content analysis exposes trends between genres and characteristics and frames the arguments in which the textual analysis is employed.⁸⁸ Within the context of the content analysis I use textual analysis to explore anomalies within the texts, provide examples that explore the similarities and differences between genres and fandom, and delve into the nuances and layers of meaning that can be unravelled through investigation of the text itself. Samples included in the textual analysis were selected from a cross-section of fandoms to probe the similarities and differences in the patterns that the data shows. Selections will not include descriptions of overtly sexual or excessively violent acts in the interest of protecting the fan-

87 Berit Åström, “‘Let’s get those Winchesters pregnant’: Male pregnancy in ‘Supernatural’ fan fiction,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 4 (2010): [3.4]. Monica Flegel & Jenny Roth, “Annihilating love and heterosexuality without women: Romance, generic difference, and queer politics in *Supernatural* fan fiction,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 4 (2010): [4.3].

88 All categories were cross-tabulated and subjected to a chi squared test of independence.

writers and fan-communities, though summaries of these acts may be included if they are integral to the context of the featured quotation.

As Evans and Stasi have noted, there is a distinct lack of references to methodologies in recent work on fandom studies.⁸⁹ This thesis is an attempt to examine the artifact of fan fiction for its differences and similarities to better gauge the frequency and perceived importance of topics not just of masculinity, but of mental health, sexual assault, and the valuation of love. By using content analysis to compare recurring themes in brother-centric fan fiction, it is possible to determine the relationship between genres and characteristics that recur in the sample and use this data to re-examine preconceived notions on the prevalence of genres, such as slash, that have previously enjoyed a privileged position in the fan studies canon.

⁸⁹ Evans & Stasi, 5.

Chapter One

“You Can’t Spell ‘Subtext’ Without ‘S-E-X’”: Investigating portrayals of gender in sex and brotherhood

This section title comes from the 200th episode of *Supernatural* entitled “Fan Fiction.” The episode is one of *Supernatural*’s “meta” episodes; it features an all-girls high school putting on a musical production of *Supernatural*, which is a book-series in the *Supernatural* universe. Dean becomes uncomfortable, complaining when he sees the physical and emotional closeness of the girls playing their characters, and the young director cuts him off, informing him “You can’t spell ‘subtext’ without ‘S-E-X!’”⁹⁰ *Supernatural* has always appeared to be fairly aware of the activities of their fan base, acknowledging them within the series periodically with their in-series device of a series of books written about the main characters, Sam and Dean Winchester, and various references to the activities of fans, including slash-writing.⁹¹ *Supernatural*’s in-universe recognition of the fandom is both gratifying and somewhat uncomfortable, shouting ‘hey, we know you’re out there’ and adding ‘and we know the dirty things you do with our characters,’ provoking reactions of both delight and embarrassment from fans.⁹²

This section focuses on the various portrayals of the brother relationship, including slash. As noted earlier, slash is a topic in fan fiction studies that has been heavily researched, and has been the subject of a number of different theories since the 1980s. The statement on ‘subtext’ is a reflection of one of the more current theories of slash that is influenced by Alexander Doty’s 1993 publication *Making things perfectly queer: Interpreting mass culture*, in which he argues

90 “Fan Fiction,” *Supernatural*, directed by Phil Sgriccia, 2014; Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Warner Home Video, 2015, DVD.

91 “The Monster at the End of This Book” *Supernatural*, directed by Mike Rohl, 2009; Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Warner Home Video, 2009, DVD

92 Jules Wilkinson, *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*, ed. Anne Jamison, (Dallas, TX: Pop Smart, 2013), 313.

that queer readings are not against-the-grain readings of television and films because there are already queer elements embedded in the text, but rather audiences have “heterocentrist/homophobic training” which encourages dismissal of queer elements in the text and ‘read straight’.⁹³ Jones argues that incorporation/resistance paradigms, which were frequently used in earlier fan fiction studies, do not adequately explain the nuances of slash; rather, she argues that slash has its roots in the interpretation of latent elements in the source-texts, a process which is similar to the queer readings of popular cultural texts that Doty notes in his work.⁹⁴

This section argues that in fan fiction, sexual politics still play themselves out in a power continuum that resembles the social and sexual construction of heterosexuality regardless of genre. While there are endless varieties and iterations of slash, the sample suggests that, though early studies of slash focused on the egalitarian potential of slash such as loving and working in the same space,⁹⁵ traditionally masculine and feminine qualities still dictate dominant or submissive social and sexual roles when character relationships are reinterpreted as sexual relationships in fan fiction. This appears to be particularly true when brothers are slashed. In addition to the ideas of masculinity and femininity in slash, there is also an issue of the privileging of romantic love as the perfect love, a perfect love that can only be achieved in slash fiction which has the appearance of operating outside of gender norms.

The sample was taken from Ao3, which was founded in 2007—well after the internet had been established as a space for fandom activities—and is accessible for free to anyone of any age with an internet connection; they do require contributors and account holders to be 13 years of

93 Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xi.

94 Jones, 119.

95 Lamb and Veith, 102.

age or older but such restrictions are notoriously unenforceable.⁹⁶ Much of the foundational research on fan fiction centred around zines and the associated fan writing communities in the 1980s. Zines had a much smaller set of contributors than internet fan fiction archives, who were typically adult women and often university-educated, while the demographics of contributors to online fan fiction archives vary broadly. Though these intricacies cannot be explored here, it would be remiss to ignore the differences in the availability, accessibility, and ease of distribution of fan fiction between the 1980s and 2000s, as the demographic differences in fan fiction writers is bound to change the landscape of fan fiction over time.

Since the 1980s, slash has been one of the most explored topics in fan fiction studies. Various theories on why slash has such great appeal to women in the fandom have been proposed, from it being pornography written for women by women,⁹⁷ to the fantasy and appeal of a work/love balance that could not be imagined within the confines of heterosexual marriage,⁹⁸ to the argument that there are latent textual elements that facilitate interpretations of same-sex romance.⁹⁹ I agree with Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins, that enjoyment and production of slash fiction is multifaceted, and no one theory will ever sufficiently unify the meanings of slash, not least because fans themselves read very different meanings into slash and their enjoyment of the genre.¹⁰⁰

This begs the question, what is ‘slash?’ A broad definition for slash is that it is fan fiction that centres on a (typically male) same-sex romantic or erotic pairing that is usually not overtly present or occurs sub-textually in the source media. To Jenkins, “Slash is not so much a

96 “Terms of Service,” Archive of Our Own, accessed 11 October 2016, <https://archiveofourown.org/tos#age>.

97 Russ, 82.

98 Lamb and Veith, 102.

99 Jones, 119.

100 Green, et al, 64.

genre about sex as it is a genre about the limitations of traditional masculinity and about reconfiguring male identity.”¹⁰¹ Jenkins offers a slightly different interpretation of slash than his contemporaries, given his position as a man in the woman-dominated world of fan fiction. I would not dispute this interpretation, I would merely suggest that there is a great deal of fan fiction beyond slash that addresses similar limitations of masculinity and male intimacy, as will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Questions of characters’ sexuality in slash further complicate the issue. Penley, writing in the early 1990s, notes that there is a sense of fans trying to skirt the issue, suggesting that fans do not see Kirk and Spock as gay, but rather so exceptional as people that gender becomes irrelevant to attraction.¹⁰² A decade later, Bury’s respondents used latent canonical elements to rationalize queer readings of *Due South*, suggesting that Fraser and Ray must be gay or bisexual to be together, and that to suggest otherwise would be queer denial and highly offensive.¹⁰³ Woledge suggests that sexual identity is not even relevant, as slash is not trying to emulate reality so much as explore questions of intimacy. She notes, “it is not so much homophobic as homindifferent.”¹⁰⁴ Woledge explains that writing slash about characters in futuristic, historical or fantasy settings removes “real life issues such as homosexual identity politics, homophobia and safe sex.”¹⁰⁵ A further question arises in the current media-scape: is it still ‘slash’ if the characters are canonically gay or does it become gay fiction?¹⁰⁶ Indeed, there is significant fan discussion on this and other issues of slash and canonicity as well.¹⁰⁷ For the purpose of this research I have disregarded the sexualities of characters in source-media as a

101 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 191.

102 Penley “Feminism,” 487.

103 Bury, 90.

104 Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 102-103.

105 Woledge, “Slash to mainstream,” 57.

106 Pugh, 98.

107 “Slash Controversies,” *Fanlore*, Accessed 18 Sept 2016, http://fanlore.org/wiki/Slash_Controversies.

factor in the classification of slash, and classified slash as any same-sex romantic or erotic relationship that occurs in fan fiction.

Given the focus of this research is on the treatment of brother characters in fan fiction, it might seem a little out of place to be talking about slash. However, there are two specific reasons why slash is integral to exploring this topic. Firstly, slash offers a point of reference for talking about other genres of fan fiction. As mentioned earlier, fan fiction has been broken down into three major genres along the lines of romantic configuration: ‘gen’ or general, which does not focus on romantic themes; ‘het’ fiction focuses on the romantic or erotic relationship of an opposite-sex couple; and ‘slash’ which of course focuses on a same-sex romance, though the romantic relationships of female couples is typically denoted as ‘femslash.’¹⁰⁸ The work that has been done on slash is partially in relation to these genres and covers topics such as emotional intimacy between male characters; this offers a starting point to talk about portrayals of emotional intimacy between men in fan fiction outside of slash. Secondly, and not unexpectedly, I did encounter some incestuous slash fic. There has been some work done on this in the *Supernatural* fandom that suggests it is a result of Jones’s latent textual elements rather than an act of pure “resistance”.¹⁰⁹ Though a less elegant but no less realistic interpretation might be:

108 It may be the case that this was the traditional breakdown in fanzines and early websites, however my experience has led me to believe that ‘het’ and ‘slash’ are sub-genres of romance, at least based on current practices of categorizing fics. In the mega-archives Archive of Our Own (Ao3) and FanFiction.Net (FF.Net), relationships, regardless of sexual orientation, are specified by tagging the characters with a “/” between their names. Ao3 has a 4 square rating/warning system for movie-based rating, warnings for character death, romantic category (slash, het, gen, multi), and complete/incomplete as well as an open tagging system. FF.Net offers ‘general’ and ‘romance’ under genre, slash and het are implied through romantic grouping options. It seems calling these the main genres of fan fiction is an oversimplification in the current fan fiction climate.

109 Catherine Tosenberger, “‘The Epic Love Story of Sam and Dean:’ *Supernatural*, queer readings, and the romance of incestuous fan fiction,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 1, (2008), doi:10.3983/twc.2008.0030: [1.1]. Monica Flegel & Jenny Roth, “Annihilating love and heterosexuality without women: Romance, generic difference, and queer politics in *Supernatural* fan fiction,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 4, (2010), doi:10.3983/twc.2010.0133: [2.5]

“it is a truth universally acknowledged that whenever there are two hot men in a TV show they must be slashed.”¹¹⁰

Within the sample only 9.3 percent of fics featured brothers in erotic relationships. This number is likely not reflective of the actual proportion of brother-incest fics. In the *Supernatural* fandom, slashing Sam and Dean Winchester was an immediate phenomenon; the first Sam/Dean story was posted only a day after the series premier, and the term “Wincest” quickly followed.¹¹¹ Some fans were uncomfortable with the idea of Wincest, but still wanted to slash the lead actors, so Real Person Slash (RPS), which focused on the actors Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles, became a substitute for the brothers.¹¹² Wilkinson suggests that there is not much difference in the themes of Wincest and gen fic about the Winchester brothers besides sex.¹¹³ Flegel and Roth suggest that Wincest and J2 (the name given to RPS about Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles) typically involve very different themes, with Wincest focusing on darker themes like desperation and claustrophobic relationships and J2 following a lighter, more traditional romantic formula.¹¹⁴

The Hobbit is another large fandom, which features similar incest and negotiation. This is particularly true since the release of Peter Jackson’s recent films. In the films the dwarven brothers Fili (Dean O’Gorman) and Kili (Aidan Turner) were made to look objectively more attractive than most of their co-stars by using comparatively less prosthetic makeup. A search on Ao3 reveals 1400 fics tagged Fili/Kili, 522 for RPS Dean O’Gorman/Aidan Turner, and—perhaps most interestingly—there is a third iteration of the characters, Anders Johnson/John

110 Wilkinson, 309.

111 Ibid., 309-310.

112 Ibid., 310.

113 Ibid..

114 Flegel & Roth, “Annihilation,” [1.2].

Mitchell, with 381 fics. This last one is particularly interesting because it combines characters which the actors have portrayed from two completely unrelated cult TV shows—New Zealand TV3’s *The Almighty Johnsons* and BBC’s *Being Human*—in fact, Anders/Mitchell accounts for almost half of all *Almighty Johnsons* fan fic of Ao3.

The sexual politics in incestuous-slash share some features with other male-male slash within the data set. Themes of dominance and submission in the sample fan fiction are highly coded as masculine and feminine through the perceptions of masculine power and physicality which operate externally to the relationship and a tendency to feminize the more submissive partner. In non-brother slash, two overt examples of feminizing characters through their treatment by brothers outside of the romantic relationship aligns with their treatment as the submissive partner in a sexual encounter.

HOB2 follows a typical hetero-normative romance pattern between the dwarves Ori and Dwalin. Ori admires the much older Dwalin from afar and Dwalin initiates the romantic relationship by offering to walk Ori home from work. After a number of familial struggles, the two dwarves are given the happy ending of marriage, a typical ending in heteronormative romance stories. Ori is consistently coded feminine throughout the story. The author highlights the feminized aspects such as the power dynamic that arises in relation to his romantic partner, Dwalin. Ori is younger, smaller, and more submissive than Dwalin and is the ‘receiving’ sexual partner—a feminized position. Even his own brother, Nori, treats him more as a younger sister in need of protection from ‘predatory’ Dwalin, than a brother capable of making his own decisions:

Nori slammed the door hard on Dwalin and Ori caught hold of his arm.

“What are you doing!?” Ori cried.

“Protecting you.” Nori snapped wiping his bleeding nose on his sleeve.

“From what?” Ori yelled.

“From him!” Nori marched past his little brother and into the kitchen where he knew his brother kept the first aid kit.

“It has been ten years, Nori!” Ori yelled following his brother. “I am not a baby anymore!”

Nori scoffed and wrapped a bandage around his bleeding hand.

“I choose who I want to be with, and I have chosen Dwalin.” Ori snapped.

Nori scoffed again.

“I love him Nori.” Ori said as calmly as he could.

“Oh yes and I can see the extent of his love alright.” Nori said walking to his brother and pulling his collar down to reveal deep purple marks.

Ori ran his hands over them and pulled his collar back up.

“I said it once I will say it again; the bloke’s only interest is to deflower innocents.” Nori said walking away from his brother and to the other side of the kitchen.¹¹⁵

This reaction seems to be the default setting of fathers and older brothers of young women in a variety of cultural texts. Nori’s assertion that Ori has been ‘deflowered’ indicates a particular notion about femininity and the value of virginity. Another *Hobbit* fic also features a similar scenario:

“Is that a fucking hickey on your neck, brother?!” Thorin repeated and Frerin blinked absentmindedly. He could hear the anger and outrage in Thorin’s voice.

The younger brother stood up and walked to the mirror, closely observing the reddish mark on his neck.

“I... think... yes...” he said slowly scratching the spot. Thorin was sitting on the bed tensely, his brows furrowed, looking at his brother like a predator.

“Who did that?” he asked with forced calmness.

“Ugh... I-uh...” Frerin returned to the bed and fell down on it with a huff. “I’m not quite sure, actually. We were drinking a lot last night.”

Thorin took a deep calming breath. If he would get the fucker who laid his dirty hands on his baby brother he would have his head and he would bathe in his blood.¹¹⁶

115 DwarvishWarriors, “Growing Up With The Ri Brothers.”

116 Rhydwin, “Brothers,” Archive of Our Own, August 27, 2013, accessed 10 January 2016.

Frerin does indeed remember his enthusiastically consensual sexual activities from the previous night and is obfuscating to keep Dwalin out of trouble with Thorin. It is also highly interesting that Thorin immediately believes that Frerin's sexual encounter had been with a male, though there is no establishing evidence that Thorin is aware of his brother's preference or indeed that sexual encounters between two men is anything outside of the societal norm. This fic also includes several elements that could be construed as 'romantic comedy,' such as the misunderstanding that Dwalin is interested in Frerin when he is actually madly in love with Frerin and Thorin's sister, Dis. It is also interesting that Dwalin is the dominant partner in both of these fics, as in the Jackson film adaptation of *The Hobbit* he is portrayed as a skilled fighter with tattoos covering his arms, hands, and bald head. He is also the first dwarf to arrive at Bilbo's home and barely speaks while he consumes Bilbo's food without asking.¹¹⁷ Based on these canonical traits, fan fiction writers often portray Dwalin as particularly tough, physically strong, skilled in fighting, reticent, and a desirable sexual partner. He is typically portrayed as one of the most normatively masculine characters in *The Hobbit* fan fiction.

It is apparent in these two examples that fan fic authors ascribe feminine qualities and female experience to the more submissive party in a relationship or encounter. Fan fic authors also factor age into understanding the balance of power in a relationship, and this is particularly obvious in these examples. In these fics, characters are feminized both inside and outside of relationship: Nori and Thorin speak down to their younger brothers Ori and Frerin. The elder brothers see them as victims of their lovers' wiles, rather than the enthusiastic participants they are characterized as in the fics. This supports a social construction of femininity within a male same-sex relationship, creating a sense of heteronormativity where one need not exist.

117 Peter Jackson, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, DVD (Warner Home Video, 2013).

In the cases of incestuous-slash in the sample, there were only 4 fics, a sample size which was too small to effectively apply statistical analysis, but was perfect for textual analysis.

Within the sample, the incestuous relationship was characterized as ultimately good (though not necessarily positive) in 3 cases and obviously toxic in the remaining fic; there was a sense in all of them that the love the brothers shared was to the exclusion of the rest of the world, a trend that Flegel and Roth noted was common in *Supernatural* slash.¹¹⁸ In “Faramir’s Adoration,” Faramir spends a great deal of time pining for his brother and allowing his feelings to get in the way of his normal routines when his brother returns to the city. Faramir reflects in solitude:

Boromir was the length and breadth of his world. It seemed when he was born he had opened his eyes into this world and Boromir was all that there was. There could not be any other living man more magnificent than his brother. Boromir who was and always had been his protector, his teacher, his confidant, his saviour...and his love.¹¹⁹

Russ notes that this feeling of longing and yearning is consistent with the sexual fantasy of the romance novel where the heroine waits and frets for a prolonged period. She notes, “Women are (quite realistically) wary of heterosexual activity. The endless analyses of motives and scruples for pages and pages, a delay that is in itself erotically arousing, since it’s a sexualization of what is or was presented to us as “the real thing” for women.”¹²⁰

In “Faramir’s Adoration,” Faramir is similarly preoccupied by his love for his brother, mirroring what Russ suggests is a the female experience. Additionally, even though the ending is ostensibly happy, as Boromir readily accepts Faramir as a sexual partner, the story ends mid-coitus with the brothers consumed by each other in sexual bliss, nothing existing outside of themselves, suggesting that there is something toxic about a relationship that is so exclusive. In addition to the female experience of waiting and worrying, Faramir displays feminine-coded

118 Flegel & Roth, [2.9-2.10].

119 Persephone, “Faramir’s Adoration,” Archive of Our Own, December 11, 2011, accessed 10 January 2016.

120 Russ, 87.

attributes and actions in relation to his more masculine brother: Boromir threatens to punish Faramir; as his brother steps from the bath, Faramir wraps him in a towel in an act of servitude; Faramir is younger and smaller than his brother; Faramir pines from a distance while Boromir conquers both militarily and sexually. Faramir's total immersion in the bliss and guilt that accompany his love reads as a feminine characteristic in itself.

Brownmiller and Steinem note that there is a feminine obsession with hearts as an accessory which symbolically “announce[s] an addiction to love that is beyond the pale and appropriate design of masculine ornamentation.”¹²¹ The symbolic obsession with love is present in a great deal of slash fiction where male characters demonstrate an addiction to love that is overtly un-masculine. To be entirely consumed by love is a common theme across all of the incestuous-slash fics in the sample, and certainly exists more broadly in both slash and het. The obsession with love and being in love is not always represented with such wistfulness. Indeed, Flegel and Roth assert:

When *Supernatural* slash stories represent ‘one true love’ in negative or subversive ways, then the romantic nature of such excessive love is called into question; in other words, stories which focus on the dangerous or darker elements of the love between Sam and Dean may provide critical commentary upon the one-true-love romance, as opposed to iterations of it.¹²²

One True Love or One True Pairing (OTP) portrays perfect love between characters, who, perhaps against all odds, are meant to be together. OTP encompasses het as well as slash and has several variations such as One True Threesome (OT3) which portrays perfect polyamorous love and BroTP which signifies a non-sexual best friendship. What is common in all of these is not perfect sex—though that is sometimes included—but perfect intimacy. The perfect intimacy presented in slash is itself a fantasy, as it requires a perfect understanding between partners that

121 Brownmiller, 215.

122 Flegel and Roth, “Annihilation,” [2.3].

is not achieved through working at a relationship, but rather comes from something more innate, even subconscious that connects the two characters. Bacon-Smith notes, “Women fan writers, [...] have developed telepathy as a code for the ideal form of understanding, empathy expanded to include thought as well as emotion.”¹²³

Slash’s treatment in fan studies has generally conceded that it is the pinnacle of writing about and critiquing love and relationships. Fans and scholars alike have tended to view some non-romantic sub-genres that deal with male intimacy—such as hurt/comfort—as a stepping-stone to slash at best and slash for a homophobic audience at worst.¹²⁴ Woledge rejects the idea that slash fiction is unique, rather, it fits into a generic division of literature she calls *intimatopia*, as its central characteristics focus on exploring emotional intimacy.¹²⁵ In contrast to Bacon-Smith’s observation on telepathy, “gold, to airy thinness beat,” offers a more perverse glimpse of the perfect intimacy of brothers sharing a telepathic link. In the case of this fic, fraternal love is privileged over romantic love, and neither are treated as perfect.

“gold, to airy thinness beat” is a semi-alternate universe in which some dwarf siblings grow up with a “soul-link” or telepathic connection that allows them to share thoughts, feelings, and images over a distance. The link requires maintenance to endure over time, and the fic portrays many older dwarf siblings experiencing a weakening or complete loss of the ability to share a telepathic connection with each other as they age and grow apart. As Fili and Kili are the youngest siblings in the colony, they share a particularly strong link and their uncle decides to take Fili with him on a diplomatic mission to a ‘far away’ colony, where Fili will be used to communicate messages to his brother in the home colony. Days before they are to leave, Fili

123 Bacon-Smith, 161.

124 Russ, 87-88; Lamb & Veith, 108; Bury, 72; Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 99.

125 Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 99.

suffers a severe injury so his younger brother is sent in his stead. Fili is consumed by disappointment and jealousy that his brother gets to take the adventure that was meant for him. After the negotiations, Kili continues to transmit the foreign sights and experiences to Fili, who angrily closes his mind to his brother's thoughts. This single act permanently severs the link between the two brothers.

When Kili returns, they exist uncomfortably, unable to address the loss for several years, until they set out together and are set upon by orcs. Even without the link they fight together seamlessly and effectively dispatch their enemies. They are both pleased by their teamwork and Fili takes the opportunity to address the rift between them:

“You must know,” [Fili] says urgently. There is no laughter in him now. “I was wrong to break the link. It was my own fault, and no failing of yours, that lay behind the separation. I would give anything to have it back, my brother.”

Kili feels something in his chest loosen that has been tight and hard for twenty years now – the certainty that he had done something unforgivable and pushed away his brother, the soul closest to his own. He grips Fili's arm in return, and tries his best to push everything he is feeling forward - not through a now-useless link, but through his own smile and gaze.

“I would as well,” he says honestly. “But Fili, don't you see? We don't need it any longer. We fight together as well as any linked Dwarves I have ever seen.”

“Because of the partial link?”

Kili shakes his head slowly. “No. When we were children, we were close because we were connected, mind and soul. Now, it is a closeness of our own choosing.” He feels a smile bubbling up, and makes no effort to keep it down. “We are as linked as ever we were, brother.”¹²⁶

Their perfect intimacy has gone from their relationship, but they are able to exist as co-operative individuals, choosing their own paths as a result. The story makes a case against the perfect intimate love of OTP, just as the claustrophobia of *Supernatural* Wincest does. It makes a case that chosen love, while lacking the oneness of a psychic link, is not less happy or less perfect, it merely requires interpersonal maintenance from both parties to operate effectively. In “gold, to

126 KivrinEngle, “Gold, to Airy Thinness Beat,” Archive of Our Own, December 14, 2015, accessed 10 January 2016.

airy thinness beat,” ‘perfect’ intimacy facilitated by telepathy is an illusion that subsides with age and experience. Once free of its invasive presence, Fili and Kili do not require the telepathic link to fight their enemies in harmony, or to communicate their feelings once they begin to communicate with each other verbally.

In an example of the toxicity of the “too intimate” relationship are two *Supernatural* fics. In “Make it all go away,” Sam suffers frequently from nightmares of his time in Hell and he wakes in a panic. Dean tries to draw Sam back to reality, but finds he is also struggling, and seeks out advice from their father-figure, Bobby. Bobby remarks that the only reason Sam is still with them is because he has had Dean to pull him through. While Dean is gone, Sam believes that he has been ditched at his lowest point by his brother and decides to leave the motel even as Dean is on his way back. Their co-dependant relationship has left them both with intense abandonment issues and each is determined not to be the one left behind, but Sam has become particularly vulnerable in his mental state. In an attempt to drive the images of Hell from his mind, Sam turns to heavy drug use. Several months later, Dean finds him and tries to help him deal with his addiction. In the end, their co-dependant relationship ends with Sam committing suicide rather than living with the torture in his head, and Dean following almost immediately.¹²⁷ Though this fic is not slash, the too-intimate relationship between the brothers leads to both of their deaths, echoing Romeo and Juliet who cannot bear to live without each other.

Within the data-set there were four fics which featured overt incestuous slash in three fandoms: *The Lord of the Rings*, *Supernatural*, and *Enlisted*. Three featured characters consumed with guilt and shame associated with feeling sexual lust for his own brother. One fic featured no sense of guilt about brothers having a sexual relationship, rather it featured a sense of

127 croatoancas, “Make It All Go Away,” Archive of Our Own, September 14, 2014, accessed 10 January 2016.

elation at the brothers returning to each other after having been apart for a long time. It should be noted that in two of these fics, the guilt disappeared when it was revealed that both brothers had been experiencing the same feelings of attraction, and a happy ending is made possible through this acceptance and consummation of their love through consensual sexual intercourse. The fic which did not feature a happy resolution was incomplete, but the darker themes contained within suggested that a happy ending may not have been possible or plausible.

“Control” is a slash fic which focuses on the guilt brothers Dean and Sam Winchester feel about their attraction to each other, as well as a host of other problems Sam has been repressing. This fic in particular is full of images of power that are reinforced through masculine and feminine imagery. Throughout the fic Sam suffers from body-image issues, an eating disorder, and a history of being sexually assaulted. These issues are certainly experienced by men, but are more commonly associated with women. Dean, meanwhile, can physically overpower the noticeably taller Sam, and does so to prove a point about how Sam’s health has deteriorated. Additionally, Dean takes sexual advantage of Sam when his consent is unclear. Throughout the encounter Dean thinks of the feminized aspects of Sam’s beauty: red lips, thick eyelashes, and how his emaciated body is delicate and fragile. In addition to issues of power and gender, the relationship is never portrayed as happy or healthy. Dean and Sam’s thoughts are consumed by each other throughout the text, worrying what the other will think of them if they reveal the sexual thoughts they have for each other.¹²⁸ This portrayal rejects the idea of OTP. Romantic love and existing only for the sake of the other, has made their lives claustrophobic and filled with paranoia.

128 Johnlockforthewin, “Control,” Archive of Our Own, February 5, 2016, accessed 10 January 2016.

These discussions of slash and intimatopic text are a long way from the idealized versions of love discussed in reference to K/S, where Kirk and Spock are both able to thrive as fully-realized people in the private (feminine) sphere of home and romance as well as the public (masculine) sphere of career and duty. Kustritz asserts, “Fan writing preys upon characters who reproduce traditional masculinity, traditional class and race hierarchies, and traditional relational scripts and reconfigures them into tales of communal societies, racial equality, and sexual transgression.”¹²⁹ However, within the data-set, even though these characters are “preyed upon,” rather than dismantling heteronormative ideals that contribute to dissatisfaction, elements of heteronormativity are replicated along other signifiers of gender and power. Traditionally masculine characters, those of greater physical prowess, and elder brothers remain dominant in relationships, while younger, smaller, and more emotionally-minded characters are feminized both sexually within their relationships and socially by those around them. Yet the audience is made to empathize with the struggles of these characters, struggles that are often familiar to women and that become grotesque in the bodies of men. Woledge asserts that slash is not subversive because it depicts sex; our mass media and culture are already flooded with that; it is subversive because it depicts love.¹³⁰

Since early fandom studies, slash has been discussed both in terms of resisting societal norms and relying upon latent elements in the source text, there are some difficulties with interpreting the data-set in either of these terms. The incorporation/resistance paradigm relies on conscious or unconscious decisions by the author to showcase or ignore the problematic elements of the source-texts and actively accept or reject elements by replicating or subverting them. Relying on latent elements of the text to produce slash suggests that these elements are

129 Anne Kustritz, “Slashing the Romance Narrative,” *American Culture* 26, no. 3 (September 2003), 376.

130 Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 111.

already present in the source-texts and that fan fiction writers are simply exposing queer elements that are not overtly obvious. While both of these interpretations are certainly plausible in a variety of texts from the data-set, they both tend to rely on certain elements of quality, such as canonicity. The samples within the data-set vary in terms of quality and canonical characterization, but these elements do not hamper the interpretation of portrayals of masculinity. I believe the subversive elements of slash within the sample are a result of the indignities of feminization and infantilization being visited upon male bodies under the guise of a romance. The absurdity of certain constructions of femininity become more apparent when they are enacted by male characters, such as obsession with love and the construct of the blushing virgin. Additionally, the powerlessness of the male characters who suffer from issues that pertain largely to women throws power differentials into sharp relief. These interpretations do not require authorial intent to expose the issues of normative power structures, as indeed they are reproduced in the fan fiction texts. The following chapter continues to build on the idea that masculinity is remade in fan fiction, but moves away from slash to less erotically-charged images of brotherhood.

Chapter Two

Stick Together and Change the World: How the bonds of brotherhood strengthen diplomacy and prevent disaster

The last chapter outlined how genre in fan fiction is divided along lines of romantic entanglement. As a result, ‘gen,’ ‘het,’ and ‘slash’ are traditionally considered the major genres of fan fiction. These are certainly considered to be important in terms of categorizing fan fiction—when posting fan fiction, Archive of Our Own (Ao3) offers six romantic pairing categories as well as the option to not categorize; FanFiction.Net (FF.Net) offers the category of “general” and allows the uploader to bracket characters together in a romantic pairing, though writers often specify in the fic summary whether the work is slash or het.¹³¹ However, character pairings can decline in importance when other attributes are present in fan fiction. The content analysis performed on the data-set did not reveal any statistically significant trends concerning genre, which I have interpreted as themes bleeding across genres. The lack of statistically significant data in genre-theme cross-tabulations suggests that genre has very little to do with directing the themes and topics which recur in fan fiction.

The last chapter argued against slash being unique among fan fiction for its portrayals of altered masculinity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jenkins has suggested that slash is “about the limitations of traditional masculinity and about reconfiguring male identity.”¹³² This interpretation of slash is not in dispute, but given the lack of thematic specificity between genres in the statistical analysis, I would argue that similar themes of altered masculinity occur across genres in fan fiction. This section examines how male cooperation and male homosocial

131 Archiveofourown.org; fanfiction.net

132 Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 191.

intimacy is valorized in the three *A Song of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones* (ASOIAF/GOT) alternate universe fics.

Alternate universe (AU) is a visible sub-genre across fandoms; at the time of writing there were about 418,000 fics tagged “Alternate Universe” on Ao3. There are various types of AU in fan fiction ranging from minor changes in canon to complete transplants of characters from their own universes into lives and jobs that do not resemble their own. These universes can be mundane minimum-wage jobs, criminal underworlds, fantastical worlds, outer space, or post-apocalyptic worlds. According to *Fanlore*, the fandom history wiki funded by OTW, these are sometimes called setting-based or character-based AUs as they completely remove characters from their regular settings and rewrite them as inhabitants of the world without overt reference to their canonical settings.¹³³ These types of AUs might feature Harry Potter and his fellow Hogwarts students as non-magical university students, The Three Musketeers in a zombie-apocalypse, or *The Hobbit* rewritten as an art heist.

Another common type of AU is the canon divergence.¹³⁴ This type of AU takes place within the in-text universe and extrapolates outward from a change in the text. It can be as simple as a character missing a train that would have taken them to an important plot point, or it can become extremely complicated as it moves out from that point of divergence, changing the original fates of the characters. Sometimes canon divergent AUs rewrite entire events, such as character deaths; these are sometimes called “Fix-it” fics because they seek to improve upon what appears to be a grievous error in the source text, and are typically much lighter on speculation outside of that event. There were about 16,000 fics on Ao3 are tagged “Fix-it” at the

133 “Alternate Universe,” Fanlore, accessed 7 October 2016, http://fanlore.org/wiki/Alternate_Universe.

134 At the time of writing it appears to be the largest specified sub-genre of AU on Ao3 with 63,350 fics tagged “Alternate Universe – Canon Divergence”.

time of writing. Interestingly within the catchall tag “Fix-it” about 650 are tagged “Not a Fix-it” suggesting that some quarters deride the sub-genre. Fix-it and canon-divergent AUs usually differ in their treatment of the source-text: Fix-it fics usually operate under the assumption that there is something wrong with the source-text while canon-divergent AUs may or may not operate under this assumption, but tend towards material that is more speculative.

Kaplan asserts that the core of fannish experience is around the interpretive community, and that fans engage in analyzing the source-text in various ways, including through the production of fan fiction.¹³⁵ While AUs may appear to stray substantially from the source-text, they do provide the opportunity for fan writers to perform analysis and explore character motivations and alternative outcomes. However, there is significant repetition in AUs and across all genres of fan fiction. When confronted with the question of the repetitive nature of fan fiction, Coppa suggests that theatre companies also engage in reinterpretation, and that it would be considered absurd to suggest there are too many reinterpretations of *Hamlet*, therefore repetitive elements of fan fiction are not more unnecessary than hundreds of productions of *Hamlet*.¹³⁶ These elements of fan analysis and repetitive reinterpretation are important to keep in mind when tackling the issues of power and cooperation in the AUs from the sample texts, as they suggest that fans wish to work out recurring issues and themes that arise in the source-text.

As mentioned above, the three fics analyzed in this section come from the *ASOIAF/GOT* fandom. The fics are based on characteristics from both George R.R. Martin’s high-fantasy book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the HBO programme based on this series, *Game of Thrones*. All three of the fics blend elements from both the novels and television series. Coppa suggests that this occurs because of the highly physical and visual style of writing in fan fiction. She

135 Deborah Kaplan, 135.

136 Francesca Coppa, “Writing Bodies in Space,” 229.

points out that both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* experienced a surge in fan fiction in the early 2000s when the films were first released, despite most fans expressing strong preference for the books.¹³⁷ I would speculate the same principal applies to *ASOIAF/GOT* fandom, as the fics incorporate visual elements—such as descriptions of the appearance of the actors rather than Martin’s written description of the characters—with textual elements—such as the choice to use the book-names of Asha Greyjoy and Jeyne Westerling, rather than their on-screen equivalents, Yarra Greyjoy and Talisa Maegyr.

Martin has expressed his distaste for fan fiction for a number of years, highlighting reasons such as a lack of original work and concerns over lawsuits from fan fiction writers for fan works that resemble an author’s own not-yet-published work.¹³⁸ Fans continue to write within this fandom however, and Martin—though he disagrees with the practice—has not banned the writing of fan fiction on his works as some writers have tried. FF.Net does not allow fan fiction writers to post work of published authors who have submitted requests that the website ban their work. The most notable names on this list are Anne Rice and Archie Comics, but George R.R. Martin does not appear on this list.¹³⁹ Presumably, the practice of acquiescing to the desires of the authors started on FF.Net because the operators feared the legal repercussions of not enacting these types of policies. Ao3 has no such restrictions as it operates under the non-profit Organization for Transformative Works which maintains that all fanworks are transformative and therefore legitimate and legal.¹⁴⁰

137 Ibid., 222.

138 George R.R. Martin, “Someone is Angry on the Internet,” Not a Blog (blog), 7 May 2010, (7:35 p.m.), <http://grrm.livejournal.com/151914.html>

139 “Fan Fiction Content Guidelines,” FanFiction.Net. Updated 20 November 2008, accessed 28 September 2016, https://www.fanfiction.net/story/story_tab_guide.php

140 “About the OTW,” Archive of Our Own, accessed 3 October 2016, <https://archiveofourown.org/about>.

Kaplan uses literary analysis techniques to examine three novel-length pieces of fan fiction to explore “the peculiarities of fandom.”¹⁴¹ She suggests that literary analysis can uncover the motivations of fan fiction authors.¹⁴² As this section focuses on the peculiarities of the text rather than the statistical evidence of the sample to examine the facets of gender and co-operation, it takes a similar approach to Kaplan’s and focuses on the construction of characters in fan fiction. The three *ASOIAF/GOT* fics, which are analyzed in this section, are all character-driven and pose the question “what if these characters had managed to stick together instead of getting separated?” In both the novels and television series, characters are separated by war, duty, and marriage pacts and are forced to forge new co-operative alliances outside of their families or to survive on their own.

In “Black Storms” issues of brotherhood and constructions of masculinity are central to the story. In this fic, the author asks, ‘what would happen if the characters Stannis Baratheon and Brandon Stark were fostered together as children as wards of Casterly Rock?’ This hypothesis not only constructs brotherhood between the unrelated Stannis Baratheon and Brandon Stark, but also, to a lesser extent, with the much younger Jaime Lannister, the son of the Lord of Casterly Rock. The fostering of Stannis Baratheon and Brandon Stark mirrors the canonical lives of their biological brothers Robert Baratheon and Ned Stark, who were fostered together at the Eyrie and forged a friendship that became the keystone to political stability in Westeros after Robert’s Rebellion. There is the additional level of alliance between two families through marriage, as Lyanna Stark, sister to Brandon and Ned, is betrothed to Robert Baratheon. This fic takes place during Robert’s Rebellion, which changed the ruling house from the Targaryens to the Baratheons about fifteen years before the beginning of the novel.

141 Kaplan, 135.

142 Ibid., 139.

In addition to the surrogate-brother relationships formed between the Starks and Baratheons, this fic also explores themes of familial duty, much like the source-texts. While in captivity with Stannis, Brandon thinks of his biological siblings as well as the Baratheons embroiled in war.

Brandon grit his teeth together harshly and though most of him was concentrating on being worried about Stannis, a mantra had started in his head that went *'Ned and Robert will have the four of you wishing for a fate as kind as that monster gave my father!'* And it was a mantra he believed in vehemently.¹⁴³

Brandon's absolute certainty that he and Stannis will be avenged by their brothers reveals a masculine construct of justice where violence and death can make things fair, though it clashes strangely with his preoccupation with Stannis's well-being. Though Stannis is too injured to speak while they are chained in the black cells, Brandon takes to both comforting him and speaking for him in his own delirium.

[Brandon] tried, for the sake of their friendship and the shame of Stannis'[s] pain being his fault, to comfort him instead of raging impotently.

"It will be all right," he said. He knew Stannis hated empty reassurance almost as much as empty courtesy, but he also knew he'd understand what Brandon really meant. "Ned and Robert will retaliate, and we live or die together, as brothers."¹⁴⁴

It is slowly revealed that the reason they are chained in the black cells is because the sense of brotherhood they formed in childhood forced Stannis to act while the Mad King tried to have Brandon killed. This diverges from the canon in which Brandon is strangled to death in front of the royal court.

In addition to Brandon and Stannis's constructed brotherhood affecting outcomes, Jaime Lannister's loyalty to the two men he grew up with is seen to change the outcome in smaller ways. Jaime's story in the source-texts is of a man torn between duty to his family and duty to

143 dehautdesert, "Black Storms," Archive of Our Own, June 20, 2014, accessed 10 January 2016.

144 Ibid.

his king; in “Black Storms” Jaime also demonstrates shame that he stood by the king while Brandon was dying and Stannis stepped in to help him. Later Jaime visits the Black Cells with a maester who claims loyalty to the Lannisters to tend Brandon and Stannis’s injuries. Jaime also brings news of the mounting war as the maester complains that the Baratheons and Starks are traitors to the king. Jaime insists that if the maester is loyal to his family he will keep quiet and treat Brandon and Stannis, even as Jaime is compromising his position as a member of the Kingsguard and potentially inciting the Mad King’s wrath.

Brotherhood is such a central theme to this fic that even the Mad King thinks there is something important about blood and brotherhood. He believes that he can put down Robert Baratheon and Ned Stark’s rebellion through some sort of blood magic that involves bleeding Stannis and Brandon and burning them to death with wildfire, even as the fighting is at the front door of the castle. In the moment they believe death is upon them, Brandon can think of nothing but his last moments with Stannis:

"Stannis?" [Brandon] whispered. He shuffled as much as he could without threatening to push the pots over; wildfire was notoriously unpredictable and he didn't want to risk the impromptu emulsion without first having one last conversation with the boy who for all intents and purposes was his little brother.

In turn, Stannis tried to move towards him, but he was too weak, and his head lolled onto Brandon's shoulder. But that was fine. Despite everything it made Brandon smile.

"I'll admit, you've always been the better tactician. What do you think of Aerys' plan to kill Ned and Robert by blowing us up miles away from where they are?"

The sharp exhale Stannis replied with could have said to have approximated a dry snort, which was as close as Stannis ever got to laughter.

"You're right. All hope is surely lost."

Stannis repeated the gesture. Then his shoulders shook again. And again. And Brandon was afraid that Stannis might have been... well, afraid.

"It's all right," he told him. Elia couldn't have heard him over her crying, but he wanted to do what he could for Stannis. "Ned and Robert made it this far. With Tywin on their side they can do anything, I know they can find Lyanna. Robert will marry her and start a dynasty that Westeros can be proud of. You and I will be together, Stannis."

There was another movement, weaker this time. Brandon glanced down and saw blood seeping onto his trousers from his bleeding wrist, and more dripping down from Stannis' wound, mingling with his. It was appropriate, and yet it made Brandon feel sick. He closed his eyes.¹⁴⁵

In their last moments, the only thing Brandon can think of to comfort Stannis is assuring him of their brothers' victory, the vitality of their families, and the cold comfort that at least they will die together. Robert and Ned save their brothers just in time and the outcome of Robert's Rebellion features several divergences from canon because of the close relationship between Brandon and Stannis. Stannis's actions in preventing Brandon's death appeals to Robert's sense of honour; as a result, Robert grants Stannis run of their ancestral castle of Storm's End while in the source-text Stannis defended Storm's End during Robert's Rebellion and Robert granted it to their more amiable youngest brother, Renly. Brandon and Stannis's connection to the Lannisters of Casterly Rock encourages them to declare for Robert much sooner than in the source-text and fewer lives are lost as a result of the Rebellion ending more quickly.

ASOIAF/GOT are diverse texts because of their lengths and the large number of characters that populate them: justice is inconsistent; some characters benefit from cooperation with others, while others do better on their own; conforming to frameworks of masculinity or femininity is useful for some characters, but unachievable for others; alliances are informed by marriage pacts and gifts of land. In "Black Storms" alliances are still sealed in marriage, but the alliance between the Starks and Baratheons is rooted in the brotherhoods formed between Brandon and Stannis, and Robert and Ned. As it is told mostly from Brandon's point of view, it probes webs of relationships as a source of power and safety. Gilligan suggests that women "see a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone."¹⁴⁶ This theme of

145 dehautdesert, "Black Storms."

146 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 29.

interpersonal relationships recurs in a variety of fan fiction genres, but is very evident in these gen *ASOIAF/GOT* fics.

While “Black Storms” speculated on a brother-relationship forming between two characters who had nothing to do with each other in the canonical events of the source-texts, “The Cripple King” and “allies in a time of war” focus on how the influence of brothers leads to more positive outcomes. In “The Cripple King” Ned Stark’s youngest sons, Bran and Rickon, refuse to go their separate ways as they did in the source-text. This refusal forces Bran to give up on the journey which appeared to be his destiny—to go beyond the wall—and instead, makes a claim as King of the North. Bran keeps his younger brother at his side and slowly negotiates his way across the North then further South.

While the story relies on some faulty premises—for example, Bran’s claim to ruler-ship is infeasible as the accident which paralysed him also left him unable to father children and therefore ineligible to rule—it exemplifies a re-working of masculinity that favours diplomacy, trade, and justice over conquest through brutality. Bran treats with various clans who are not all predisposed to alliances with his house; relying on his advisors, he is able to win over allies, create peace within his borders, and reunite his remaining family members. When Bran comes across Asha Greyjoy, an enemy and potentially valuable hostage, rather than exacting revenge for the destruction of his home by Asha’s brother, Theon, Bran appeals to her ambitions in order to make an enemy into an ally:

“I will make you the Lord of Iron Isles if you in turn swear fealty to the Winter Throne,” he says coldly to Asha Greyjoy, sitting in front of the Master’s chair in the great hall of Deepwood Motte. “You may continue raiding the Westerlands and the Reach until it has been resolved whether or not the Riverlands will join the Kingdom of the North. If they do not, you may raid them too, but I will not tolerate you raiding my Kingdom. Your heir, may it be your bastard daughter or legitimate son, will be fostered at Winterfell from their eighth name day until their fourteenth name day when they will return to you to learn what it means to rule the Iron Isles. This practice would continue as long as the Iron Isles are part of the North, the heir fostered at Winterfell for six years.”¹⁴⁷

147 Haely_Potter, “The Cripple King,” Archive of Our Own, February 26, 2013, accessed 10 January 2016.

Bran conducts most of his diplomacy in this manner: he seeks out enemies who have been scorned by their own families and binds them to his kingdom through promises of peace, resources for their people, and security. This is in contrast to his eldest brother Robb, whose anger and sense of filial duty drove him to call his banners and wage a war for the return of their father.

Bran considers the errors of his brother:

“Oh yes, I was quite content being a prince but then Robb didn’t heed my advice. I doubt he would have heeded my advice had I become a Maester and told him to rest in bed after being sick. Don’t misunderstand me, he was all I could have hoped for in a brother, but sometimes he was too proud for his own good,” Bran grumbles.¹⁴⁸

Robb’s stubbornness, pride, and refusal to rely on the counsel of others could be considered more masculine traits, even admirable, but Bran dismisses them as weaknesses. The characteristics Bran values in himself come from his inability to engage in the physicality of masculinity. He modestly confesses that his advisors engineered his victories. He acknowledges his reliance on them and his own drive to reunite what remained of his family:

“I became a King, the Cripple King in the North. I had the best advisers that could be found on such a short notice and I had time [to] think because no matter what, I wouldn’t be able to fight in a battle. But I also had a younger brother to protect and two sisters to find and bring back.”¹⁴⁹

The willingness to rely on counsel, watch battles from the sidelines, and reunite his family presents a much more tempered version of masculinity than is typically valued in a heroic character. Additionally, Bran demonstrates the desire to teach and nurture his younger brother and keep him safe by his side, to grant lordship to a woman in a fiercely masculine society, and to surround himself with women warriors and counsellors.

148 Haely_Potter, “The Cripple King.”

149 Ibid.

Bran's mercy is another feminized quality, which is seen as a strength rather than a weakness. When he and his retinue return to Winterfell, Bran notices Theon Greyjoy, broken and half-mad from previous torture, hiding among the village folk. Theon had betrayed Robb and taken over and destroyed Winterfell, but was captured by the Boltons and dragged away, leaving Bran and Rickon to flee the ruins of Winterfell. Bran recognizes that Theon, far from the arrogant man he had been, he is broken and barely sane from the brutality of the Boltons. Bran makes the decision to deal with Theon:

It was on his name day that Bran calls Theon to his solar, making sure to tell the servant to fetch [Theon] and to reassure the man that he had done nothing wrong if he showed fear. Still, it was a man shivering with fear that entered the half furnished room, wringing his hands and Bran compares him to the handsome man that had taken him prisoner in his own home.

"Come forth," he tells Theon who shuffles forward reluctantly and stops well out of Bran's hitting range. "Come on, closer, I'm not going to hit you, Theon."

The last word instantly sends Theon groveling on the ground, whining. "No Theon, only Reek, only Reek."

"Theon, come here," Bran commands, disturbed by the reaction the mere name had on Theon. The Bastard must have done some unimaginable things to him to cause this in the proud youth Bran had known.

Theon crawls closer. "Not Theon, just Reek," he keeps muttering even when he is crouching by Bran's chair, head barely on the same level as Bran's knees.

"Theon, there is only Theon and no Reek," Bran tells him, taking on a voice gentler than with anyone but his siblings, his hand coming to rest on top of Theon's head.

Theon flinches at the touch but when it doesn't hurt looks up at Bran.

Bran runs his fingers through Theon's thinned out hair gently, knowing it might be the first gentle human touch Theon has had in nearly a year. Certainly no one in Winterfell had touched him gently after he'd taken the castle but even before that he'd been on battlefield and if what Asha had told him was true, no one on Pyke had been exactly thrilled to have him back. "There is no need for Reek anymore Theon, Bolton and his Bastard are both dead. You can go back to Pyke to your sister, she has agreed to have you."¹⁵⁰

Bran lays hands on the kneeling Theon in an image of both absolution and extreme tenderness. Bran does not precisely forgive Theon, but agrees that he may live out his pitiful life in the halls of Winterfell as he is too frightened to leave.

While this fic does have some obvious “fix-it” qualities, such as exacting justice and pardons based largely on the subjective likeability of characters, the rewriting of Bran growing into a patient, thoughtful, even-tempered young man exposes values of a reworked masculinity. Bran works within a web of supportive friends and counsellors, in contrast to the strict hierarchy Robb imposed on himself, distancing himself from his bannermen, never allowing himself comradeship, and guarding his thoughts. Bran operates very much within Gilligan’s imagining of the feminine inter-personal web, rather than the masculine hierarchy as Robb did, and this quality is among the more feminized qualities that constitute Bran’s praised leadership in “The Cripple King.”

“allies in a time of war” features two other Stark brothers reuniting: Robb Stark and his illegitimate half-brother, Jon Snow. In the source-text Jon contemplates joining Robb when Robb calls his banners and marches south to free their father; Jon is prevented from joining Robb as he has already pledged his life to the Night’s Watch and is no longer allowed to participate in the political affairs of Westeros. “allies in a time of war” diverges from canon at this point asking ‘what if word of Robb calling his banners had reached Jon before he took his vow with the Night’s Watch?’ As a result Jon suffers very little crisis of conscience leaving the Night’s Watch and joining his brother’s war, and Robb benefits immensely from having his brother at his side.

While Robb’s new responsibilities as King of the North and leader of a rebellion wear him down and age him prematurely, Jon stays by his side and tries to help him bear the burdens

of his position. In the source-text, Robb makes a political misstep which ends the North's rebellion and results in many casualties. In order to secure an alliance with a large house—the Freys—Robb's mother Catelyn, arranges that he will marry a Frey daughter when the war has ended. Robb fully intends to fulfil this agreement until he meets another young woman whose insignificant house is allied with their enemies, sleeps with her, and marries her to preserve her honour. In addition to negating the marriage contract with the Freys, Robb's new bride's family cannot make any significant contribution to the war effort. In the source-text, Robb is without his closest friends and family during the incident, and ignores the advice of his bannermen, believing that marrying the woman he deflowered is the only honourable course. The marriage results in the Freys abandoning Robb's cause, and ultimately causes his downfall.

In “allies in a time of war” Jon catches up with Robb, though not before Robb has relations with Jayne Westerling. As it occurs to Jon what his brother has done, he realizes that Robb wants to do the honourable thing and marry her, but Jon knows that it would break Robb's vow to the Freys and makes Robb listen to reason as only a brother can:

Oh. Jon steps away from his brother and, of course he did and, of course he wants to make it right. Robb is honorable, he always has been. He feels the familiar twinge of regret – what if Father had done the same with his [own] mother, what of him then? – and forces himself to shake his head.

“Robb,” he calls. “You still cannot.”

His brother seems to cringe at that, staring at Jon right in the eyes for the first time that night, looking as though he does not believe what he has just heard. *And he has the right of it. I almost don't believe it myself.*

“Why Jon,” he says, [...] “I never would have expected you, of all people, to –”

Jon cuts him off with a punch, feeling a flash of pain in his knuckles and salty blood in his mouth where Robb has hit him right back.

They stand in front of each other after that, both starting warily, until Jon hears a laugh and realizes it's coming from him. “Do you –” he begins, and then stops to laugh again.

“Do you think that was treason, Your Grace?” He asks when he has had enough air. “Punching the king in the jaw?”

Robb is staring at him as if he were crazy, and Jon thinks he might as well be. *Grief makes strange things to men.*

“Listen,” he begins again, calmer. “You cannot marry her. I am sorry, Robb, I am so sorry – but you cannot. You need to leave now. [...]”

There is understanding in Robb’s eyes, and sadness, and anger. *He knows I am right, Jon thinks, he knows what I am saying is right, and he hates me for telling him.*

“As for Lady Jeyne, you needn’t see her.” His brother makes to protest, and Jon speaks up again before he can. “You mustn’t. I will – I will go and seek her out and explain, and no one else will ever know.”¹⁵¹

Jon performs the unsavoury task of informing Robb’s lover that Robb cannot marry her. While the fic does not extend to the end of the war, or even make clear who wins, Jon’s intervention prevents the failure of the campaign and the deaths of many characters.

The author of “allies in a time of war” acknowledges in the notes preceding the fic that it is a bit of a “fix-it,” but rather than have Robb make the decision not to marry Jayne on his own, the author uses the close bond that Robb and Jon share to navigate Robb into more rational decisions. Similarly in “The Cripple King,” Bran makes more rational decisions in the hopes of protecting his brother and reuniting his family. In “Black Storms” the brother-like bond which Stannis and Brandon share provokes Stannis to make a moral decision that prevents Brandon’s death, though they both suffer for his impulsiveness.

The healthy and open communication that accompanies the images of male homosociality in these fan fiction texts could be interpreted as a critique of western masculinity, but the additional tactics such as negotiation and diplomacy which are favoured, particularly in “The Cripple King,” seem to speak to an idealized view of leadership that is the result of blending masculinized and feminized traits. It is interesting that while the writers incorporate these gender-blended traits, it is not to the detriment of the characters’ existing masculinity, but rather blending traits that are considered ‘feminine’ contributes to the enhancement of some

151 L_Cloudy, “Allies in a Time of War,” Archive of Our Own, July 31, 2013, accessed 10 January 2016.

‘masculine’ characteristics—such as level-headedness and pragmatism. It is also notable that ‘feminine’ traits of mercy and gentleness exist alongside ‘masculine’ traits of vengeance and intransigence. Moreover, the emphasis on two characters working as a team, achieving what one on their own cannot, reiterates Gilligan’s observations about women understanding life through a web of interpersonal relationships compared to the desire of men to be alone in hierarchy. The character relationships in these fan fics transcend the hierarchies of age, birth, and kingliness to prevent the destruction these characters—particularly in the case of Robb in “allies in a time of war”—bring down upon themselves when acting alone at the apex of a hierarchical structure.

Chapter Three

Not the End of Hurt/Comfort: Blurring gendered lines of emotional intimacy

The title of this section refers to the title of a work by a well-known fan writer of the 1970s and 1980s, Leslie Fish. She wrote several prolific fan fics for zines that have been discussed by major figures in fan studies. The title of this chapter specifically refers to her fic “This Deadly Innocence, or ‘The End of Hurt/Comfort Syndrome,’” a K/S fic, that uses parody to highlight the tendency of fan fiction writers to use the hurt/comfort subplot as a way to get the two protagonists to admit feelings of love in the process of caring for each other’s physical injuries. In “This Deadly Innocence,” Dr. McCoy recognises that Kirk and Spock are getting injured as an excuse to offer and to accept physical comfort from each other within the limitations of masculine friendship. McCoy sends them on shore leave reminding them to pay special attention to each other. Seeing each other through some minor hurt/comfort scenarios and potential dangers, Kirk and Spock are eventually able to see, through caring for each other, that they are in fact in love with each other, and are finally able to admit to their love.¹⁵²

Hurt/comfort has typically been examined in the context of slash fiction, and treated as a device in fan fiction for (usually male) characters to initiate physical and emotional care for one another, culminating in a realisation that there is a profound love between them.¹⁵³ Hurt/comfort however, is not confined to slash—indeed, one of

152 Lamb & Veith, 107-108.

153 Ibid., 107.

Bacon-Smith's interviewees suggests it is an alternative to slash, as it focuses on emotionally intimate relationships rather than sexuality¹⁵⁴—and is frequently used as a device in gen and het fics as well, but it almost invariably revolves around emotional revelations and it is apparent that the sub-genre is a particularly female invention. The feminine act of caring for another when they are at their most vulnerable gives an impression of gender-blended characters when hurt/comfort focuses on male characters; these feminine-coded actions are carried out by male bodies regularly in fan fiction. This section argues that hurt/comfort is not just a bridge to admissions of romantic feelings, but rather is a bridge to a more nuanced rewriting of gender that celebrates the emotional connections that male characters can make with each other when the socially constructed barriers of masculinity are stripped away.

A typical hurt/comfort story involves a character pair—typically of two males—suffering an injury or illness as a result of violence, accident, or act of god, while the other character cares for the injured party. This often results in a strengthened relationship or understanding between the two as the vulnerability of the injury breaks down the socially erected walls and allows emotional honesty between characters. In the early 1990s Bacon-Smith suggested that some of the characteristics of hurt/comfort are: that it should not be sexually exciting; that the first hero's concern should always be for his companion, in spite of his own pain; that there is a clear good/evil distinction, as the inflictor of pain is doing so for his own reasons and they are not for any 'greater good'; and that it ends with true love between the heroes, though not necessarily

154 Bacon-Smith, 25.

romantic.¹⁵⁵ Bacon-Smith also noted that types of hurt-comfort typically fell into five categories: “get-’em” which has more emphasis on the pain and less on the comfort, which is now usually referred to as “whump,”¹⁵⁶ as “get-’em” or “get” has fallen out of use; slave stories, which can take place in an alternate universe; rape; death stories/wallows; and resurrection stories.¹⁵⁷ Woledge notes that hurt/comfort is often characterised by desperate situations that prevent immediate medical attention, making the “comfort” half of the equation necessary.¹⁵⁸ In addition to these characteristics and genres, the data from the sample suggests that in the last decade, fan fiction writers paid a great deal of attention to themes of mental health and addiction. Within the data set, 50 percent of the fics that feature hurt/comfort involved issues that were specifically coded as depression, anxiety, or non-war related post-traumatic stress; harmful drug or alcohol use is depicted in 18.8 percent of fics featuring hurt/comfort.

The visibility of mental health issues in fan fiction is likely due to several factors. In the last decade there has been increased awareness and openness in discussions of mental health in the media and particularly within the fandom: *Supernatural*'s Jared Padalecki openly discusses his own battles with mental health, and has started a t-shirt campaign with proceeds going to a charity which supports people struggling with depression and self-harm.¹⁵⁹ Stein notes that *Glee* actor Cory

155 Bacon-Smith, 259.

156 I have observed this on FF.Net and Ao3 for the last several years.

157 Bacon-Smith, 261.

158 Woledge, “Intimatopia,” 110-111.

159 Sydney Bucksbaum, “Jared Padalecki Opens Up About His Struggle with Anxiety and Depression: ‘I’m Not Alone’,” E!News, 24 July 2015. Accessed 5 October 2016 <http://www.eonline.com/ca/news/679954/jared-padalecki-opens-up-about-his-struggle-with-anxiety-and-depression-i-m-not-alone>

Monteith's death of a drug-overdose in 2013 prompted much darker themes in the show. These types of narratives are emblematic of what Stein calls "millennial noir" or the darker narratives that circulate in millennial-era fandom.¹⁶⁰ This sense of "noir" is embedded in the cross-flow of information on platforms like *Tumblr*, where fans flaunt their fandom identities, share messages about anxiety, depression, and mental illness, and embrace queerness in an online environment that celebrates openness in a bombardment of messages, gif-sets, and miscellany.

Additionally, many of these source-texts address issues of mental health, though it should be noted that they do not always address them very well. There are several examples from among the source-texts in the sample: on season 3 of *The Almighty Johnsons*, Axl is depressed and contemplates suicide; in *Supernatural*, Dean drinks excessively when he suffers loss and Sam is depressed and increasingly ready to give up his life in an act of 'heroism'; Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes has an addictive personality, though BBC's *Sherlock* has substituted nicotine for cocaine, and John Watson suffers from PTSD in the first episode of *Sherlock* upon returning from his tour in Afghanistan. These elements suggest that a more complex reading of hurt/comfort might fit within Jones's notion of latent textual elements contributing to slash fiction. These latent elements of hurt/comfort are not buried very deeply in the text. Jenkins has noted that *Supernatural* bears a lot of similarities to hurt/comfort fan fiction.¹⁶¹

160 Louisa Ellen Stein, *Millennial Fandom: Television Audience in the Transmedia Age* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 2.

161 Wilkinson, 315.

Lamb and Veith suggest that in K/S hurt/comfort is reliant on the two men's 'feminine' characteristics of "compassion, tenderness, affection, gentleness, altruism, and most important, the necessity for permission to initiate physical closeness."¹⁶² They suggest that this device is a reflection of women's socialisation in Western culture that does not allow them to initiate sexual relationships, while manufacturing an excuse for emotional admissions.¹⁶³ Woledge interprets hurt/comfort as a facet of what she calls "intimatopic texts," or texts whose "central defining feature is the exploration of intimacy."¹⁶⁴ She suggests that "in the case of all intimatopic texts, both slash and mainstream, [hurt/comfort] is used to enhance the eroticism of intimacy." This is because "Hurt/comfort provides a plausible way for any author to depict the increasing closeness between two men, because when the hero is hurt he is at his most vulnerable."¹⁶⁵ In both of these interpretations male characters are given an excuse to circumvent the confines of traditional Western masculinity, allowing themselves to form close psychological bonds. Creating these bonds requires revealing anxieties and weaknesses—actions that, according to Lamb and Veith, would undermine the state of competition between men.¹⁶⁶

Bacon-Smith suggests hurt/comfort is at the heart of fandom. She notes that in her inculcation into the fandom her mentor initially guided her away from hurt/comfort material, excusing it as "the special interest of a small group."¹⁶⁷ Two of Bacon-

162 Lamb & Veith, 108.

163 Ibid., 107.

164 Woledge, "Intimatopia," 99.

165 Ibid., 110.

166 Lamb & Veith, 100-101.

167 Bacon-Smith, 255.

Smith's interviewees side-stepped questions of hurt/comfort, and a third told her she stopped writing after she found out that one of her zine-published fics was considered hurt/comfort.¹⁶⁸ Bury found similar responses to the genre a decade later; of her respondents, three did not like it, two did not mind the occasional story, and only one claimed to really enjoy it.¹⁶⁹ In Bacon-Smith's study hurt/comfort frequently features psychological pain. In spite of the participants' unwillingness to address topics of hurt/comfort directly, Bacon-Smith notes that "psychological pain pervades all the genres, if not all stories."¹⁷⁰ This psychological pain is evident in my data-set as well, and is most obviously apparent in the aforementioned prevalence of such themes as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. Additionally, among the selections that featured hurt/comfort, 12.5 percent featured war-related PTSD or battle weariness in pre-modern settings—the number in the sample increased outside of the context of hurt/comfort, with a total of 20.9 percent of the sample featuring elements of war-related PTSD/battle weariness; 9.4 percent of hurt/comfort fics from the sample featured thoughts of suicide, compared to 9.3 percent of the general sample; among fics featuring hurt/comfort, the 18.8 percent that also featured alcohol or drug abuse dropped to 16.3 percent in the general sample. Given that Ao3 is less than a decade old, I would speculate that these specific themes in recent fics are reflective of the period in which there is greater awareness of, and publicised attempts to de-stigmatised mental health topics.

168 Ibid., 256-257.

169 Bury, 73.

170 Bacon-Smith, 267.

Given the frequency of hurt/comfort themes in the data set, it appears that hurt/comfort does have a prominent role in fan fiction, particularly among fandoms where the relationships centre around male characters. Within the sample 74.4 percent of fics demonstrated themes of hurt/comfort in the fan fiction regardless of whether or not they were tagged ‘hurt/comfort.’ It was particularly apparent that hurt/comfort themes were more likely to appear within the fan fiction of certain fandoms in the dataset, appearing in 75 percent of *Harry Potter* fics, 100 percent of *Sherlock* fics, 77.8 percent of *Supernatural* fics, 100 percent of *The Almighty Johnsons* fics, and 78.6 percent of *The Hobbit* fics. The actual tags for these fics did not necessarily specify whether the text would contain hurt/comfort themes: none of the *Harry Potter* fics, and only 33 percent of *Sherlock* fics, 66.7 percent of *Supernatural* fics, 50 percent of *The Almighty Johnsons* fics, and 21.4 percent of *The Hobbit* fics we tagged for ‘hurt/comfort’. This suggests that using the category of ‘hurt/comfort’ to label a fic may have fallen out of favour—in spite of the presence of textual elements of the genre—perhaps not to scare away prospective readers or perhaps because the authors did not feel small amounts of hurt/comfort merit a tag. It is also possible that this may be tied to the culture of the specific fandom, and even the differences in categorising fics across platforms. The frequent textual occurrences of hurt/comfort supports Bacon-Smith’s claim that it is an important element of fan fiction, even perhaps that these expressions of vulnerability and caring are at the heart of media fandom. Even so, the unwillingness to definitively categorise stories as hurt/comfort suggests that fans may be protecting the heart, though it may just be a case of generic fashionability.

However, as the fics in the sample often portray a cathartic release of emotion at the climax, the plots are not necessarily event-driven but emotionally driven. Stein notes that emotionally-driven fan-made material is the norm in millennial fan-culture, and flaunting these previously private emotional responses has become the norm in what she calls ‘feels culture.’¹⁷¹

Bacon-Smith points out that American television typically lacked emotional story lines that carried over beyond the end of an episode before *Miami Vice*, while British programmes like *Blake’s 7* “seemed overlaid with an existential weltschmerz that lent itself perfectly to the depiction of hurt-comfort.”¹⁷² This “existential weltschmerz” is certainly present in the five fandoms where hurt/comfort surfaced the most: *Harry Potter* has happily masqueraded as a children’s book series about witches and wizards for two decades, but the first book opens with a newly orphaned baby, and every subsequent book is shot-through with reminders that a bigotry-driven war nearly tore apart Britain’s wizarding society less than a generation earlier; BBC’s *Sherlock* features cinematic moments of loneliness, evidence of Watson suffering from PTSD early in the first series, as well as the emotionally intimate friendship of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson; *Supernatural* thrives on death, angst, and uncomfortable decisions made in moral ambiguity; *The Almighty Johnsons* is a series about Norse gods living in human bodies, but the added facet of being a part of a pantheon increases their dissatisfaction and increases the struggles of living day-to-day rather than generally

171 Stein, 156.

172 Bacon-Smith, 266.

improving the protagonists lives; Peter Jackson's three film adaptations of *The Hobbit* emphasize the sense of loss and rootlessness the dwarves experienced because of the destruction of their ancestral home a generation earlier.

The overarching sadness in these stories certainly lends itself to hurt/comfort themes, but hurt/comfort also comes up within the American shows that suffer from the "45-minute reset button."¹⁷³ While the majority of the nine fandoms do not suffer from this episodic amnesia, two of them do. *Enlisted* was a half-hour comedy on Fox; during its short life it typically focused on single-episode shenanigans, though it continued to highlight themes of mental health in the military week to week. *Bonanza* is a product of its time and place; it was a TV Western that ran on NBC from 1959 to 1973, which focused on the interpersonal relationships between the characters as well as social issues of the period, and typically worked in contained episodes.

Both of these media-texts make up extremely small portions of the sample and are minuscule fandoms in terms of creative output on Ao3. I assessed the total numbers of hurt/comfort fics on two platforms: Archive of Our Own, which uses unlimited tags to categorise fics; and FanFiction.Net which allows only two generic categories per fic to be chosen from a drop-down list. Between the two fan fiction platforms, *Enlisted* had only 18 fics—2 of which were categorised as hurt/comfort—meeting the average of 11 percent of fics from the sample fandoms categorised as hurt/comfort between these two platforms. *Bonanza* fics were tagged hurt/comfort in a substantial 33.6 percent of

173 The 45-minute reset button is a trope of American television. It means that episodes are self-contained and any emotional or traumatic events are contained to a single episode and are not addressed outside of their assigned episode.

cases on Ao3 and selected as genre in 13.4 percent of cases on FF.Net—compared to the average from the nine fandoms which came to 8.7 percent tagged hurt/comfort within the tags on Ao3 and 14.3 percent of selected genres on FF.Net. The frequency in these contained episode genres would suggest that hurt/comfort is not limited to those texts that rely on arcs rather than singular episodes, instead it can be used to “fill in the blanks” or extend the themes that already exist in the source-texts.

The next section will use examples from fan fiction to explore the facets of emotional intimacy between brother characters—whether or not it constitutes a rewriting of masculinity—and the dynamics of comfort. The first fic is from a New Zealand programme, *The Almighty Johnsons*. The programme centres around four adult brothers of Norwegian descent living in Auckland; Mike, Anders, Ty, and Axl each came to embody a Norse god on their respective twenty-first birthdays. In the programme, Anders is the vessel of Bragi, Norse god of poetry, and has the power to convince mortals to do things through his speech. Anders regularly uses this power to convince women to sleep with him, and after the fact, the women generally feel unsure why they did it.¹⁷⁴ While the programme has difficulty addressing that Anders’s powers have given him the ability to lure women into his bedroom while telling himself they wanted it, I have yet to see any fan fiction addressing the issue of rape, even in the limited fashion of the programme, which suggests Anders does unethical things with his abilities. Interestingly, Anders is often subject to a lot of hurt in fan fiction—he is

174 “Bad Things Happen,” *The Almighty Johnsons*, directed by Murray Keane, (2010; Auckland, N.Z.: ALL3MEDIA & South Pacific Pictures Limited/Public Media Distribution, 2015), DVD.

injured in all four of the *Almighty Johnsons* fics from the sample and sexually assaulted in two of them. Anders is the most popular character in the fan fiction and is tagged in 92.8 percent of *Almighty Johnsons* fan fics on Ao3; compared to his brothers Mike at 41.3 percent, Axl at 35.7 percent, and Ty at 27.1 percent.

In “Pride,” Anders Johnson is at the centre of some bizarre happenings at his PR firm. He receives several disturbing “gifts” at his business, including a dead cat; his client’s information list is subject to a privacy leak; and then his stalker sexually assaults him, leaving him in the hospital. The story might seem like a familiar narrative for women: a creepy man sends unwanted gifts and then attacks them for not appreciating the gifts or him; the media is littered with these stories both real and fictional. Bacon-Smith notes that hurt/comfort sometimes inflicts real female fears on fictional male bodies.¹⁷⁵ While this may not constitute gender-blending strictly speaking, there is certainly a distortion of gender-representation at work in this practice; men become victims to the sexual violence of other men, never reporting the incident to the police, and dealing with intense feelings of shame and loss of power; this mirrors the real-life experience of many women who are victims of sexual assault, as it is reported in very few cases.¹⁷⁶ Within the sample, sexual assault occurred in 18.8 percent of fics that had hurt/comfort features, though this varies somewhat between fandom and genre. Within the sample, sexual assault occurred in 50 percent of *Almighty Johnsons* fics, 22.2 percent of *Supernatural*, and 14.3 percent of *The Hobbit*.

175 Bacon-Smith, 271.

176 “Sexual Assaults,” Statistics Canada, accessed 28 October 2016, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/2010024/part-partie1-eng.htm#h2_9

In “Pride,” Anders wakes up in the hospital after the attack, with his eldest brother, Mike, sitting at his bedside. Anders is initially annoyed to see Mike as the two have a troubled relationship; he had been rejecting Mike’s help for the entirety of the fic, but this resolves in the moment of comfort:

He hadn't realized he had started to shake until Mike had sat on the bed and pulled him close like when they had been younger and he had had a nightmare. He scoffed at the fake caring and he hated the pseudo tender hand that gripped the back of his neck and guided his head down onto Mike's shoulder. He kept staring pointedly at the wall and let Mike hold him because he thought that's what Anders needed. To be loved in the arms of a brother he hated on most days. So he remained rigid and cold to Mike's embrace.

But then he caught a whisp of Mike's scent, the wood from the bar and a layer of soap and suddenly that was all he could smell to the point that he couldn't remember the musk of David or the overly sweet rank of perfume or the dead cat or the blood.

He sunk into Mike's hold, though he didn't return the hug and his arms just sat limp in his lap, and just tried to keep his breathing steady. But he didn't push away either. Because part of him needed it. It was like all the tension left his body for a moment and he was swallowed whole by the smell of his older brother. It smelled normal. It smelled safe. And it was the first thing Anders had smelled that hadn't reminded him of death.¹⁷⁷

The comfort that occurs in this scene expresses a familial love that goes beyond the friction in Mike and Anders’s relationship. This section not only exemplifies the comfort that comes at the end of a build-up of pain to the moment where comfort is eroticized, but also neatly demonstrates the bond that exists between the two brothers beneath all of the anger and disagreement. This moment represents the resolution between brothers who have disagreed, high in the selection from *The Almighty Johnsons* at 50 percent and 37.2 percent of the entire sample.

It is also notable that other common themes that were prominent in *The Almighty Johnsons* sample were “unwanted interference in life from a brother” (100

177 Princessfbi, “Pride,” Archive of Our Own, May 15, 2013, accessed 10 January 2016.

percent) and “overprotective brother” (50 percent.)¹⁷⁸ As the source-text is littered with tension between the four brothers, this is not unexpected, though in *The Almighty Johnsons* the tension evolves and the constellations of relationships between the brothers and the other main characters change with circumstances. Typically, Mike is at the centre of the tension, overstepping into his brothers’ lives—particularly Ty and Axl—when he thinks they are doing harm to themselves. Anders consistently accuses Mike of interfering in all of their lives too much—though he himself occasionally interferes in Mike’s affairs, including Mike’s contracting business and his marriage.¹⁷⁹ The tension between Mike and Anders in particular is replicated in fan fiction, where a resolution is possible only after Anders allows Mike to help him and Mike gives Anders both support and space, usually brought on by the hurt/comfort scenario. There is a sense in the source-text that in spite of regularly expressing his judgement of Anders’s behaviour, Mike has largely given up on him, and the fan fiction takes up this theme as well.

These themes of mending brotherly relationships frequently occur when characters are at their most physically and emotionally vulnerable in fan fiction. In *Supernatural* fic “Guilt,” Dean and Sam, aged 18 and 14, are left behind in a hotel while their father is on a case tracking a supernatural threat. Sam is recovering from

178 When coding for “overprotective” behaviour between brothers I interpreted behaviours that would appear to be excessive for the age and ability of the brother who is under protection. It might be helpful to think of it as “helicopter brothering”.

179 “You’ve Gotta Love Life Baby,” *The Almighty Johnsons*, directed by Murray Keane, (2010; Auckland, N.Z.: ALL3MEDIA & South Pacific Pictures Limited/Public Media Distribution, 2015), DVD; “I Can Give you Frigg,” *The Almighty Johnsons*, directed by Murray Keane, (2010; Auckland, N.Z.: ALL3MEDIA & South Pacific Pictures Limited/Public Media Distribution, 2015), DVD.

having broken several bones in his leg after “the monster of the week” caught him several weeks earlier, and Dean is left in charge of his brother’s care, working at a movie theatre to help pay for Sam’s physiotherapy and pain medication. Throughout the fic, both try to quietly help the other: Dean, by not letting Sam know how often he is checking in on him so his pride is not damaged, by dredging up the last reserves of his energy to work double shifts and take Sam to physio; Sam, by trying to make his expensive pain medication last longer by taking half-doses, by secretly working in the hotel office to help Dean pay for things, and by not letting Dean feel guilty over how lonely and bored he is in the hotel all day. They are both mired in guilt over the incident with the monster; Dean for not protecting his much smaller brother and running ahead, Sam for not being able to keep up with his brother and letting his injury ruin everyone’s summer.¹⁸⁰

The text alternates between the brothers’ points of view, each quietly dwelling on the guilt they feel about failing the other, until Sam drops a case of soda and wrenches his injured leg; when Dean admonishes him for pushing himself beyond his abilities, Sam finally lashes out in anger, insisting he was just trying to help and confesses his guilt about keeping Dean tied to a crummy job all summer. Sam confesses that he has also been working in the office and has saved some money for Dean to go to a concert, insisting that Dean take the gift for all he has done for Sam. They each reflect in their own point of view that they are fortunate to have the other as a brother. Particularly, they note qualities that are not typically masculine as the reason

180 Sam_Eller, “Guilt,” Archive of Our Own, April 6, 2015, accessed 10 January 2016.

they are lucky to have each other. Dean sees Sam as caring, and self-sacrificing and having “the biggest damn heart on the planet.” Sam sees Dean as protective and caring and loving.¹⁸¹ Though masculinity prevents them from voicing these thoughts, they both see these qualities that are both parental and feminine in the other as the reason why they cannot live without each other.

Among the *Supernatural* fics in the sample, 66.7 percent feature behaviour that can be characterised as “overprotective,” typically from Dean. This is not inconsistent with the source text, as Dean is so dependent on fulfilling his role as Sam’s protector that in Season 2 he sells his soul to bring Sam back from the dead.¹⁸² Surprisingly, only 22.2 percent of fics featured “unwanted interference” from the brothers in each other’s lives. In Flegel and Roth’s analysis of *Supernatural* slash, they noted that Dean/Sam often features themes of “claustrophobia, desperation, and suffering” and highlights their dangerous co-dependency.¹⁸³ Wilkinson remarks:

It is notable that Gen fic and slash in *Supernatural* fandom often share the same focus of intense emotional relationship between the main characters, which is of course at the core of the show. [...] In fact, aside from the sex, Gen and Wincest fics can be almost indistinguishable, leading to the coining of the terms “Gencest” and also “hard Gen”.¹⁸⁴

Typically, when addressing the differences between slash and hurt/comfort, some academics have noted that hurt/comfort that is not contributing to slash is just de-sexualised slash for those who might not be comfortable reading or writing about

181 Sam_Eller, “Guilt.”

182 “All Hell Breaks Loose (Part 2)” *Supernatural*, directed by Kim Manners, 2007; Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Warner Home Video, 2007. DVD

183 Monica Flegel & Jenny Roth, “Annihilation of love and heterosexuality without women: Romance, generic difference, and queer politics in ‘Supernatural’ fan fiction,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 4, (2010), [1.2]; [2.8].

184 Wilkinson, 310.

sexual activity¹⁸⁵; Wilkinson's observation, and the fandom's hair-splitting in terms of generic difference, suggests a fluidity exists between genres in fan fiction. I would suggest, based on the sample, that hurt/comfort is pervasive as a secondary characteristic of a great amount of fan fiction that deals fundamentally with the extremes of character relationships.

The aspect of gender-blending comes to the forefront in this emphasis on interpersonal relationship maintenance. Bacon-Smith notes that in fandom, character relationships, typically dyadic or triadic, are central.¹⁸⁶ She cites Gilligan to highlight the dynamics of relationships in fan fiction. Gilligan explains that women find the image of hierarchy morally problematic and often choose to live in a web of interconnected human relationships rather than strive for distance from others at the top of the hierarchy, which men find to be the more comfortable position.¹⁸⁷

The most represented fandom in the sample was *The Hobbit*, making up 32.6 percent. The reason for its over-representation in the data is twofold: firstly, it features four sets of brothers within immediate source-text, and a fifth set of siblings in the paratext; secondly, it experienced a surge in popularity shortly before the sample was collected. *The Hobbit* fandom experienced some minor popularity after the release of *The Lord of The Rings* in theatres, judging by the small spike in fan fiction for *The Hobbit* on FanFiction.Net starting in 2002.¹⁸⁸ The earliest *Hobbit* hurt/comfort fic on

185 Bacon-Smith, 256; Bury, 72.

186 Bacon-Smith, 146-147.

187 Gilligan, 62-63.

188 "The Hobbit," FanFiction.Net, accessed 11 Sept 2016,
<https://www.fanfiction.net/book/Hobbit/?&srt=1&r=103&p=372>

FF.Net was posted a few months before the theatrical release of the film in December 2012, likely coinciding with the release of publicity photos of the cast.¹⁸⁹ In the three-year period when the films were released, the material produced by *The Hobbit* fandom grew substantially; it has the ninth most fan fics under the category of “books” on FF.Net, approximately 12,000.¹⁹⁰ On Ao3, almost 22,000 fics are tagged under “The Hobbit—All Media Types”.¹⁹¹

In *The Hobbit* sample fics, 78.6 percent featured hurt/comfort themes. It featured the highest number of battle wounds—50 percent of *Hobbit* fics, and 70 percent of all battle wounds mentioned within the sample; this is unsurprising because of the danger of the setting. A variety of other hurt/comfort themes were represented in the sample fics from *The Hobbit* including: illness (21.4 percent), injuries from torture (14.3 percent), battle weariness (21.4 percent), depression, anxiety, or non-war PTSD (35.7 percent), and miscellaneous physical injuries not from battle or torture (50 percent). While none of these percentages constitute the highest numbers in a fandom, it is evident from the sample that the ‘hurt’ in *The Hobbit* fics, often stems both from physical and psychological pain.

“Race against time,” exemplifies the hurt/comfort genre, playing the pain and guilt high, and the comfort and emotional revelations just as high. The ‘hurt’ begins when Kili is accidentally hit with one of Fili’s stray arrows while the two brothers

189 “The Hobbit,” FanFiction.Net, accessed 11 Sept 2016,

<https://www.fanfiction.net/book/Hobbit/?&srt=1&gl=20&r=10&p=75>

190 “Books,” FanFiction.Net, accessed 11 Sept 2016, <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/>

191 “The Hobbit – All Media Types,” Archive of Our Own, accessed 11 Sept 2016, <https://archiveofourown.org/tags/The%20Hobbit%20-%20All%20Media%20Types/works>

practice archery. In this fic, this incident that causes the hurt also manufactures Fili's guilt, and initiates the beginnings of fractures in the brothers' relationship:

[Fili] wanted to run. He wanted to get away, to hide from what he had done, but he couldn't leave Kili. What kind of brother would he be if he did? No, he had to stay and face his error. No matter what punishment Thorin would have for this foolishness—this stupidity—nothing could be worse than witnessing the pain he had inflicted on his little brother, the one he had sworn to protect with his very life.¹⁹²

Even from this snippet of text from the second chapter, themes of responsibility and guilt emerge. As the elder brother, Fili's responsibility to Kili is already implicitly greater than the reverse. This is a pattern that was fairly evident throughout, as well as in the earlier examples from *The Almighty Johnsons* and *Supernatural*. These fics revel in the inordinate pressures placed on eldest children, and the brothers in these fics seem more compelled to rise to the challenges of defending and caring for their younger brothers than to shirk them.

In "Race against time," it is only after a long and complicated recovery that Fili and Kili can forgive each other and themselves for the various slights they perceive from each other, emotional injuries that are largely caused by the brothers' private anxieties about their relationship, rather than any overt declarations. This may speak to the anxieties of readers that even those closest to them do not really care for them. Fili's refusal to leave his brother's side, and Kili's promise to fight to live so Fili does not have to live his life in guilt, construct the sort of unselfish love that can exist only in fiction, and is most exemplified in hurt/comfort. Bacon-Smith suggests:

Hurt-comfort fiction as constructed in the fan community is a complex symbol system for the expression of strong feelings that masculine culture defines as unacceptable. In it, fictional theme and personal experience come together. Stories about suffering mask real

192 ItalianHobbit, "Race against Time," Archive of Our Own, July 7, 2013, accessed 10 January 2016.

suffering, sometimes immediate and overwhelming, sometimes remembered, and sometimes only observed. That suffering may objectively appear to be intense [...] but in many cases it may seem inconsequential to outsiders. No story serves only one purpose here; at least one level of meaning, and often many levels, lie close to the raw-nerved living surface of the writer and the reader. Outside of the group one may not speak of the real anguish of death and pain but must put on a 'brave front,' a 'stiff upper lip,' and go on.¹⁹³

The gender-blended quality of hurt/comfort is obvious in the selfless displays of compassion and 'feminine emotion'. Brownmiller suggests that compassion has been associated more with femininity, at least since Aristotle suggested that women are inherently more compassionate than men.¹⁹⁴ In hurt/comfort, compassionate acts are often assigned to male characters in defiance of typical portrayals of masculinity. However, it is not just the acts of caring and compassion that contribute to the sense of gender-blended characters in brother-oriented fan fiction. A sense of sentimentality was present in many of the sample selections; 60.5 percent of all fics in the sample mentioned shared childhood experiences between the brother characters, while 25.6 percent used flashbacks to childhood to further emphasise the bond the two characters shared. These devices were often employed in the service of nostalgic recreations of a time when inhibitions of masculinity did not prevent displays of emotion.

In "Caring is not an Advantage," a fic from the *Sherlock* fandom, Mycroft Holmes reflects on how several events from his childhood and youth shaped the tense adult relationship between himself and his younger brother. Mycroft recalls the death of Sherlock's dog: their manipulative mother and emotionally vacant father tell the seven-year-old Sherlock that the dog ran off to a better place. 'Mummy' manipulates

193 Bacon-Smith 270.

194 Brownmiller, 207-208.

teenaged Mycroft into confirming the story to Sherlock, as Mycroft is the only person he believes to never lie to him. When Sherlock discovers several years later that the dog had been put down, he suffers an emotional breakdown because the lie that their mother had thought would protect a child from pain had been confirmed by Mycroft:

“If you are going through hell, keep going.” Another great piece of advice by the great statesman himself. Mycroft couldn’t have said he was going through hell, but Sherlock certainly was, and it fell to Mycroft to help him through.

“You have learned the truth about Redbeard,” he offered carefully. “And you’ve discovered that we lied to you all those years ago, then never bothered to tell you otherwise.”

“I don’t care about them,” Sherlock said coldly. “But you, I’ve always believed you. You lied to me. You said you’d never lie to me, Mycroft! How many more lies have you told me? Can’t you see I can never trust you again? I wondered... I often asked myself... When I asked, that evening you returned from school, I knew you were going to tell me that Redbeard was dead, that it was just a story they had made up because they’re stupid and just assumed I wouldn’t understand. But then you...”

Mid-stride he cut off and his head vanished [into the tree-house] as abruptly as it had come into view two minutes ago.¹⁹⁵

Mycroft feels terrible both when he lies to Sherlock and also when Sherlock brings up the unforgivable betrayal as the source of his hatred for his brother. Mycroft ponders these pivotal moments in their relationship as he rides a the town-car, preparing to fly to Serbia and bring his brother home.

Brownmiller notes, “feminine emotion specializes in sentimentality, empathy, and admissions of vulnerability—three characteristics men try to avoid.”¹⁹⁶ In the four examples discussed in this chapter there are many instances of Brownmiller’s “feminine emotions;” empathy and vulnerability seem particularly obvious, as they are characteristics central to hurt/comfort. The demonstrations of these typically feminized

195 dioscureantwins, “Caring Is Not an Advantage.”

196 Brownmiller, 213.

characteristics by male characters contribute to a gender-blended version of the characters. The propensity for fan fiction writers to imbue their male characters with feminine characteristics could be interpreted many ways, from the eroticism of nurture to a female understanding of what masculinity seems to lack; the reasons may be layered, or perhaps not really considered and subscribed to as a part of generic convention.

Whatever the reason, it is obvious that in fan fiction hurt/comfort is *the* device to break the walls of emotionally reticent characters; the need to provide comfort or ward off the spectre of death forces characters to set aside the socially erected barriers of masculinity and allow themselves to be vulnerable, empathetic, and to form relationships of real substance.

Conclusion

Undertaking the study of fan fiction with an uncommon methodological approach has yielded results that favour an understanding of fan fiction that avoids elevating certain genres as more or less valuable or unique. The content and textual analyses both support my assertion that thematic elements are not unique to genre. While I had been expecting certain thematic elements—for example, themes of guilt—to show statistically significant relationships to specific genres or sub-genres, the lack of these relationships suggests several things about fan fiction focusing on brother characters, and perhaps fan fiction more broadly.

Firstly, the genre breakdown of slash, het, and gen, has very little bearing on the themes that are explored in fan fiction. Fan fiction as a whole often focuses on exploring the nature of character motivation and the interpersonal relationships of characters. The genre designations do have some writing conventions attached to them, however elements of sub-genre direct the themes more obviously than genre does. Slash, a genre which has previously been elevated as being more subversive than gen or het, probably attracted attention of both academics and fans because of its salaciousness and has become overvalued by virtue of having been more represented in study. Within the data-set, slash fics did not display elements that were any more critical of societal norms, concepts of love, or gendered power-relations than gen fic, in spite of the tradition of viewing slash as renegade. In fact, gen, het, and slash all showed a variety of critical and uncritical rewritings of the text. This analysis of genre suggests that the canonization of slash as the most critical and subversive genre of fan fiction may be

misplaced, however the endurance of the genre suggests that fan enjoyment of slash has not diminished.

Secondly, the hurt/comfort sub-genre, which has typically been treated as a stepping stone to the end-goal of slash (consummation), or an eroticization of nurture as an alternative to the sexual/romantic content of slash, seeps thematically across genres that centre around male homosocial relationships. Hurt/comfort is so prevalent in the data-set that it cannot be categorized as just a sub-genre or just a theme; hurt-comfort scenarios seem to occur across genres, often facilitating an emotional resolution for characters. It can be considered a sub-genre when the focus of the story is on the physical and emotional care given by one character to another. However only two fics in the sample focused specifically on hurt/comfort to the extent that it could be considered a sub-genre. Of the remaining 74.4 percent of fics in the sample that featured hurt/comfort, the scenarios were sparing and were typically incorporated to facilitate an emotional resolution. This scenario is of course not limited to fan fiction, and seems to appear in television and movies that are typically favoured by fandom. These scenarios emphasize emotional closeness and physical care in desperate situations to highlight the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships of the characters involved. This sub-genre is not tagged or categorized on archives as frequently as it appears thematically. As there is a tendency to hope for maximum readership within the fan fiction community, fan writers could perceive the ‘hurt/comfort’ tag as either risky or beneficial in terms of generating an audience for their fic. Additionally, interviews with fans by Bacon-Smith and Bury suggest (but do not overtly state) what

tends to be assumed but unsaid in fandom: hurt/comfort is targeted at a smaller section of fan fiction readers who may lack refined taste.

Lastly, the emphasis on slash in the early decades of fan fiction studies provided a theoretical basis for approaching intimacy in fan fiction, however that has been at the cost of treating other fan fiction as less critical and canonizing the fan fiction reader and writer experience as one that centres on resistance or focus on queer textual elements. I posit that this reduces the perceived importance of other genres in relation to slash, and reduces other experiences of re-reading and rewriting the source-text through fan fiction as less critical. What has become clear, particularly through the textual analysis, is the idea of quality in fan fiction. Markers of quality such as writers-craft and canonicity vary widely across all genres and sub-genres. This may be an area for future exploration, as perceptions of quality and commitment to writing fan fiction vary, with some writers proudly touting the research they have incorporated into their writing, while others shrug off a lack of investment with statements of participating for fun. Speculatively, these attitudes are related to age, class, and investment in the practice of writing fan fiction, but present an avenue of research that has not been fully explored as of yet.

This research contributes to a multifaceted understanding of genre and themes in fan fiction. The advantage of the methodological approach taken in this thesis is that it allows for comparison between themes and genre that has not been undertaken in previous studies. As a result, it negates totalizing understandings of genre and theme, such as the idea that the genre of slash is uniformly resistant because of its portrayals of same-sex

intimacy. Instead, the content analysis provides evidence that while some slash is subversive, a large amount also replicates very ordinary romance narratives and replicates heteronormative portrayals of intimacy. Employing mixed methods complicates the understanding of fan fiction and honours the variety and sameness that occurs in the vast collections of fan fiction which now reside, virtually unmoderated, on the internet.

Appendix A

Notes on Fandom Source-Texts

Fandoms Included in Data-Set

A Song of Ice and Fire is a series of epic fantasy novels by George R. R. Martin. The first novel *A Game of Thrones* was published in 1996. The series received increased exposure when HBO began airing *Game of Thrones* in 2011, a television series created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, based upon Martin's novels. The final series is currently in production.

The Almighty Johnsons ran for three seasons from 2011 to 2013 on New Zealand's TV3. It was created by Rachel Lang and James Griffin. The programme is about four brothers living and working in Auckland with a secret: they are reincarnated Norse gods. The show focuses on their mostly mortal struggles while they attempt to fulfil the quest of Axl/Odin (Emmett Skilton) to find the mortal incarnation of Frigg so they can ascend to Asgard.

Bonanza was a western series which ran on NBC from 1959 to 1973. Unlike a traditional western, it focuses on a ranch-owner and his three sons and their life on the Ponderosa ranch in 1860s Nevada.

Due South is a Canadian police comedy-drama which ran for four seasons from 1994 to 1999 about an RCMP officer who is stationed with the Canadian consulate in Chicago.

Enlisted ran for nine episodes on Fox in 2014 before its cancellation. It is a half-hour comedy about three brothers in the United States Army. It received acclaim for addressing issues such as post-traumatic stress in soldiers returning from tours in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Hobbit is a high-fantasy novel by J.R.R. Tolkien, published in 1937. Peter Jackson's film version gained popularity on fan fiction platforms after the release of the first film of the trilogy in 2012.

Harry Potter is a series of fantasy novels by J.K. Rowling, released between 1997 and 2007. Warner Bros. produced eight films to correspond with the seven books from 2001 to 2011. It focuses on a titular character, a boy-wizard who is a legend throughout the Wizarding World

The Lord of the Rings is a high-fantasy novel by J.R.R. Tolkien, split into three parts and released in 1954 and 1955. Peter Jackson's film version became a popular for internet fan fiction after the release of the trilogy in 2001, 2002, and 2003

Sherlock is a BBC series that changes the setting of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* from Victorian London to present-day London, created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. The first series aired in 2010 on BBC One, with subsequent series airing in 2012 and 2014. A fourth series is currently in production.

Supernatural is a fantasy horror series, which centres on two brothers who hunt and kill demons across America. It was created by Eric Kripke and aired from 2005-2006 on The WB and since 2006 on The CW. It is currently airing its twelfth season.

Other Fandoms Discussed

Being Human is a British supernatural drama created by Toby Whitehouse which ran for 5 seasons from 2009 to 2013 on BBC Three. The programme features a vampire, a werewolf, and a ghost who rent a place together and try to balance their mundane obligations with their supernatural afflictions.

Star Trek is an American science-fiction series created by Gene Roddenberry. The Original Series ran from 1966 to 1969 and is considered the founding source-text of modern media-fandom practices.

Appendix B

Chart of Acronyms and Fandom Terms

Term	Context
Ao3	“Archive of Our Own” is a fan fiction archive run by fans, funded by the Organization for Transformative Works.
apa	A type of zine that is produced by members, each contributing a section of criticism by printing as many copies as there are members of the group and sending them to a central editor to bind and distribute.
AU	Alternate Universe
FF.Net	FanFiction.Net. A Fan fiction Mega archive launched in 1998.
fic	Refers to an individual piece of fan fiction, whereas ‘fan fiction’ often refers to a body of work
gen	General. Fan fiction that is not romance-oriented
het	Probably a shortening of “heterosexual”. Fan fiction that focuses on an opposite-sex pairing.
hurt/comfort (h/c)	Is a sub-genre of fan fiction where a character suffers “hurt” (injury, illness, torture) and receives “comfort” from another character. It is a plot device that can be used to have characters expose their romantic inclinations for each other, set aside differences, or just be psychologically vulnerable with each other.
J2	The RPS pairing of Jared Padalecki and Jansen Ackles
K/S	refers to Kirk/Spock; a short hand used to denote that a piece of fan fiction or an entire zine is dedicated to the romantic/erotic relationship between the Captain (Kirk) and First Officer (Spock) from the original series of <i>Star Trek</i>
OTW	Organization for Transformative Works
OTP	One True Pairing; the fandom concept that a fictional couple could only ever be with each other. The perfect romantic pairing.
RPF	Real Person Fiction
RPS	Real Person Slash
slash	Comes from K/S; refers to the “/” that comes between the letters denoting that the romantic or erotic relationship the fic focuses on is between the parties indicated on either side. Slash now refers to all romantic or erotic relationships between two men in fan fiction (sometimes specified as M/M). Same-sex relationships between women in fan fiction are often denoted as femslash (sometimes F/F). A “/” is often used to denote any romantic or erotic pairing (or grouping of 3+) but “slash” still refers specifically to same-sex male relationships.
<i>ST</i>	<i>Star Trek</i>
<i>TOS</i>	“The Original Series”, usually in reference to <i>Star Trek</i>
Wincest	A particular genre of <i>Supernatural</i> fan fiction in which brothers Sam and Dean Winchester are paired sexually
Whump	A subgenre of Hurt/Comfort that focuses particularly on the physical or mental injury of a specific character. (eg. Kili!Whump)
zine	amateur fan magazine

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