

Jessica Freya Kem. Cataloging the Whedonverse: Potential Roles for Librarians in Online Fan Fiction. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. February, 2005. 57 pages. Advisor: Dr. David Carr

This study describes an online survey of fan fiction writers in the Whedonverse, the fandom surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel: the Series*. The aim of the study was to determine emerging issues and practices related to online fan fiction's accessibility, searchability, and preservation, and to explore potential roles for librarians in shaping these bibliographic issues and practices.

This exploratory research found that the fan fiction community is conflicted between a need for better accessibility and a need for community sovereignty. Issues such as the growing popularity of fan fiction online, the archival practices of the community, the urge to keep fan fiction "underground" in light of potential copyright battles are explored.

Headings:

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (Television Program)

Electronic Discussion Groups

Fan Fiction/Bibliography

Librarianship as a Profession

CATALOGING THE WHEDONVERSE:  
POTENTIAL ROLES FOR LIBRARIANS IN ONLINE FAN FICTION

by  
Jessica Freya Kem

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty  
of the School of Information and Library Science  
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in  
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

February 2005

Approved by

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Dr. David Carr

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## Introduction

Fan Fiction<sup>1</sup>, or fanfic\*, is fiction written by fans of a particular medium (usually a movie, book or television series), using characters, setting, or other elements of the medium as the basis for an original story. Often, fanfic places characters in alternate universes\* (“a world without shrimp”) or explores how characters would react to new situations or relationships not encountered in the original medium. Fanfic is a subversion of the receptive culture of television because it allows the fan to step out of the passive role of viewer and into the active role of author, and it does so without sanction from networks and producers.

Though it could be argued that any work of literature based on another (Chaucer, Shakespeare...) is a form of fan fiction, fanfic as it will be addressed here is believed to have developed in the *Star Trek* fandom of the 1970’s, partly in reaction to the show’s cancellation. Stories were exchanged at conventions and through fan-produced zines. In more recent years, fanfic has moved to the Internet, and it has flourished online, and in a wide range of fandoms\* (for a wide range of television programs, comic books, movies, and other media).

Cultural Studies and Communications scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith have been studying fanfic since the early 1990’s, but the field of library science, a field which should be at the forefront of scholarship regarding new forms of literature and new modes of reading and writing, has largely ignored the phenomenon thus far. To this

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1. For alternative definitions of fanfic and other terms used in this paper, see Appendix A, Fan Fiction Glossary. Within this paper, terms found in the glossary are marked with an asterisk.

end, I have conducted some exploratory research aimed at a better understanding of why fans read and write fanfic; how satisfied fans are with fanfic's organization, description, and archival practices; and what role librarians could play in improving access to fanfic.

The neglect of fanfic in the library science literature likely indicates that many librarians are either willfully ignoring fanfic or are wholly unaware of its existence. My stance is that the field of library science is missing a significant opportunity in this seeming ignorance of fan fiction. Fanfic is one of many emerging electronic forms of information and literature, and librarians neglect a central tenet of the profession if they ignore the emerging issues fanfic and other electronic information present: namely, how to create and maintain access to ephemeral forms of information. To ignore the phenomenon of fan fic is to ignore the duty of librarians to help provide access to information and good reading.

Because the world of fanfic is broad and ever-expanding, and because it is loosely organized around fandoms, I have chosen to focus this research on the "Whedonverse," or the fandom based on the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*\* and *Angel: The Series*\*, both programs created by Joss Whedon\* with interlocking characters and plotlines. It seems appropriately ironic to focus this exploratory study of the role of librarians in online literature on the program that introduced the character of Rupert Giles, librarian and proud technophobe.

## Literature Review

In *Dismantling the Public Sphere*, John Buschman (2003) describes the “crisis culture” of librarianship now. Over the past 30 years, as the profession has evolved at a rapid rate and attempted to keep current with technological advances and trends, librarians have raised concerns about the impact of electronic and online information on library funding and the general relevance of the profession as a whole. Buschman advocates for librarians, as we continually redefine ourselves, to actively seek out cases to test the boundaries and definitions of librarianship. “If librarianship is merely reactive, we will continue to see the same rapid cycles of crisis-naming and professional and institutional responses to the issues of the moment” (2003, 7). Jennifer Vinopal, discussing collaboration in academia as a way of expanding the role of the librarian, makes a similarly advocates active questioning of the boundaries of the profession:

If we are concerned about our usefulness to and future role in the academy (and the future of the academy itself), and we believe our core values remain legitimate, our goal should be to discover how to apply those values in ways useful to our users. This we can only do by examining and understanding the changes affecting the academy and our user community’s functioning within it. (2002, 93-94)

The library profession must take an active role in examining, shaping, and expanding its boundaries, and it must do so by looking to needs among users.

The American Library Association’s Core Values Task Force II Report (2004) describes a profession that values equal access to information, diversity of people and materials, intellectual freedom, preservation of the cultural materials of our community, and

social responsibility. Ours is a profession that seeks to preserve the vast array of cultural documents (“in all media and formats”), and to provide wide access to such materials and media. These abstract discussions of access to information and the right to read raise questions about how to provide that access when the reading material is published in a decentralized environment like the Internet (or like the zines\* of pre-Web fandom), and is inherently ephemeral and vulnerable. What is the library profession’s responsibility in such a case? And why should librarians care in the first place about fiction written about television characters?

Librarians have a long history of alternately ignoring and embracing new genres and formats of literature and information. Recently, we have been chastising ourselves for being behind the times on electronic forms of media and for being having ignored popular, genre, and series fiction. These wrongs are being righted, but perhaps not rapidly enough.

Wayne Weigand has been an outspoken proponent of more thorough reading research by librarians, arguing that librarians have lost touch with the most common activity that prompts and results from library usage: reading. In his essay, “Missing the Real Story” (2000), he criticizes current research and collection policies for overemphasizing the significance of the media format, and for attributing more significance (and hence, more budget allotments) to informational sources, to the detriment of popular, recreational reading sources. He identifies the mid-1970’s as the point in time of this shift, when library science education

had become convinced (along with most of the rest of the library profession) that access to “useful” information—and especially the kind that librarians thought people needed to become informed citizens and intelligent consumers—constituted librarianship’s most important professional responsibility. At conferences and in the research literature, discussions about the stories most patrons wanted were either marginalized or ignored. (2000, 11)

He advocates, in addition to this focus on “useful information,” a renewed focus in the profession on reading, reading habits, and reading materials. Citing the growing popularity of book clubs and one-book-one-community programs, he espouses the idea from literary and cultural studies that reading is an inherently social process, and he implores libraries to understand and advocated for their role in this social process.

Weigand’s concept of reading as a social activity is particularly resonant in fan fiction. Here, stories are written for a known community, and writers and their readers will often correspond about the story publicly, through comments posted along with the story. In a fan fiction community, the social connection is not simply among readers of a common text as in a book club, but rather an ongoing interaction between writers and readers. Weigand’s focus on reading has thus far illuminated print reading practices, but have not addressed the reading, writing, and sharing of stories in electronic formats and among members of a subculture.

Objections to a fuller study of fan fiction from a library and reading perspective may spring from a distaste for fiction written about television characters—and the value and quality of such fiction, but this argument would run counter to the growing sense in literary theory and in library practice that popular reading materials such as genre and series fiction are legitimately valuable. Weigand has looked to literary and cultural theory to make the case that the distinctions between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” literature are invalid (citing reader-response and cultural theorists from Stanley Fish to Herrnstein Smith), particularly to librarians, asking rhetorically,

Is it possible that that my seventy-six year old mother can get as much pleasure from reading a Christian romance written by Janette Oke as I get from reading Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserable*? And if it is possible for each of us to get equal pleasure from the act of reading these two separate texts, is it not also possible that the texts can be said to have equal value for each of us, despite the fact that our lives are so different? (1997, 319).

The cultural studies theories that underlie this shift in determining value in reading materials from notions of inherent values in a text to the perspective and social values of the reader has led to varied explorations of the varied materials we read, and why we read them. Oft cited is Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1991), which studied romance genre readers and their reading habits, preferences, and motivation. In *Cult Fiction* (1996), Clive Bloom turns his attention to the literary history of pulp fiction—"trash" paperbacks and magazines (the term trash being used both descriptively and facetiously)—and its readers. Serial fiction gets a similar treatment in Jennifer Hayward's *Consuming Pleasures* (1997), and series fiction is covered as well in Catherine Sheldrick Ross's article, "If they read Nancy Drew, so what?" (1995). This last article stands out among the list, as it is the only one written from a library science perspective. The resurgence in readers advisory literature, especially as exemplified by the *Genreflecting* series, helps to put this theory into collection and advisory practice in the library profession.

Likewise, guides for young adult librarians (perhaps the library professionals most concerned with keeping relevant to their users) have come out describing how to collect non-traditional library materials. *Thinking Outside the Book* provides practical advice on collecting and organizing video, music, zines, graphic novels, and audiobooks; *A to Zine* and *Getting graphic!* and many other titles describe such collections in more detail (Nichols 2004; Bartel 2004; Gorman 2003). However, the only professional library literature mention of fandom as a source of popular reading materials appeared in a two-page spread in *Voice of Youth Advocates* which directs librarians to a few official fan web sites for rock bands and popular cartoons, not to fan fiction archives or independent fan-created sites.

Strangely, the library profession has bypassed any serious consideration of fan fiction despite its recent popularity in the literature of the cultural, literary, and communication

sciences. Though not the first academic study of fan fiction, Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* (1991) has provided the dominant theoretical approach to the understanding and study of the fans their community, and its texts. Adopting Michel DeCerteau's notion of readers as "textual poachers" who poach meanings from texts as they are personally relevant, Jenkins sees fans and fan fiction as a very literal application of this theoretical stance. Fans poach (in both a literary and a legal sense, but copyright concerns will be addressed later) from the objects of their fandom (television series mostly, but movies, books, comics, and other media as well), constructing their own texts (literally). Jenkins deconstructs the stereotype of the fan in a brilliant analysis of the *Saturday Night Live* sketch featuring a *Star Trek* convention in which William Shatner tells his fans to "Get a life!" and instead interprets fan activities as creative, productive, and actively questioning—as opposed to passively absorbing—the mass media culture that surrounds us.

Jenkins's descriptions and analysis of the fan community that forms around these activities has also shaped much of the literature that followed. Jenkins describes fan reading as a "social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers," and notes that fandom does not distinguish between readers and writers because "[f]ans do not simply consume preproduced stories; they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art prints, songs, videos, performances, etc." (1991, 45). His description of the "alternative social community" of fandom whose "values may be more humane and democratic than those held by mundane society" (1991, 280) resonates throughout other studies of fan communities. In her introduction to *Theorizing Fandom*, editor Cheryl Harris conceptualizes fandom as

a spectrum of practices engaged in to develop a sense of personal control or influence over the object of fandom (such as a star or text), in which the outcome of one's involvement is not as important as the involvement

itself—recognized membership and interaction centering around a common object. (1998, 6)

Christine Scodari and Jenna L. Felder liken “the scientific theory of a distinct ‘pocket universe,’ within which events have no impact upon the real universe,” to describe the online *X-Files* Shipper\* community, explaining, “These mechanisms allow marginal audiences to collectively and actively challenge the meanings offered by commercial culture” (2000, 252). The fan community is not just a utopia or an escape for its members—it is defined by its outsider status, and as a result, tends to regard itself as underground. Sometimes, this perceived deviance is rooted in the marginal legality of what fanfic writers do—use copyright-protected characters in original fiction, and in many cases employing obscenity in the process. Reflecting on her own experiences writing slash\* fic, Kylie Lee describes feeling the need to hide what she was writing from her husband, despite his acceptance of her writing, and cites other writers who initially felt deviant in their slash-writing. It is through the slash community that these writers find “the simple comfort of dealing with like-minded people” (2003, 74-75). Both C. Lee Harrington (1995) and Cinda Gillilan (1998) use Elaine Showalter’s concept of the “wild-zone” to describe their respective fandoms (soap opera fans in the former case, *War of the World* fanfic writers in the latter). The “wild-zone” refers to “the realm of intense pleasure surrounding both viewership...and fanship” (Harrington 1995, 121), the “women-centered cultural space in which reinterpretation of the text can occur—both theoretically and demographically” (Gillilan 1998, 184).

Henry Jenkins, Cheryl Jenkins, and Shoshanna Green’s ethnography of a slash community provides insightful commentary on the community’s inner workings, largely provided through the fans’ voices, writings, and analysis, in their own words. K. Bannister, a fan quoted throughout the chapter, reflects,

I think part of what makes slash so alluring is not so much that it's taboo...but that *we* create it, our community, unhindered by all the rules of creative writing professors, of publishers and of marketers. We create the fiction we want to read and, more importantly, we allow ourselves to react to it. (Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 1998, 35)

Here, in an aspect of the fan communities that may raise issues for librarians, is the unmediated nature of fanfic: Would asserting a role for librarians as advocates or preservationists conflict with this sense of autonomy in fandoms? Nancy, another fan, commenting on fanfic's then-underground, print-based distribution, commented "Heaven forfend...that fanfic should ever want to go aboveground. Fanfic's greatest strength is that it *is* underground and alternative." (Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 1998, 36). Though fandom has gone far more "aboveground" since it moved to the Internet, the question remains as to whether its members still value this underground status.

The literature on fandom thus far has come out of the social sciences and cultural studies, and has primarily examined fandom through an ethnographic lens (Deery 2003; Lee 2003; Lewis 1992; Zweerink and Gatson 2002, in addition to those already cited above). This study will examine fanfic from a library science perspective, in light of the existing social science studies, to determine what roles librarians may play in creating access to fanfic for new readers and in preserving fanfic for future generations, while bearing in mind that the fan community may have mixed emotions about such intermediation.

## Methodology

For the purposes of my study, I have chosen to focus on the fan community of the “Whedonverse”—the shows produced by Joss Whedon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and its spin-off *Angel: the Series* (1999-2004). It is a well-established fandom, established in 1997 when the *Buffy* television series premiered. It contains a large body of original, fan-generated stories with a wide variety of genres, styles, and forms. Multiple fan conventions\* have taken place (for example, WriterCon, which has happened four times, most recently in July 2004 in Las Vegas). The writers and even creator/producer have been known to encourage fan fiction, both explicitly and implicitly. Writer Jane Espenson spoke at Writercon, encouraging fanfic writers directly, while Joss Whedon (allegedly and legendarily) once posted a message to the official Buffy discussion board inviting fans to “Bring your Own Subtext!” (Tjardes 2003, 71) It has even been suggested that the character of Jonathan was created as a wink to fans, an acknowledgement of “the complex relationship between fan and professionally produced *Buffy* texts” (Larbalestier 2002).

The shows themselves feature vampires, werewolves, and demons (as well as multiple armageddons) and are imaginative in nature. Fandoms that have really flourished (for example, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*) are generally imaginative—usually falling in the genres of science fiction, supernatural, or fantasy. The television programs explore fanfic tropes such as alternate universes, unlikely character pairings, and inside jokes. Both series have ended now (*Buffy* in 2003 and *Angel* in 2004), but fans are still

writing. The end of a series may invite more fic, as fans envision the futures of the characters. Fanfic in the Whedonverse is accessible on the Internet through a variety of types of sites: archives\*, which may be privately administered or may allow writers to self-post, may collect fic from any fandom, from only the Buffy/Angel fandom, or may be limited to a particular genre, character, or pairing; personal websites; LiveJournal\*, a community-based blog site; Yahoo Groups\* and other mailing lists; virtual series\*; and other permutations of fan sites.

Because the study is exploratory, and there is little precedent for a study of the bibliographic needs of fans, I have chosen a mostly qualitative methodology, adapting a grounded theory approach to an online survey. The online survey seems most appropriate given the online environment of the fan community, and the normal method of communication therein, online postings. The questions were written to gather basic data about the respondents and then to elicit reflection on some topics that could shape future study of the intersection between library science and fan fiction. The topics I am most interested in are first encounters with fanfic, thoughts about the future of fanfic, archivists' concerns, and potential roles for librarians in shaping (or not shaping) access and preservation issues for fanfic.

The survey was designed using the online web survey service SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>), a product which provides a usable, professional look and feel while collecting responses confidentially and securely. Before inviting participation to the survey, a test version was sent to a fanfic writer who tested the questions' clarity and survey's functionality. She had initial problems with her Internet security firewall but was able to enter the survey with a minor adjustment.

Respondents were then solicited through a variety of fan sites and mailing lists, in order to get a variety of fans from the vast reaches of the Whedonverse. Those who write *Buffy* or *Angel* fanfic and are 18 and over were invited through postings at:

*Yahoo Groups (subscription-based mailing lists)*

Better Buffy Fics: <http://tv.groups.yahoo.com/group/BetterBuffyFics/>

Buffy Fem Slashers: <http://tv.groups.yahoo.com/group/BuffyFemSlashers/>

Near Her Always: [http://tv.groups.yahoo.com/group/nha\\_fic/](http://tv.groups.yahoo.com/group/nha_fic/)

Writercon: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/writercon/>

*LiveJournal Communities:*

Porch Talk: [http://www.livejournal.com/community/porch\\_talk/](http://www.livejournal.com/community/porch_talk/)

Writercon: <http://www.livejournal.com/community/writercon/>

*Discussion Boards hosted by fanfic archives:*

Slayer's Fanfic Archive: <http://www.theslayer.net/>

Twisting the Hellmouth: <http://tthfanfic.ipbhost.com/>

The basic text of the invitation is provided in Appendix B.

For moderated mailing lists, I first sent the email to the list moderators (“mods”) for approval; as a result, the mods also helped to pre-test the survey, and did note some difficulty with getting to the survey through their Internet security firewalls. One mod who experienced the problem found a solution to it, and emailed it to me, which I was then able to provide to future respondents. What had been intended as a courtesy to the mods became an enormous aid in facilitating smooth data collection.

I posted the survey online for just over two weeks, from December 19, 2004 through January 3, 2005. I had planned on a two-week collection period, extended if responses hadn't reached 50 by the end, but was pleased to find over 70 responses within the first two

days posted! It was difficult to gauge how many responses to expect, or how long it would take to reach 50, because of the exploratory nature of the research, so this positive reaction was fortuitous. In all, 143 responses were collected.

Respondents entered the survey through a single Web page which contained an informed consent statement; at the end of the document, participants could enter the survey. The survey itself asked ten questions, some multiple choice, others open response. At the end, respondents could opt to provide an email address for potential follow-up questions. See informed consent document and survey questions in Appendix C.

Data analysis was performed using an adaptation of grounded theory as described in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Charnaz 2000). Responses were divided into two categories for analysis. The first group consists of those respondents who indicated that they had first published a piece of fanfic in 2001 or earlier (question 2) *and* had published/posted over 20 individual pieces of fanfic online (question 1); this group is composed of those with significant experience in online fanfic practices. This first cohort consists of 30 respondents, of whom 21 provided complete or near-complete responses. The second group consists of all other respondents, a total of 113, of whom 68 provided complete or near-complete responses.

This division is not perfect, particularly in its concentration on writing and publishing fanfic without acknowledgement of other fan activities such as reading. The literature indicates that the fanfic community does not distinguish between readers and writers as I have done, but the questions were so worded in an attempt to elicit responses from those whose fanfic is or has been available online, and thus may have more of a personal stake in bibliographic issues related to their own writings.

Also potentially problematic is the possible ambiguity in the questions' reference to fanfic—participants may have interpreted this to mean either fanfic in the Whedonverse or fanfic in general. The latter was intended, and survey pre-testers interpreted it as such, but it is possible that some respondents only listed their involvement in Whedonverse fanfic in these questions and thus appear less experienced than they actually are.

Data from the first, more experienced group was analyzed, coded and categorized, and these categories were then cross-checked with the responses from the second, presumably less experienced group. One exception is to be noted: question 6, which asked respondents if they manage a multi-author fanfic archive; all positive responses were examined. These categories, or trends in respondents' comments, are reported in the following section, represented by writers' original words whenever appropriate, following the model of Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins (1998).

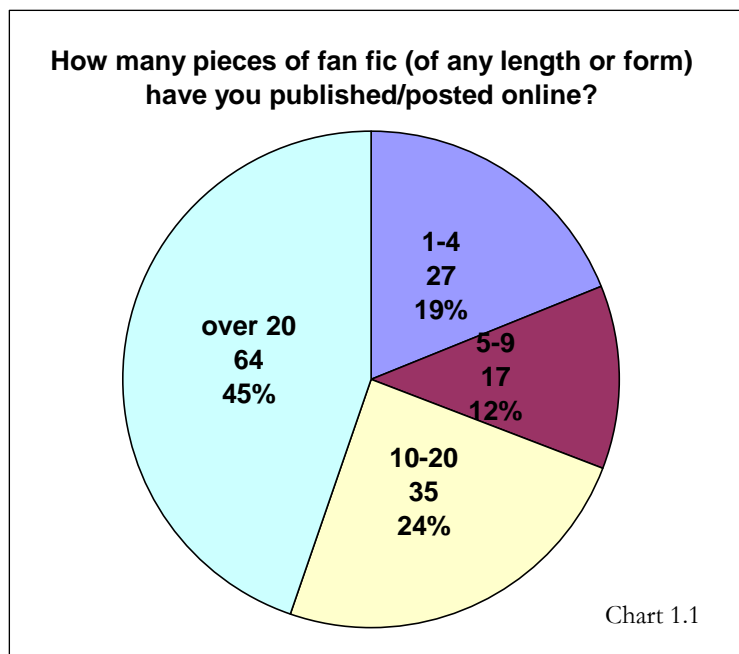
## Results

### 1. Survey Respondents: What are their fanfic publishing histories and practices?

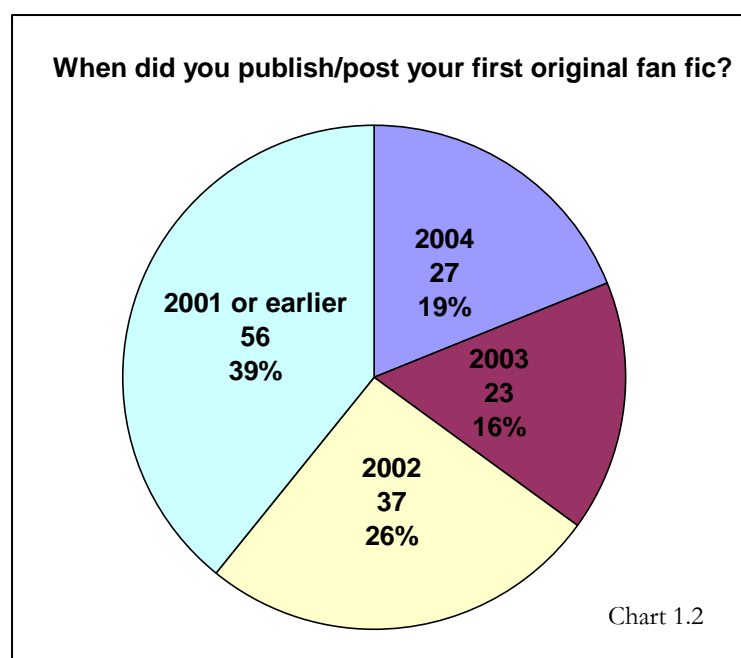
The survey began with questions soliciting basic information about respondents' publication of fanfic:

*How many pieces of fan fic (of any length or form) have you published/ posted online?  
When did you publish/post your first original fan fic?*

From the total of 143 respondents, 6 skipped this question. Of the remaining 137 (see chart 1.1), nearly half (45%) have published over 20 pieces of fan fiction, and a clear majority have published at least 10 pieces (69%). As noted earlier, these results could be slightly skewed if respondents referred to fanfic in any fandom or in the Whedonverse alone.



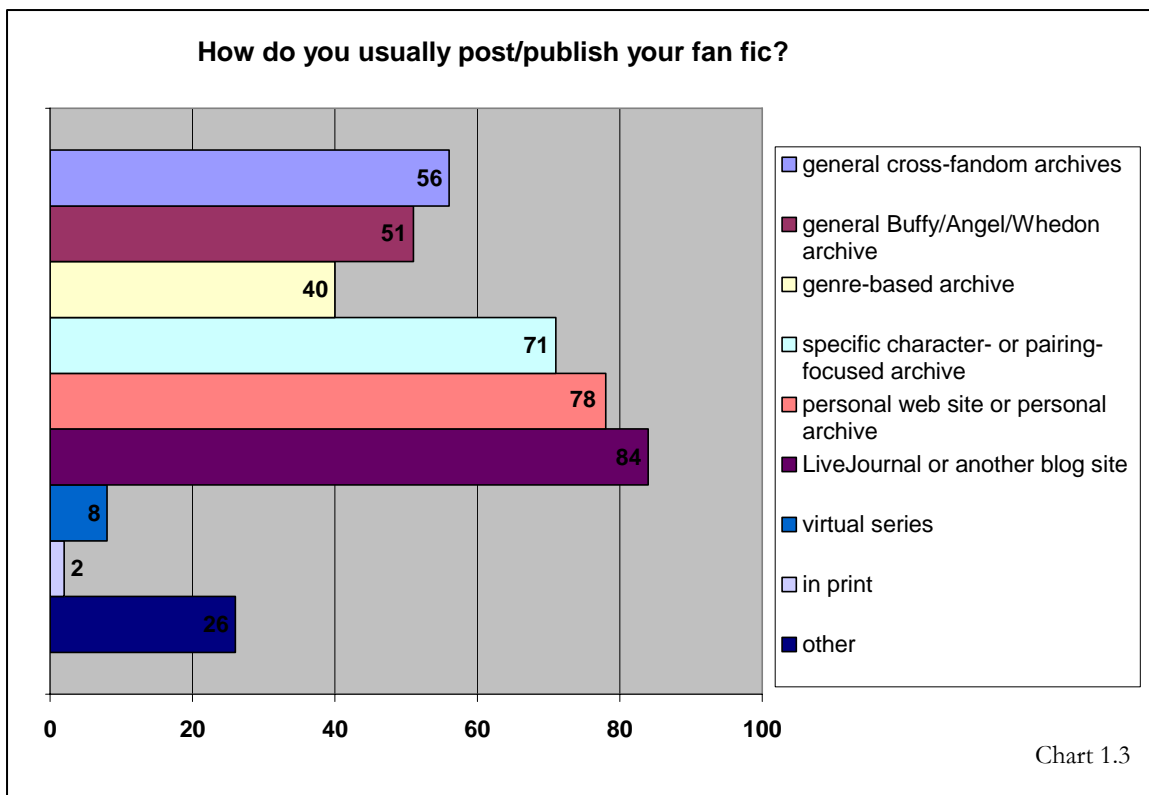
Similarly, a majority (65%) published their first piece of fan fiction more than 3 years ago; again, the results may be skewed depending on the interpretation of the question. In addition, these figures do not reflect the time a fan has spent as a fan or as a reader of fan fiction, only the time since first published as a fan fiction writer.



The survey then asks what methods of online publishing the respondents use:

*How do you usually publish/post your fan fic?*

Respondents publish their stories to a wide variety of types of media. Respondents were asked to check all types that apply, and most chose multiple options. 116 respondents indicated using two or more publication methods, with a mean and median of 3 boxes checked. Results may be dependent on the means of inviting respondents to the survey; Livejournal's popularity could be attributed to invitations on two popular Livejournal communities. However, the popularity of personal web sites/archives cannot be explained similarly, so this possible distortion is difficult to confirm. A total of 137 respondents completed this question, and more than half of these respondents publish using Livejournal



or another blog site, a personal web site or personal archive, or a specific character- or pairing-focused archive. Among the 26 respondents who chose “other,” 21 indicated using a mailing list such as a Yahoo! Group to distribute stories, and 5 indicated using a message/Usenet\* board.

## 2. *First Impressions*

The first open-ended questions asked survey respondents:

*Please reflect on your experiences when you first encountered fan fic. How did you find out about it? What surprised, confused, delighted, or frustrated you about the fic or the process of finding good fic? Did you encounter any obstacles to finding fic or fic communities that you enjoyed?*

Many found fan fiction serendipitously, through other fan-related activities, such as searching online for information about the show’s actors or plotlines:

—I accidentally stumbled across Buffy fanfiction in 1998. I was looking for information about the first couple of seasons which I hadn't seen on television.

—I found out about the existence of fanfic through entering the term 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' in a search engine and getting many fanfic page hits. I was stunned to know it existed. It was interesting.

—When I first discovered fanfiction, I was taken completely by surprise. I had been using a search engine to find websites for a show that I was obsessed with at the time, and -- completely by chance -- I came upon a site that was hosting several stories.

Another was less surprised, noting, "I hadn't heard of it before but wasn't really surprised it existed." A number were introduced to fanfic through friends who read or wrote it. Others mention finding fanfic at fan conventions\* or by reading fan zines\*:

--I encountered fanfic before I was on the Internet -- back when I was a member of the SciFi Roundtable on GENie in the early 1990s. It was Star Trek and Doctor Who. The major obstacle was that it was almost all hardcopy back then, and you could only get it at Cons or by mail-ordering Zines from other fans.

--I first found fanfic before I was actually online...in printed fanzines, at media conventions. Since I only went to one convention a year, I definitely had problems finding fanfic. Also, since it was a convention to which actors were invited as guests, the fanzines that were available were often limited, and/or hidden under tables, so that the guests might not be offended by them.

While these discoveries were as serendipitous as the search engine finds, they also indicate a long history of fandom—one that likely predates the existence of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and points to a tendency among fans to enjoy multiple fandoms. Many respondents indicated that they were introduced to fanfic through other fandoms, such as *X-Files*, *Highlander*, and *Star Trek*.

Once they had discovered fanfic, many found in it a place to exchange ideas with other fans about new possibilities for favorite characters. Some saw in fan fiction the

opportunity to right the wrongs of the original show, unconstrained by network/financial/censorship concerns:

--Stories could explore alternate routes that the show could have taken. What if Xander had married Anya? What if Buffy stayed dead after season 5?

--I was delighted to find fanfic. It was such a wonderful way of expressing what I thought was wrong with the original TV show, and putting it right.

-- I was happy to see a way to bring back my favorite character, who had been killed on the show.

-- Buffy generated such unresolved issues--which is great to keep you watching the show, but OH SO frustrating as a fan. So the idea that I could read or write my way out of that frustration was great.

Some respondents were already voracious readers, and had found a new source of reading material, such as one writer who commented:

--I love to read and I'm a natural speed reader, so I'm \*always\* looking for more to read. Fanfiction was wonderful because it was more of the characters and situations I loved.

--I... found myself at All About Spike, a fanfic archive. Wow! There were additional stories about the 'verse available to read without having to wait until the tie-in novels came out.... I am a voracious reader, and much of the fanfic I read is as good or better than many published novels.

Others were already writers who found in fandom an opportunity to hone writing skills and get immediate feedback on their stories:

--I am a writer of original gay erotica and I went online to see if there were any communities of writers willing to share work and critique. I found the archive for 'Queer as Folk' fan fiction and read every piece, then I started writing some of my own. I was very well received in that small community and did a long, long piece that took nine months to finish.

-- I'm a semi-pro author (mostly role-playing games and SF) and fan of BtVS, as are several friends. A friend recommended fanfic at time I was blocked in another writing genre, and I started to write it as a way of getting past the block.

Many were surprised by some aspect of fan fiction. Many were surprised to like it as much as they did. Others were surprised at how much is available online, and some

mentioned the community itself as a surprise. Two mentioned actually writing fan fiction without any awareness that others did too, or that it was called fan fiction:

--Started writing online fic after first ep of Angel. Wrote some before that, but didn't know it was called fan fic.

--I have always written fan fic, I just didn't know it was called that or that anyone else did it until 2001, when I sort of blundered into it.

Fans were divided on how easy it can be to find the fanfic they enjoy reading. While many attribute their introduction to fanfic to luck, a common refrain among respondents was that, as their tastes developed and focused, it became more difficult to find stories that met their criteria:

At first it was all surprisingly and delightfully easy to find. But after I'd read through all the obvious stuff, and done a little googling, I hit a wall. Then I discovered Livejournal, and the wall receded for a long, long time.

Perhaps one of the most common frustrations mentioned is the difficulty of finding high-quality fan fiction among the large (and ever-growing) amounts of low-quality fic. Many complained about sloppiness, such as misspellings, poor grammar, typos, and “netspeak.” Others criticize weak plots and characterization and either a failure to stick to canon\*, or alternately, a tendency to stick too close to canon. One long-time fan compared the quality of fanfic in zines to that available online:

Online fandom, after we all got to the Internet (post-1993) meant there was a lot more fanfic, and it was easier to get. But quantity doesn't always mean quality, and finding the 'good stuff' got harder. (When it was harder [to] publish, the standards were generally higher, and only the most dedicated got Zines done.)

Others spoke to the difficulty of searching given the technological tools at hand. Many archives, if searchable at all, may not have searching capabilities as robust as some readers would like:

The most frustrating thing was finding fanfic that was both well-written and a pairing I liked or engaging gen fiction. Most of the archives I found didn't have a good way to search...

Two respondents mentioned Gossamer, *The X-Files* fan fiction clearinghouse, which consolidates and archives a large body of *The X-Files* fic and features robust searching capabilities; both respondents expressed a wish for something similar in the Whedonverse fandom.

Many fanfic readers, however, have developed ways of finding the fic they like. Most commonly cited were to stick to favorite authors and/or to only read fanfic that has come recommended from a trusted source (often from a favorite author's LiveJournal or a recommendations-based site such as Better Buffy Fics):

--The best way these days to find good fic is through either recommendation and word-of-mouth. Trying to find something for oneself will only lead to frustration and wasted hours.

-- I find the Better Buffy Fics mailing list to be a god(dess)send.

-- In general, I don't have \*too\* much trouble finding fic I like, although I tend to quickly exhaust the good new fic (that I know is good because I like the author or because of trustworthy recs) and end up trawling archives, and then I have to go through a bunch of lower-quality stuff.

A few expressed concerns or frustrations with internal disputes within the community, which could refer to "shipper\* wars," where fans of one ship or character are dismissive of fans of other characters, or more generally to nasty comments on posted fic:

--I am pretty jaded and tired of some of the internecine battles that go on within fanfic writing / fandom, so it can be pretty frustrating to find good fic by people I actually respect, and who aren't two-faced or turncoats.

--...'ship bashing in some 'ships is a lot more predominant than others. Certain groups for B/A fan fiction were very snippy, crude, and very immature when all I wanted was to read fanfiction and I had to put up with petty arguments and bashing Buffy/Spike.

Some seem generally concerned about the effect such divisions and conflicts could have on the fandom. One respondent compared the Whedonverse with *The X-Files* fandom (which has the aforementioned Gossamer project):

Thus, I've been frustrated by how fractured BtVS/Angel fandom has been--there isn't one complete archive, and shipper and character wars means that I doubt that there ever could have been one complete archive. But it would have been a fantastic thing, to have ONE complete archive.

In general, most fans initially found fanfic through general fan-related activities, and discovered in it a number of reasons to keep reading and writing. Many have expressed frustrations with the current state of fanfic, particularly with the difficulty of finding the stories they enjoy reading among the large number available online through various sources.

### 3. *Future Issues*

The survey then asked:

*How do you see the future of online fan fic? Do you anticipate issues that concern you, particularly regarding its popularity, preservation, access, legality or proliferation?*

For the most part, this section elicited concerns and problems more than optimism about the future of fan fiction. The most common comment expressing optimism reflected confidence that the legal issues surrounding fan fiction—namely the copyright question—would work out in the favor of fan writers. Many expressed a belief that copyright holders would come to see fan fiction as something that benefits their enterprise—as free publicity, not as an intellectual property theft—or that holders would see the public relations disaster likely associated with suing a show's biggest fans. The growing popularity of fan fiction was often cited as being in writers' favor, because the bigger fan fiction is, the harder it would be to get rid of. Many cited Joss Whedon's apparent approval of fanfic as a sign that, at least

within this fandom, fanfic is relatively safe from legal problems, with one respondent going so far as to write:

Legality doesn't seem to be an issue in the Whedon realm of fanfic. Although Joss sent down an edict telling his writers not to read any fanfic while they were in the process of writing for the shows (for obvious reasons), he has now all but endorsed it. Several of his writers pretty much have endorsed it, and Jane Espenson even participated in WriterCon, helping fledgling fanfic writers to hone their craft.

However, many writers expressed misgivings about the copyright issue. While many felt secure that Joss Whedon would not pursue any action against fans, most expressed fear of the networks' legal teams. The questionable legal status of fan fiction seems to be troublesome to a few writers—the copyright issue seems to loom as a major threat to writers. Adult-oriented fic seems particularly vulnerable, since it could potentially violate both copyright and obscenity laws. Fans express fears of lawsuits and cease-and-desist letters, but the uncertainty—not knowing if the networks would ever sue or if they would win—seems even more frustrating. While one respondent did assert that fans would “likely put up quite a legal fight, if our freedom of expression were challenged,” many others were less optimistic:

While I do personally believe that fanfiction is a transformative and hence a fair use, few fanfiction authors have the money to defend themselves in court -- and we're all afraid of a precedent from a judge who doesn't get it which could take us out of the grey area and into the black.

Another respondent spoke to fears about another potential legal battle, regarding the U.S. government's recent interest in online content:

With the upping of 'security' in the United States, am I worried about some legal issues with fanfic due to the government prying into more and more of our online lives. Not to mention the new 'pro-family' laws and bills.

Others expressed concern that the growing popularity of fanfic on the Internet was endangering fanfic, and likened the situation to that of Napster and music file-sharing. One respondent commented:

The more visible fanfiction is, the greater the risk that someone will decide they can't afford to ignore us anymore and smash us like Napster. Admittedly, online music sharing hasn't stopped -- but we like our community and don't want to go spinning off into furtive, flybynight shards.

This same writer brought up an issue closely related to fanfic's legal status: the preservation of fanfic as it is threatened by outside forces. In the comparison to Napster, the respondent noted that such a crackdown could result in lost stories, "[e]specially since the content, unlike commercially produced music, often doesn't exist anyplace else -- any archive deleted often results in stories lost," as happened with the purge of NC-17 material at FanFiction.Net. The problem of disappearing stories resonated with many respondents, with many remarking that stories they've enjoyed reading in the past have disappeared, sometimes permanently, and for various reasons. One keeps personal copies of stories she likes on her own hard drive, but worries about her own computer crashing, while another has used the Wayback Machine (<http://archive.org>) to find stories that have been taken down.

While some fear the disappearance of stories in the future as a result of lawsuits, two commonly cited reasons stories are disappearing now are authors removing stories and individual archivists\* abandoning their sites. One respondent lamented:

One thing that is sad, however, is the fact that so many of the early online fanfiction is disappearing. Quite a few authors have left their various fandoms over the years, and many of the earlier online works have already been taken down. Many of the stories that I first came across when I was new to fanfiction have long since ceased to exist online.

Another discussed the potential loss of fanfic when an archivist deletes stories:

For example, a moderator may in anger delete his or her community after a particularly bad session of back-stabbing, and then all the fic is lost unless he or she backs it up prior to deletion. Of course, that person may not regret the loss at all, but an objective outsider may mourn the loss of the opportunity to decide for herself what the quality may have been, and the loss of an opportunity to mine for nuggets of gold amongst the dreck.

Adult-themed fanfic—slash, NC-17 stories, and fic that deals with incest and “non-con” (i.e., non-consensual sex)—is vulnerable to an additional preservation issues: censorship. The popular multi-fandom archive Fanfiction.net’s decision to delete all NC-17 stories posted to its archive frustrated many fans because it denied these writers access to a searchable archive with wide appeal, and potentially deleted stories that have not been reposted elsewhere. Other archives have taken measures to restrict access to readers over 18.

In addition to the issues of copyright, preservation, and access, respondents also expressed concerns that the sometimes shocking nature of adult-themed fanfic could draw undue attention to fanfic. A number of writers expressed a fear of overexposure of fan fiction. One openly expressed a resistance to scholars writing about fan fiction because it sheds light on a community that preferred to keep off the radar. Echoing comments made by earlier fanfic writers about keeping underground (for example, in Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 1998, 36), the respondent wrote:

For decades, fan fic writers have worked very hard to keep their culture under wraps. First off, because people don't accept it. And second, because it is not \*entirely\* legal...and when some celebs or copyright holders find out, they occassionally, you know, sue...

Part of this desire to keep fanfic “off the radar” is some fanfic writers’ need for anonymity (most immediately noticeable in the pseudonyms regularly used in LiveJournal and in archives). Many writers may feel it is necessary to hide what they do online from those outside the community; as one respondent expressed, “Many fanfic writers are professors, teachers, librarians, etc., who are afraid of losing their jobs should their

employers discover the fanfic.” Again, the traditional community wish to keep fanfic away from public view is echoed in their privacy concerns.

Not all are in agreement that the growing popularity and exposure of fanfic has enjoyed of late is a negative change. One respondent commented:

I think there will always be fic. And I think it will become more and more accepted. (It's still somewhat of a secret hobby. People don't like to admit to non-fans that the[y] write fic.) I think the day is coming when it will be as accepted as stamp collecting or gardening as a passtime (sic).

Even the respondent cited earlier who expressed concerns about “pro-family” laws opined, “I think fanfic will go on no matter what,” while another wrote that “[o]nline fanfic will only grow.”

As the noted in the responses to the previous survey question, fans have noticed that the growth and popularity of online fanfic have made searching among the ever-expanding options more difficult. One writer attributes this problem to automated archiving software, which:

tends to make the finding of higher quality fanfic a bit harder (since quite a few archive owners who would previously select quality work by hand, have converted to an author-self-submission process).

The respondent, however, does call this software “a good thing” because it makes running an archive much easier “for the layman,” which may indicate an acknowledgement and acceptance of the trade-offs associated with widened accessibility to the tools of online fanfic. Another respondent agreed:

I believe the biggest challenge for fanfic is also its greatest plus side: the ease with which to publish stories online. As said above, there is an incredible amount of slush to be found. But I'm sure the internet will find ways around that. At the same time, young people might learn to enjoy the art of writing and improve their skills due to the instant readership and feedback that the internet provides.

Yet others seemed less pleased by the results of the innovation of “[s]elf-uploading boards”:

The chief issue for me is around quality. I feel that the rush of poorly-spelled, immature young teen fanfic that floods forums such as fanfiction.net can only decrease fic's popularity and standing.

While self-publishing and automatic archiving technologies have caused some consternation, others point to LiveJournal's popularity as a reason it has grown increasingly difficult to find fanfic that meets their personal criteria:

One of the unfortunate side effects of a wide-reaching switch to Livejournal and other blogging sites is that it is more difficult to find fics if one is unfamiliar with the author. I think this would actually have created a higher volume at fanfiction.net if they had not decided to elimi[n]ate all fics NC-17 and above.

LiveJournal is not easily searchable except by username, so one must know writers' names to find their fic, whereas Fanfiction.Net allows for both keyword searching and directory browsing. Some attribute the popularity of LiveJournal to the increasing fragmentation of the fanfic community, and one respondent notes that this "ghettoizing" makes serendipitous finds less likely:

This makes it more difficult to find fanfic by new writers, or by writers outside one's own social group: if I've never heard of a writer, and none of my friends have ever heard of a writer, it's decreasingly likely that any of us will encounter her work by accident.

This fragmentation issue echoes concerns noted earlier about "shipper wars" and other disputes within the Whedonverse fanfic community. One respondent succinctly noted that:

Online fanfic will only grow. As will people's resentment towards authors who write in a style they don't like or criti[c]ize a style they do.

This infighting seems to be capable of leading to both deleted archives and difficult searching. Another internal issue that troubles some respondents is a perceived growth of plagiarism within fanfic:

I am concerned about people plagiarizing other fic and passing it off as their own. I keep hearing horror stories about blatant rip-offs. I know that all fan

fic is derivative, but good writers bring a sense of personal style and originality to his/her work.

While the fanfic community has existed for a long time, and has developed a strong sense of autonomy and self-protection, there seem to be threats looming that could change the nature of the community. Some of those threats come from without: the addition of many new fans to the community, the public spotlight of scholarship and reporting on fanfic, and the potential legal troubles brought by copyright holders and obscenity watchdogs. Others have developed within: shipper wars and plagiarism.

#### 4. *Archivists' Issues*

The next survey question addressed those who operate multi-author archives\*:

*Do you manage a multi-author fan fic archive? If so, what is easy and what is difficult about maintaining it, and why?*

29 respondents indicated that they administer or moderate an archive (or that they are building one now or have archived in the past). Among those 29, a variety of types of archives were represented, from small, invitation-only archives to large, automated archives that specialize in a particular genre, to Yahoo! group archives based on members' recommendations.

Many discussed issues associated with the selection of fanfic for their archives. Those who used self-uploading software, which allows writers to directly post their stories to the archive with no input from the archivist, seemed to have the fewest troubles with maintenance. Some, however, indicated an uneasiness regarding their lack of editorial control over their archives.

It is hard to allow free access but then not be annoyed with some of the things that are posted. There are some fics that I do not feel are giving enough credit to the script writers whose dialo[gu]e they are tweaking.

Another archivist, whose archive includes fic selected by member recommendations (not through her own selection) has similar editorial urges:

... people recommend fics that I don't like. But I just run the site; I don't pass judgement on the fics... well, once I did, but that was the exception that proved the rule.

The auto-upload software available (such as eFiction, cited by one archivist) makes the technical issues of coding, uploading, and editing easier for archivists, no matter their level of computer know how.

Those who operate small archives, by invitation or for a limited number of authors, also indicated that archiving was not very difficult or cumbersome. Among those who selected fic by hand, some described the selection process as easy, with one noting that, “The easiest part of maintaining [a large shipper archive is] that there are thousands of B/S stories out there that are worth archiving, so finding stories isn't a problem.”

Archivists with large or hand-picked archives, however, struggle with a number of selection issues. Even those that cite finding good fic as easy mention the time-consuming nature of posting those stories.

--The most difficult part in maintaining it is keeping everything updated - adding new authors, new stories, updating the WIPs - works in progresses, and making sure that everything is linked correctly and works.

--I love running it, but it is time consuming as all the stories are handpicked.

Other selection problems include quality levels, echoing fanfic readers' frustrations with mining for gold among large quantities of fic. One former archivist described archiving as “hard because I got so much crap fic being submitted.”

The technical skills and attention to coding details needed to build, maintain, and grow an archive were cited by many as difficult aspects of archiving.

--First one of the biggest problems is finding a webhost with the right set of tools, space and cost. Second would be setting up and maintaining it, as that

would include insuring that all the links are working (Or you'll get some angry email!).

-- The difficult part of maintaining it is that it is a very intricate process. You must update many files along with any new story file that you code. And the coding is difficult, of course. Having to remember what to upload when you're finished updating is a problem as well -- I find myself having to write it all down.

--The hardest part in maintaining it is the initial set-up. Broken links or forgotten parts can ruin a reader's experience, and formatting errors can destroy a story's readability.

The minutiae of handcoding is but one obstacle; dealing with authors in an online environment is another. Because many authors change email addresses often and may have left the fandom altogether, contacting authors can be difficult. This is an issue for one archivist who seeks authorial permission to archive their stories to a recommendations-based archive, and for another who has email addresses linked to authors' stories for feedback purposes. Other concerns about authors (and readers) vary from keeping up with user suggestions (about broken links or searching capabilities) to dealing with demanding authors to identifying and addressing plagiarism. In addition, many archive administrators struggle to maintain consistency in the form and metadata associated with each piece of fic; most have submission guidelines posted for authors (for example, asking for attachments as text files, not Word documents, or requiring certain header tags such as ratings and spoilers).

Online fan archives struggle with the same limits other volunteer-based organizations face: staffing, motivation, and time. One archivist quit working on a multi-moderator archive when she and her colleagues could not agree on significant systems changes; another has been left behind by other archivists who have moved on. Time and motivation can be of limited supply due to the voluntary nature of the work (as one archivist put it, "real life" interferes with the ongoing tasks of maintenance). The many above-mentioned obstacles, coding, selecting, keeping track of authors, are highly demanding of time. One archivist

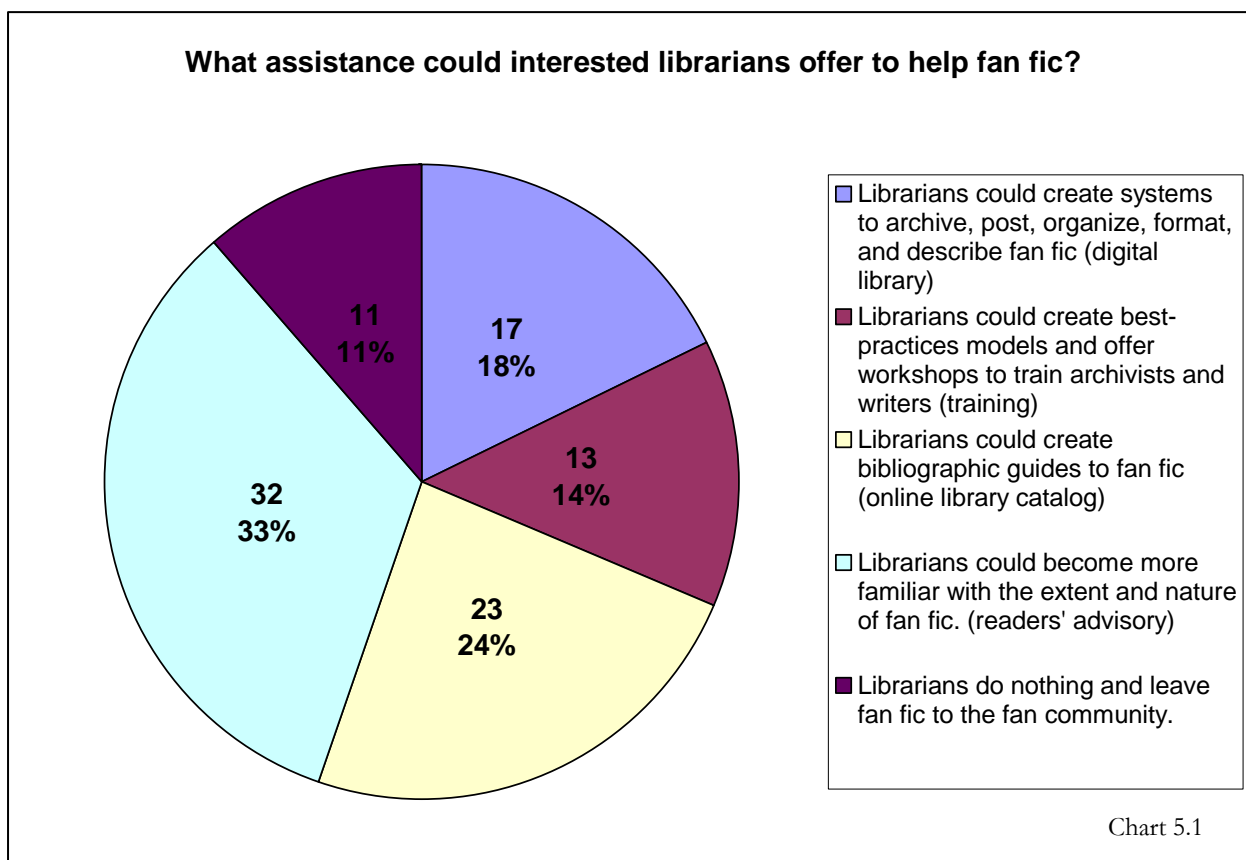
mentioned that after all the work of setting up the archive, it's very easy to just let it sit instead of expanding it and seeking new fic. Another called it, "a pain in the neck, at times, but I look at it as a public service."

Given these difficulties, it was not surprising to find three respondents who have quit archiving, and two on the verge of retiring their archives. The respondents with more positive experiences with archives tended to be involved with small or auto-uploading archives.

##### 5. *Potential Roles for Librarians*

*What assistance could interested librarians offer to help fan fic? Which of the following levels of assistance would you be willing to support, and why?*

Respondents were asked to choose one of five options for a preferred role for librarians in fan fiction, and the responses were varied. Out of 96 respondents, 32 (33%) chose a readers' advisory role, wherein librarians "could become more familiar with the extent and nature of fan fic, in order to direct potential readers and writers to it, but not altering practices or policies of fan fic authors and archivists (similar to traditional readers advisory services)," while 23 (24%) preferred a cataloging role, where librarians "could create bibliographic guides (with a systematic, consistent descriptive method) to fan fic (similar to an online library catalog)." The smallest grouping, those who indicated a wish for librarians to "do nothing and leave fan fic to the fan community," is a significant minority.



Of the 21 respondents to this question who also indicated that they had written 20 or more pieces of fan fic, and had first published in 2001 or earlier, the results look much different. A higher proportion were resistant to any librarian role, and a smaller proportion indicated a preference for the most involved role, where “librarians could create systems to archive, post, organize, format, and describe fan fic (similar to the model of online full-text journal databases).” There was a higher proportion interested in a cataloging/bibliographic role, and a smaller proportion who preferred a readers’ advisory role, but these options remain the most popular of the five in this cohort.

Perhaps the main message to be drawn from the above data is that the fanfic community does not have a consensus on what role librarians should play in developing better access, preservation, and searchability for fanfic archiving systems. The responses to

the follow-up question asking respondents why they chose the option above also demonstrates this wide array of responses.

A significant number of respondents preferred limited roles for librarians because they were concerned about the effect of outside intervention on the community. Many simply felt librarians and fanfic were a bad match—some due to assumptions about librarians, others to assumptions about fanfic. Some felt that fanfic itself was “too wide, too unorganized and too amateur” while another called fanfic “mostly a lost cause.” Another wrote: “I sort of feel as if att[e]mpting to train fandom is utterly impossible... truth be told, I'm not sure how feasible any of this would be.”

The copyright issue was raised yet again here in the observation that, “Librarians have a special responsibility to protect the integrity of the legal protections of copyright.” Some who felt that the library profession (or the institutions that support librarians) were incompatible with fanfic remarked:

--Because I don't know about where you live, but where I'm at any involvement from the public library wouldn't fly. A \*lot\* of fanfic is written by and for adults, and if the bro[u]haha over Internet access is any indication, the library board here would have a real problem with evaluating and cataloging written pornography. Also for the moment fanfiction is illegal as hell. The above step about creating a guide would be nice, but I'm not exactly holding my breath.

--Fanfic is all well and good, but I see libra[r]ians as people whose job it is to deal with works published by institutions. Though the knowledge they have of writing would be helpful to fanfic writers in terms of style and grammar. Leave the rest to the geeks on the net.

Interestingly, both of the above-quoted respondents chose the bibliographics guides option in the multiple choice portion of this question, not the last, hands-off option.

More prevalent than this notion that librarians and fanfic are a bad fit was the wariness expressed throughout the survey of interference in the community. Many felt that

librarian involvement is unnecessary because fandom should only be by and for fans, and fans could take care of problems that arise themselves:

--if we wanted to change it we would (from a respondent who chose the "Librarians do nothing" option)

--But I would definitely prefer an approach where librarians respectfully learn how to interact with the existing culture on its terms than, as it would feel like, trying to rearrange that spontaneously developing community into a more rigid model for their own convenience and/or its legitimacy. (from a respondent who chose the bibliographic guides option)

--I'm a bit uncomfortable at the idea of any 'official' intervention in the ways fanfic is produced. The best part of fandom is that it's run by fans. (That can also, sometimes, be the worst part, but that's another issue.) Fanfic takes profit-making corporate products (TV shows, movies, books) and transforms/supplements them with freely available fiction that's produced in a completely decentered way. I worry that any attempt at formalizing the archiving etc. of fanfic would inevitably affect the nature of fanfic itself--its conditions of production would change. (from a respondent who chose the readers advisory role option)

While others urged some librarian involvement, but only so far as it did not impose anything on fandom:

--Generally I'm all for as little regulation as possible. You'd want to be, I suppose, like a really great bra: supporting without showing, enhancing while remaining essentially invisible. (from a respondent who chose the bibliographic guides option)

--It wouldn't change the way fandom grows organically, but could overlay something really, truly useful! (from a respondent who chose the first choice of librarian-created systems, but indicated that any of the options would be acceptable)

Some indicated a preference for help from only those librarians who are already fans (from within the fandom) However, many others are very concerned about anything that could shed more light on fanfic than already exists.

--I do think that professional librarians have been an asset to the fan and the fanfic communities, but I fear that making our work too public, pushing it into the open where it can no longer be ignored would not benefit us. (from a respondent who chose the readers advisory option)

--If it weren't for the legal issues, I'd have less of an issue with bibliographic guides, since they'd be a supplement rather than a replacement, and mainly for the librarians' own use. But as it stands, the more complete such a listing is, the more dangerous it is to someone wanting to make a clean sweep, or simply being exposed to the overwhelming size of the 'problem'. (from a respondent who chose the readers advisory option)

This fear of overexposure leading to legal problems for fanfic was not uncommon.

However, many other respondents saw more potential benefit of a relationship between librarians and the fanfic community. The experience and assistance librarians could offer to archivists in workshops or best practices models was cited as one such benefit:

I have a few friends who have run archives, and their biggest problems were just knowing how organize the material they had. I think some kind of standardized method for organizing fic, would be helpful. (from a respondent who chose the best practices and workshops option)

While another chose the first option, of the librarian-created archive "Because it makes sense. Finding the stories is the biggest challenge. You hit google and hope for the best."

Others in favor of a role for librarians in fanfic noted the potential value of an objective, outside perspective to help solve some of the community's problems, particularly in describing and cataloging fanfic. Reflecting on the growing fragmentation within the Whedonverse, two writers voiced very similar ideas:

--a library quality catalog would be a useful service to the fanfic community, which is too splintered to devise its own.

--I would \*love\* a guide like that. It's so overwhelming to try to find good fic in large fandoms like the Buffyverse. I'd love for someone with literary experience (and little to no 'shipper bias) to objectively create a guide.

In contrast to writers who predict that further public exposure of fanfic could lead to legal issues for the community, some respondents felt that readers advisory recommendations from librarians could help to legitimize a hobby many practice in secret:

--I do think that acceptance from librarians of fanfiction as a viable and legitimate form of literature would help bring fanfiction writers 'out of the

closet' and help writers grow more comfortable with their role, but I really don't see how they could do much more.

--I believe fanfiction needs to be recognised as an actual art form of its own, hopefully becoming better understood and respected - form of 'folk-art' if you will, that needs to evolve in its own way, directed by the writers and readers. After all, if graffiti can be seen as an artform, why not fanfic?

This idea of a readers advisory role for librarians did get mixed reactions in general: while many were in favor of the idea for various reasons, some were doubtful that librarians would be interested in recommending fanfic to readers because of a perception that fanfic is “not of literary value.” Others, however, saw an enormous opportunity here:

I come from a family of librarians, and I can't say that the idea of librarians becoming involved in fanfic has ever crossed my mind. Because of my own background with ebook devices, I like the idea of librarians at least knowing that this enormous 'content resource' is out there, and pointing readers in its direction.

Another respondent echoed this sentiment that librarians could do fanfic—and its potential reading audience—much good by being familiar with some basics of the available resources:

A librarian who can define 'slash' and steer a kid to a G-rated Harry Potter archive is a useful person.

In sum, the fanfic community is not of one mind regarding what roles they would prefer for librarians, but the vast majority does see some benefit to some role, whether limited to readers' advisory, a role that does not directly impose on the community, or extended to shaping archival practices within the community.

## Discussion

As became increasingly evident in reviewing the online survey responses, fans in the Whedonverse are conflicted about the potential role for librarians in their fandom. While traditional library science subjects such as access, search interfaces, archiving practices, metadata, and preservation are significant issues within the community, so is the sense that fandom is and always has been autonomous and self-reliant. This conflict is largely unprecedented in library science because traditional print and commercial digital publishers have safely assumed that their authors would like wide reception of their texts. Within the fanfic community, however, there is a sense that, though stories are published to the public sphere—the Internet—they are not intended for public consumption but for the fan community. This assumption—and the conflict that arises when information and cultural materials within it appear valuable to those outside the community—could extend to other emerging online writing practices such as blogs. How to resolve this conflict to the benefit of the community, the public, and the library profession must be studied further.

This study was intended to break the ice on research into what fans want, and what they are willing to cede in order to improve access to their fiction. While this perspective has not been settled by any means, we must also consider what the library profession's responsibility is to the communities it serves—which should include both the public at large and the fanfic community. The American Library Association “supports the preservation of information published in all media and formats. The association affirms that the preservation of information resources is central to libraries and librarianship” (2004). How

far does this responsibility reach? Obviously, it does not extend to the entirety of all available content without limit—to every web page, flyer, or fanfic in existence—but where does that line of demarcation lie? Where does the material we should preserve end and where does it begin?

Whether approached from the perspective of the librarian, the fan, or even the general public, the issue of preservation is complicated by a number of factors. As noted in the survey results, there is the issue (possibly unique to fanfic) of authors wanting to maintain anonymity and control over the distribution of their writings. However, there is also the value of the cultural record, and fandom has made a significant impression on American popular culture. Reading Jenkins and Bacon-Smith and other scholarly works on fanfic, this point was driven home for me—as each author quoted or referred to specific pieces of fanfic (mostly from pre-Internet days), I could not help but be frustrated as I reflected on how incredibly difficult—if not impossible—it would be to find and read those original stories. In those stories, and in the stories written and posted on the Web today, is a part of the wider story that shapes our contemporary culture. As librarians, do we not have a responsibility to help preserve the records of our culture?

Reconciling that urge to preserve with the tenets of the community that produced the texts is difficult. Adding to the complexity is the ethical and legal gray area that fan fiction inhabits, and librarians' duty to respect intellectual property rights. Fans are alternately wary of and ambivalent about copyright and obscenity issues. Could association with libraries help to legitimize fanfic (and help to fend off legal issues) or would it shed unwanted light on the practice and make it impossible for copyright holders and obscenity police to ignore? Until the legal issues are resolved, this question will hang over the heads of any attempt at collaboration between the fanfic community and librarians. An exploration

of ways to create private collections (not available to the public until copyrights expire or other legal issues are resolved) could be an alternative approach. Waiting to collect and preserve until all legal issues are resolved could mean waiting until much fanfic has already disappeared.

Preservation is an example of librarians' responsibility to future generations, for whom we may wish to preserve the cultural record. We also have a responsibility to readers today who may enjoy fan fiction but have difficulty accessing it. Again, this responsibility potentially lies in conflict with the needs of the fan community for self-preservation. While many fanfic writers, even those involved in the community for a long time, have bemoaned the difficulty of finding new fic that meets their own personal criteria, here again lies the conflicted needs of the community for easier access and better protections. Concerns about lowering quality of fanfic as the means of publication have become easier, about legal ramifications for copyright and obscenity, and about the very fabric of the fan community need to be addressed and further studied. At the same time, methods of expanding access through more robust searching capabilities, an X-Files style central clearinghouse, or other means, must also be studied to better understand what the library establishment can offer fandom.

Some survey respondents did indicate a feeling that the online community would be able to take care of its own problems, and it is possible that the turn to LiveJournal is an example of a self-correcting problem. While LiveJournal's searching capabilities do not meet many fans' needs, its community-based structure allows readers to easily find fic by authors they already know and trust, and to find links from there to other recommended fics. Both of these methods of finding new stories—essentially built on reputation, a major element in

community social workings—may simply work better for fandom than any search-based methods of finding new stories.

While this does provide an example of fandom taking care of one problem (the difficulty of finding good stories among weaker ones) in an organic way, it does not address a multitude of other problems the community has identified both implicitly and explicitly. Many respondents expressed great concern over the future of the community as a whole in light of growing segmentation, “shipper wars” and “back-stabbing.” The turn to LiveJournal, as one respondent pointed out, will only further these divisions. Given that many current fans discovered fan fiction through other fandoms and moved seamlessly from the fandoms of *Highlander* or *Doctor Who* into that of *Buffy*, this segmentation may mean a radical shift in how fandoms relate to one another, and how new fans discover the fan community. It may also mean that serendipitous discoveries of fan fiction, such as those described by the many fans who learned of fan fiction’s existence in a search engine search for information about their favorite shows, could become less likely as fanfic moves to a format that is not easily uncovered by search engines.

This study was designed to explore the emerging issues of fanfic, as they relate to library science, to gain a better understanding of the potential roles for librarians in shaping bibliographic access to fanfic. As such, the study and its many participants have raised many significant questions which cannot be easily or simplistically answered at this time. Further research needs to be performed to flesh out these conflicting issues, and to develop solutions and plans. A few recommendations based on this research include:

Librarians should become more familiar with the extent and nature of fandom, and should better understand how fans discover, search for, read, and interact with fanfic, if only to further our understanding of how readers in general discover, search for, read, and

interact with texts. Fans' close relationships with their texts, their very literal interaction with texts (as readers, writers, and providers of feedback) could help librarianship better understand the relationship between a reader and a text.

At the same time, librarians must study fandom for the sake of fandom, to better understand its issues in order to be able to offer our expertise to the community. We should study, for instance, if the issues that have emerged in this study of the Whedonverse fandom are also present in other fandoms.

Perhaps most importantly, this research should be conducted by librarians from within fandom. Based on the number of self-identified librarians who participated in this survey, it appears feasible for this research to be conducted, for plans to be proposed and tested, all from within fandom. While it makes sense that those with an interest in, and knowledge of, fandom would be best suited to engage in such research, it would also temper the clearly demonstrated resistance to outside interventions in the fandom. Perhaps a loose organization of librarians from within fandom (the Whedonverse and beyond) could be formed, and could carry out this needed research.

## Appendix A: Fan Fiction Glossary

Because fan fiction developed within a small, insular community, and because it often deals seriously with subjects many others don't regard as deserving of serious treatment, fandom has developed a specialized vocabulary. Some terms listed below developed in the early, zine-based communities, while others are products of the Internet age. Some terms were coined by fans, while others were adapted for use in fandom. The terms below were selected and defined for the purposes of this paper; for other glossaries, see Bacon-Smith (1992, Appendix B) or the BFA Fan Fiction Glossary (Buffy Fiction Archive 2004).

**AtS:** *Angel: the Series*, the spinoff program from Buffy the Vampire Slayer, in which Angel moves to Los Angeles, and with Cordelia and Wesley plus new characters Fred, Gunn, Lorne, and others, operates a detective agency that “helps the helpless” and fights demons. The series ended in 2004, after five seasons. The entire series is currently available on DVD.

**ARCHIVE:** a web site that hosts fanfic by multiple authors. Some archives are selective, others allow open, automated submissions. Some archives span multiple fandoms, some focus on genres, some on individual characters or character pairings.

**ARCHIVIST:** the administrator and builder of a fanfic archive.

**AU or ALTERNATE UNIVERSE:** as the name implies, the writer sets the fic in an alternate universe, which allows for significant departures from canon. In the Whedonverse,

AU can refer to fanfic set in a non-supernatural universe, where Buffy is not a Slayer and Sunnydale is a normal town (i.e., not situated on a Hellmouth, and not home to vampires)

**BETA READER:** an editor or proofreader for fan fiction. Betas are usually other fanfic writers who offer feedback to writers before the fic gets posted.

**BLOG:** weblog, an online journal, sometimes dedicated to a specific topic, sometimes hosting the blogger's original fanfic. See LiveJournal.

**BtVS:** *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a television series based on a film of the same name, in which young Buffy is the Chosen One, she who must battle vampires, as well as a high school student. Her friends, Willow, Xander, Oz, Anya, Tara, Cordelia (alternately known as the Slayerettes or the Scoobies), and others assist her in battling evil. Giles is her Watcher, and Angel and Spike are vampires who alternately help her and hunt her. The series aired 1997-2003. The entire series (seven seasons) is currently available on DVD.

**CANON:** the text of the original media. In this case, it's the episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel: the Series*. Fanfic uses the canon as the jumping off point and then creates non-canonical works, but generally writers attempt to keep consistent with canon.

**CHALLENGE:** often issued by the list administrator of an archive, challenges give fanfic writers strict parameters in which to write a fic; challenges may mandate certain character pairings, time limits, or combinations of events.

**CON:** short for convention, a physical gathering of fans, usually held in hotels, and featuring guest speakers (often celebrities), fan merchandise, and other fan-related activities. (see Bacon-Smith 1992, chapter 2)

**CROSSOVER:** fanfic that blends the canons of more than one fandom; for example, BtVS/LotR crossover would include characters, settings, and/or events from both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

**DISCLAIMER:** usually included in the header of a piece of fanfic, the disclaimer is a statement from the author that acknowledges the copyright holders (Joss Whedon and the networks usually) whose characters they've used, often full of praise

**DRABBLE:** a short form of fan fic, exactly 100 words. Sometimes written as part of a challenge, where the writer is given a character or a word to include and a time limit.

**FANDOM:** the social organization formed around a media text such as BtVS (here referred to as the "Whedonverse.")

**FANFIC** or **FAN FICTION:** fiction written by fans of a particular media text (for instance, BtVS), using characters, settings, or other elements of the medium as the basis for an original story. "Fan writing or fan fiction is the practice of using characters from a professionally published text (a source product) in an original story. Fan fiction is written by amateur authors..." (Kustritz 2003, 371). Fanfic writers "are engaged in an act of rebellion. They have stolen characters, settings, plots off the home and movie screens, fleshed them out, created new characters for them to love and given the characters permission to love each other" (Bacon-Smith 1992, 3).

**FIG:** a piece of fan fiction, which could range from a drabble to a full-length novel.

**FICLET:** a short fic (less strictly defined than drabbles).

**LIVEJOURNAL:** a type of blog that allows for a group to post in the same space and to link between blogs.

**SHIPPER:** Short for relationshipper. Someone who writes fiction about canonical or, more often, non-canonical relationships ("ships"). Can also describe the fic itself.

**SLASH:** a form of shipper fiction which depicts a homosexual relationship (which can range from implied emotions to graphically detailed sexual acts) between (canonically) heterosexual characters, usually both male ("m/m"), but sometimes female ("femslash" or "f/P"). The

term comes from the punctuation in the way it's described: A/X is slash featuring the characters Angel and Xander. The original slash was K/S, or Kirk/Spock, in *Star Trek* fanfic. Interestingly, it's usually written by heterosexual women (Kustritz 2003; Green, Jenkins and Jenkins 1998).

**SPOILER:** one of the regularly-used headers, or metadata tags, for a piece of fic which identifies elements of canon that are revealed in the fic (for the benefit of those who have not seen all episodes.) Usually lists a season number or episode name.

**VIRTUAL SERIES:** fanfic written to resemble a spin-off of the original television series. Virtual series are typically written by a group of writers, follow episode plot formulas and a season arc, and are posted on a regular (usually weekly) schedule.

**WHEDON, JOSS:** Creator, head writer, and producer of the *BtVS* and *Angel* series.

Reputed to have encouraged fans of Buffy to “Bring your Own Subtext!” (see Tjardes 2003, 71).

**USENET:** text-based discussion forums often focused on particular topics or interests, a precursor to the World Wide Web. Fanfic appeared on Usenet groups early on.

**YAHOO! GROUP:** Web-based mailing list; members may read messages on the group web site or receive them as email.

**ZINE (or fanzine, letterzine, datazine):** literally, a magazine produced by and for fans of a particular subject, often produced at minimal cost and distributed through networks of fans rather than through commercial media outlets. Fanzines were the primary means of sharing fan fiction before Usenet and the Web (see Gilliam 1998 for more on print zines; see Smith 1999 for an analysis of e-zines, which maintain the periodic nature of print zines but are available online.).

## Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in Online Survey

I am writing to invite your participation in a survey of Buffy/Angel fan fic writers. This survey is part of my research study for a Master's of Science in Library Science degree at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science. I am exploring the impact of fan fiction on librarianship, and how librarians could potentially serve the readers and writers of online fan fiction, in a project tentatively titled, "Cataloging the Whedonverse: An Exploratory Study of Potential Roles for Librarians Regarding Fan Fiction."

This survey includes some multiple-choice questions and a number of open-response questions regarding the publication, access, and preservation of fan fic, as well as potential roles for librarians in facilitating the above. Depending on how much you have to say, it could take between 5 and 30 minutes to complete.

I am inviting participants from a few Buffy fan fic archives, listservs, and discussion boards. Respondents are not limited to these groups, so please feel free to forward this survey to any Buffy/Angel fan fic writer or discussion board you like. Survey respondents must be at least 18 years of age, and should have written at least one original piece of Buffy or Angel fan fic.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact me at [freya@email.unc.edu](mailto:freya@email.unc.edu).

The survey service I've used (SurveyMonkey) does require that you allow cookies, and I've had a few people report difficulty opening the survey using Firefox. One person very kindly reported to me that she had success with Firefox after allowing cookies and turning off the mobile code control of the firewall, thus allowing active-X elements. If you have trouble accessing the survey, please let me know and I'll see what I can figure out (or I'll enlist the help of the SurveyMonkey people).

If you'd like to read more about the survey and/or take it yourself, please start here: <http://ils.unc.edu/~freya/survey>

Many thanks for your time and participation!

Jessica Kem

freya (at) email.unc.edu

or freyakem (at) yahoo.com

MSLS candidate, School of Information and Library Science

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## Appendix C: Online Survey of Fan Fiction Writers in the Whedonverse



### UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

School of Information and Library Science  
Phone (919) 962-8068  
Fax (919) 962-8071

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
CB# 3360, 212 Manning Hall  
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-3360

#### Student Research Project for the Master's Paper

#### **Cataloging the Whedonverse: An Exploratory Study of Potential Roles for Librarians Regarding Fan Fiction**

I am writing to invite your participation in a survey of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel: the Series* fan fic writers. This survey is part of my research study for a Master's of Science in Library Science degree at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science. I am exploring the impact of fan fiction on librarianship, and how librarians could potentially serve the readers and writers of online fan fiction. After all, the essence of the library profession is to help readers gain access to information and reading material, and to do this in part by describing, organizing, collecting, preserving and protecting such material. Yet the development of fan fiction seems to have been missed by most librarians, despite the profession's recent attention to digital information in general. I am exploring the definition of the library profession—testing the boundaries of our professional obligations—and trying to determine if librarians have a place in the online world of fan fiction.

This survey is designed to get your responses to some open-ended questions about your experiences as a reader, writer, and perhaps archivist of fan fiction on the Web. Your responses may help me determine what librarians should be doing or should be aware of regarding online fan fiction. Some questions include multiple-choice questions with comment areas, others are more open-ended; I am especially interested in your thoughts in your own words.

I am inviting participants from visitors to the following web sites or members of the following listserv accounts or discussion boards. Respondents are not limited to these

groups, so please feel free to forward this survey to any *Buffy* or *Angel* fan fic writer or discussion board you like. Survey respondents must be at least 18 years of age.

- [Better Buffy Fics Yahoo Group](#)
- [Buffy Fem Slashers Yahoo Group](#)
- [Buffy Fiction Archive Yahoo Group](#)
- [Near Her Always Yahoo Group](#)
- [Porch Talk LiveJournal Community](#)
- [Slayer's Fanfic Archive Discussion Board](#)
- [Twisting the Hellmouth Discussion Board](#)
- [Unconventional Relationshipippers Yahoo Group](#)
- [XanderZone Yahoo Group](#)
- [Writercon's LiveJournal Community](#)
- [Writercon Yahoo Group](#)

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may skip any specific questions that you choose, for any reason. Due to the open-ended nature of some questions, the survey may take anywhere from 5 to 30 minutes to complete. Your responses, once submitted, are emailed anonymously to me. I will not know who has taken the survey, unless you choose the option to supply your email address. You may request the results after 1 May 2005, by emailing me at [freya@email.unc.edu](mailto:freya@email.unc.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact me at [freya@email.unc.edu](mailto:freya@email.unc.edu) or 919-960-8254, or my advisor, Dr. David Carr, at [carr@ils.unc.edu](mailto:carr@ils.unc.edu).

The Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has approved this study. If you have concerns or questions regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, please contact the IRB at 919-962-7761 or at [aa-irb@unc.edu](mailto:aa-irb@unc.edu).

Thank you for your time and valuable insight.

By clicking below to begin the survey, you certify that you are over 18 years old.

**[Begin the survey](#)**

---

Jessica F. Kem  
[freya@email.unc.edu](mailto:freya@email.unc.edu)  
<http://ils.unc.edu/~freya>

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## Cataloging the Whedonverse: Fan Fiction & Librarians

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### 1. Welcome!

Thank you for coming to my survey, part of the research for my masters paper, "Cataloging the Whedonverse: An Exploratory Study of Potential Roles for Librarians Regarding Fan Fiction." You should have arrived here after reading my informed consent statement and clicking the link from there. If not, please [read that page](#) before beginning this survey. Please remember, you can quit this survey at any time, and you may skip any question you would prefer not to answer. ...And you must be at least 18 years old to take this survey. If you're ready to start, please click "next." Thanks!

---

### 2. Publication of Fan Fiction

1. How many pieces of fan fic (of any length or form) have you published/posted online?

- 1-4
- 5-9
- 10-20
- over 20

2. When did you publish/post your first original fan fic?

- 2004
  - 2003
  - 2002
  - 2001 or earlier
- 

### 3. Publication of Fan Fiction

3. How do you usually post/publish your fan fic?  
(check all that apply)

- general, cross-fandom archives (for example, FanFiction.Net <http://www.fanfiction.net>)
- general Buffy/Angel/Whedon archive (for example, Buffy Fiction Archive <http://www.bfa.com>)
- genre-based archive (a crossover archive or shipper archive, for example)
- specific character- or pairing-focused archive (a Willow or Buffy/Spike archive, for example)
- LiveJournal or another blog site
- personal web site or personal archive (with only your fic)
- virtual series
- in print
- Other (please specify)

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#### 4. Access and Preservation of Online Fan Fic

4. Please reflect on your experiences when you first encountered fan fic. How did you find out about it? What surprised, confused, delighted, or frustrated you about the fic or the process of finding good fic? Did you encounter any obstacles to finding fic or fic communities that you enjoyed?

5. How do you see the future of online fan fic? Do you anticipate issues that concern you, particularly regarding its popularity, preservation, access, legality or proliferation?

6. Do you manage a multi-author fan fic archive? If so, what is easy and what is difficult about maintaining it, and why?

---

#### 6. Librarians and Fan Fiction

7. What assistance could interested librarians offer to help fan fic? Which of the following levels of assistance would you be willing to support, and why?

(answers below range from deep involvement to no involvement)

- Librarians could create systems to archive, post, organize, format, and describe fan fic (similar to the model of online full-text journal databases).
- Librarians could create best-practices models and offering workshops (either online or at fan fic conventions) to train archivists and writers in organization, description, and usability techniques.
- Librarians could create bibliographic guides (with a systematic, consistent descriptive method) to fan fic (similar to an online library catalog)
- Librarians could become more familiar with the extent and nature of fan fic, in order to direct potential readers and writers to it, but not altering practices or policies of fan fic authors and archivists. (similar to traditional readers advisory services)
- Librarians do nothing, and leave fan fic to the fan community.

8. Why did you choose this response?

---

### **7. OPTIONAL: followup questions via email**

As with all questions in this survey, this one is optional.

9. Are you willing to provide your email address should the researcher have further questions about your responses? If you provide your email address, it will not be released to anyone else by the researcher, and her record of it will be destroyed upon completion of the research.

- No, I'd rather not provide my email address. I will remain anonymous in my response.
- Yes, I would accept follow-up questions. My email address is:

---

### **8. Thank you!**

Thank you very much for your participation and your insight. If you have any questions or would like to request a copy of the research when completed, please contact Jessica Kem at [freya@email.unc.edu](mailto:freya@email.unc.edu).

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