FANNING THE FLAMES OF ROMANCE:
AN EXPLORATION OF FAN FICTION AND THE ROMANCE NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Fan fiction and romance novels constitute two bodies of romantic literature being produced for and by women within dramatically different environments. The purpose of this project is to analyze these two varieties of romance, detailing some of the ways that romance stories are being constructed in contemporary society and how they bring pleasure to their readers through immersion and sensuality. In this thesis I examine the writing guidelines currently provided by the Harlequin company for potential romance authors. I survey within fan culture to establish the popularity of romantic fan fiction and to learn more about fan fiction readers and their reading preferences. I also analyze the stories themselves, reading popular contemporary romance novels and works of fan fiction. The term textor is used, instead of fan writer, to convey the layers of writing, remixing, and creative play the creators of fan fiction engage in when developing their stories.
This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, with many thanks for letting me rummage through her library of paperbacks and for introducing my mother to Georgette Heyer.

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Introduction: Romance, A Reflection of Pleasure and Compromise

Bringing in $1.37 billion dollars in revenue in 2006, the commercial romance genre outsells nearly every other type of fiction on the market. The romance's consistent popularity with readers and selling power in the larger book market makes these stories and their audience a major market force. Fan fiction is another body of literature read and produced predominantly by women. Fan fiction also focuses primarily on romance. Once a print medium, passed in zine format from one fan to another at conventions, through local fan groups, and the mail, fan fiction has now taken hold on the Internet forming a vast and diverse network of communities and their interests. Socially however, we treat both with great discomfort and more than a little disdain. The romance novel's notorious covers and "purple prose," the fan's intense focus on a media product and eroticization of celebrities, all of these things, as well as the subject matter itself, have led to significant aesthetic, literary, feminist, and social critique as well as an overall devaluation of the genre.

Fan fiction and romance novels constitute two bodies of romantic literature being produced for and by women. However, they are produced within dramatically different environments. Simply categorizing these spheres as amateur and professional does a disservice to the many fan fiction producers with years of writing experience. It
also fails to convey the time and care that is often put into developing story ideas and editing the final text. Fan culture also produces texts in a different manner than traditional fiction textors. A major part of the fan's role is to rebuild and remix existing stories and characters, creatively weaving a new story into an existing universe. To better capture the essence of this work, I will be using the term textor throughout this project, rather than fan author or amateur writer. In this way I hope to convey and emphasize the distinctions between these two forms of romantic story production.

The purpose of this project is to analyze romance narratives with an emphasis on romantic literature being produced within fan culture. The project also explores the possibilities presented to contemporary readers within both types of romance narratives and uses survey data to establish the popularity of romantic fan fiction. In doing this, my goal is to identify what possibilities and fantasies emerge when women step away from the traditional format of professional writer/consuming reader, leaving an economically motivated sphere, and begin writing sexual and romantic stories for each other in a system without commercial guidelines, restrictions, and expectations.

The project's motivating questions are: When fan fiction is examined side-by-side with romance novels, what are the textual similarities and differences that emerge in these romantic stories? When narratives are produced within a more informal economy, how do women represent relationships, desire, and sexuality? What different
fantasies begin to appear and which traditional ones fade from view? To begin answering these questions, this project explores numerous texts from both communities. It also engages with fans directly to further explore who is reading and writing fan fiction and to assess the popularity of different romantic stories within this community. No one project can fully answer these questions, but my intent is that this research will motivate others to ask questions of their own.

**Discussion and Debate on Commercial Romances**

Whether produced by the publishing industry or within fan communities, romance stories are a major source of enjoyment in many women’s lives. These texts have also been the topic of great debate within academic circles. Some have expressed concern that romances are tools of oppression and patriarchy, others insist that romance narratives celebrate and empower women. Readers can use these stories to temporarily escape from their daily lives. Some critics have argued that this provides a refuge for the reader, others that it prevents her from acting in the real world. Looking over past work, it seems likely that the reality is more complex. The romance story's value to academics may be found instead in its ability to provide us with a mirror to the ways that certain groups of women negotiate and make sense of their gender, sexual relationships, and sexual material.
Before examining contemporary romance, however, we must look backwards to see the context and conversations which shaped today's romance novels. In the 1980s and early 1990s, significant scholarly work was produced on the content of romance novels. When the research of Janice Radway, Tania Modeleski, Jayne Ann Krentz, Pamela Regis, and others are examined as an ensemble, several major themes emerge: Romance novels have traditionally been used as forms of escape and fantasy by readers. The stories often depict emotionally withdrawn, physically, and/or sexually aggressive men being 'tamed' by their heroines. They also nearly always end with marriage and children shown as the inevitable outcome of love.

Critics Pamela Regis and Jayne Ann Krentz argue that these endings show that these are stories in which the heroine learns empowerment and the hero respect. Tania Modeleski and Janice Radway argue that they reveal women's compromise with patriarchy and inevitable containment within it. I believe that these varying interpretations reveal our own conflicting views, both socially and within academia, on what constitutes a balanced, equal heterosexual relationship in modern American culture, as well as what does or does not constitute passivity, submission, empowerment or agency.

Romance novel heroines changed as the roles of women in society shifted in the 1970s and 80s. A new, more empowered heroine—found particularly in the
"contemporary sensuous" romances of the 1980's—emerged out of the erotic romances in the 1970s.¹ Examining these texts in 1987's *The Romance Revolution*, Carol Thurston explains that this second sub-genre rejected much of the sexual violence present in earlier erotic historical romances, but continued to include explicit sexual content, as well as removing heroines from traditional domestic environments, and portraying the heroine's journey as a story of survival and success in building a new, more balanced emotional and physical relationship with her hero.² Throughout *Romance Revolution* Thurston cites romance novels which depict their heroines as women working hard to claim and defend careers, becoming more sexually aware, and focusing on their own needs, independence and happiness. Elements of all these heroines can be found in today's romance novels, but Thurston's analysis focuses on texts produced out of a specific cultural moment, influenced by the women's movement in the 70s and 80s. Once these new stories were established as the norm, the themes of empowerment and sexual liberation lessened. Following this trend, analysis has shifted to examine more subtle ways in which traditional, patriarchal elements of power and submission are still present, despite more obvious, surface level changes.

Romance novels may not always be manifestos for women's liberation, but they are still lauded by readers for their focus on women's sexuality and sexual pleasure. In

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² Ibid., 91-111.
1984's *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway found that romance novel readers "believe that they learn to assert themselves more effectively as a consequence of their reading because they so often have to defend their choices of material to others and justify their right to pleasure."³ Radway's readers felt that the act of reading transformed their lives and improved their self-esteem, but Radway herself remained unsure.⁴ Performing her own reading of romance novels, Radway found that the stories themselves presented a "promise of patriarchy" in which the heroine's happy ending depended on her learning to successfully interpret and understand her hero's behavior.⁵ Tania Modeleski shares her concern. In 1982's *Loving with a Vengeance* she argues that "Harlequins, in presenting a heroine who has escaped psychic conflicts, inevitably increase the reader's own psychic conflicts..."⁶ While Radway works to bring the opinions of readers into her analysis, she closes *Reading the Romance* unable to determine reading romance novels reading is "fundamentally conservative" or "incipiently oppositional."⁷ For Radway and Modeleski, the happy ending that contains compromise and balance is not enough. They also want to examine how this ending is obtained and which partner takes on the burden of obtaining it.

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⁴ Ibid., 86-118.
⁵ Ibid., 119, 149.
⁶ *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (Routledge, 2007), 57.
⁷ Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 209.
Many romance novel readers and writers have strongly defended the content of romance novels, often in direct response to these concerns. Jayne Ann Krentz and over twenty other romance novel writers present their own theories on the romance's appeal to readers in 1992’s *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*. Here they highlight the significance of the female protagonist within a male-dominated literary field, argue that romance endings are impossible without compromise and change from both partners, and emphasize that romance novels function as fantasy experiences for their readers, that the stories are in no way confused with reality. Krentz states, "the romance novel is based on fantasies... the readers are ... [not] likely to use their reading as a substitute for action in the real world." She refrains from identifying how and where action does occur, but the implication seems to be that these texts serve as models for reader behavior and encourage them to work for their own happiness, both as individuals and in their relationships.

Krentz and her fellow authors emphasize the significance of texts focused on women. Krentz also argues that, "[r]omance novels invert the power structure of a patriarchal society because they show women exerting enormous power over men." While focusing on the taming of men does provide the heroine with greater power over

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9 Ibid., 5

10 Ibid.
the hero, this notion of a fully inverted patriarchy may be an overstatement, particularly if the heroine's power is located in her beauty, sexuality, or her ability to understand the hero's emotions and motivations. This is not to say that romance novels always limit the heroine's power to these areas—many celebrate the heroine's intelligence, wit, and reactions under pressure—but deeper questions must still be asked about the type of power a heroine exerts, before it can be proclaimed an inversion of patriarchy.

The replacement of the traditional male protagonist with a female heroine, however, deserves greater emphasis, even if it simply operates as a new or different literary device. Examining the place of romance novels within traditional literary forms, Pamela Regis argues that romances are a traditional literary comedy, modified so that the heroine remains "at the center of the book…"11 For Regis, "[t]he romance novel's focus on the heroine, then, is a focus on women's problems."12 The importance of a literary genre focused on women's problems cannot be overlooked. As literary comedy, however, the narrative structure must also solve these problems and produce a happy ending. Again, we are left with the reality that the happy ending demanded by the romance formula may not be possible within the real world. Knowing this, the larger issue to be raised may be the question of why a focus on women and women’s

12 Ibid.
problems within literature is so often limited to or contextualized within the context of romance, rather than looking at women's lives beyond romantic struggles.

Much of this past analysis touches on the role of fantasy for women and the ways that modern social norms meld with classic literary archetypes. The presence of certain traditional tropes does provide a convenient format through which we build fantasy, but it does not foreclose the possibility of the concepts of marriage, partnership, and sexuality being changed in subtle ways.

Placed side by side, Thurston and Radway's work can be seen as clear examples of this process. Thurston found change and revolution in the romance novels of the 70s and early 80s. Also writing about romances in the 80s, Janice Radway expressed concern that the stories provided women with a false utopia and placed too much responsibility on the heroine to interpret and understand her hero's needs in order to gain a happy ending. Here, Thurston sees the impact of the women's movement and a place where change has occurred. Radway's concerns reflect a focus on the next steps—what happens after women start negotiating for more power both at work and in their relationships.

As a piece of popular literature, romance novels seek to tell a love story for the purposes of fantasy and pleasure to a very mainstream market segment. These texts speak to dominant norms, but the norms are adapted over time, reflecting the society
that produces them. The formula provides a structure, but it also can lead to change and experimentation within expressions of romance. In actuality, this may be one of romance's more significant functions for its readers.

In general, popular literature formats provide the reader with a comfortable structure and sense of stability, but this structure can then be used to expose the reader to new ways of being. Examining traditional detective novels and the more recent emergence of lesbian detective fiction, Phyllis Betz argues "[f]amiliarity may breed contempt for some, but for readers of genre fiction familiarity provides points of reference that enable us to maintain a sense of stability while at the same time allowing us to consider change."13 Looking at popular fiction as a whole, Scott McCracken argues, "[p]opular fiction, we might say, mediates social conflict… it acts as a medium between reader and world through which the social contradictions of modernity can be played out."14 Thurston's examination of the erotic romances of the 1970s and 1980s showed the impact the women's movement had on women's relationships. Past feminist critiques of commercial romances, highlighted the ways in which certain traditions remain embedded in the romance formula, but is there experimentation as well? In order for genre fiction to experiment with social changes, as Betz and McCracken

argue it can, the overall literary environment needs to be one that encourages diverse voices and new approaches.

Romance novels have achieved some level of notoriety for their larger-than-life moments of sexual pleasure and the use of "purple prose." While the so-called sweet romances limit their heroines to (at most) a few impassioned kisses, the more explicit sensual romances include multiple sex scenes told at varying levels of explicitness. Female sexuality and desire form threads which weave themselves through all these texts.

The traditional romantic tropes (monogamy, marriage, and family) may help romance novels to disguise or displace their role as erotica for women. As Thurston notes, the erotic romances that emerged in the 1970s "mark[ed] the first appearance of a large and coherent body of sexual literature for women…"15 No matter the level of sexual explicitness, the stories are highly sensual. While the sexual aspects may be coded and hidden, the texts still aim to bring a level of sexual pleasure to a heterosexual, female reader.

During the same time period in which Modeleski, Radway and Thurston wrote, feminist critiques of pornography and the pornography industry were beginning to

15 The Romance Revolution, 88.
emerge and gain strength. Lead by well-known feminist advocates and writers like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon, the movement culminated in several "feminist-led attempts to ban pornography by labeling it sex discrimination and defining it as any material that includes 'graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women'."\textsuperscript{16} The arguments constructed against pornography during this time period, as well as the movement's "assert[ion] that a causal relationship exists between the sex depicted in books, magazines, and movies, and crimes against women," undoubtedly shaped the conclusions and concerns of feminist academics writing about romance novels as well.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, while Modeleski and Radway raise concerns over romance's potentially negative impact on women, neither of them can easily prove these claims.

Many have cautioned against fixing a definition of pornography or taking too adamant a stance against it. In 2004's \textit{More Dirty Looks}, Lynne Segal argues that this limits or overlooks moments of reappropriation and transgressive readings, maintaining that different readings and interpretations help lead to change and the rearticulation of norms.\textsuperscript{18} Jennifer Wicke encourages academics to see pornography "as a genre, indeed a genre of consumption, with many branches, in order to break

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 161.
\textsuperscript{18} “Only the Literal,” in \textit{More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power}, edited by Pamela Church Gibson (British Film Institute, 2004), 68-69.
\end{flushright}
down the monolith of 'pornography' that can only serve to turn it into an allegory."

The same distinctions are needed when examining romance novels. It is a genre composed of many different subgenres and interests, each speaking to its reader and mediating social change in its own way.

As much as romance novels are debated within academic circles and derided as products of an inferior literary genre within scholarly and social circles, their role as one of the first (and still one of the only) types of sexual literature available to women deserves greater attention and analysis. The long silence in this area, despite ongoing attention to the traditionally male-focused pornography industry, may reflect a greater discomfort with female sexuality on the part of academics than we wish to acknowledge. Additionally, depictions of passive, entrapped female readers, helpless against an industry supposedly promoting patriarchy and submissiveness are also suspect, as they call upon the very stereotypes of women these academics seek to overcome.

**Fan Texts and Textors**

Fan fiction is a form of romantic literature that builds on the romance formula, but is not constrained by publisher guidelines and industry norms. Written within fan

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culture, these are stories that expand on existing popular media texts. Since the mid-seventies, communities of female fans or textors have been producing romantic and sexual stories of their own, cooperating with others in the community to workshop, edit, illustrate, and self-publish these stories for other fans. While general, non-romantic fan fiction exists as well, romance-based stories, gay and straight, dominate fan production.

Within fan communities participants produce art, videos, and stories. With the production and consumption of fan fiction, the fan uses fictional stories to extend a media universe beyond the boundaries of its original source. Sometimes these practices focus on playing in a fictional world, in other instances on developing an aspect of the world or a secondary character further. In the late nineties, fan fiction also expanded to involve fictional stories using real people, actors and other celebrities as their characters. Each of these fictional worlds allows fans to extend a media text as they please. Much like adults playing a game of “make believe,” these creative practices allow fans to push the directions of storylines and explore as they see fit.

Traditionally there are three major categories of fan interest—heterosexual pairings ("het"), homosexual pairings ("slash"), and general fiction ("gen")—but romance, the development a sexual and/or emotional attraction between characters, lies
at the heart of most stories. Within each fandom there are popular characters and popular character pairings. Fans often have favorite characters or types of stories that they prefer and may only seek out certain romantic pairings. Community also forms around these preferences, with fans crafting new stories as a way of maintaining and contributing to their own area of interest.

Much of the academic work on fan fiction has either focused on fan practice and the fan’s sense of empowerment as an audience or on fan culture and the ways that fans create and maintain community. Community plays a powerful role in the fan’s attraction to fan fiction. Based on her ethnography of female fan communities and practices, Camille Bacon-Smith concluded that female fans find great pleasure in "creating a new kind of community that fulfills women's needs to reach out and be heard." Examining the work fans do with media texts, Henry Jenkins coined the term "textual poaching" (borrowing from Michel de Certeau) to describe the reappropriation and imaginative work of fans, which he felt showed a strong sense of agency over media texts. Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander point out the importance of this

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20 The slash category can be further broken down into gay and lesbian subcategories, slash and femslash. Slash is often used as a catch-all term for all the homosexual romance, but due to the prevalence of male/male stories the term also synonymous with that particular type. Yaoi and yuri are additional subcategories, used for slash and femslash style stories within Asian related fandoms.


agency for self-expression and invention. They also see it as an important response to the political economies of culture in contemporary society:

"In postindustrial societies becoming more, not less, class divided, one's subordination may be a source of anomie and despair. Looked at this way, some individuals may seek to express their otherwise silenced identities through a common interest in a symbol, icon, or text, and, then, redress their alienation, through the social nature of fan practice."23

It is not just the social nature of fan practice that is important here. The production of fan fiction provides fans with new ways to craft fantasy for themselves and others, tailored to their own interests and pleasures. The diversity of sexuality and characters, rich universes, broad adaptability and freedom of expression—all features of fan fiction—can function as direct responses to the restrictions, traditions, and limitations found within the structure of many commercial romance novels. Fan fiction may often take the form of romantic comedy (as Regis defines it), but this is by no means its only form. With this in mind, fan fiction can also be seen (and used) as either supplement or replacement for traditional romance narratives. This is not to say that all fan fiction does this. Neither does it mean that traditional norms are eradicated. The stories produced are reflections of the fantasies and pleasures of the women reading and the textors creating them.

23 Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, eds., Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity (Hampton Pr, 1998), 5.
Slash, one aspect of fan fiction’s romantic content that receives significant attention, is a genre of fan fiction in which characters of the same gender are paired together romantically or sexually. There has been a great deal of academic and social curiosity over the production of these stories, due in great part to the fact that most slash readers and textors are assumed to be female and heterosexual (which may or may not be the case). In turn, this has caused some frustration on the part of fans, who "are interested in exploring the multiple and differing—sometimes even contradictory—motivations that lead them to this genre."24 The focus and excitement over slash may also be explained by what Jane Juffer sees as a general academic "desire to generate new interpretations, new ways of reading texts in the interest of producing new ways of seeing..."25 While great value can be found in examining and celebrating transgressive texts, in particular as a way of highlighting different and new ways of expressing gender and sexuality, analysis of them should not fully replace the examination of more traditional stories. Changes in traditional structures may sometimes be subtle, but they are still important shifts in message and social expectations. Additionally, examinations of various themes, old and new, show us how these more subversive texts impact dominant narratives.

With this in mind, in this project I explore a selection of popular fan fiction texts nominated by fans, instead of simply focusing on slash. Heterosexual or homosexual in content, fans have been crafting romantic and sexual stories for each other for decades. Like romance novels, these are stories written primarily for and by women offering them opportunities for escape, pleasure, and entertainment. However, it must be remembered that fan fiction is not produced for profit and its content does not need to be vetted by the publishing industry to reach its readers. Instead, these romances are produced communally, for fellow fans online, at fan conventions, via email exchanges and in living rooms around the world.

Another distinction between these two forms of romance literature is the fan's traditional comfort with the sexual content of their romance narratives. While romance novels have historically been careful to place sexual encounters within marriage (or the promise of an inevitable marriage), fan fiction textors and readers happily produce stories in which sex may be enjoyed in a variety of circumstances and often write about sexual encounters without a larger courtship narrative accompanying them.

Fan fiction provides us with a unique opportunity to explore new depictions of gender and sexuality from a different perspective than their depictions in romance novels. While fans gain immense pleasure from immersing themselves within a particular media text's universe and poaching texts with wild abandon, the effect of this
textual play is in telling new and/or different romantic stories than the ones being presented to the fan by the earlier media text. These practices facilitate an environment in which women explore love and sexuality without conventional boundaries, taking the romance formula and creating new forms of fantasy and entertainment for themselves.

Traditional approaches to popular culture texts can be found embodied in the different aspects of both the romance debate and the analysis of fan fiction. In their examination of romance novels, scholars traditionally approach the texts using a method which cultural studies scholar Paula Saukko summarizes as a "structuralist textual analysis that examines tropes and patterns in texts."26 Analysis of fan communities is often located under the umbrella of resistance studies. Saukko describes the historic approaches in resistance studies as critical contextualism (focusing on "structures of dominance") versus textual optimism (focusing on "symbolic resistance").27 Traditional textual analysis is complicated by the reality that each examination may differ depending on the perspective of the researcher and the cultural moment during which it is examined. Similar complications arise for

26 Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches (Sage Publications Ltd, 2003), 113.
27 Ibid., 39-40.
resistance studies, as each group both resists power and attempts to negotiate a place for themselves within traditional power structures.

To help balance the researcher's perspective in textual analysis, Saukko recommends "a sensitivity to complexity and the intertextual and social context… [a]nalyzing texts or discourses from multiple points of view, in order to tease out the social contradictions and contestations embedded in it…”\textsuperscript{28} She also identifies a third emerging approach to resistance studies, contingent resistance, which "analyzes a particular resistant activity from several perspectives… analyzing what types of power this activity resists and what types of power it buttresses."\textsuperscript{29} This notion of the compromises made between the individual and structures of power is well suited to romance narratives. It allows us to place the perspectives of feminist academics like Radway and Modeleski side by side with the viewpoints of writers like Krentz who insist that the novels are their effort to celebrate and focus on women. Looking at these negotiations, and comparing the major themes identified within romance novels in previous analysis to the messages found today, may also help us to see the places in which dominant ideologies have changed as well as the areas in which they remain static.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 39-40.
Examining these same issues from within the realm of popular fiction, Scott McCracken argues that popular fiction exists to help negotiate between both a resistance to change and an acceptance of it, distinguishing between the "self who reads" and the "self of everyday life." The self who reads is engaged in imagination and open to change, the self of everyday life craves a story that reflects elements of their own experience. As fantasy stories, romances must negotiate between these two perspectives, using its structure, characters, and the overall narrative to make sense of changes in the larger world, or change them within the story in order to create a place of refuge and pleasure for the reader.

Within my own research I seek to combine these approaches. Examining romance novels, I look further at the ways in which they balance the "self who reads" with the "self of the world." Another major goal is to revisit the dominant romantic themes identified in past analysis like Radway (1984), Modeleski (1984), and Thurston's (1987) and explore ways in which romance narratives have or have not changed in the intervening years. As the role of women in society continues to shift and expand, in what ways have romance novels moved with it? If popular fiction serves as an area for negotiation between traditional and developing social norms (as suggested by Scott McCracken and Phyllis Betz), what are the social and cultural

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30 *Pulp*, 5.
31 Ibid.
conflicts which can be found in romances today? I am also interested in the ways that romance stories and characters remain the same. My hope is to bring the romantic and sexual content into the forefront of my analysis rather than allowing it to remain hidden, and in doing so, complicate the easy dismissal or condemnation of romance novels and their depictions of power and aggression within relationships.

Next, I survey fans to identify types of fan fiction and specific stories which are popular within fan culture. I approach fan fiction not just as a fan practice, but as an emerging form of literature and another way that women are constructing romance and fantasy. Here I explore the impact that genre (which type of original media text the fan is working with) has on the stories produced, as well as looking at the influence that a greater diversity of sexualities may have on the various types of romantic narratives produced.

In the third chapter I place these two types of romantic stories in dialogue with each other, using the writing techniques used by fan fiction textors to examine the similarities and differences between these texts. I touch on which audiences are served or omitted from these stories and, throughout this, I look at how these two types of romance stories may function as pornography or erotica for women and the ways in which romance novels work to disguise this purpose.
My objectives for this project are: to re-examine romance novels and their functions for readers by testing our assumptions and stereotypes against the texts themselves; to produce an analysis of fan fiction as a type of romance literature; and, finally, to look at the interplay between fan fiction and romance novels. Writing in 1979, Ann Sitnow says that the world she sees reflected in romance novels "is indeed a cold, cold place." Much of what has been written on romance novels and on fan fiction stories was produced in the eighties and early nineties. Today, is the world depicted in romance novels any warmer? And, if romance novels reflect a negotiation with social norms to bring women pornography, what norms do contemporary romance novels negotiate with and reflect? Similar questions can be asked of fan fiction. When produced outside of a commercial environment, further removed from mainstream social pressures or the publishing industry, how are the fantasies being produced by women changed? Where do they remain the same?

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Chapter 1. Immersion and Desire: Common Themes in Contemporary Romance

The popularity and long history of romance novels within the publishing industry is testament to the genre's powerful resonance with and importance to its readers. Focusing on the lives of women, romance novels serve as windows into the ways that gender and sexuality are framed in contemporary America. Past analysis of romances have dealt with the role of women in society, and the preservation of patriarchal traditions, with the sexual content of the novels often remaining in the background. While scholars do sometimes discuss it, the traditional focus has been on examining and identifying heteronormative, domesticating, or patriarchal messages and condemning sexual violence, rather than exploring the purpose of the sexual content and what it may bring to its readers.

This chapter examines the ways in which romance novels are constructed, beginning with publisher guidelines on story construction as well as permitted content and then moving into some of the texts themselves. I argue that a romance novel’s structure is designed for immersion as well as entertainment. The characters and descriptive details are vehicles which bring fantasy to the reader. The fantasy itself may be one of erotic, sensual, or emotional pleasure, the level depending on the type of reader and the type of novel. Or, to phrase this more explicitly, on both the type of
female sexuality being created by a text and the construction of female sexuality the book’s target audience is perceived to be open to. Within this system archetypes and typical plot structures continue to be reused, but in some cases they are altered and reworked as times and norms change.

I begin with a brief summary of the industry and an examination of the writing guidelines provided by the Harlequin publishing company to potential authors. Many romance novel publishers still maintain open acceptance policies for unsolicited manuscripts, but the Harlequin company also supplies detailed writing guidelines on their website. Where some publisher websites simply list their contact information and formatting requirements, Harlequin identifies each imprint they publish and then details the type of stories they are looking for. These guidelines help us to see the forms that publishers want contemporary romances to take as well as how publishers would like the books to be perceived by outsiders.

Relying on Harlequin alone means that these guidelines may reflect more conservative and traditional aspects of the romance industry. As one of the older and more established romance publishers, Harlequin comes to romance with its own habits and history shaping current decisions. As an industry leader, however, Harlequin's self-positioning is a clear indicator of some of the forces at play across the romance market.
After examining the writing guidelines, I move on to some of the texts themselves. Examining major themes, the ways in which the stories connect to readers and how, as popular entertainment texts providing escape, fantasy, and pleasure, they move the reader from McCracken's "self of the real world" to the "self who reads," positioning the reader in a space that works both to resolve and circumvent societal conflicts, allowing the reader to temporarily escape day-to-day realities.\textsuperscript{33} I will explore the difference between fantasy and real world settings and revisit the character archetypes of the tamed man and the woman in need. Throughout this analysis I view romance novels, their archetypes, and traditions as texts that maintain a complicated balance between traditional norms and ongoing social changes. The stories play a key role in creating moments of pleasure and excitement for their readers, but the industry's strict guidelines may restrict experimentation and diversity.

\textbf{The Current Romance Market}

While today's romance novels remain dedicated to telling the stories of heterosexual women falling in love, the number of publisher imprints as well as the diversity of subgenres available to readers is somewhat overwhelming. Harlequin remains a dominant market force, but the company has competitors, such as Random

\textsuperscript{33}\emph{Pulp}, 5.
Figure 1: Romance Fiction by Subgenre

* Source for statistics: Romance Writers of America, Industry Statistics, 2006
** Includes young adult, erotic romance, chick-lit, and women’s fiction

House, Penguin Group, HarperCollins, Kensington, and numerous others, small and large. Traditional romance subgenres (regency, historical, contemporary, western)


While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the rapid emergence of smaller publishing houses, as well as internet based and self-publishing resources, the impact of these publishers on the industry and the content of romance novels would be a fruitful topic for analysis. Also, given that several major fan fiction authors have (and continue to) pull their fan fiction from the internet for the purposes of "filing off the serial numbers" and reworking their stories to be sold as e-books and/or self-published, the connection between fan fiction, these new areas of production, and the traditional
stories adhering to conservative Christian values and beliefs), suspense, paranormal, and erotic romances. Suspense and paranormal stories are not new to the industry, but in recent years the paranormal genre has grown to include a staggering variety of fantasy stories, far beyond vampires, brooding eighteenth century husbands, and dark castles.  

Representing two very different depictions of women's sexual behavior, the erotic and inspirational subgenres have both been identified as emerging trends by the Romance Writers of America. Inspirational romances adhere to conservative Christian beliefs and norms, making religion integral to the character's journey. The Harlequin writing guidelines for their erotic and inspirational imprints highlight the differences between these sub-genres. The more sexually explicit Blaze line states:

The series features sensuous, highly romantic, innovative stories that are sexy in premise and execution... Writers can push the boundaries in terms of characterization, plot and explicitness… We want to see an emphasis on the physical relationship developing between the couple: fully described love scenes along with a high level of fantasy, playfulness and eroticism are needed. [Emphasis mine.]

romance, merits further exploration. More time for development and expansion may be needed, however, before this can be given proper analysis.

35 These stories seem to have their roots in the traditional "gothic" romance, a category term which is no longer used, but was the subject of significant past analysis.


In contrast, the inspirational romance imprint, Steeple Hill, emphasizes:

Each story should have an emotional, satisfying and mature romance; however, the characters should not make love unless they are married. These are "sweet" romances. Any physical interactions (i.e., kissing, hugging) should emphasize emotional tenderness rather than sexual desire or sensuality. There should not be an excessive reliance on kissing scenes or use of words such as "desire," "need," etc. Please use euphemisms for the more intimate body parts. Please avoid any mention of nudity. [Emphasis mine.] 38

The differences between these two guidelines show just how varied and dichotomized our modern views on female sexuality and sexual conduct can be. Two different romantic and sexual ideologies are being articulated within commercial romances, one in which norms can be stretched and another working very hard to contain and obscure desire. Rather than placing these two genres in conflict, however, it is important to note the other Harlequin imprints arranged between them.

Several Harlequin lines (American Romance, Intrigue, Historical, Superromance [sic], and others) do not directly specify the level of sexual content they require, leaving authors to write what they prefer. The guidelines for the Romance imprint instruct writers to go with what they are comfortable with, as long as the couple is in love and things aren't too explicit. 39 No matter what, however, "There should be high sexual tension between your hero and heroine — a chemistry that leaps

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off the page from the get-go." Even if the hero and heroine are not portrayed in explicit sexual detail, the mood and tension remain. This emphasis on mood (and its importance in bringing pleasure to the reader) is something I will explore in more detail later in this chapter.

While the Harlequin guidelines reveal a large degree of flexibility in what level of female sexual activity (and desire) is depicted in their books, the wording also suggests that age may play some role in which practices (sex outside of marriage, explicit writing of sexual encounters) the reader and the heroine will prefer. Harlequin's Blaze line explains, "Submissions should have a very contemporary feel — what it's like to be young and single today. Heroes and heroines should be in their early 20s and up." The SPICE line introduces itself by declaring, "Modern women have finally begun embracing and taking charge of their own sexuality." While not stated explicitly, the suggestion seems to be that these stories are targeting a younger demographic and reflect a changing audience.

With the popularity of the erotic and inspirational romances, we see two different stances on women's sexuality, but between them, making up the majority of romance novel content, we see subtler versions of these extremes. The Blaze and

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40 Ibid.
Inspirational writing guidelines highlight the reality that we are living in a moment where female sexuality and sexual practices are viewed from a wide variety of perspectives and norms, each aspiring for their practices to be normalized. The readers seek out stories that are familiar and comfortable. They look for heroines who deal with power dynamics that they are familiar with, but also seek out the stories in which the narrative makes the reader's dreams possible and gives them their a happy ending.

Despite their seeming diversity, in many respects, romance novels remain homogeneous. While publishers request varied levels of sexual conduct and content, the stories themselves continue to focus on four major themes: love, marriage, children and heterosexuality. Most of the writing guidelines do not directly state that the novels must end with love, marriage, and children, but the Harlequin American Romance line does connect these themes, saying it "features fast-paced, heartwarming stories about the pursuit of love, marriage and family in America today."\(^{43}\) They also align these goals with social norms, emphasizing that these stories are "all the best of what it means to be American!"\(^{44}\) Similarly, the Romance line focuses on the "realities of real women's lives — the importance of home, family, friends; universal hopes and aspirations for love, security and children."\(^{45}\) Also, the guidelines for nearly all


\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) eHarlequin.com, “Writing Guidelines: Harlequin Romance.”
publications emphasize and assume the connection of sex with love. Romance and the happy ending are linked to partnership, emotional commitment, and family building. As these are stories aimed at heterosexual women, these notions are also then imbedded in the male/female relationship and the social and gender norms that accompany these relationships.

**Reading the Romance(s)**

The romance novels included in this analysis provide an overview of the popular narratives in contemporary romance novels. The project limits itself to books and authors identified by readers as favorite stories and storytellers. Within the romance industry, there are many reader polls produced each year, compiling lists of annual favorites. Many of these are specific to certain genres, but there are two major, long-standing reader polls available that provide lists of popular texts from across romance genres: The Romance Writer Association's (RWA) annual reader poll (organized by the RWA's Oklahoma Chapter) and the All About Romance annual readership poll (a popular online community for romance readers). This project uses the most recent reader polls available, both focusing on novels published in 2006. While a number of authors from the RWA's honor roll, a list of bestselling authors across the industry, are already represented within the reader polls, several other
authors from the honor roll are also included. Which additional texts are included
depends on which authors have published in the past 2-3 years, which texts are
available, random selection, and the time restrictions of the project. (See appendix one
for the complete list of books, authors, and publishers, sorted by sub-genre.)

While the reading list includes several texts that are available electronically (as
e-books) it does not include any books that are only available electronically. If any e-
books appeared on the reader polls, they would be included, but all the finalists are still
available in print. At the present, the romance novel industry's production of e-books
and Internet-related content is in its infancy, with print materials still dominating the
market.\textsuperscript{46} The reader polls themselves insure that a text from most of the major
romance categories is included, but the two most prevalent genres represented are
historical and contemporary romance.

Given practical constraints, it is not possible to read every bestseller published
in 2006. The project is undoubtedly missing some top authors and popular books.
Instead, the texts represent a range of romance sub-genres, specifically, those identified
by readers as their favorites. It is important to note that neither reading poll included a
category for African American romances, a subgenre within the industry. Few

\textsuperscript{46} Despite this, it should not go unstated that romance novel publishers are industry leaders in
the exploration of electronic publishing and promotion. In their most recent report on the industry, the
Romance Writer's Association noted that "the early [ebook] best-seller lists were dominated by… titles
favored by men… But lately the lists are led by romance and women's fiction…" (Romance Writers of
America, “ROMStats Report 2006.”)
characters of color appear anywhere in these texts, with the exception of one Asian American heroine and a few secondary characters. However, this lack of diversity is significant in and of itself, suggesting that these particular depictions of romance may be read primarily by white women. This further reinforces the deep connections between romance novels and western, white, patriarchal frameworks for power and gender.

Within these books two types of worlds are constructed: "real" and fantasy. While each of the romance novels are works of pleasure and escape—or, to quote Harlequin, "[u]pbeat and feel-good"—many situate their stories within the context of women's daily lives, providing everyday situations and details with new narratives and fresh potential for something more than the everyday encounter. These stories include general single title and series romances like Connie Brockway's *Hot Dish* and Kelley St. John's *Real Women Don't Wear Size 2*, as well as Molly O'Keefe's *Family At Stake* and Holly Jacobs' *Here With Me*, both single father stories—providing the heroine with an instant family and call to motherhood—and *With Christmas in His Heart* an inspirational romance by Gail Gaymer Martin.

The heroines of these stories include a social worker, several small business owners, a successful advertising

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48 Series romance involves a collection of romances being produced from one publisher. It might involve one author or several writing on a certain romantic theme, focusing on a group of women, a particular location, etc. A single title is exactly that, a one-time story.
executive, a housewife, a retiree, a department store worker, two high school students and an emerging television host. The characters range from role model figures to the woman next door. The erotica novels also fit into this category. They are stories situated in the real world, but a world in which sensory details, as well as character's sexual thoughts and desires are heightened, making sexual desire an even larger piece of the story structure.

Others leave the real world far behind. These stories include R. Garland Grey's *Fey Born*, Jacquelyn Frank's *The Nightwalkers: Jacob*, and J.R. Ward's *Lover Awakened*, paranormal/fantasy romances involving vampires and demons, as well as historical stories like *Devil in Winter* by Lisa Kleypas (regency) and *The Silver Rose* by Susan Carroll (medieval). These heroines include a bored librarian sensing there should be more to her life (in this case benevolent demons), a female vampire captured by vampire hunters, a regency wallflower looking to escape her family, and a medieval mystic. While the first set of stories work to enhance the possibilities of real world situations, this group places the reader in a new reality, providing a different (possibly more complete) form of escape.

The suspense and western genres seem to position themselves carefully in-between fantasy and real worlds. Suspense stories like Anne Stuart's *Cold as Ice* and Elizabeth Sinclair's *Baptism In Fire* are situated within real places, but the characters
soon find themselves drawn into far more dangerous versions of reality, worlds populated by spies, arsonists, criminals and filled with constant threats to the protagonists’ safety. Contemporary western's like *Bunking Down With the Boss* by Charlene Sands, also sit in this space between the real and full fantasy. While set in the United States, the western speaks to a much different way of life, building upon the myth of the cowboy, the American West and ranch life. The characters are classic archetypes (the ranch hand, sheriff, ranchers wife or strong frontier woman) reworked to fit a modern setting. This genre's proximity to reality, however, also shifts depending on the reader and their relation to the story and the West. 

Fantasy style worlds allow readers to escape from their reality and immerse themselves in a new one. In historical romances like *Lord Perfect*, the reader rides in carriages across England, J.R. Ward's Black Dagger Brotherhood series involves punk-rock vampires, and *Fey Born* is set in a mythical Ireland. Each experience depends on the reader's book selection. In contrast, the heroine of *Spying in High Heels* stakes out an office building while drinking a Frappachino and in *A Good Yarn* the attractive FedEx deliveryman is a romance in the making. Here we see romance stories set in the real world allowing romance fantasies to enter and enhance the reader's daily life. 

These different world-types provide the reader with a broad array of fantasy opportunities. Each, however, works to move the reader from her own life into the text.
Play, escape and imagination are classic reading experiences. The difference within the romance novels is that—whether entering a fantasy realm or a heightened version of the real world—sensuality, sexuality, pleasure, and love are all embedded in the reading experience as well.

Past explorations of romance novels such as Janice Radway's work have focused on common romantic themes, particularly that of aggressive heroes, tamed and rendered safe through a heroine's love. Radway and many others have expressed concern over how the romanticizing of aggressiveness and control may impact readers. However, the erotic elements of these scenes must also be considered. Making the sexual elements of power more explicit makes it easier for readers and academics to begin untangling sexual fantasies from social realities.

The tamed male archetype is still present in romance novels today. This character tends to take on two different forms. In one, the hero is a repressed or constricted male who learns to trust, depend upon, and be open with the heroine. Mac Edwards, the hero in *Family at Stake* has been hurt by both the heroine, Rachel Filmore, and his late wife. At the beginning of the story, Mac is struggling with raising his daughter and reluctant to date women again. Later, Rachel confronts him, saying:
'You're a coward, Mac Edwards. This is not about you protecting your daughter. It's about you being scared I'll leave you again.' 'You talk to your daughter Mac. You're shortchanging her and you're robbing us of the chance to be happy.'

For his character to grow, and for the romance to develop, Mac needs to learn to forgive the Rachel, confront the history of his marriage, and be open with his daughter. This will lead to trust of the heroine and love.

The tamed male can also take on a darker, much more aggressive form. This hero is violent and angry, a possessive man who learns to express gentleness and trust towards the heroine, while also channeling these traits into a new role as protector, keeping her from danger. Books like *Cold As Ice* and J.R. Ward's *Lover Awakened* are careful to place the characters of Peter and Zsadist in a context that helps explain to readers how these heroes were shaped. In *Lover Awakened*, Zsadist (a vampire) is respected by his friends, but also feared and mistrusted because of his propensity towards physical and sexual violence. He's described as "being known for his misogyny" and readers are told from the start that, "[u]sually fright in a female was the only thing that could turn him on…"

The next thing readers learn, however, is that Zsadist spent years being imprisoned and tortured physically and sexually by another female vampire. All of this is intended to give readers and the heroine a context for his actions, but more importantly, it provides a reason why these traits can be changed or

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49 Molly O'Keefe, *Family at Stake (Single Father)* (Harlequin, 2006), 239.
directed elsewhere. Here, the story’s message can be interpreted in several ways. At first glance, this is a classic idealization or rationalizing of violent behavior, but it is also a way of allowing the reader to enjoy darker, more violent aspects of sexuality while disguising them within traditional romantic contexts. Specifically, a story environment that leads readers out again safely and, if readers are uncomfortable, allows the audience to be misdirected by a happy, normalizing ending.

Darker more aggressive heroes also add intensity and danger to traditional romance narratives. The tone is darker, the sexual acts more dangerous (and more violent), the power dynamics charged. In *Cold As Ice*, Peter is "a brilliant operative who'd never failed a mission" but readers are told, repeatedly, that the heroine is endangering his task and may need to be killed.\(^{51}\) The traditional themes of conflict and misunderstanding between hero and heroine are given additional emotional charge. The danger also reinforces and amplifies the romantic and sexual moments. Peter is emotionally cold and committed to his role as an operative. Readers are told that his nickname is "The Iceman" and that "he never showed or felt emotion."\(^{52}\) However, he still finds himself compelled to make sure Genevieve escapes to safety, all of this further emphasizing the depth of the romantic bond being formed between the two characters.

\(^{51}\) Anne Stuart, *Cold As Ice* (Mira, 2006), 25.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 85.
In *Cold As Ice* the majority of the sex scenes are angry and bleak. In their first sexual encounter, Genevieve still believes that Peter is the villain, and that he is going to kill her. The entire sex scene is a power struggle, he wants to dominate her, to prove his abilities as a lover and force her to enjoy herself. In turn, she wants to show him that he can't affect her and that she will not submit. Instead, Genevieve finds herself physically and emotionally overwhelmed and overpowered: "Things were tumbling out of control… there was nothing she could do to stop it. He'd taken over and her body no longer belonged to her. It was his, to do with what he liked."\(^{53}\) One reading of this moment is that the text removes some of the potential stigma attached to female desire and sexuality by forcing it upon her. Another is that the text is playing with classic pornographic and erotic themes of dominance and submission. When doing this, romances provide a structure where the heroine is hurt, but readers know that she will find safety and happiness at the end of the story. Given that the happy endings of romance novels are guaranteed, the formula itself provides readers with a safe way to experience and enjoy the darker aspects of these stories and sexual encounters. Readers know that they will also be lead out safely, along with their heroines.

Great concern has been raised by Radway, Jackson, and others about the implications of angry and aggressive romantic heroes and their eventual taming at the hands of the heroine. According to Radway, "[t]he romance's conclusion promises her

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 171.
that if she learns to read male behavior successfully she will find her needs… will be satisfied perfectly."54 Here, Radway's concern is that the text places all the responsibility on the reader, while promising the impossible. Also speaking of the temperamental hero, Modeleski cautions that "Harlequin novels do not so much acknowledge evil as transform it."55 In response, romance writers Ann Maxwell and Jayne Ann Krentz argue that these are essential aspects to romance narratives. "A story without conflict of real risk of danger to the heroine is flat and uninteresting… You don't get much of a challenge from a sensitive, understanding, right-thinking modern man… he is too much like the heroine to provide any real source of conflict."56 Writing in 1989, perhaps this new prototype for a hero seemed implausible, but within this project, several variations on these newer, more sensitive characters can be found, particularly within the two single father stories. Yes, both these heroes have flaws that need to be overcome and there is still conflict between the protagonists, but the heroines are not placed in any direct physical danger as a method for creating conflicts and challenges for the characters to overcome.

While these more violent and aggressive moments can be connected to both the historic and modern roles proscribed to women and men in society, they also involve sexual and romantic encounters, sometimes sensual, sometimes erotic, and are placed

54 Reading the Romance, 149.
55 Loving With a Vengeance, 43.
there for the readers' enjoyment. Rather than condemning romance novels and the more power laden elements within them (or within women's sexuality) it seems more productive to ask: Are other stories also being told? Are other depictions of love, happiness, and sexuality available?

Looking over the selection of texts used for this project, the answer is a conditional yes. Only a few of these stories include depictions of sexuality as dark and aggressive as those in *Cold As Ice*. However, many played with the concepts of size and attractiveness, as well as overwhelming passions and emotions leading to aggressiveness and one partner overpowering the other. There is a clear sexual subtext to all of this and it needs to be taken into greater account when interpreting these scenes. Obviously, these pleasures are complicated by many real world issues and concerns, but becoming trapped in an argument over which type of sexual conduct is or is not "good for women" to read and take pleasure in seems to be a dangerous path to go down.

Another dominant theme within the romances read for this project was that of the deserving heroine. These protagonists are, for the most part, women in need. Not of rescuing per se (although that certainly occurs), but in need of relationships, love, and change. Their lives are missing something and the process of falling in love leads them to make changes and grow, both within themselves and through the developing
relationship. These heroines are all written sympathetically. While some may have temporarily lost their way, each is good at heart. Several of the career women are cast as characters too committed to their jobs and too distracted from their families, personal ethics, or feelings. As the books must close with a happy, romantic ending, the stories lead the heroine back to family life and into motherhood.

Instead of interpreting these characters solely as women who have been forced back into traditional roles, I would like to suggest incorporating a second framework. While traditional norms no doubt play a role in how these narratives are constructed, these characters also seem to be caught between the conflicting priorities present in contemporary life. In *With Christmas in His Heart*, Christine is committed to her job and successful, but her manager is inflexible when it comes to giving her time off to care for her grandmother. In *Here With Me*, Lee owns a small, successful business, balancing her time between art production and sales, but her parents devalue her choices, unable to recognize Lee's success because it is smaller and nontraditional. In *Cold as Ice*, Genevieve is a talented lawyer, but she has traded helping others for wealth. Now, she helps the rich hide their money and drugs herself to escape self-hatred and guilt. In *Hot Dish*, Jenn yearns for success. She wants to prove that she's different, but does so while denying herself a personal life as well as detaching from and devaluing her family and hometown. Each of these women struggle to find a
balance between corporate success and their happiness. These heroines are successful, financially independent, and proficient in their fields, but they also value compassion, caregiving, empathy, and community responsibility.

As the role of women in society changes, traditionally male and female spheres and responsibilities have begun to merge. The professional realm (historically male) gradually opens itself up further to women. The domestic space (historically female) is integrated further into the lives of men. The habits of today's ideal worker—a competitive spirit, prolonged work hours, etc.—clash with the strong demands of an individual's personal life, family obligations, and desire to help others. In Here With Me, Adam's commitment to work threatens his relationship and ability to be a good parent. These tensions can be viewed through different lenses. The heroine's journey might be seen as a return to the domestic, but the narrative also seems to end when she has found a balance between the two worlds and the hero has entered the domestic sphere with her as a parent and partner. Rather than identifying these moments solely as the heroine's return to the household and motherhood, they can also be seen as focusing on the hero's entrance into this space, as well as critiquing the demands of modern professional life.

Contemporary heroines are financially independent and self-reliant. They lack partners, but will find heroes who admire and love them. Historical heroines battle
against the inequities of their times and find relationships that provide happiness and mutual respect. Ultimately, the protagonists' journeys are also their negotiations with each other; a process of coming to terms with their partners and guaranteeing that respect is present in their relationships.

One of the oldest and most criticized elements of romance novels are the dramatic rescues of damsels in distress. These scenarios echo back to historic stereotypes of women as passive victims, unable to protect and fend for themselves. Within contemporary romances, authors seem confused as to how to escape this dynamic. A romance requires drama, and a climactic moment to unite the characters. Doing this without a dramatic rescue appears to be a challenge. Most of the action oriented stories ended this way, but some attempted to construct these moments in new ways.

One method for reworking the rescue scenario is to place the heroine and hero in danger together, forcing them to cooperate and help each other throughout the climactic moment. In Elizabeth Sinclair's *Baptism in Fire*, Rachel Lansing, an arson investigator, is called upon to investigate arson cases that may be connected to her daughter's disappearance. Rachel's ex-husband is a police officer who is also involved
in the case. Luke wants Rachel to be safe and demands she be removed from the case, but he's depicted as too protective and controlling. In *Baptism by Fire* the hero can't solve the case or resolve the conflict, it is not his role. He plays a part, but he is one piece of a team, made up of men and women. There are moments in which he attempts to take on the role of rescuer, he tries at one point to leap into a fire and help Rachel, but other officers restrain him. Instead, it’s the job of the firefighters (lead by a woman) to help the heroine. Throughout the story gender does not determine a character's role, instead a characters actions are determined by their individual skills.

*Baptism by Fire* also maintains a careful balance between honoring the heroine's intelligence and ability to protect and assist herself with the moments of drama and conflict that make up a suspense and action story. Rachel does find herself in peril, but she responds proactively and works to reduce the danger. In the climax—a moment when the reader must traditionally feel that the fate of the protagonist (male or female) is truly in jeopardy—Rachel is trapped in a burning building, but she frees herself, moving into a location where she can be found. Later, she and the hero cooperate to navigate through another fire, protecting their daughter from the danger together.

While *Baptism by Fire* features a smart, quick-thinking, and proactive heroine, other heroines deal with danger in less productive ways. *Cold as Ice*, reminds us that it
is not enough for the author to tell readers that a character is empowered. The character's actions and choices must support it. Genevieve, the heroine, is a talented lawyer. Peter, the hero, is an agent for a secret organization. Genevieve is entirely dependent on Peter throughout the story, but she spends much of the novel thinking he is the villain. When she acts to protect herself or tries to escape and rescue the villain, the reader knows that the entire attempt is foolish and unwise. An act of power is reduced to poor judgment and emphasized as inappropriate behavior. Genevieve may be trying to help herself, but the author never allows her protagonist to be anything but a victim.

These two very different heroines, one able to protect herself the other helpless, represent two extremes in approach and gender roles. In past analysis of romance heroines, scholars have criticized romance novels for their victimization of women. Stevi Jackson summarizes this concern saying, "[i]nsofar as romance helps to construct a form of femininity which finds pleasure in submission, this is a very good reason why we should retain our critical stance on it." In response, romance advocates have strongly defended the books. Jayne Ann Krentz, a romance author, counters:

Readers understand that the books celebrate female power. In the romance novel… the woman always wins. With courage, intelligence, and gentleness

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she brings the most dangerous creature on earth, the human male, to his knees. More than that, she forces him to acknowledge her power as a woman.\(^5^8\)

Given how important the heroine is to readers, how conflicted the reactions are on both sides, and the various ways in which heroines are written, it seems like this conflict also points to a genuine confusion in society over women's level of power.

The romance formula relies on conflict and danger to add to the intensity of the drama and emotions. The damsel in distress is an easy way for authors to fill this need. However, looking back at *Baptism by Fire*, there are still other story options that could have been used for the climax. The hero might have been the one in danger, instead of the heroine, or the climax could have been constructed around something completely different, like the capture of the villain. The repetition of the rescue scenario, again and again within romances, indicates a place where the traditional formula has become entrenched. Ultimately, moments of peril provide excitement and danger for the reader, but these sensations can be provided in a variety of other ways.

Romance novels provide readers with fantasy experiences and an escape to happier or more exciting realities. The goal of these fantasy experiences is immersion. Reader are then positioned within settings where sexual and erotic pleasures are either

\(^{58}\) *Dangerous Men & Adventurous Women*, 5.
explicit, encoded, or barred depending on the gender and sexuality norms the texts adhere to. While placing stories in historic settings or fantasy worlds far removed from a reader's daily life is an important method for initiating immersion into romantic fantasies, two additional storytelling techniques, focusing on food and costuming, cement this process and connect the reader's body to the heroine's.

The heroine's clothing choices and hairstyles are often described in great detail and elaborate meals carefully itemized. In *The Husband Trap*, Violet wears "a spotted muslin in pale yellow with an overskirt of sea green that her maid declared made her eyes sparkle like jewels."59 Maddie, in *Spying in High Heels*, wears what she describes as "kick-butt clothes. Black DKNY cargos, ice-blue baby T, and my prize black, two-inch Jimmy Choo's with the rhinestone details."60 In historic stories, descriptions of clothing often provide readers with a method for entering the text and playing at being in a time very different from their own. In modern stories, the use of designer brands provides readers with similar experiences, but here it includes experiencing designer goods and consumption, as well as playing dress-up.

In more familiar settings, food can also operate as a sensory detail and a way of drawing readers into the story. *Real Women Don't Wear Size 2* begins with the heroine gleefully eating cranberry bliss bars at Starbucks. In *Spying in High Heels*, Maddie

60 Gemma Halliday, *Spying in High Heels* (Making It, 2006), 32.
stops at Starbucks as well, multiple times, for baked goods and drinks. Jenn's cooking, in *Hot Dish*, is described in reverent detail and her hot dish (a sort of casserole) is "a golden silky concoction." In historic and fantasy stories, different foods may be exotic and new, but are easy to imagine, like "the tantalizing scent of stew stock, mutton and herbs… [and] long round loaf of spotted barm brack bread" Lana eats in the beginning of *Fey Born*. With food, readers are given yet another path into a particular adventure, this method appealing directly to the senses as well as the imagination.

The use of food and costuming draws readers into these stories, connecting them to a character's physical body, feelings and emotions. Over and over, these stories focus on immersing their readers in romance, emphasizing sensory details, emotional feelings and the physical responses the heroine or the hero has towards the other. By ensuring that readers are fully inserted into the fantasy world, these texts allow readers to experience the character's sensations for themselves, physically and emotionally.

While it is sometimes joked that romance novels are "porn for women", scholars discussing these texts have not explored this aspect of the stories for their readers in great detail. Given the complicated relationship women have with their own sexuality, it is not surprising that connections to pornography are carefully hidden, or

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that when they become more visible, we react with discomfort. Romance novels do not
cater to the sexual desires of men and may not match our immediate expectations of
pornography.

Romance novels have traditionally been texts filled with code words and
suggestive details. We often laugh at the elaborate ways stories manage to avoid words
like penis or clitoris, but these euphemisms indicate the many restrictions and
limitations placed on women's sexuality within our society. Obscuring these elements
has also allowed them to remain under the social radar.

This masking shows us the historic separation of women from more explicit
and easily identifiable pornographic material. However, it is also a disguise that has
allowed the sexual content to remain within the text and reach its audience. Here,
finally, we see the constant tension within romance novels regarding their sexual
content. By disguising sexuality and desire, the books are better able to reach readers.
By encoding sexuality and desire within marriage, motherhood, and heterosexuality,
the books adhere to dominant social norms and constrain the diversity of sexualities
and practices represented. Readers seeking more explicit and open sexual texts may go
directly to the erotica genre of literature instead. However, as erotic texts for women
establish themselves and loosen social stigmas, romance publishers also adapt, as is
indicated by their increased focus on erotic romance.
Contemporary romance novels provide a wide variety of sub-genres and imprints for their readers, catering to a diverse spectrum of interests and conceptions of female sexuality. Despite this diversity, we cannot forget that romance novels still focuses solely on the lives of heterosexual women. These depictions of women and male/female relationships reflect a dominant group. Challenges to norms, and any changes to the female roles over time, occur slowly and subtly. Certain core romantic archetypes remain and past concerns raised over tamed males and women in need still resonate. However, the sexual elements of these archetypes also need to be considered. This may not change scholarly concern over the darker and more violent elements of some romances, but it may help to explain why these characters continue to be written in such extremes.

There are also ways in which romance novels are experimenting with new methods of character construction and for telling classic stories. Heroines are placed in danger, but what happens to these characters there varies greatly. In some stories heroines cannot assist themselves, in others, heroines and heroes are in danger together, and in still others, heroines work independently to rescue themselves. Each of these scenarios places heroines and readers in a position of excitement and danger.
However, it may also be time for authors to explore new ways of creating this sense of excitement within their texts. Harlequin writing guidelines for some of their more contemporary imprints seem to reinforce this need, demanding fresh approaches to romantic stories and a departure from cliché.

Finally, we see in romances a variety of ways in which the texts work to create immersive worlds for their readers, providing experiences of excitement, danger, adventure and sexual pleasure. The traditional euphemisms and formulas found in romance novels can also be seen as ways in which the stories compromise with society and the historic regulation of female sexuality. These compromises mean that romance novels, publications dedicated to telling stories by, for, and about heterosexual women, remain one of the most popular types of books sold today. These negotiations come with some costs, however, and the maintenance of dominant social norms and gender roles does not appeal to all readers. What happens when women begin to seek other stories, and want to create new models for romance, will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter 2. Surveying Fan Culture: The Popularity of Romantic Fan Fiction

Before exploring romance narratives in fan fiction the overall popularity of romantic and sexual stories within fan writing needs to be established. With romance novels, publishers have created specific imprints to target readers and subgenres like regency and suspense have formed as major organizational categories. Sales records and reader polls can then be used to identify the books that are popular with commercial romance readers. Similar groups exist within fan culture in the form of fandoms, popular story types and pairings. The popularity of these different interests is harder to identify. Many fans read homoerotic stories, but how popular are they really? Relationship stories seem to be more popular than nonromantic ones, but is this really the case? A survey of fan interests, reaching out to a large group of fan fiction readers can begin answering these questions in ways that personal observations of fan culture or an analysis of a specific fandom cannot.

While an individual survey cannot provide an exhaustive look at all of fan culture, it is a beginning step towards asking broader questions about fan texts and looking at some of the larger romantic and sexual themes in fan fiction. This process involves using the survey results for two different levels of inquiry. First, assessing the prevalence and popularity of romantic and sexual stories within fan culture by
identifying popular stories and general reading preferences (the focus of this chapter).

Next, moving into a deeper exploration of the texts themselves by reading popular stories (found in the next chapter). Do trends and frameworks emerge across fandoms as they do in romance novels? And who, generally, is reading these stories? Is this group similar to romance novel readers or different?

Asking questions of a community which faces stigma for its activities and interests involves a great deal of trust on the part of that community. Despite this, thousands of fans chose to contribute to the survey and help spread the word. This is an engaged, self-observant sub-culture, eager to participate, provide feedback, and to be heard. A survey requires its participants to generalize, but this particular survey asked participants to generalize about reading practices, a process which can be hard for any reader. Reading is, in and of itself, a personal, subjective, experience. This experience becomes even more personal when sexual content and less socially accepted reading preferences come into play. While generalizations can be made, which romantic or sexual materials are read, and under what circumstances, are all personal choices on the individual level. In the process of identifying popular trends, some of this diversity and personalization has undoubtedly been lost.

This chapter and the next rely on the specialized vocabulary of fan culture. Here is a list of key terms:
Fandom: A major category of fan interest, typically focused on one media text or universe. For example: *Harry Potter*, Jane Austen, *Star Wars*.

Slash: Fan fiction focused on a romantic or sexual relationship between two men. (Sometimes used in reference to lesbian pairings as well, but these are more commonly referred to by another term.)

Femslash: Fan fiction focused on a romantic or sexual relationship between two women.

Het: Fan fiction focused on a heterosexual romantic or sexual relationship.

Gen: Fan fiction that does not include a romantic or sexual pairing.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the survey’s general construction, how it was promoted, and the level of responses obtained. Participant feedback and survey limitations are also covered, as well as how the data has been processed and the ways in which this shaped the final list of popular fandoms and stories. Finally, the results are used to discuss the popularity of romantic fan fiction among survey participants, the similarities and differences that appear between fan fiction and romance readers, and the specific types of romantic stories that are popular with fans.

**Survey Construction, Promotion, and Response Rates**

The survey asked for three types of information: general questions about reading practices, favorite fandoms and stories, and basic demographic information.
Created with input from academic advisors and colleagues, the survey consisted of twenty-five to thirty questions, with the final amount varying depending on if the respondent participated in a single or multiple fandoms. Participants were asked to think back, remember favorite stories and textors, and to provide story and webpage links. This required some added commitment of time and energy on their part. Fortunately, maintaining bookmark lists and recommendation pages, as well as participating in other individual and/or social tracking activities, are popular exercises for many fans. These community practices greatly facilitated the collection process.

Participant recruitment for the survey depended primarily on word of mouth. To facilitate this the survey was promoted in a variety of ways and as generally and broadly as possible in hopes of moderating the non-random nature of convenience sampling. In February 2008, journals were created on Livejournal.com and Insanejournal.com, two major social networking sites popular with fans. Journal entries explained the purpose of the survey, provided a link to participate, and also supplied various recruitment tools to encourage promotion of the survey to others. The promotion tools consisted of a sample email and several banner images (with accompanying HTML code) that could be used in blog posts or on websites to spread the word and gain attention for the survey. These journals then 'friended' several general fan discussion communities and other journal accounts listing fan fiction in

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63 Greastestjournal.com and Journalfen.net were not accepting new accounts at the time.
their interests for a limited time period (the duration of the survey).\textsuperscript{64} This technique allowed the survey to reach about 400 journal accounts. A request for participation was also made within Fanthropology, a major fan community often used by academics and fans to ask questions, promote surveys, and discuss fan practices.\textsuperscript{65} It is impossible to say just how many people read Fanthropology, but the journal has nearly 2000 members, is watched by nearly 2000 journal accounts, and the entries are also syndicated outside of LiveJournal on sites like InsaneJournal. Finally, the survey itself concluded by taking participants to a web page thanking them for their participation and requesting that they take a minute to tell others on their own or using the provided promotional tools. No personal contacts were used to help spread the survey and no direct appeals to individual fandoms or interest areas were made.

Considering the time commitment involved in taking the survey, the outpouring of interest and participation that followed was astonishing. The survey received nearly 1000 responses in the first twenty-four hours alone and this pace remained steady throughout the two-week process. At close, the survey had 7,748 participants. None of this would have been possible without the incredible engagement and enthusiasm of

\textsuperscript{64} Friending is a fairly benign method for reaching out to others in social journaling communities, however, some journal owners do prefer to only be friended by individuals that they know and approve of. In order to address any requests for 'defriending' prominent posts and links were provided so that individuals could request their removal. Additionally, the posts explained that the survey would be active for two weeks, after which all individuals would be defriended. Throughout the course of the survey, only 4 individuals requested their removal.

\textsuperscript{65} http://community.livejournal.com/fanthropology
fans, many emailing with additional information, to volunteer themselves for follow-up questions and interviews, ask their own questions about the project, and provide general feedback on the survey itself.

**Participant Feedback and Survey Limits**

Discussion and analysis of fan culture often focuses more on fan practices rather than the stories themselves. Given this, there was considerable curiosity and some concern expressed by community members over the purpose of the survey. Several participants emailed to ask why the survey didn't ask about their writing process, others wanted to know what was going to be done with the stories that were collected.

Gathering story titles and links depended on a certain level of trust on the part of survey participants. Due to past (and ongoing) legal concerns over fan practices, a small group of participants expressed concern over sharing outside of the community and opted out of this portion of the survey. A few individuals asked if textors would be consulted for permission before their stories might be analyzed or expressed concern that analysis might cause hurt feelings. Ultimately however, while a small selection of individuals were apprehensive, thousands of others chose to participate and spread the word. More importantly, all of the leading stories in the survey results were publicly
published texts, widely available online. Guidelines for online research are still evolving, but analysis of publicly available texts traditionally falls well within the boundaries of standard research practices. Given these factors, the decision was made not to contact individual creators.

Feedback also pointed out some of the biases inherent in the survey. These reflect the inherent biases and interests of the overall project as well. This thesis is focused primarily on American texts and stories read predominantly by women. The alternate pairing names used by members of Asian fandoms (yaoi instead of slash, etc.) were not used and demographic questions (particularly income level and schooling) could be more easily answered by Americans than others. Given the focus of this project, while the survey may provide indications for broader fan demographics, it can only truly provide a picture of this group of survey participants. This thesis does approach fans as a broad community, looking for themes across fandoms, but it is a beginning point. The survey does not attempt to (and can not) speak to larger intercultural issues.

**Survey Results**

Survey participants were members of a diverse selection of fandoms, representing several different types of media texts. Despite this, clear trends emerged,
across fandoms, regarding the types of stories fans most enjoyed to read. The general demographics of the survey revealed a reading community with similarities to romance novel readers, but also some key differences.

Within the twenty most popular fandoms, several were represented by thousands of stories. Others held smaller majorities. Nearly all of these fandoms could be categorized as science fiction, paranormal, or fantasy stories. Most were television shows, several were Japanese anime, two combined books and movie adaptations, one was a video game, and another focused on a group of popular music celebrities.
The majority of popular stories, the pieces of fan fiction which participants identified as their favorites, were nearly all focused on romantic stories. More significantly, most of these stories featured slash pairings. This differed from the broader reading practices reported by fans. When asked about their overall preferences, participants said that they read similar amounts of the major story types (specifically het, slash, and gen) and a smaller group of readers read femslash or lesbian focused stories. Looking at the major fandoms, consensus on popular stories could only be clearly identified in fifteen of the top fandoms (any story with less than ten mentions was not considered), however, nearly all of these fifteen stories focused on slash pairings. This trend held true with the twenty most popular stories overall. While fans may be open to reading across categories, favorite stories, the ones readers return to and remember, were nearly all focused on male homosexual romance. This contrasts significantly with the focus on heterosexual pairings and female protagonists found in romance novels.
Table 2: Top 20 Stories Overall (in order of story popularity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Textor</th>
<th>Fandom</th>
<th>Relationship Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written by the Victors</td>
<td>Speranza</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm In Iowa</td>
<td>Sheafrotherdon</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom is Just Another Word</td>
<td>Synecdochic</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Mixed*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing Harry</td>
<td>Copperbadge</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop Dead Gorgeous</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Beautiful Lifetime Even</td>
<td>Astolat / Shallot</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoebox Project</td>
<td>Dorkorific and Ladyjaida</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Mixed**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bound Prince Series</td>
<td>Slashpervert &amp; Sayingsorry_hh</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental</td>
<td>Astolat / Shallot</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartographer's Craft</td>
<td>Copperbadge</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell Curve or: Ladies' Night at the Boom Boom Room</td>
<td>Rageprufrock</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrograde (series)</td>
<td>Martha Wilson</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Mixed****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Big Pink</td>
<td>Supernatural</td>
<td>Gen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the End</td>
<td>Arabella &amp; Zsenya</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Het</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underwater Light</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Stone</td>
<td>Josephine Darcy</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindsight</td>
<td>Rageprufrock</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrets</td>
<td>Vorabiza</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things to do in Denver when you're dead</td>
<td>Speranza</td>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfigurations</td>
<td>Resonant</td>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* gen w/slash back-story
** unfinished story w/developing slash plotline
*** w/additional het pairing
**** primarily gen series w/slash and het side stories

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All of these stories were also very long, typically many hundreds of pages in length. Across fan culture, fan fiction comes in a variety of sizes. Smaller stories are created independently as short stories (sometimes very short ones called ficlets) or as pieces in a series (often called chapters) which can then build into a novel-sized piece. Larger works follow the same pattern. Typically novella-sized or longer, they are released on their own or develop into a series over time. The popularity of these longer, ongoing stories can be seen in the survey results. Nearly all of the popular stories were pieces in a series and all of the stories were novella length or longer. A few reach well over 400 pages in length. This means that many of these texts are significantly longer than most romance novels. They are also ongoing, updated over the course of years, another noticeable difference from romance novels, which typically focus on a romantic couple once and then move on.

These contrasts with romance novels suggest that fan fiction readers may be looking for alternatives to romantic conventions, as well as more variety in the types of romance they consume. Overall, the romance novels in chapter one ignored anything outside of traditional, monogamous, heterosexual pairings. Within the fan fiction, an interest in romance also remains dominant, but while pockets of interest appear for heterosexual pairings, the major focus is on alternative stories.
Table 3: Top Stories From Individual Fandoms (in order of fandom popularity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fandom</th>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Textor</th>
<th>Relationship Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>Stealing Harry</td>
<td>Copperbadge</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stargate Atlantis</td>
<td>Written by the Victors</td>
<td>Speranza</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Big Pink</td>
<td>Gen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torchwood</td>
<td>Shades of Ianto</td>
<td>Sarcasticchick</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</td>
<td>Necessary Evils</td>
<td>Barb Cummings</td>
<td>Het</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Greenleaf and Imladris (Series)</td>
<td>Eresse</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naruto</td>
<td>Diplomatic Relations</td>
<td>Maldoror</td>
<td>Slash (Yaoi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandom</td>
<td>Forever Now</td>
<td>Harriet Vane</td>
<td>Mixed (Real Person)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Austen</td>
<td>Slurry</td>
<td>HeatherLynn</td>
<td>Het</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.S.I.</td>
<td>Casa Caliente (series)</td>
<td>Cincoflex</td>
<td>Het</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Fantasy</td>
<td>Mascot-verse (Series)</td>
<td>Sleeps With Coyotes</td>
<td>Slash (Yaoi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due South</td>
<td>Chicago's Most Wanted</td>
<td>Speranza</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Metal Alchemist</td>
<td>Adventures of Roy Mustang: Sex Ed Teacher</td>
<td>Sky Dark</td>
<td>Slash (Yaoi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallville</td>
<td>Conflict of Interest</td>
<td>Rageprufrock</td>
<td>Slash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gundam</td>
<td>Ion Arc (series)</td>
<td>Sunhawk</td>
<td>Slash (Yaoi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*predominantly gen with some light slash subtext and a slash sequel*

The differences between fan fiction and romance novel readers are harder to identify, but industry statistics provide some data for comparison. Most of survey population was younger that that of romance novel readers. The majority of survey participants were eighteen, but the dominant age group ranged between eighteen and twenty-eight years of age. The Romance Writers of America's (RWA) most recent
statistics show that most commercial romance readers are between thirty-five and forty-four. As a slightly older population, it is unsurprising that more romance novel readers are married than the fan fiction readers. However, romance novels appeal to male readers much more than fan fiction does. More women still read romance novels (seventy-eight percent), but the amount of male readers grew fifteen percent between 2002 and 2005, a remarkable increase. These numbers are significant when compared to the near complete absence of men within the survey population. There are numerous possibilities for these differences, but romance novels are more widely known to the general public than fan fiction is. Both communities face some stigma for their reading, but romance novels focusing on more mainstream, heterosexual relationships may be more accessible and provide less of a barrier for outsiders.  

The large population of bisexual readers within the fan fiction population suggests a more diverse, fluid approach to sexuality and attraction. This also indicates an awareness of diverse sexualities and a greater level of openness regarding gender and sexual attraction within this readership. The majority of the survey population was still heterosexual (68%), but over a quarter of the group identified as bisexual or homosexual (23% bisexual, 4% homosexual). The RWA provides no statistics on

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sexuality for comparison. The concentration within romance novels on male/female relationships targets a more heterosexual readership, but the books' focus on women's sexuality and sexual experiences can be enjoyed by a more diverse readership than heterosexual women alone. Additional information on the sexual orientation and genders of romance novel readers would be interesting for comparative purposes, but also because it could challenge our assumptions about commercial romance readers as a whole.  

When it comes to race, the content of both popular fan fiction stories and romance novels was not diverse. Most of the characters in fan fiction pairings are white

| Table 4: Comparison Between Survey Participants and Romance Reader Statistics\(^{67}\) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **Gender**                                   | **Romance Novel Readers**                     |
| Gender                                       |                                               |
| 96% Female                                   | 78% Female                                    |
| 2% Male                                      | 22% Male                                      |
| 1% Other                                     |                                               |
| **Sexuality**                                |                                               |
| Sexuality                                    |                                               |
| 68% Heterosexual                             | None Provided                                 |
| 23% Bisexual                                 |                                               |
| 4% Homosexual                                |                                               |
| 3% Asexual                                   |                                               |
| **Relationship Status**                      |                                               |
| Relationship Status                          |                                               |
| 62% Single                                   | 50% Married                                   |
| 25% Married, Civil Union, Domestic Partnership| 37% Single                                    |
| 13% Dating                                   |                                               |
| **Most Common Age**                          |                                               |
| Most Common Age                              |                                               |
| 18 years old                                 | 35-44 years old                              |

\(^{67}\) Ibid.  
\(^{68}\) Ibid.
men. Nearly all of the romance novel protagonists (male and female) are white as well. There are romance novel imprints and publishers that focus solely on African American characters, but none of these titles were present in the reader polls. The segregation of nearly all non-white characters to specific publisher imprints is frustrating. While popular media certainly struggles with representations of diversity, even the dreaded 'token' character would be an improvement over a nearly complete absence.\textsuperscript{69} Additionally, the reader polls could certainly take greater steps to acknowledge the existence of romance imprints targeting an African American audience by including a relevant category within their polls. The RWA did not provide statistics on the diversity of commercial romance readers, but more information would be instructive, particularly regarding which readers are and are not being ignored.

The lack of diversity within the fan fiction is shaped by the fandom's original media texts. If protagonists are predominantly white, that homogeneity will carry over into the stories about these characters. This focus may also reflect the overall makeup of the survey participants. Fan fiction readers are typically described as predominantly white, English speaking, and middle class.\textsuperscript{70} The survey population also reflected these groups. A large majority of participants said they were white (88%). The major

\textsuperscript{69} It should be noted that some authors seemed to be making efforts to tackle some diversity issues. In particular, Suzanne Brockman's "Troubleshooter" series—known for its large ensemble of characters—includes a diverse group of lead and secondary characters.

\textsuperscript{70} Sheenagh Pugh, \textit{The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context} (Seren, 2006), 130-131; Bacon-Smith, \textit{Enterprising Women}, 320; Harris and Alexander, eds., \textit{Theorizing Fandom}, 154, 184-185.
countries represented outside of the United States were all places where English remains the dominant language (the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia). The general lack of racial diversity within the original media texts, as well as the community population, suggests an overall environment where diverse characters and protagonists are less likely to appear.

The overall picture to emerge from these results is of a population of fans that participates in a broad array of fandoms. Nearly all of them are women. Most of them are white, American or English speaking, and heterosexual, but many are also bisexual. While participants were as old as seventy-four, the majority was younger, which distinguishes them from romance novel readers. Their favorite stories were nearly all romantic and while clear pockets of interest in heterosexual romance emerged, slash stories were by far the most popular, again reflecting a significant difference between the material available in traditional romance novels and fan fiction.

**Fan Fiction and Romance Reading**

Within fan culture there is an ongoing enjoyment of and passion for romantic and sexual stories. Fan preferences point to a desire for greater variety, control, and experimentation in these narratives. Labeling and organizational practices also suggest a community very aware of the sexual content of their stories and their individual
reading preferences. Most fans choose not to read romance novels, instead they read, create, and workshop stories for themselves and their community. Fan fiction also builds on the immersive experience provided by romance narratives by repeatedly returning to specific fantasy worlds and relationships, deepening the reader's engagement with a specific couple, rather than visiting with one couple for a limited time, as romance novels do.

Among the types of fan fiction, survey participants were very aware of their interest in romance. When asked whether the fan fiction they read was either romantic or general, seventy-seven percent reported that they preferred romantic stories. Despite this, only thirty percent of them read romance novels. For participants that did read romance novels, the vast majority still read fan fiction more (84%). Fan fiction's approach to romantic and sexual content seems to hold much greater appeal to this community of readers.

The overall structure and configuration of fan culture also reflects the community's active interest in romantic and sexual stories. This can be seen in the proliferation of groups, websites, and story archives for specific story types and couples, and more generally in the very presence of the slash and het categories. Fan fiction stories are organized in ways that target interested readers and make it easier to identify story types. Most individual texts are carefully labeled, allowing readers to
determine what a story is about and how sexually explicit it will be. This enables readers to avoid what they do not want to read and quickly find what they are seeking to read.

Fan fiction communities engage with and celebrate specific media texts, but they are also very focused on romantic or sexual pairings. Readers frequently identify themselves by their reading preferences, referring to themselves as slashers, for example, or fans of a specific pairing of characters. These popular pairings are often given nicknames and abbreviations. Used as a sort of shorthand, they form interest areas which community can be built around. For the survey participants, a story pairing was often synonymous with the fandom itself. Many identified their fandom by the names of characters (ex. Angel/Buffy, Mckay/Sheppard, H/D) others provided popular nicknames (ex. McShep, Viggorli, GSR). The use of pairing names may reflect some of the stigmas that come with fan activities. Fan culture is often subjected to a great deal of skepticism and derision by outsiders, having codenames for interests and activities can provide additional protection and privacy. Overall, however, these phrases and nicknames emerge due to their frequent discussion and use, as well as a desire for terms and phrases to assist in organize community.

In these ways fan culture forms genre and interest areas in ways both similar to and different from the ways romance novel publishers structure their imprints. The
broader story genre of a piece of fan fiction is suggested by the fandom itself. A *Harry Potter* story is probably fantasy, a *Stargate* story is probably science fiction. More specific information is often included in a story header, description, and/or content disclaimer where a textor provides labels for the story and sexual content ratings.

While not provided in every instance, these explanations and disclaimers are common practice, particularly when textors post to communities, on mailing lists or in story archives. One of the more popular textors identified in the survey includes a informational note and warning on every journal page which reads:

This is the fanfiction journal for Sam Starbuck, aka Copperbadge. Predominantly composed of Harry Potter fanfiction, it also contains a heaping helping of House MD, Good Omens and Lord Peter Wimsey, along with sprinklings of other fandoms. Please be aware that these fanfics range in rating from G to NC-17 and frequently contain both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.\(^71\)

While romance novel readers can sometimes use publisher imprints to distinguish the level of sexual explicitness or type of sexual content in a story, this is not true of all imprints. Instead, the cover image and the story description on the back cover must be decoded to identify what is inside. In these ways fan fiction stories replicate some of the promotional techniques used by the publishing industry, but also reveal more about a story's contents.

Fan fiction stories are often carefully packaged to appeal to readers in ways that are reminiscent to traditional publishing practices. Like the back covers of commercially published romance novels, individual stories are frequently posted with brief descriptions or summaries to entice and inform readers. Sarcasticchick provides her *Shades of Ianto* series with brief teaser style summaries like, "Inspections, mop buckets, and walls of navy blue," and, "A meeting of minds..." Sheafrotherdon begins the *Farm in Iowa* series with the summary "John inherits a farm, Rodney ends up entirely out of his element, and there is much ado about baseball..." There is also a graphic referred to as "cover art." In these ways stories are carefully formatted for their readers, ready to be distributed via story communities, webpages, journals, and through word of mouth recommendations.

Just as commercial romance readers keep and reread favorite stories or visit libraries and bookstores for more, fans maintain their own collection and tracking methods for stories. These collection points become virtual bookshelves and public libraries for reading fan fiction stories online, with texts passed on and recommended just as romance novel readers borrow books from friends or check the library for new stories. Not all fan fiction readers keep a record of their favorite pieces of fan fiction, several survey participants stated that they did not track or remember specific stories.

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However, many maintain accounts on social bookmarking sites like del.icio.us, use the memory features provided by sites like LiveJournal.com, or maintain their own webpages and journal entries listing and recommending favorite stories.

Fan fiction stories allow readers to return to worlds and characters over and over again, using repetition to intensify the immersive experience. This is a departure from most romance novels, which tell the story of a couple once and then move on. Both techniques provide readers with romantic fantasies, but fan fiction stories can sustain a reader's relationship with a particular world and set of characters, expanding the boundaries of specific media texts. This technique is facilitated by the nature of fan culture. The fandom is something fans love and actively seek to return to and celebrate. The difference here, between serialized fan fiction stories and the focus on one couple/one story within commercial romances, is also influenced by the celebration of dominant, heteronormative relationships that end in marriage which is found within most romance novels.

Overall, the survey results reveal a population of readers who are looking for a broader array of stories. In particular, something beyond traditional heterosexual, romance narratives. This is also a group of very active readers and textors, building their own romantic stories out of the media texts and materials around them. The next chapter will focus on the most popular fan fiction stories in more detail, looking at the
ways that this audience has both maintained and reworked traditional romantic narratives.
Chapter 3. Fan Fiction, Widening the Romance Formula

Within romance novels, women’s sexual experiences are continually connected to the traditional themes of love, marriage, monogamy and children. Relationships are framed as life-changing events that reshape individuals into better, completed, versions of themselves. These popular novels reflect the dominant messages and expectations of our society. Many works of fan fiction also tell romantic and sexual stories to their readers. Only here, without the publishing industry as a dominant gatekeeper, textors are able to engage in greater experimentation with story structure, character sexuality, and the types of relationships they present to readers. Dominant gender norms and ties between sexuality, love, and monogamy are still found within works of fan fiction, but so is experimentation, a greater variety in approaches to relationship building, and further adaptation to circumvent social norms.

This chapter examines popular fan texts and the ways that these stories enact romance for their readers, contrasting these approaches to those previously examined in romance novels. Major components of romantic stories (character, story endings, narrating attraction, etc.) are explored, as well as some of the ways that popular slash stories allow the textor to circumvent or obfuscate certain romantic and gender conventions. The differences between romance novels and fan fiction complicate the
idea of a straightforward romance formula and highlight the importance of experimentation as a way of diversifying romance. The dominant narratives within fan fiction stories reveal an audience taking great pleasure in reading and building romantic and sexual stories. They also highlight a readership that is seeking more diversity and realism in storytelling technique and in relationships.

**Themes in the Narratives of Fan Fiction**

There are three major types of fan fiction: heterosexual romance (het), homosexual romance (slash/yaoi, femslash/yuri) and general stories (gen).\(^7^3\) While fan fiction can be grouped into these three areas, it is important to note that the boundaries between them can be blurred. Fans may prefer slash within one fandom, het in another, and gen in a third. It all depends on which characters and pairing dynamics appeal to an individual. Additionally, many textors include multiple types of pairings within their stories, or create a series of stories focusing on different relationships in different parts in the series. If a character or celebrity appeals to fans, they may choose to follow them in numerous directions. Throughout this, however, the general categories and popular character pairings remain, providing fans with broad story types and a method for organizing fan practices, socialization, and reading material.

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\(^7^3\) Yaoi and yuri are often used by fandoms related to Asian media.
The majority of fans surveyed for this project identified the stories they read as romantic and the most popular stories all reflect this, only one or two stories did not include romantic or sexual elements. A few stories mixed types, containing both heterosexual and homosexual pairings, and within some the romantic or sexual aspects of the plot were limited to the background, rather than explicitly detailed. Romantic themes nearly always had a presence, however. Despite this, most fans did not read romance novels. If they did, fan fiction stories were read more. For this population, fan fiction's approach to romance has significantly greater appeal.

Types of Stories

Within romance novels the classic story structure is often generalized as, a) girl meets boy, b) they encounter obstacles, c) they overcome them. While fantasy, action, and suspense stories are created for the characters to experience, the two protagonists and the romance that builds between them is the primary focus. Although fan fiction also typically follows this ABC progression, there is significant variety in the way textors chose to structure their stories, narration style and point of view, as well as the balance between romance and plot.
A more traditional romantic approach can be seen in stories like Maldoror's *Diplomatic Relations* (*Naruto* fan fiction) and Sunhawk's *Ion* series (*Gundam Wing*). Both deal with internal barriers to romance and focus on building understanding between the protagonists. In *Diplomatic Relations* the character's emotional struggles are large enough to constitute most of the plot. The ending focuses on the relationships discovery by outsiders. The third story in the *Ion* series uses on character's self-destructive behavior to lead to a dramatic rescue for the climax, keeping the psychological obstacles at the forefront of the story. This focus on personal barriers can also be balanced, however, by providing a larger storyline for the characters to work through. In a third story, Barb Cumming's *Necessary Evils* (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), the relationship evolves alongside a long and elaborate storyline that challenges the main characters and gives the relationship a structure.

This approach is reminiscent of the paranormal or fantasy sub-genre in commercial romances. These fantasy settings force the commercial writer to spend significant story time on universe building, rather than focusing on the relationship alone. *Necessary Evils* is also very long (well over 400 pages). This story's length gives its textor time to develop an elaborate plot and spend significant time on the secondary

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characters, their own struggles and romantic relationships. This level of detail and length is very rare within commercial romance novels. On a practical level, they are much more restricted by page limits and printing costs. More importantly, a secondary couple can be saved for another book and an additional sales opportunity.

Within fan fiction the textor does not need to spend time introducing a universe and its characters. Readers already know them via the original media text. Instead, storylines are developed by playing in this preexisting world. Unlike romance novels, there are no restrictions regarding narration and point of view. Textors tell their stories in the first person, third person, explore different voices and perspectives, and often incorporate multimedia and hyperlinks as ways of telling and reinforcing their story.

The most experimental work of fan fiction was also the most popular. Speranza's *Written by the Victors* (*Stargate Atlantis*) uses an innovative story structure. This story is presented in two formats. Half of it is told through excerpts from fictitious articles, book reviews, and academic debates, the other half is traditional fiction. This interplay between two very different writing styles entertains the reader as well as providing additional ways of reinforcing the relationship and the broader story conflict.

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The story's progression also involves a shift from commercial romances. The two protagonists' importance to each other is recognized from the beginning. Rather than struggling with admitting their attraction, they confront political obstacles and escalating dangers. A political situation impacts the relationship, John marries a woman and this causes problems between him and Rodney. In this way the relationship faces trials, but the conflicts impact the lives of the characters both in and outside of the relationship. The challenges also depend on intelligence and planning as well as danger and rescue. Throughout this, readers are entertained by a complicated plot, a novel storytelling technique, and fast moving, explicit sex scenes. The story's ending is classically romantic. The characters are victorious, safe from dangers, in love, and there are children on the scene, but the journey to this ending and the creative story structure creates a romance which feels fresh and new to readers.

**Types of Happy Endings**

Romance novels end with established, monogamous relationships. Partners marry, build homes together and create families, moving onto another stage in their lives. At the end of most romance novels, a relationship is permanent. Readers are assured that the couple will be together, will be happy, and that it is time to move on to another couple's story. Within fan fiction, stories typically end with a degree of
happiness and closure, but when it comes to the exact details of that ending, there is great variety.

Heroines are usually pregnant at the end of romance novels, or have just had a child. This is not the norm in most fan fiction. Obviously, the prevalence of homosexual pairings plays a major role here, but in fan fiction homosexuality is certainly not a barrier to children and family. Neither is heterosexuality an inevitable path to children. Only one of the male/female fan fiction stories, HeatherLynn's *Slurry (Pride and Prejudice)*, ends in pregnancy and marriage.\(^7\) Cincoflex's *Casa Caliente (C.S.I)*, includes a scene where the couple discusses not wanting or being ready for children.\(^8\) This mutual agreement is part of what cements the relationship, rather than dismantling it. Throughout these endings, fan fiction stories provide their characters with options. Partnership can lead to children, but it does not require it.

Many of the stories do end, however, with the two protagonists moving to a new stage in their relationship and the implication of monogamy. In some cases this involves building a home together, but it does not need to be a large commitment. Ray and Fraser move to Canada to build a new life together in Speranza's *Chicago's Most Wanted (Due South)*, but in *Diplomatic Relations* Lee and Gara decide to try sharing a


These two levels of commitment also highlight the different types of relationship on display. Many of these are epic, life-changing romances, but the stories focus on different stages of the journey.

In fan fiction stories, relationships and romance are commonly framed as works in progress, rather than something than something that is settled by the end of a story. This sense of an evolving process is enhanced by the serial nature of many works of fan fiction. More than half of the stories read for this project were pieces in a series of stories. Many of them can be read as self-contained units, but the message that relationships are ongoing, that work and character development continues over time, was always present. The third part of the Ion series concludes with Duo thinking, "The road ahead of us looked long and steep and bumpy…" \(^80\) Necessary Evil closes in a similar fashion. Buffy observes, "Neither one of them was who they'd been, and it remained to be seen what they were becoming. She had no idea how it would end." \(^81\) The story will not conclude, but move forward. The relationship will continue to be challenged and to overcome barriers.

This message that there is more to come, more growing to do, can also serve a practical purpose. It provides the textor with a way of keeping readers engaged and

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ready for the next part in the series. In many cases, the original media text the story is based on creates a precariousness to these pairings. The first part in Sarcastickchick's *Shades of Ianto (Torchwood)* series ends with no established relationship and one of the protagonists removed from the picture. It does this because the first season of the television show ends with the show's lead character disappearing. The television show also includes a relationship between the two characters, but where the producers will take it, or if it is love, is unclear. Textors must deal with these issues and compensate for them to craft their stories.

These practical considerations reinforce the overall sense that relationships are precarious and that a couple always has more to learn and more ways to develop. Television characters may date someone new in the next episode or marry someone else in a new season. The peril here, the danger of an unexpected change and a schism between the work of fan fiction and the original story, echoes the danger present in relationships themselves. Only here, of course, fan fiction stories can mend this break and provide a fantasy that restores ties.

Throughout these endings, the textors balance happiness and progress with a sense of realism. The message is that relationships are hard, they require work, but the characters are probably still up to the task. These less utopian endings present

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relationships a little bit closer to those in the real world. They suggest an audience looking for romantic stories, but interested in happy endings that do not require marriage and a life long commitment, simply an emotional bond and level of understanding between two people. Ultimately, in these happy endings, fan fiction stories take the romantic myth and alter it to create a new type of romantic promise. One in which happiness involves a mutual commitment to another person, male or female and with or without a marriage for protection.

**Types of Protagonists**

Commercial romance authors and defenders Ann Maxwell and Jayne Ann Krentz discuss several traditional romance novel story types in their article, "The Wellsprings of Romance," and critique what they identify as two emerging modern hero archetypes or myths, the "househusband" and the "Alan Alda clone." One is a homemaker, the other a supportive partner and listener. Maxwell and Krentz acknowledge that these characters may have some attraction to readers, but issue a caution, "putting sauce on the gander is great fun. However, both of these myths lack an ingredient that is vital to popular fiction: conflict." For Maxwell and Krentz romance stories focus on the taming of a male, growth for the heroine, and the

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development of an understanding between the two characters. They state, "[t]he problem with the new myths in romance fiction is that they lack real gut-level challenge for the heroine." This argument suggests certain prototypes for romantic heroes and heroines: powerful men who need to be calmed, women who can match or understand them.

The taming of aggressive males within romance novels has often been interpreted as a way for women to render violent and threatening partners safe. Rather than only dealing with the controlling of aggression, taming also involves domestication and caretaking behavior, particularly towards the heroine, and the hero being less career and more family focused. The women's role here is typically more passive. She motivates through her example, her love, and by maintaining communication. These types of character changes are also storytelling device, a way of showing readers the power of a relationship and the emotional importance one character has on another.

The traditional themes of the tamed hero and the deserving heroine were present in fan fiction stories in many of the same ways they were in contemporary romance novels. Anger and aggression were controlled for love and male characters were domesticated in ways that tied them more to family and the home. This process

\[84\] Ibid.
often occurred without the presence of a female partner, however, and where heterosexual relationships remained they were dealt with taming in wildly contrasting ways, one active, one passive. In *Necessary Evils*, the hero, Spike, is a vampire. He presents Buffy, the heroine, with a challenge, but she is powerful, can protect herself, and tames her partner through her emotional and physical power. Charlotte, one of the characters from *Slurry*, tames her male partner, Richard, through much more conventional means. Rather than breaking away from Richard when he rejects her, she continues to seek him out. Her quiet attempts and hurt feelings motivate his decision to change himself. Richard observes:

Turning away from her had been hard, but turning back to her would be even harder. But he had failed at forgetting her, so now he had no choice. If he was going to survive, he would have to change. He couldn't do it for his own sake, but he would try for hers.  

These two conflicting approaches within fan fiction stories reflect ongoing confusion over women's power and agency within relationships and suggest similar confusion for women in the real world.

One way of circumventing these issues is to eliminate the male/female dynamic and replace the woman with another male. Suddenly moments of aggression, parenting, empathy, action etc. do not carry with them the attachments and ramifications they have within the male/female dynamic. The stories still provide

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tamed or domesticated heroes for readers to observe, however. Several of the male characters have been given new roles as parents and caretakers. The stories center on their role as parents and the development of an equal partnership around parenting. In Copperbadge's *Stealing Harry (Harry Potter)* the male leads take in an eight-year-old Harry Potter and establish a home together.\(^{86}\) Rageprufrock's *Conflict of Interest (Smallville)* is narrated from the point of view of Connor, Lex and Clark's child. Conner wants to have a mother and assigns Clark this role.\(^{87}\) For Conner, children have moms and dads, but the individual's actual biological gender is less relevant. This story highlights a more flexible approach to gender norms. The importance of a domestic scene, monogamy, and a two-parent household are reinforced, but there is greater openness as to who fills the parenting roles. Men can raise children and be moms. What's more, this adds to their romantic appeal, to the other protagonist and to readers.

The presence and popularity of fan fiction stories incorporating these more balanced, less aggressive and dominant characters challenge Maxwell and Krentz's assertion that these protagonists do not provide the right dynamics to entertain their readers. It is not that they stories lack conflict, as they suggest, the textors have just found different character journey's to build stories and relationships around. In many of


the slash stories dramatic tension is connected to sexuality and societal expectations, in others the story setting and plot provide the characters with their challenge. Lex, Remus, and Sirius are all careful and sensitive parents, but there are interpersonal dynamics, larger story arcs, and other characters to be dealt with. The opportunity for conflict has not been lost, instead, these characters simply require different conflicts.

The popularity of these different stories is an important reminder that the heroic alpha-male character does not hold romantic appeal to all readers. Instead, readers are interested various depictions of masculinity. Stories can be written about partnership, family building, and a couple's growing understanding and connection through communication as well as conflict and power struggles. This does not mean that fan fiction stories cannot also play with power and control. Neither does it mean that conflict will not exist between two protagonists. It simply means that romance is not being limited to one particular relationship type. Again, within fan fiction stories, the romance formula is being broadened and diversified.

**Talking About Attraction**

In each of the previous categories the existence of a previously established story—what is referred to as the 'canon' within fan culture—serves to enrich the romantic story the textor tells. When establishing attraction, the canon has an even
greater impact. If the characters already know each other, attraction can begin at any point in a relationship. If readers are familiar with the protagonists, the textor does not need to spend time detailing what the characters look like. In fan fiction stories attraction does not always appear suddenly, inexplicably and magically in individuals lives. Instead coworkers, partners, or best friends are given romantic potential.

In romance novels, protagonists begin as strangers to each other. They may have been acquainted in the past, or in passing, but there is always sense of two individuals seeing and approaching each other for the first time. Contrasting this, in Stealing Harry, the two leads are life-long friends. Written by the Victors, Chicago's Most Wanted, Necessary Evils, and Casa Caliente all begin with previously established working relationships which develop into something more.

The majority of the stories build their relationships out of these partnerships, but not all. Others return to a beginning encounter. Diplomatic Relations and Conflict of Interest both reconnect their characters after a separation, allowing the characters to meet each other in new circumstances. Conflict of Interest takes this device further. The characters are kept apart for most of the story and it is up to a third person, their child, to reintroduce them. These ways of beginning and building attraction use classic romantic scenarios to tell their stories, but they also play with new ways of beginning and initiating affection.
Within a written text evidence of attraction and sexual desire may be presented to readers in a number of ways. The writer or textor can use secondary character observations and various styles of narration to signal a protagonist's thoughts and physical reactions. Rather than using these many options, romance novels rely on omniscient narrators, who sometimes takes the hero or heroine's perspective, to pass information to the readers. One popular technique is to see one character through the other's eyes. In this way the heroine or hero is viewed, their attractiveness is catalogued, and the impact of all of this on their counterpart is given as evidence to readers. These moments exist in all of the romance novels discussed in chapter one, but the technique is rarely present in the fan fiction, suggesting that there is less need for character descriptions in fan texts and that the fan fiction readers and textors are looking for more than a simple physical reaction to beauty as a way of developing attraction.

Observational moments within romance novels are not quick, minor pauses. Instead the protagonist is physically and emotionally overwhelmed by their impression and filled with desire. A quintessential example of this in commercial romances can be found in Loretta Chase's *Lord Perfect*:

For a moment he was blinded by the clarity, like on stepping out of a cave into a blazing noonday.
She stood in profile, like the figures on the wall behind her. She was studying a statue.

Benedict saw black curls under the rim of a pale blue bonnet. Long black lashes against pearly skin. A ripe plum of a mouth.

His gaze skimmed down.

A weight pressed against his chest.

He couldn't breathe.\textsuperscript{88}

Here the commercial author takes her time and inserts multiple pauses between sentences to deepen the moment. There are typically several moments like this within an individual story. They are also often used within a sex scene or to highlight sexual desire.

These instances of observation serve as important moments of awareness for the characters and provide the readers with ongoing evidence of the developing relationship. They were uncommon, however, within the works of fan fiction where descriptive moments were primarily limited to character makeovers. (In \textit{Slurry} for example, the characters from \textit{Pride and Prejudice} are now rock stars. Giving the characters new costumes is a part of the fun.) The absence of these scenes within fan fiction stories may be explained by fan cultures' general familiarity with the appearance of the original characters. The majority of these fandoms are places where

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Lord Perfect} (Berkley, 2006), 5.
a visual image for characters is well established. As popular media, often featuring celebrities, the physical attractiveness of these characters may also not need to be proven. No matter what the origin, however, the importance of awe inspiring, dramatic physical beauty is diminished within many of these stories. This leads to depictions of attraction in which physical appearance has a presence, but its role is not as strong, or as consistent, as it is in romance novels. All of this suggests a readership looking for more individuation and personality from their protagonists, rather than a simple combination of conflict and beauty.

**Talking About Sex**

Sexual attraction and desire are key components of romance. How these elements are displayed within stories, however, depends on the beliefs of the author and/or textor as well as larger social norms. Romance novels (with the exception of the erotic romances) seem to adhere to more traditional versions of women's sexuality and behavior. Fan fiction stories depart from these norms, but they often do so by removing women from the picture. This avoids many issues of gender inequality and certain power dynamics, but it also prevents reworking and experimentation in regards to the sexuality of women. What it does do is focus on men, making them perform sexual and sensual acts for the reader.
The explicitness and realism depicted in sexual conduct is reduced within both approaches to romance (fan fiction and romance novels). The preference is for idealized moments and fantasy, reminding us that these stories are here to provide pleasure and entertainment for their readers, rather than gritty realism. Within the romance novels examined earlier, the majority of the books used euphemisms for genitalia and the different sexual acts. Only a few books, telling the most modern stories, used more specific terms or referenced birth control. In contrast to this, while the fan fiction often strategically avoided specific terms, sex scenes generally used upfront vocabulary for male genitalia as well as paying greater attention to technical details and some of the physical preparation needed for intercourse. Condom use was still erratic, however, typically depending on the universe the story was set in, with the science fiction and fantasy worlds often omitting these concerns. Clearly the preference is for slightly more sexual explicit or pornographic language, and physical preparation will be acknowledged where required, but not so much that it distracts from the fantasy or depicting the character's pleasure.

Only one of the stories set in contemporary society (the CSI story, Casa Caliente) made a point of incorporating condom use into each sex scene. Here the textor reframes these moments to connect the condoms to desire, rather than seeing them as a barrier to romance and a distraction to the scene. Slurry struggles with
incorporating contraceptives. They are referenced once, during a one-night stand, but never for the other two female protagonists who are developing long-term relationships. At the end of the story the reader learns that these two characters have been on the pill, but one of them is pregnant. The message here is confused. One-night stands are dangerous, but a sense of love and inevitable monogamy means that the characters do not need to discuss additional precautions? Still, within both of these stories the textors do more to incorporate and make a note of the practical concerns that modern women face than can be found in the vast majority of the romance novels.

Many of the female protagonists in romance novels are learning about sex for the first time or learning to enjoy sex in a way they never had before. In contrast, their male protagonists are sexually experienced and skilled. When two characters have sex it is typically described as an entirely new level of sexual pleasure, unlike anything the heroine has experienced before. Frequently this is a surprise to her, the character observes that she didn't know she could enjoy sex so completely or lose control and inhibitions because of her pleasure. She is able to enjoy this because she is in love, she will marry, and stay within the dominant patriarchal framework.

Within fan fiction stories, these themes of commitment and sexual pleasure are more blurred. By making love less explicit, fan fiction leaves room for sexual pleasure without love and commitment. These stories also did not punish characters for their
desire or frame sexual pleasure as something that was forced upon the heroine in order to maintain a sense of gender inappropriateness. Rather than quietly playing on the erotic elements of power, force, and size, *Casa Caliente* openly engages them. The character's dominant and submissive sexual relationship is discussed and also given careful parameters so that it exists only in the context of the bedroom. Within all of these scenarios there is a greater sense that sexuality and sexual pleasure is something human beings engage in and can enjoy without the desire being disciplined in some way or channeled towards child rearing and marriage.

Slash fan fiction stories provide readers with several classic romantic/sexual experiences, but also an expansion of men's sexual roles to incorporate perspectives and feelings which are traditionally restricted to women. Returning again to the most popular piece of fan fiction, in *Written By the Victors* there is a large battle scene towards the middle of the story. John leads the attack by joining his mind with the city and planet's computerized defense systems. He feels every element of the system and the battle as sensations and colors rather than straight-forward actions and decisions. "He arched and convulsed, every neuron singing as his body became a conduit and closed a circuit. All the colors in his mind gathered and exploded into a single, white hot ball of energy that overtook the fourth hive ship, enveloping it and—eliminating it." The scene builds in its intensity and the combination of power, action, and
sensation. At the end, John falls onto the floor, experiencing one orgasm after another from the combination of power and sensation. Like many classic romance novel heroines, his body is venerable and open, he is lost to his feelings and to pleasure. The scene's sensuality and eroticism comes from this combination of power and loss of control. The character is not experiencing sexual pleasure by doing, but experiencing. This approach to sexuality is one in which the character's experience is more closely aligned with depictions of female sexual pleasure in romance novels. However, explaining slash stories solely as romances in which one of the men takes on a female role is too simple. It overlooks the work being done to broaden and alter men's sexual roles, moving away from the binaries of active/passive or top/bottom to something more flexible and open.

What is the implication here for women? Clearly there is great interest in more diverse roles for men in romance stories, but does this mean that women are content with their own roles? The absence of women in so many fan fiction stories suggests that women's role remains confused, easier to omit or regulate to the background than engage with directly. However, this also must be balanced with the pleasure these stories bring to their readers. This is an audience that enjoys looking at men and sexualizing them. In response to the history of female objectification and sexualization, an audience has formed which derives a great deal of pleasure from watching back.
Romance novels create immersive experiences for their readers by providing new worlds to experience, bringing fantasy into daily life, and providing readers with a character to identify with so that they can experience the fictional reality. In contrast to this, fan fiction stories take advantage of existing pre-created fantasy worlds, deepening the experience and allowing readers greater immersion (and greater time) with the universe and its characters. While some original characters are created, each of the stories read for this project focused on taking known bodies and forms and positioning them in new ways. In many cases this involved sexual fantasy and a fan's construction of romantic, erotic, and/or pornographic stories out of bodies that they find attractive. This attraction may not always involve conventional, physical beauty. Instead, it can be the dynamic between two characters which then creates appeal for a pairing.

While readers may identify with one character in particular, unlike romance novels, the access point into stories can be less predetermined. Of course, part of what studying fan practices has taught us is that no formula has complete control over readers. The heroine may traditionally be offered as an identification point in romance
novels but readers can choose to identify with the hero, both characters, or do something entirely different.

Many of the stories incorporate traditional story elements and present readers with classic romantic tropes. The practice of creating fan fiction, however, is also about experimentation and play. In doing this conventional romance themes are maintained, but stories incorporate broader approaches to sexuality and sexual relationships, add realism, and create versions of romance closer to those found in contemporary women's lives. While a happy, heteronormative style endings remain, reworking occurs as well. Sexual binaries are stretched, both for the original characters and readers, and individual stories are presented as parts of relationships in progress, continually revisited for further development and change. These practices reveal an audience that believes that partnership, trust, and emotional bonds can lead to sexual desire and romantic feelings regardless of gender and societal conventions. All of these techniques insert greater realism and more contemporary themes into romance narratives. They create fantasies that are less permanent and binding for the characters and their readers. Ultimately, while honoring conventional forms, fan fiction stories also points out a variety of ways in which a formula can be used and complicated to reflect a more diverse world and more realistic types of romance.
"The End," New Directions for Research and Romance

Why do women's romantic stories make so many people uncomfortable? Romance novels are derided and devalued. Their covers and writing style are mocked. Romances are one of the most popular forms of literature on the market, but we talk about them through giggles and disclaimers. Fan culture has been active for decades, engaging with and speaking back to popular culture, as well as building a subculture where creativity, experimentation, and play are encouraged. Yet, despite this, many fans still feel safer behind anonymous screen names than they do expressing these interests in their daily lives. This is not simply about silly stories or purple prose. It is about women, women interested in sexuality, love and desire, and society's reaction to them.

There are distinctions between pornography, erotica, and romance, but there are also connections. If we are to honestly examine these texts we also need to acknowledge that many of our own judgments and discomforts come from deeply entrenched and very ancient ideas about women's sexuality, pleasure, and behavior. From one perspective, romance stories are trapped within these traditions. From another, they are works in progress, constantly shifting with contemporary social norms.
This project looks at two bodies of literature, each created within very different production environments. The intent is to detail some of the ways in which romance stories are being constructed in contemporary society and the ways that they bring pleasure to their readers through immersion and sensuality. In commercial romances, a highly controlled production environment is identified. The publishers themselves determine the types of stories and set firm boundaries depending on the target audience. Commercial romances contain different levels of sexual conduct, some stories are conservative and religious, others more explicit. Despite this, the stories continue to emphasize marriage and motherhood as the happy ideal for their heroines.

In contrast, fan fiction stories often opt to omit heroines altogether, indicating just how frustrated some readers are with classic romantic heroines. In fan fiction, romance is one of the most popular story types, but conceptions of romance begin to expand, incorporating homosexual relationships, less permanent relationships, greater sexual realism, and more diverse depictions of gender. Fan culture is also much more explicit about fan fiction's sexual content, creating an environment where a reader's interests and sexual fantasies may be more easily expressed.
Research 2.0

The high participation and response rates in the fan fiction survey (nearly 7500 in two weeks) are indications of fan culture's well established presence online and general openness to self-reflection and discussion. These numbers also speak to the new outreach opportunities available to scholarly research. Online social networks often provide a community environment ideal for web-based surveys and research. The use of small, replicable promotion tools, such as banner images and links, as well as sample email texts, show themselves to be simple, low-cost, and effective ways of helping researchers reach out to and connect with potential participants.

Online survey providers like SurveyMonkey.com also supply researchers with simple marketing tools to assist in tracking and monitoring the success rates of different outreach efforts and survey designs. The fan fiction survey was promoted in four major ways: the creation of journals on two major social blogging communities, a promotional announcement in a popular fan community, through the "friending" of journal accounts listing fan fiction as an interest, and by sending survey participants to a web page at the end of the survey and asking for assistance with promotion. Each of these methods was tracked and tested through the use of unique hyperlinks. While the survey's journal pages and the announcement on Fanthropology resulted in over 900 responses, participation numbers show that the most effective technique was the use of recruitment tools and the request for assistance at the end of the survey. Access to this
type of data allows researchers to follow their different outreach methods and revisit them, making adjustments if necessary.

It is important to emphasize however, that entering online social networking communities for research needs to be done cautiously. Researchers must be familiar with norms of the community. Journal communities are typically moderated to keep discussion relevant to the community topic. Also, there are often explicit rules regarding how posts may be made to communities. Fanthropology details on its profile page rules for researchers approaching the community and allows scholars to post requests for assistance. Many other communities do not and would not welcome this practice.

Overall, the participation numbers achieved in this survey indicate how important it is for contemporary researchers to take advantage of new and creative outreach methods to reach online audiences, as well as how valuable these communities can be for research. This is new territory, however, and new guidelines must be developed to help researchers navigate these online worlds. In the meantime, being literate in the structure, practices, and norms of online communities may be the researchers best guide.
Fan Fiction as Literature and Hypertext

An examination of fan fiction reveals ways in which opening the romance formula and allowing different writing techniques, narrators, and structures enriches and diversifies romance. Fan fiction also pushes literary boundaries in other ways. As a form of literature now produced primarily online, fan fiction textors are taking greater advantage of the opportunities digital creation provides. There is a long history of fan art and video creation within fan communities. Now, these objects can be combined with stories to enhance the reading experience. Images and artifacts are created in photoshop to develop stories further. Textors do not need to limit themselves to describing a character's apartment, they may now link to pictures of it, and to the coffee shop down the street. Stories constructed in smaller sections can be linked together into a larger story in whatever order the reader wishes to place them in. The stories in Sleep's With Coyotes Mascotverse series are written out of chronological order. Instead, this textor produces the story in pieces, instructing readers as to when and where a section should be placed in the general story outline.

This creative, experimental atmosphere exists more easily within a fast moving, low budget, online environment than the still paper-bound publishing industry. However, recent changes in the romance publishing industry suggest that the opportunities found online may be influencing traditional publishers as well. Harlequin recently announced the creation of SPICE Briefs, short (5,000 – 15,000 word) erotic
stories available for download online.\textsuperscript{89} The company now also offers regular previews and opportunities for free reading on its website.\textsuperscript{90} These are not radical changes to the overall structure of the texts, but language in the Harlequin writing guidelines also suggests that some awareness of the formula's stagnation may be growing in the industry. Their calls for fresh voices and new approaches suggest a quest for something new. The recent popularity of chick-lit may be having an impact here as well. An exploration of that genre of literature could provide valuable insights to these calls for change.

The difficulty in writing about entire categories of literature is that there are always so many more topics to be discussed. For every generalizing statement, there are further contradictions to be accounted for or explained. Thousands of romance novels are published each year and a seemingly infinite amount of fan fiction stories are available online and off. Only a small sample of romance novels and fan fiction could be examined for this project. I have focused on the most popular stories because


it is their content that has resonated the most with readers. However, this means that less popular but potentially more experimental romance novels have yet to be explored.

While long, elaborate fan fiction stories are popular reading material within fan culture, there are also thousands of shorter stories available as well, many of these much more pornographic that the texts explored here.

My intent is not to issue some sort of verdict on a "right" or "wrong" approach to romantic stories. The idea of censoring or passing judgment on what women take pleasure in is deeply problematic. It is important, however, that we pay attention to the diversity within the stories we tell. This involves greater attention to racial and ethnic diversity, sexual orientation, and in our approach to romance. In ignoring these issues we whitewash and homogenize women's lives, creating a world in which pleasure exists in only one form rather than reflecting the many different ways women find happiness in the world around us.
# Appendix 1: Romance Novel Reading List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Secondary Theme/Genre</th>
<th>Title, Author, Year</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Action/Suspense</em> (Stories featuring significant amounts of action and danger)</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td><em>Baptism In Fire</em> (Elizabeth Sinclair, 2006)</td>
<td>Harlequin: Silhouette</td>
<td>NRCA*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td><em>Cold As Ice</em> (Anne Stuart, 2006)</td>
<td>Harlequin: Mira</td>
<td>AAR Poll**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary, Chick-Lit</td>
<td><em>Spying in High Heels</em> (Gemma Halliday, 2006)</td>
<td>Dorchester Publishing Company</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td><em>Taken</em> (Barbara Freethy, 2006)</td>
<td>Signet</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary, Military Themes</td>
<td><em>Into the Storm</em> (Suzanne Brockman, 2006)</td>
<td>Ballantine Books</td>
<td>RWA Honor Roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Contemporary</em> (Stories set in modern times)</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>A Good Yarn</em> (Debbie Macomber, 2004)</td>
<td>Harlequin: Mira</td>
<td>RWA Honor Roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Father</td>
<td><em>Family At Stake</em> (Molly O'Keefe, 2006)</td>
<td>Harlequin: Superromance</td>
<td>AAR Poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Father</td>
<td><em>Here With Me</em> (Holly Jacobs, 2006)</td>
<td>Harlequin: Silhouette</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Hot Dish</em> (Connie Brockway, 2006)</td>
<td>Signet (Penguin)</td>
<td>AAR Poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chick-lit</td>
<td><em>Real Women Don't Wear Size 2</em> (Kelley St. John, 2006)</td>
<td>Grand Central Publishing (Hachette Book Group)</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Erotica</em> (Stories with greater sexual content.)</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td><em>All U Can Eat</em> (Emma Holly, 2006)</td>
<td>Berkley Sensation</td>
<td>AAR Poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Secondary Theme/Genre</td>
<td>Title, Author, Year</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<td>------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Historical</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Stories set in the past)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regency</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Husband Trap</em></td>
<td>Random House Publishing Group</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tracy Anne Warren, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medieval</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Silver Rose: A Novel</em></td>
<td>Ballantine Books (Random House)</td>
<td>AAR Poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Susan Carroll, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regency</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Devil in Winter</em></td>
<td>Avon (Harper Collins)</td>
<td>AAR Poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lisa Kleypas, 2006</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Inspirational</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Stories with religious themes)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>With Christmas In His Heart</em></td>
<td>Harlequin: Steeple Hill</td>
<td>NCRA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gail Gaymer Martin, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Paranormal/Fantasy</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stories featuring magical, paranormal, or fantasy themes)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fey Born</em></td>
<td>Medallion Press</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R. Garland Gray, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lover Awakened: A Novel of the Black Dagger Brotherhood</em></td>
<td>New American Library</td>
<td>AAR Poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J. R. Ward, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td>RWA Honor Roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Nightwalkers: Jacob</em></td>
<td>Zebra Books (Kensington)</td>
<td>AAR Poll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jacquelyn Frank, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Western</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stories set in the west and incorporating heavy western themes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bunking Down With The Boss</em></td>
<td>Harlequin: Silhouette &quot;Desire&quot;</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charlene Sands, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Young Adult</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stories aimed at young adults)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Major Crush</em></td>
<td>Simon &amp; Schuster</td>
<td>NRCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jennifer Echols, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* NRCA: National Reader's Choice Awards (RWA's reader poll)
** AAR Poll: All About Romance reader's poll
*** RWA Honor Roll: RWA's best-selling authors list

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Appendix 2: Sample Fan Fiction Survey With Commentary

The following survey was posted on SurveyMonkey.com in February 2008. The survey was active for two weeks.

A. Fanfiction Survey - Informed Consent

My name is Katherine Morrissey and this survey is part of my master's thesis at Georgetown University. You are invited to participate in the following survey on current popular works of fan fiction. In this survey you will be asked to identify a few of the stories and authors you have recently read and enjoyed. The survey will also ask you for some general demographic information.

You may NOT participate in this survey if you are under 18 years of age. By completing this survey you acknowledge that you are OVER 18 years of age.

Any identifying information collected about you the participant will be kept strictly confidential. If you include comments, they may be quoted in my research, but you will not be personally identified in any way.

Participating in this survey is voluntary. You do not have to complete the survey and you do not need to answer every question. You may stop at any time for any reason, with no penalty. You may also contact me with any questions or concerns, or to be put on a list of those wishing to obtain a copy of my completed thesis in the spring by writing me at kem82@georgetown.edu.

This research has been approved by the Georgetown University Institutional Review Board. For questions, concerns, or complaints, please call the IRB office at 202-687-6553.

1. I acknowledge and agree to the terms of this survey, and agree to participate.

___ YES, I agree to participate.
___ NO, I do not agree to participate.
B. Fanfiction Survey - General Questions

First, I'd like to get a general idea of how you're involved in fan fiction.

For the purposes of this survey please assume:
• Gen Fiction = A story focused on non-romantic themes in which any romantic and/or sexual relationships are kept to the background.
• Het Fiction = A story focusing on a romantic and/or sexual relationship between a man and a woman.
• Slash Fiction = A story focusing on a romantic and/or sexual relationship between two men.
• Femslash Fiction = A story focusing on a romantic and/or sexual relationship between two women.

1) Do you read, write, and/or beta fan fiction? (Check all that apply.)
   ___ Read
   ___ Write
   ___ Beta (assist writer with feedback/proofreading prior to story release)
   ___ None of the above

2) Of the major types of fan fiction which do you prefer to read? (Terms defined above, check all that apply.)
   ___ Gen
   ___ Het
   ___ Slash
   ___ Femslash

3) What about fan fiction involving real people? (i.e. actors, celebrities, historic figures, etc.)
   ___ I DO NOT read fan fiction about real people
   ___ I read real person fiction but NOT real person slash
   ___ I read MOSTLY real person slash
   ___ I read real person fiction AND real person slash

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4) Thinking about all of the fan fiction you read, do the stories you prefer to read typically tell a romantic story? OR, do you prefer general stories, with very little romance?
   ___ The stories I prefer are usually romantic
   ___ The stories I prefer are usually not romantic

5) Do you read romance novels?
   ___ Yes, I read romance novels
   ___ No, I do not read romance novels

6) If you read romance novels, do you read them more than you read fan fiction, less, or an equal amount?
   ___ I read MORE ROMANCE NOVELS than fan fiction
   ___ I read MORE FAN FICTION than romance novels
   ___ I read romance novels and fan fiction EQUALLY

Section A asks for a general overview of the participant's reading interests. It is important to note that in question two, "Of the major types of fan fiction which do you prefer to read?" the four possible answers were gen, het, slash, and femslash. The alternate pairing names (yuri and yaoi) often used by fans of anime and other Asian related fandoms should have been included here as well. However, the four terms were all defined for participants and numerous Asian fandoms appeared within the survey data, five of them part of the twenty-five most popular. Given this, the omission of the two terms appears to not have had a major impact.

Feedback from participants noted a few areas of confusion with some of these more general questions. The placement of the question four "Thinking about all of the fan fiction you read, do the stories you prefer to read typically tell a romantic story? OR, do you prefer general stories, with very little romance?" directly above question five's "Do you read romance novels?" may have been slightly problematic. While the first question was directed towards any sort of romantic relationship, some participants asked if this meant something specifically like a romance novel. That, in and of itself, is hard to define given that while there may be a traditional, stereotypical 'type' of romance in romance novels, there are certainly many kinds currently available, popular or not. Despite some potential confusion, however, it appears that most
participants were able to understand the question and the answers correspond with the overall survey results.

For the question regarding participant's comfort reading fan fiction about real people, several participants stated that they would have preferred an additional 'other' option to express their conditional reading of certain kinds of stories, depending on specific circumstances. The same was true for the romantic/non-romantic story binary established in the question above. The survey asked participants to generalize and the wording attempted to acknowledge this, however some would have preferred the opportunity to explain their specific experience.

C. Fanfiction Survey - Single or Multi-Fandom?

Now, I'd like to hear more about which specific stories you like to read. Please think back over the past few years and consider what your favorite stories and authors were.

Feel free to consult your bookmarks, journal memories, del.icio.us accounts, etc. Whatever you need to help jog your memory!

1) Do you prefer to participate in only one fandom at a time or in multiple fandoms at once? (For the purposes of this survey, participation in a fandom means reading fan fiction, writing it, or both.)
   __ I tend to participate in one fandom at a time.
   ___ I tend to participate in more than one fandom at a time.

Section C sorts survey participants into two groups, depending on whether they participate in one or multiple fandoms. It is also designed to prepare participants for the upcoming questions on favorite authors and stories.

D. Fanfiction Survey - Stories (One Fandom)

I'm going to ask you to list a few titles and authors. If you have links for any of these stories or authors, please include them.

1) What fandom are you going to talk about today?
2) Please list three of your favorite stories from this fandom:

   * **Story One**
     - Title: ________________________________
     - Author: ______________________________
     - Link: ________________________________

   * **Story Two**
     - Title: ________________________________
     - Author: ______________________________
     - Link: ________________________________

   * **Story Three**
     - Title: ________________________________
     - Author: ______________________________
     - Link: ________________________________

3) Now, please list a favorite author in this fandom:

   - Name: ________________________________
   - Link: ________________________________

---

**E. Fanfiction Survey - Stories (Multiple Fandoms)**

I'm going to ask you to list a few titles and authors. If you have links for any of these stories or authors, please include them.

1) What are the major fandoms you participate in? Since you are in more than one fandom, please limit yourself to your top 2-3: (If you participate in only two, just leave number three blank.)

   - Fandom 1) __________________________________
   - Fandom 2) __________________________________
   - Fandom 3) __________________________________
2) Now, in those two or three fandoms, please list six of your favorite stories:

**Story One**
Fandom: _____________________________________
Title: ________________________________________
Author: ______________________________________
Link: ________________________________________

**Story Two**
Fandom: _____________________________________
Title: ________________________________________
Author: ______________________________________
Link: ________________________________________

**Story Three**
Fandom: _____________________________________
Title: ________________________________________
Author: ______________________________________
Link: ________________________________________

**Story Four**
Fandom: _____________________________________
Title: ________________________________________
Author: ______________________________________
Link: ________________________________________

**Story Five**
Fandom: _____________________________________
Title: ________________________________________
Author: ______________________________________
Link: ________________________________________

**Story Six**
Fandom: _____________________________________
Title: ________________________________________
Author: ______________________________________
F. Fanfiction Survey - General Demographics

You're almost done! Now I'd just like to get a little information about you, to help give me some context for my survey. This is optional, but if you're willing to answer, it is really helpful information for me to know.

1) How old are you: ___

2) What gender do you identify as:
   ___ Male
   ___ Female
   ___ Other

3) If you live in or are a citizen of the United States, do you consider yourself:
   ___ Asian
   ___ Black
   ___ East-Asian
   ___ Hispanic
   ___ Native/Indigenous
___ White (Non-Hispanic)
___ Other (please specify)

4) If you live outside of the United States or are a citizen of another country, what country are you from:

________________________________________

5) What sexuality do you identify as:
___ Heterosexual
___ Homosexual
___ Bisexual
___ Asexual
___ None of the above

6) What is your relationship status?
___ Single
___ Dating
___ Married
___ Civil Union or Domestic Partnership

7) What is the last educational level you completed?
___ High School
___ 2-Year College Program
___ 4-Year College Program
___ Masters Program
___ Doctorate Program

8) What is your current annual income:
___ Below $10,000
___ $10,000 – 20,000
___ $20,000 – 30,000
___ $30,000 – 40,000
___ $40,000 – 50,000
___ $50,000 – 60,000
___ $60,000 – 70,000
___ $70,000 – 80,000
___ Above $80,000
These demographic questions (particularly income level and schooling) can clearly be more easily answered by Americans than other participants. However, this reflects the inherent biases and interests of the overall project. This thesis is focused primarily on American texts and stories predominantly read by women.

G. Fanfiction Survey - Finished!

That's it! Thank you so much for participating in my survey, I really appreciate it. Please take a minute send a link to anyone you know that reads fan fiction. The more participants, the better!

Visit my survey promotion page for sample email text and image buttons for your blog and/or webpage.

Or, here's a copy of the survey's web address, if you just need the link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=egL8uDC_2flsSivLFSB7eTGw_3d_3
Appendix 3: Survey Outreach Materials

1) Graphics Provided for Online Promotion

HTML code was also provided so that each graphic linked directly to the survey.

- take the fan fiction survey!

Do you read fan fiction? If so, please take a few minutes to complete a survey exploring popular types of fan fiction throughout fan culture. Help represent the diversity of fan culture. Let your voice be heard!

- take the fan fiction survey!

- take the fan fiction survey!
2) Sample text provided for emails, blog, and web posts:

A master's student at Georgetown is working on fan fiction for her thesis. There's a survey and she needs as many people from as many fandoms as possible to complete it so that the diversity of fan culture is represented.

If you have a minute, please check it out and send the link to your friends. The survey can be found at http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=66K1U2DcT3EL6i0goWCzAA_3d_3d.

I've agreed to help spread the word, but if you have any questions/concerns, you can email her at kem82 @ georgetown.edu.
Appendix 4: List of Primary Sources

Commercial Romance Novels


**Fan Fiction**


* Dated via Internet Archive (http://web.archive.org/web/)
** Dated via journal post
*** Dated via creator comment
References


Institute, 2004.


