

**Writing About *Harry Potter* Boinking:
The Reality of Fantasy in Pornographic Fanfiction**

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Abstract

With the advent of participatory culture or Web 2.0, fans are flocking to the Internet in increasing numbers in order to write stories about their favorite characters from books, movies or television shows having sex. While this participation with primary media was primarily dismissed by fan and pornography scholars, more recent studies on pornographic fanfiction argue that this activity is an empowering one. This reception study purports to answer how the creation of these stories benefits their lives. Using content analysis techniques, this study examines fan discourse on online forums about writing pornographic fanfiction and it is concluded that their play with reality and fantasy has benefits on their offline lives in an emotional and sexual sense. Recently as well as historically, pornography scholars have suggested that authenticity is the key factor in determining quality products, and this study suggests that experimentation across the boundaries of what is real and not real leads to present and future benefits for fan's lives.

Part 1: Foreplay

Introduction

i. 'Getting A Life': William Shatner and Modern Day Fanship

I am a fan. This means I like, or am a 'fanatic' for, books, television, movies, music and more. I recommend movies to my friends; I talk to strangers on the subway about the books they are reading; I go to concerts to be among my own kind. I am a fan.

Being a fan also means I log onto the Internet to talk to other fans. For Henry Jenkins (2006), this is the activity that has taken over almost any other activity that defines a fan. Jenkins calls this interactivity within the fan community a burgeoning part of Internet culture based on greater participation. Jenkins (2006: 290) defines participatory culture as: "culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content." In other words, these fans 'talk back' to previously static media, appropriating content to fit their own ideas, opinions and fantasies.

A particularly good example of participatory culture is fanfiction, or stories about an established fictional universe penned by someone other than the original author – a fan. Furthermore, a good amount of the content on the Internet is fanfiction about characters engaging in sexual acts with each other. In the case of slash fiction, a genre of fanfiction, fans write about characters engaging in homosexual acts with each other when they are not canonically depicted as such. While many stories feature fleshed out characters and plots, the majority of fanfiction is rated NC-17 for explicit sexual content and thus can accurately be termed erotica or pornography. Out of the 21,000 stories on Fictionalley.org, one of the most abundant Harry Potter fanfiction online archives, over 15,000 are rated R. This means that fans

are flocking to the Internet to write about Harry Potter having sex with various other characters, and unsurprisingly, the question from everyone who does not engage in this activity is: why?

More specifically, this study is asking: why do fans create pornographic fanfiction, and what are the personal, emotional and social benefits of this creation and consumption to their lives? The common negative attitude towards fans and their intense interest in media was famously lampooned in a *Saturday Night Live* sketch, in which William Shatner implored his *Star Trek* fans to: “Get a life!” (Jenkins 1992). Within scholarly literature, fan-created media has been typically condemned as frivolous – a representation of time better spent on original pursuits (Penly 1997). In recent academic studies, the explanation for this hobby is: “Community members often present fan fiction as a fantasy life with direct cathartic or exploratory benefits for their “real” lives” (Driscoll 2006: 88) The rest of the literature on this subject largely follows this thought, discussing how fans ‘use’ online fantasy lives to better their own lives (Jenkins 1992, Penley 1993, Radway 1991). The literature on pornography suggests that effects of online pornography on the lives of fans are beneficial due to the community created when fans discuss the work. Lindgren (2006: 175) notes that “how audience members consume and discuss pornography and how pornography is used in social interaction and identity construction” is primarily the reason for increased scholarly focus on pornography. This involvement is expanded upon in Busse and Hellekson’s (2006: 6) observations on the “intertextuality of fannish discourse, with the ultimate erasure of a single author as it combines to create a shared space, fandom, which we might also refer to as a community.”

Another explanation for the pleasure fans find in writing pornographic fanfiction is the opportunity inherent in rewriting scenes: to play with reality and fantasy. There is a prevailing thought within the literature that authenticity has always been a factor in the evaluation of

pornography's quality; Hardy (2008: 61) notes that pornography has moved "towards greater realism" in order to firmly hook fans into greater consumption. I aim to use the term 'realism' with regards to fan texts the way Jenkins defines it; for Jenkins, the reality in the story is based on the correlation between the fiction and the fan's offline life: "what counts as 'plausible' in the story is a general conformity to the ideological norms by which the viewer makes sense of everyday life" (1992: 110). Use of realism within this study, then, can be equated with the concept of verisimilitude: to appear true to a fan's life. Following this thought, Driscoll (2006: 86) elaborates on the relationship between reality and pornography: "we learn and negotiate with porn what appears sexy as we learn and negotiate with romance what it is to appear 'in love.'" Pornography, then, is not a simple mirror that reflects reality, and the question is: where does reality fit in the fictional universe of pornographic fanfiction? The importance of realism within this acknowledged fictional universe, with characters known to be fictional, is especially problematic – to what extent does this pornography have to be authentic and believable so it benefits the fans?

This relationship brings my study into focus; I am interested in how the rhetorical construction of reality and fantasy contributes to an understanding of the sexuality of the fans, and how the collaborative production of this fanfiction has benefits on fans' offline lives. I want to uncover the link between their play with reality and fantasy and the resulting advantages on their offline lives. I will explore this by looking at online fan forums, specifically those in which fans discuss wordplay within the stories, to investigate how fans' negotiation with realism and fantasy through word choices can be an affirmative, meaning-making practice for fandom members. Online fandoms are illustrative of the new kinds of creative communities that the Internet has been breeding. The exploration of fan or amateur creation may allow for some broad

observations on Internet culture in general and perhaps more saliently, may provide comments on the directions in which greater Internet participation, in the form of open, collaborative and voluntary communities, is taking in today's society.

Review of Literature

i. What is Empowering about Fanship?

The literature on fans and fan culture has repeatedly tried to answer the question of why – why do fans do what they do, what motivates them to consume media the way they do, or in short: what makes a person a fan? Henry Jenkins first responded to this question directly in *Textual Poachers* (1992), which signaled the beginning of academic attention on fan activity. Reflecting on his seminal work in an interview with Matt Hills, Jenkins (2001:12) explains: “When I was writing *Poachers* I was so frustrated by how badly fans had been written about. As a fan I felt implicated in that writing and I wanted to challenge it”. Accordingly, in *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins writes a celebratory treatise on fandom, which can best be described as a descriptive or anthropological study on the habits of fans that influences the study of fandom to the current day (Hills 2002). He comprehensively theorizes the field, drawing from audience studies, detailing little known aspects of the fan community with the intention of bringing the fan community out from the virtual underground. Chief among these aspects was the genre of slash writing, or romantic stories written by mainly female fans with significant homosexual contact between fictional characters that are, in most cases, originally depicted as heterosexual. While the book was very informative and groundbreaking at the time, perhaps the main criticism with Jenkins's seminal study on fans would be his need to defend fan habits, which had up to that

point been derided in popular culture (Jenkins 1992). He writes “both as an academic (who has access to certain theories popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community)” (Jenkins 1992: 5). In other words, Jenkins wrote “as a fan”, and “felt a high degree of responsibility and accountability to the groups being discussed” (Jenkins 1992: 7). Jenkins’s free admission explains his books purpose as a guideline on fan practices, as he did not try to answer why fans engaged with the primary texts as they did, but how they did. He ended his landmark book with the thought: “there is something empowering about what fans do with those texts in the process of assimilating them to the particulars of their lives” (Jenkins 1992: 291). Accordingly, the unwritten question in the literature, spanning from this seminal work in the 1990s to present day, appears to be: what is this ‘empowering thing’ these fans are doing with these texts? Along with Poachers, the 1990s saw the publication of the most celebrated texts of fan culture: Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) with *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, and Constance Penley with *Nasa/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America* (1993). While these writers suggest that it is the discussion about the text, or the communal aspects of fandom that draws the fan into the community, there is by no means a consensus in the literature. Though writers agree that fandom participation contributes, rather vaguely, to the ‘good health’ of its members, the question remains what precisely is it about fan activity that is so important for members, and how, as Jenkins suggested, it is empowering to their lives.

ii. Early Audience and Reception Studies

To look at the question of empowerment more generally, it would be profitable to consider early audience and reception studies as they are concerned with researching the process

of viewership. While these works studied the audiences for television shows and romance novels, these studies are examined with the view that the difference between a viewer and a reader is not substantial, as both can be said to consume texts. As well, these studies share a similar goal to my own, in this study: to consider how any consumer makes sense of the primary texts and what the texts meant to their lives—emotionally, socially or sexually. Furthermore, while they do not specifically use the word ‘fan’ to describe the viewers, these audience studies on romances and soap operas specifically address the issue of pleasure and fandom for female fans.

In one of the first texts in fan study (Jenkins 1992), Janice Radway in her 1991 book, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* specifically asked female romance fans why they read romance and how they integrated the novels into their lives. Radway’s study is chiefly of interest here due to a revealing finding that fiction itself was not the main factor of the pleasure in fanship. Rather, it is the act of reading that is the source of pleasure for readers. Radway’s findings respond to the question of the ‘empowering thing’ fans are doing with the text: the act of reading is transformative for the fan, helping to construct an identity separate from their ‘real’ ones.

Using a sample of a group of female readers in a town she called Smithton, she researched her questions using a two step process: a survey with directed response questions, and then face-to-face interviews with select participants. During her face-to-face interviews, Radway found that the women cited “escape” and “instruction” behind their reasons for reading romance fiction. Far more interesting and relevant to this study is Radway’s finding that the participants needed to believe that they were learning while reading; several conversations with the participants demonstrated the “intensity of their need to believe that their books are “factually

correct” and that the authors conducted extensive research by poring over historical documents and even traveling to the places they write about to infuse their stories with more information (1991: 110). This need is very telling as it forecasts her later assertion that reading is positive for the fan’s self-image, as it “serves to confirm their image of themselves as intelligent individuals” (1991: 114).

This discussion is relevant to this study as it leads directly to the idea of empowerment through fan activity, addressing Jenkins’s question of what exactly it is that empowers the fan, and this study’s research question of what makes a good story for a fan. Radway’s finding of identity construction through reading suggests that romance fiction is transformative and emancipates the female readers from their real lives. Radway’s findings included the notion that reading can contribute to positive changes in the women’s lives: “the women themselves vehemently maintain that their reading has transformed them in important ways” (Radway 1991: 101). The Smithton readers were housewives with dependent children and husbands, and as such reading “supplies them with the important emotional release that is proscribed in daily life because the social role with which they identify themselves leaves little room for guiltless, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure” (Radway 1991: 95-96). Radway’s point here is that this belief in the books and whatever transformations they may provoke is more important than whatever factual information they contain; the act of reading itself is a form of resistance and places the participants in a position of power. Radway describes the reading as a connoting “free space where they feel liberated from the need to perform duties that they otherwise willingly accept as their own” (93). This conclusion has interesting dimensions for this study as it suggests that reading is transformative for the fan, and that the specific source of pleasure for fans is the liberation from their responsibilities.

Taking Radway's findings one step further, Baym (1993) equated fan empowerment and pleasure with something other than the actual story: with talk amongst the fan community. She highlighted the importance of the social aspect of soap opera fandom, defining fandom as "an intrinsically social phenomenon in which a person becomes a fan, in part, for the social connections or community that fandom entails" (1993: 112). Rather than surveying and interviewing participants, Baym analyzed the online discussions of fan groups, as they served the same purpose as interviews: they are "electronically recorded and transmitted, so one can collect and examine a wide range of naturally occurring interactions over an extended period of time" (1993: 113). Her chief discovery was fans taking advantage of the opportunity "to engage in public discussion of normally private socioemotional issues", which raise questions about "the functions implicitly served by the frequently overlooked mundane interactions between fans" (1993: 113). In other words, the soap is "the pretext for discussion of many things other than the soap", and for Baym it is this particular opportunity that is the "motivation for becoming and remaining a fan of a particular medium" (1993: 127). Similar to Radway's finding, Baym discusses how "soaps offer safe terrain on which people can discuss their own and vicarious experiences with a broader range of people, comparing, refining and negotiating understandings of their socioemotional environment" (1993: 127).

Interestingly, Jenkins (1992: 45) echoes this social reading: "Fan reading, however, is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers. Such discussions expand the experience of a text beyond its initial consumption." Like Baym's assertion that a soap is a safe space that fans use to discuss personal problems, Jenkins writes: "Many times, fans are drawn to particular programs because they provide the materials most appropriate for talking about topics of more direct

concern (1992: 83). This is because the programs “continually raise issues the fans want to discuss; such discussions offer insights not only into the fictional characters but into different strategies for resolving personal problems” (1992: 83). For both Jenkins and Baym, the soaps and books are valued by fans as safe grounds to address personal issues, and as more than stories.

In line with Baym and Jenkins’s findings, Mary Ellen Brown’s (1994) study of soap opera fans found that fans place importance on more than the pleasure of the story itself; she finds that the discursive network among fans is the significant aspect of fanship. However, she makes an important distinction about the specific kind of talk amongst a traditionally oppressed group. Like Baym and Jenkins, she suggests that the source of pleasure in soap opera fanship “lies in the discursive network among women that builds around the viewing of a program that is designed for them” (1994: 1). Stating it more plainly, Brown writes: “Not only are soap operas constructed in such a way that they elicit talk, but is also obvious that a large amount of the pleasure that women derive from soap operas is in talking about them” (1994: 167).

However, the significant development Brown made to Baym and Jenkins’s findings concerns women as a disenfranchised group; as a marginalized people, their talk, or gossip, is empowering because it “contains information contrary to ideas validated in dominant or hegemonic culture” (1994: 32). While Baym and Jenkins offer interesting perspectives on the value of communal bonds within fandoms, what is even more interesting in Brown’s work is the suggestion implicit in the notion of a discursive network: the communal bonds among women made through talk is a major source of empowerment, providing through the community “a space for women to construct their world in their own terms” (1994: 37). For Brown, their talk appears to “produce, circulate, and validate feminine meanings and pleasures” (1994: 32). Brown

comments: “It is in this spoken text that most of the meaning generation concerning everyday life and the construction of identity for audiences takes place” (1994: 167). This finding relates to earlier assertions in the literature that fanship can be transformative, and is specifically related to Radway’s finding that reading connotes a “free space” within which fans feel emancipated from their lives. Brown’s observations suggests that fanship is not just emancipatory for fans, but compensatory for the shortcomings they experience in their regular lives. In other words, similar to this study’s goals, Brown recognizes that through the consumption of a popular television show, or in Radway’s study, romance novels, the women have constructed a third realm? in which it is safe to explore feelings and desires not accepted in their lives.

Ien Ang (1985) has previously spoken about this idea of liberation, expanding on these findings regarding fanship and liberation by arguing that empowerment and pleasure for fans is specifically found through recognition. Similar to Brown, she recognizes women as a marginalized group and suggests that an involved viewership is a strategy for resolving personal struggles. In her study of the viewership of the soap opera *Dallas*, she researched: “what are the characteristics of Dallas that organize the viewer’s pleasure?” (1985: 3). This is very much in line with the question ‘what makes a fan?’ that is central to this study.

Ang’s main contribution to the literature on fanship lies in her discussion on empowerment through realism and fiction; she notes that fiction can be empowering for women for the vicarious pleasures it affords them. Sprinkled within this discussion of pleasure is the tension between the fictional and the real: while “various letter-writers show quite explicitly that they are aware that Dallas is a textual construction” (1985: 48), what these remarks suggest is that “precisely because the letter-writers are aware of this [construction], it appears, they can indulge in the excessive emotions aroused in Dallas” (1985: 48). This is similar to Radway’s

findings that it was not the story itself but the act of reading, as the generation of fantasies, that is the source of empowerment.

“it is not primarily a matter of the content of the fantasy, but mainly the fact of fantasizing itself: producing and consuming fantasies allows for a play with reality, which can be felt as liberating because it is fictional, not real. In the play of fantasy we can adopt positions and ‘try out’ those positions without having to worry about their ‘reality value’ (1985: 134).

She states it more plainly: “At the level of fantasy we can occupy those positions without having to experience their actual consequences” (1985: 134). As one letter writer put it: “It is easier and loads more pleasurable to dash away a tear because Ma Dallas has cancer—because she’s only acting—than because of whatever annoying things are in your own life, and at least you have got rid of that tear” (1985: 50). This notion of vicarious empowerment is particularly relevant to this study as it suggests that fans may use the primary text to enrich their own lives, or as a coping technique to deal with their own demons. Furthermore, Ang’s discussion on the realism of the show leads to the observation that the boundary between truth and fiction is where resistant reading can be found.

Following Ang, Matt Hills (2002), a protégé of Jenkins, expands on the boundary between reality and fantasy in fandoms. He discusses fandom as “affective play” and suggests that Donald Wood Winnicott’s theory of transitional objects “offer the clearest potential for a psychoanalytic interpretation of fan cultures” (2002: 112). For Winnicott, the transitional object, such as a stuffed animal or blanket, is one used when a child starts to separate his or herself from his mother, or “me” from the “not-me”, and evolves from complete dependence to a stage of

relative independence. In other words, it is the suggestion of a child's knowledge of two worlds when playing that Hills finds relevant in Winnicott's theory: "it is through the transitional object that the child recognizes the existence of the world outside him or herself" (2002: 104). In using the fictional world of fandom in the play as the transitional object, and being aware of its status as a collective construction by a community of people, fans can 'use' the world: "these texts can be used creatively by fans to manage tensions between inner and outer worlds" (2002: 106). Hills stresses: "That fans are not able to use media texts as part of this process does not suggest that fans cannot tell fantasy from reality. Quite the reverse; it means that while maintaining this awareness fans are able to play with (and across) the boundaries between 'fantasy' and 'reality'" (2002: 106). Taken together, Ang and Hills's conclusions suggest that fans' knowledge of the distinct boundaries between the fictional and the real can be used to their benefit: as Ang suggests, to 'try out' positions without the consequences, to vicariously feel emotions. This thought expands on Radway and Brown's notions of a fandom as a free space; in addition to female fans using the space as liberation from their responsibilities as a marginalized group, the fans also use the space to insert themselves into the fiction as a method to deal with their personal struggles, connecting well with this study's question of the value of fanship.

iii. Slash Fiction and Beyond

Continuing the discussion of how fandom is empowering for fans, I have found that within studies of the fanship of romance novels and television shows there is a prevailing thought that fictional fandom participation offers strategies for resolving personal conflicts. Within slash fiction fandoms, the strategies spoken about in the literature become much more specific: as per Baym, Brown and Ang's initial observations, slash fiction scholars have suggested that fans insert themselves into the well-loved fictional worlds, using slash fiction as a

performative space to specifically answer questions about sexuality and gender. In his first essay on slash fandom, Jenkins (1988b:42) states that, “participation within an international network of fans grants a degree of dignity and respect otherwise lacking”. This essay features excerpts from what he calls “the most theoretically oriented of the existing fan discussion forums about slash” regarding possible motivations for reading and writing slash (1988b: 62). One fan says she identifies with the male characters depicted, as it “means liberation from one’s own gender-related taboos” (1988b: 68). For other fans, Jenkins found the motivation behind slash enjoyment is as “a way of rethinking and rewriting traditional masculinity” (1988b: 71). Put differently, fans may enjoy imbuing straight male characters as more sensitive than they are canonically depicted, and having stereotypically feminine – that is, emotional – sex with each other. Thus, fandom is a useful safe space for exploring questions about gender through depictions of sex.

Bacon-Smith offers another satisfying explanation of the source of pleasure for fans in work on slash fandoms. In her research, which encompassed several slash fandoms including *Dr. Who* and *Star Trek*, Bacon-Smith (1992: 6) identifies the importance of writing about sex for members of various media fandoms: “many of the ladies write about sex in all its permutations; it symbolizes the search for trust and community and security”. Bacon-Smith’s major contribution to the existing literature was to view fan study from a feminist and explicitly sexual perspective. She finds, through a series of ethnographic interviews, that women create and read slash because it is “sexually exciting” and “they can share in the relationships with both of the male screen characters with whom they already maintain an imaginary relationship. The fan can imagine giving and receiving both physical and emotional love from the point of view of one or both of the characters” (1992: 240). Besides the sexual response, Bacon-Smith finds that fans must create slash because “women can’t imagine themselves as heroic characters unless they

imagine themselves as male” (1992: 240). One fan says: “we were raised in this culture and we don’t believe women are equal” (1992: 242).

This view was expanded on in the third landmark text on fan study, also published in 1992: Constance Penley’s essay on *Star Trek*, which was later expanded on in her 1993 book *Nasa/Trek*. Penley focused on one fandom and one pairing, allowing for a more focussed discussion on slash fiction than either of her predecessors Jenkins or Bacon-Smith. She asked specifically why these *Star Trek* fans write their sexual fantasies through the bodies of two men, and why specifically they use the characters Kirk and Spock. Penley’s essay uses a psychoanalytic approach to the identification issue for women in fandoms; she argues that slash allows female readers “to have and be either and both of the characters” (1992: 38). While Penley did not come to concrete, verified conclusions regarding whether creating slash is positive for women, preferring just to discuss the issue broadly in order to bring awareness to the academic world, her book raised questions on gender issues in popular literature, comparing the negative portrayals of women in the *Star Trek* series with systemic problems and gendered double standards in the space agency NASA.

More recently in the academic literature about slash fandom, other writers have been influenced by Penley and Bacon-Smith’s assertions about women inserting themselves in the fiction to make up for a feminine lack, either in their lives or media. Writing about illustrated Japanese slash, Valenti comments on the advantages of slash for women: “women enjoy [slash] because it is a way for them to be entertained by sex in a non-threatening way, without the anxieties and problems associated with being female, such as pregnancy and misogyny” (as cited in Stanley, 2008: 100).

Other views suggest that slash subverts traditionally iconic narratives of male and female power. Writing about Japanese slash fiction, Isola (2008) cites Takamitsu Hisako's argument that Japanese slash fiction was "liberating for women because unlike heterosexual stories, where women are routinely the object of the male gaze, [Japanese slash fiction] constructs an egalitarian model for gazing" (2008: 89). In this view, slash fiction functions as an "act of agency over sex/gender hegemony by constructing liberating spaces within which females can negotiate the male gaze" (2008: 89). This perspective mirrors Valenti's, as Isola discovers one fan's interest in slash as having "nothing to do with gay men and everything to do with her dissatisfaction with heterosexual narratives that tended to disadvantage the female" (89).

Similarly, in her review of the literature of Japanese slash, Stanley (2008) concludes that recent literature on slash suggests that slash's main purpose is to "interrupt the dominant narratives of television and even pornography by giving females a chance to play with boys and the male body in ways that male authors/artists have traditionally assumed to be their right to manipulate and play with the female body" (2008: 107). Rather than simply imagining themselves male, a thought that originated with Penley's 1992 essay, in this view women have rendered themselves the controller rather than the controlled.

Another disadvantaged group that may use slash fiction to fulfill voids would be homosexuals; Jenkins suggests in his work that slash fiction can function as a safe, queer space for homosexual fans. In a study done on a group called 'Gaylaxians', comprised of Star Trek fans campaigning for increased gay visibility within the science fiction community, Jenkins (2006: 109) finds that the "deferral of a gay character colored the Gaylaxians' relationship to the series and invited them to constantly read a gay subtext into the episodes". In this sense, slash

fiction can be seen as wish fulfillment for queer fans that want to see their orientation represented in popular media.

While the notion that fandom exists as compensatory fiction for groups underrepresented in the media is prevalent in the literature surrounding fandom, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these explanations may limit the full understanding of a fan's enjoyment. While this literature review begins to respond to the inherent questions behind fan fiction and its apparent value for those who create it, I wish to go beyond these questions and respond to the gaps, specifically regarding how realism fits into these questions about empowerment. As illustrated in my introduction, previous studies have stipulated that the specific criterion of pleasure for a fan is realism (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Hardy 2008). I propose to deploy a theoretical framework that will allow me to respond to this question of how the representation of reality affects a fan's notions of quality and value of the stories—specifically, how it is used in strategies to better their lives. This framework will enable me to comment on what pornographic fan fiction is doing for the lives of those who create and read it, and for Internet culture more generally.

Research Question

i. The Reality of Fantasy

The literature on the subject of pornography makes it axiomatic that pleasure in pornographic consumption is now linked to verisimilitude. While historically feminists have cited pornography as an extremely artificial, idealized representation of sexuality, Hardy (2008: 61) claims that the creators of modern pornography incorporate realism into their product for greater affect: "at both the point of production and consumption, pornographic representation has always sought to directly invoke elements of real sexual experience." Driscoll (2006: 87) echoes

this "The real on which porn relies is a claim about bodily presence, but this realism is still evaluated by affect: does it get you off? Do you believe in it?" Following Driscoll and the other authors referenced previously, this paper will examine how fans' play with realism is used to affect or influence their lives when reading pornographic fanfiction. Using a theoretical framework comprised of ideas found within media reception theory as well as Butler and Baudrillard's concepts of "resignification and "hyperreality", I will examine how the ways in which fan readers experience, value and judge explicit erotic fan texts create personal meaning and influence their offline lives.

Theoretical Framework

i. Switching Positions: Destabilizing Dominant Sexual Narratives

The most telling work from Jenkins's catalogue regarding the value of fanfiction to fans comes from his 1993 essay. Like many scholars have found, Jenkins discovers a wide range of motivations for enjoying fanfiction. Unable to come to a conclusion about these many opposing theories, Jenkins ends his essay with quotations on the "paradox" and the absence of "easy, satisfying answers" for the 'why' behind enjoyment for fans (1993b: 87). Bacon-Smith (1992: 242) echoes this statement, closing her study by stating that she does not find the feminist explanation for the enjoyment satisfying: "it sounded too intellectual, too politically correct". Bury (2005: 77), writing about the *X-files* fandom, finds that fans reject traditional explanations for their enjoyment; while they believe enjoyment is feminist in nature, they "acknowledge that their interpretation was contested" within the fandom.

Certainly, the plurality of answers regarding the motivation for enjoying fanfiction in the existing literature predicates further study, but it must be specified to the question: How do fans use the stories to better their lives? In this study, I explore the primary criterion that elicits or produces pleasure for a fan, realism or textual verisimilitude, and the ways this criterion of quality can be seen to have an influence on their lives, specifically their sexuality or offline sexual practices. To frame my study on the common themes in fan writing forums about slash fiction sex scenes on Internet, I will be using the key tenets of media reception theory, and Baudrillard's concepts of reality and simulation. The unifying concept found within all the theories is that of the destabilization of the central narrative.

ii. The Active Viewer: Media Reception Theory

To explain this central concept, it would be useful to begin with media reception theory. Reception theory, also commonly called audience theory, was developed by Stuart Hall in the 1960s in Birmingham, United Kingdom (Davis 2004). This cultural movement brought about Hall's theory of encoding and decoding. This approach to textual analysis focuses on the scope for negotiation and opposition on the part of the audience, otherwise known as active viewing. The concept of the 'active viewer' is explained by Livingstone (1992: 36) as the understanding that viewers "make sense of programmes relatively unconstrained by the structure of the text, drawing instead upon his or her interests, knowledge and experience." Within the context of media reception theory, audiences are not passive but active, interacting with the text to make meaning from it, rather than simply absorbing what is offered. In other words, 'meaning' is a negotiated process between different audiences and texts. Allen (1987: 75) describes the theory:

“meaning should no longer be considered as the result of the immutable property of a text but must be considered as the result of the confrontation between reading act and textual structure.” Jenkins (1992: 23) based his initial work of *Poachers* on the assumption that the reader was not passive in media consumption: “Rejecting media-fostered stereotypes of fans as cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers, this book perceives fans as active producers and manipulators of meanings.” This model, then, can be seen as egalitarian, as it “allows for the validity of competing and contradictory interpretations” and “questions the institutional power that values one type of meaning over all others” (Jenkins 1992: 33).

It is this democratic thought that is central to this study: questioning institutional power, or put differently, destabilizing dominant narratives. Following the observations made by scholars on Japanese slash that it turns women from the controlled into the controllers, I am interested in how fans destabilize the general societal accepted narratives of pleasure and sexual desire. Taking the concept of the active viewer further, this study argues that readers are contributing to the ‘reality’ of their favorite fictions by offering their own readings of the text as based on their own experiences. While these fan works cannot be appreciated in the same way as the originals as they are derivative, this theory evokes the thought that these contributions should still be privileged by the general public.

iii. Butler: *Gender Trouble* and Resignification

Butler (1990) expands on this idea of re-imagining of the hierarchical structure by discussing the concept of resignification, bringing up my central theory of destabilization once again. In *Gender Trouble*, she argues that nothing is natural with respect to sexual identity, which is socially produced through repetition and imitation of cultural norms. Furthermore, she

explains that this learned behavior exposes the institution of gender as a fallacy: “the parodic repetition of gender exposes as well the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance” (Butler 1990a: 146). She elaborates further:

“As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an “act”, as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of “the natural” that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (1990a: 146 – 147).

What is significant about this view is that, as she asserts, naturalized gender identity is a myth and gender roles can be learned, it becomes apparent they are open to revision, or to use her term, resignification. Butler’s theories on the illusion of gender roles as a construction dissolve the boundaries between real and fantasy – there is no ‘real’ gender identity. Applying this theory in a broader sense and specifically to this study, I will use Butler’s theory to argue that there is no ‘real’ and meanings and codes by which we live our lives can be negotiated and altered - specifically socially accepted narratives on sexual desires.

iv. Baudrillard: Hyperreality

To tie up these theories, Baudrillard’s concept of the hyperreal expands on Butler’s ideas on reality by similarly noting how the real disappears into the signifier. For Baudrillard, society is now living in the state of the hyperreal, or a world in which signs have now disappeared into the things signified. Baudrillard explains that ‘hyperreality’ is a special kind of reality that it is experienced as more real than the real, because of its effect of breaking down the boundary

between real and imaginary. In essence, it becomes "a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1981: 1732).

Using an example to explain this concept, Baudrillard borrows Borges's fable 'Of Exactitude in Science', where "the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up exactly covering the territory" (Baudrillard 1981: 1739). In other words, Baudrillard posits that the 'map' and reality can no longer be separated from one another, so the map has become as 'real' as the real. His example of Disneyland further explains this concept: "the fake castles can look more real than the real, because they embody all of our childish and romantic notions of what a castle should ideally look like, and the machinery of representation is so well hidden that reality and representation blur together" (Lane 2009: 88).

With respect to this study specifically, Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality can be used to understand the reality created and experienced by fans when writing and reading the stories. In Baudrillard's words, the image goes through four phases before it is considered hyperreal: "It is the reflection of basic reality", it then "masks and perverts a basic reality", and then "masks the absence of a basic reality" and then finally, "it bears no reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (1981: 1736).

In other words, there is no blurring between reality and representation as the 'real' does not exist anymore. Since there is no longer a standard against which to measure the simulation, the real and the simulated become completely unified. The map in Borges' story, Disneyland and other hyperreal worlds show a reality that is created or simulated from models, or defined by reference to models. The idea of a reality generated from ideas is especially relevant to this study

on fanfiction as it is, in essence, a secondary fantasy world appropriated or drawn from from an acknowledged fictional universe.

I am interested in using these ideas as I examine the dialogue of fans while they play across the boundaries of reality and fantasy to find pleasure. As they do so, I will analyze how they incorporate the stories into the interstices of their ‘real’ lives and their offline sexual practices. In other words, similar to the map and other hyperreal spaces, fans begin to inhabit the world of fanfiction as ‘more’ real than the real, or reality by proxy, as they take another version of reality and claim it as their own. Using this enhanced reality—changed, or altered by the person perceiving it—I am interested in seeing how they destabilize the dominant narratives of sexual pleasure and desire, to answer this study's general question, asked at the very outset, of why fans become fans.

Methodology

i. Research Design

A reception study was carried out that employed content analysis techniques in order to thematically analyze fan comments, with the aim of showing how the primary criterion within the stories that dictates fan’s pleasure, realism, influences their lives. Accordingly, Culler (1981: 13) explains reception studies are “not a way of interpreting works but an attempt to understand their changing intelligibility by identifying the codes and interpretative assumptions that give them meaning for different audiences at different periods.”

While reception studies normally employ interviews and ethnographic research (Jenkins 1992; Radway 1992; Bury 2005), I have chosen to use content analysis techniques to analyze online forums that allow fans to exchange opinions on the stories, as it offers a viable alternative

to qualitative interviews and observation. As fan websites give fans a space to discuss their views on stories amongst one another, the analysis of the website is similar to both these methods in terms of the data that can be obtained. Zito (1975: 27) defines content analysis as “a methodology by which the researcher seeks to determine the manifest content of written, spoken or published communication by systematic, objective and quantitative analysis”. As Zito argues that a content analysis stresses the “intention of the communicator”, or the manifest content of the message, this method seems especially apt for analyzing written fan comments (1975: 27).
Yes!

According to Berger (2011: 206), content analysis also has the other advantages of being unobtrusive, inexpensive and able to yield quantifiable data. With regards to the specific benefits of content analysis techniques in reception studies, Staiger (2005:10-11) points out that content analysis is a popular technique in media reception studies as it is “able to quantify textual information” through the “locating and counting preselected features of texts.” Staiger also notes that the counting “seems to produce objectivity” (2005: 170). She uses the example of a seminal reception study of Nazi propaganda films executed by Kracauer that used content analysis techniques in order to “reveal hidden mental processes”, or the tastes and opinions of the audience watching the films (2005: 51). For Kracauer, “it is the repetition—not merely the appearance—of formulas and motifs that proves their attraction to the middle-class audiences” (2005: 51). While Kracauer studied the films to which the audiences reacted, and this study studies fan comments on or about the stories, the goal is similar: to reveal their interpretative processes. The principle of Kracauer’s research also holds up in this study: the counting of the repetition of themes and patterns within the comments made by slash fiction fans may be taken

to reveal their tastes, in a way similar to interviews, and will enable me to discover how the main criteria of a good story, realism, influences their lives.

ii. Data Sampling

In the last decade, fans of many popular media have moved their discussions from mailing lists and face-to-face at annual fan conferences to the Internet, which has made their discussions much more accessible to scholars. To date, there are numerous fan fiction websites that have the feature I wish to analyze, writing forum posts that discuss the craft of writing. I chose the forums that discuss writing techniques as these posts would contain the dialogue among fans I wish to observe: what devices used within the stories that made them 'good stories' and what did not, which would afford insight into their main criterion for pleasure. Fanfiction.net is the most prolific and exhaustive of this list, with 26, 501 posts within the forum part of the website in March 2013, but does not allow NC-17 rated stories. There are also websites dedicated to a particular fandom; Fictionalley.org specializes in Harry Potter and also has a large discussion board, with multiple forums regarding slash pairings, but the forums cannot be used for my study as they do not examine the craft of writing. For my study, I have chosen the following website to focus on, Adult Fanfiction.com, found at the following link:

<http://hp.adultfanfiction.net/main.php?list=838>. A screenshot of the home page can be found in Appendix 1.

The above is a fan fiction archive featuring romance stories, rated R to NC-17, from a variety of fandoms, including male/male pairings, female/female pairings, heterosexual pairings, and human/animal pairings. This website was chosen as it is one of the largest NC-17 fanfiction archives on the Internet. It also archives stories from several fandoms, which is thought to

provide variety, and provides a more than average amount of community support for authors, including: discussion boards on varying topics, story recommendation posts, guides to writing fan fiction, and a disproportionately high (as compared to other sites) number of user comments and reader reviews for stories.

Of these aspects of the site, I analyzed a sample of comments made by fans about the stories. Specifically, I focused on writing forums posts that discussed how to write a good story. The forums were found in a particular part of the website called “Writers Corner”: “An area for writers to discuss the art of writing amongst themselves. Includes advice, strategies, styles, and specifics on writing adult material” (Writers Corner, 2012). I chose these forums within in this particular part of the website as they would be frequented by both writers and readers of the stories, as the posts themselves confirmed, and thus would provide the most explicit discussion of the stories found on the website, and what they disliked and liked about them. As for the scope and quantity of analysis, the community is large: at the time of analysis there were 142, 320 authors. I chose 3 topics in total, which were titled as follows:

'Using Proper Anatomical Terms Over Sex Slang' (23 replies, 9 pages of data)

'Vocabulary Turn-ons' (32 replies, 7 pages of data)

'Vocabulary Turn-offs' (248 replies, 80 pages of data)

At the time of collection (between June and December 2012) there were 23, 32 and 248 replies, yielding a total number of 96 pages of data.

My sample was chosen through the principles of “relevance sampling”, explained by Krippendorff (2004: 120) as selecting “all textual units that contribute to answering given

research questions.” There were over 100 topics in total within the Writers Corner, ranging from requests for help with writing sex scenes from the perspective of a man or woman, what sexual acts really feel like for those who have not experienced them, as well as more typical requests for help with technical aspects of writing, such as syntax, grammar and story pacing. In my coding, I isolated the topics that discussed writing good sex scenes, with the view that discussions surrounding the preferred sexual terms would provide an argument for what the fans prefer or do not prefer to see in the story. Specifically, the topics I chose are directly relevant to this study’s focus on fans’ interplay of fantasy and reality; an initial scan of these topics revealed discussions rich in references to realistic or unrealistic words. In other words, these topics would show whether posters preferred realism or fantasy in the story, through the preference for euphemisms, or terms that are not clinical, medical terms for anatomy, with the thought that the preference of euphemisms or sex slang would imply a preference for fantasy.

iii. Coding Procedures

After isolating the topics, I assigned the corresponding posts to one of the thematic categories, recognition or sexual, which are expanded upon below, and then assigned the post to the sub-category of positive or negative.

Recognition Realism: comments praising or criticizing the fanfiction author’s realistic depiction of sex, as compared to the sexual experiences they experience in their real, offline lives

- Positive toward realism: praising the use of realistic details in sex scenes (+)
- Negative toward realism: criticizing the use of realistic details in sex scenes (-)

Sexual Realism: comments praising or criticizing the author's use of realistic words or euphemisms, as affecting their opinion of depicting sexually gratifying sex between characters (Penley 1997; Driscoll 2006)

- Positive toward realism: comments praising the use of realistic words to describe sex (+)
- Negative toward realism: comments praising the use of euphemisms to describe sex (-)

These categories respond to my research questions regarding the criteria of a good story for a fan and what the story means to them. These categories situate pleasure in fanfiction reading with realism, responding to the theme in the academic literature on fanfiction regarding the boundaries of 'real' and the fictional in fanfiction (Jenkins 1992; Penley 1997; Bacon-Smith; Driscoll 2006; Hills 2002). Put differently, the academic literature on fanfiction has repeatedly addressed the importance of the play across the clearly defined worlds of the fictional and the real, suggesting that empowerment and pleasure take place in the intersection of the 'real' and the fictional. These categories measure to what extent pleasure for fans is connected to finding realism in their stories.

iv. Collection and Analysis

In order to collect the data and analyze it, I copied and pasted posts within either of the categories listed above, and then within the positive or negative categories. I counted the number of posts within each category and sub-category, in order to make arguments about the level of realism posters preferred in their erotic stories. When I stopped collecting the data in December 2012, I took screenshots of each page of each forum. To organize my data, I collected the data into charts, with the headings: 'poster', the time stamp of the post in order to easily find the

original wording, 'significant words' and then '+ or -', to signify whether the post was positive or negative towards realism or euphemisms. I also counted the number of posters per forum.

v. Limitations of Research Design

In-depth, ethnographic interviews might have yielded rich data from participants. Specifically, interviews would have allowed me to ask questions of a selected group of fans regarding the motivation for becoming a fan, as well to the kind of pleasure that is derived from consuming and writing erotic fanfiction. These questions would have provided direct answers to my research questions, rather than having to infer themes from established forums. For Creswell (2009: 179), the advantages of interviews include allowing the “researcher control over the line of questioning.”

However, interviews would have been prohibitively lengthy, to conduct with several participants as well as to transcribe and analyze the data. As stated earlier, using content analysis achieves a similar affect to in-depth interviews, and is more replicable than interviews. As well, according to Berger (2011: 213), one of the key advantages of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive: “Unlike research methods such as interviewing and participant observation, the researcher does not ‘intrude’ on what is being studied and thus does not affect the outcome of the research.” Other advantages of content analysis include that it is a relatively inexpensive method. Furthermore, the data for research is often publically available and the researcher usually does not require participant’s consent for analyzing the data (Berger, 2011).

Part 1: Sex

Results

The forum "Vocabulary Turn-offs" is the most abundant of the writing forum posts, with 248 replies as of December 2012, and 59 that were found to be relevant to the categories chosen, Recognition Realism and Sexual Realism. The next forum, entitled "Vocabulary Turn-ONS", had 32 replies with 10 relevant. The last forum, entitled "Using Proper Anatomical Terms Over Sex Slang", had 20 replies, with 14 relevant. I have provided a table summary of my results below:

Forum Name	Total Replies	Relevant Posts	Posts within Recognition Realism Category	Posts within Sexual Realism Category
Vocabulary Turn-OFFS	248	59	22	38
Total Number of Posters: 43			Negative: 5	Negative: 22
Vocabulary Turn-ONS	32	10	4	6
Total Number of Posters: 13			Negative: 1	Negative: 1
Using Proper Anatomical Terms Over Sex Slang	20	14	3	11
Total Number of Posters: 10			Negative: 2	Negative: 7
Totals:	300	84	29	53
			Positive: 23	Positive: 23
Total Number of Posters: 66			Negative: 8	Negative: 30

Detailed results tables for the three forums can be found in the appendices.

i. Recognition Realism and Sexual Realism: A Contradiction

The number of posts within the positive sub-category of the Recognition Realism category, 23 out of 29 posts within the category, suggests that fans are preoccupied with not just realism within their stories: the specific kind of realism they are looking for is one that mimics their offline lives. Specifically, the larger number of posts in the positive sub-category means that the fans are praising the use of details they deem realistic as compared to their own lives in a sex scene, according to my definition of recognition realism. Within the forum 'Vocabulary Turn-OFFS', the poster Maidenhair draws a direct comparison with her life and the scene: "I find talking dirty during sex to be a major turn-on so that might colour my view" (June 5, 2008 – 7:25 pm). She explains further: "My taste on what I like to read and the way I write is a reflection on what I like and don't like in the bedroom, I guess" (June 5, 2008 – 7:25 pm). Another fan, Scottishfae, within the same forum explains that badly written stories are the product of writers with little sexual experience:

"I think that sometimes what happens is that people who aren't as well...versed.. in the material they are writing about take the 2nd hand experience of others and morph that into their fiction writing. Then we get these sloppy, unsexy scenes which we all cringe over" ('Vocabulary Turn-OFFS', July 8, 2008 – 7:07 a.m).

The word 'unsexy' suggests that fans are looking for a representation of what they have experienced in their offline sexual lives within their stories, and enjoy or find pleasure in stories that exude greater realism, as defined by what they experience in their offline sex lives.

To contrast with this finding, the number of posts in the sexual realism category within all three forums is higher in the negative sub-category, which means fans are praising the use of

euphemisms to describe sex. In other words, my results show that while fans preferred reading about realistic sex as compared to their own lives, they expressed distaste at the use of realistic terms for genitalia. Within ‘Using Proper Anatomical Terms Over Sex Slang’, Foeofthelance writes: “Reliance entirely on the anatomic terms can quickly turn a scene into a “How To” manual, which bores the reader” (June 8, 2012 – 2:08 a.m). This matter-of-fact explanation is followed by many others that express similar distaste to authors who use clinical terms in sex scenes. In the same forum, Lunaticfringe writes:

“I suppose the only thing that would leave me cold/indifferent would be reading nothing but clinical terms in a sex scene: He inserted his penis into her vagina, moving it back and forth until he ejaculated, the semen from his testes traveling via the vas deferens until it was expelled and deposited into her vaginal canal when he orgasmed. Man that’s steamy. If I want something that sterile, I’ll curl up with a copy of the Merck Manual” (Using Anatomical Words Over Sex Slang, March 15, 2008 – 4:16 am).

This preference for euphemisms, which reoccurs throughout all three forums, seems at odds with the other finding that shows fans prefer to see realism, or verisimilitude, in their stories.

Previous studies have emphasized pornography’s preoccupation with reality: “Pornography is obsessed with the real – with demonstrating the empirical reality of arousal and orgasm, even to the point of overdetermining these until they resemble no one’s real life” (Driscoll 2006: 87).

Speaking of general trends in pornography, Hardy (2008: 62) discusses how the “harnessing of gonzo and amateur sub-genres to new media technologies is now enabling the pornographic representation of sex to close ever more proximately with whatever ‘reality’ lies behind it.”

My study would appear to be in line with these findings, with the larger number of positive posts within the 'Recognition Realism' category, showing that fans require the story to have realistic details in order to enjoy it. However, my other finding that fans also prefer the use of euphemisms for sexual organs, seen in the higher number of posts within the negative category for sexual realism, complicates the straight hypothesis that better realism equates better pornography for fans. If the fans in my study require realism based on their own lives to find pleasure in stories, why do they not like the use of specific, technical terms for anatomy?

This apparent contradiction helps to focus my response to the research question that began this study. My question centered on how the primary criterion in the story that dictates pleasure for a fan affects their offline lives. These results show that it is a blend of realism and fantasy within a story that makes it enjoyable for a fan. Another way of saying this is that their negotiation with the reality within the stories, the addition of fantasy with reality base, is what makes the story an enjoyable one. Accordingly, Butler (1990) has written that the relationship between fantasy and reality is as a close one, arguing that fantasy should not be conceived as entirely outside the real, but rather it emerges from within it. She explains: "we can understand the 'real' as a variable construction which is always and only determined in relation to its constitutive outside: fantasy, the unthinkable, the real" (1990: 106). By showing that fantasy and reality are conflated or merged, I mean to suggest that elements of both are important to fans when defining pleasure in a story.

Additionally, their play across the borders of reality and fantasy destabilizes dominant narratives of sexual desire and traditional, societal positions and creates positive effects in their offline sex lives. I have isolated two strategies through which they accomplish these effects. The finding that fans prefer to read about sex that compares with their own sex lives leads to the

thought they may be trying to locate themselves in the scenes, and are identifying with the emotions described in the scene. Put differently, this study takes previous arguments from my Literature Review that fans are using the strategy of empowerment through emotional identification to better their offline lives. Another strategy fans may be employing is fantasy; fans are infusing their own fantasies into the text, seen in their preference for euphemisms or fantastical words for genitalia. For fans, the act of fantasizing is important as it shows them what could be: a reflection upon their own future lives. What I mean to suggest, as I will explore in the next section of this paper, is that fans are using strategies of realism and fantasy to better their offline lives by subverting marginalized positions. They are accomplishing this by recognizing their marginalization in the text, as well as projecting an image for the future so they may change it for the better.

Analysis

i. Strategy 1: You write what you know: Recognition + Identification = Empowerment

To begin to talk about these strategies, I refer to Avarian's words within Vocabulary Turn-OFFS: "I disdain a chronicle of physical events. We all know how biology works, we all know the sounds that are generally produced; is it really necessary to document them all without adding any substance?" She later adds: "The key to getting it right is finding a balance" (July 1, 2008 – 3:49 am). Avarian's words have two ideas of note: the reality of the sex scene needs an addition of some kind, as fans do not just want the reality they experience replicated within the sex scene. Avarian's next statement, that the 'key' to what can be inferred as pleasure is the 'balance', is particularly telling. In other words, this 'balance' may be between what the fans experience in their offline sex lives and what they wish to experience.

To unpack this statement, I will start by exploring the 'what fans experience' portion of this comment; I am arguing that recognizing the reality that the fans experience is a meaning-making practice for fans, or a method to better their lives. As illustrated earlier in this paper, fans equate real life sexual experience with a better story. Within Vocabulary Turn-OFFS, Raymy writes: "Where do you think some of us get our ideas from? I don't think I could write about something I know nothing about" (Nov. 4, 2012, 6:03 a.m.) In complimenting another fan author, Guardian SoulBlades explains her opinion as to why the other author's stories are good: "She's also married and has kids so she actually knows what she's writing about" (September 21, 2012, 1:55 pm). Ginevra sums up these thoughts by stating: "You write what you know" (February 20, 2008 – 12:01, p.m.).

Jenkins (1992) and Ang (1985) elaborate on the process fans go through after recognizing their own experiences in the fiction. For Jenkins, the reality in the story is based on the correlation between the fiction and the fan's offline life: "what counts as 'plausible' in the story is a general conformity to the ideological norms by which the viewer makes sense of everyday life" (1992: 110). Elaborating, he explains that this reality-based "conception of the series" can "allow fans to draw upon their own personal backgrounds as one means of extrapolating beyond the information explicitly found within the aired episodes" (1992: 110).

Expanding on what 'drawing on their own personal backgrounds' means for their lives, Ang's (1985) words are also relevant, demonstrating that by recognizing themselves in the scenes, fans are able to subvert dominant narratives about sexual desire in their offline lives. Earlier in this paper, I discussed Ang's (1985) findings in her study of *Dallas* fans with regards to vicarious empowerment. Her thoughts on realism are also extremely relevant here; her findings include the thought that "popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of

recognition”, concluding that what viewers are recognizing in *Dallas* is, among other things, a kind of reality aligned with their own. In other words, the characters must be genuine, or aligned with characteristics from their own lives, with the viewers able to identify with them: “being able to imagine the characters as ‘real people’ thus forms a necessary precondition for the involvement of viewers and is an anchor for the pleasure of *Dallas*” (1985: 30).

Ang specifies her findings with regards to the kind of realism fans are seeking in their stories. For Ang, what resonates with the viewers more than the characters are the concrete situations and complications; they are “regarded as symbolic representations of more general living experiences: rows, intrigues, problems, happiness and misery” (1985: 45). Put differently, “the realism of *Dallas* can be called ‘emotional realism’” as “emotions form the point of impact for a recognition of a certain type of structure of feeling in *Dallas*; the emotions called up are apparently what remain with the letter-writers most” (1985: 45). Ang talks about the “tragic structure of feeling” which she describes as “life is a question of falling down and getting up again. This structure of feeling can be called tragic structure of feeling; tragic because of the idea that happiness can never last forever but, quite the contrary, is precarious” (1985: 46). While “the effect of ‘genuineness’ is then the most important thing these viewers expect” (1985: 34), more specifically it is the emotional ups and downs ‘that are taken from life’ that are the source of pleasure in *Dallas*.

In other words, the *Dallas* fans viewed the program not as empirically true but rather as emotionally true to their personal lives, and Jenkins (1992) suggests that this emotional realism is the most productive part of fanship. In his discussion on her work, Jenkins argues that “‘emotional realism’ is not a property of fictions so much as it is an interpretive fiction fans construct in the process of making meaning of popular narratives” (1992: 118).

It is not difficult to see this thought about making meaning replicated in the forums I studied. The poster Avarian is very adamant about reading scenes that are realistic: "I think the one thing that makes me grind my teeth, clench my fists and throw an real wobbly is reading fics about a character losing her virginity" because "they never sound *anything* like real life. I don't want a load of sappy drivel then launch into a scene of hot rampant first-time sex between a couple of teenagers!" (June 27, 2008 – 5:57 pm). However, the poster specifies the reason for the lack of verisimilitude: "When I think of the first time I think of emotional vulnerability, curiosity, fear, excitement, awkwardness and embarrassment" (June 27, 2008 – 5:57 pm). The poster's stress on the specific emotions brought forth as a result of the sex suggest that they are the primary ingredient of the realism he or she seeks within the stories, and the source of pleasure.

Interestingly, the emotions Avarian names are not happy ones, which follows another discovery from Ang's study. In her study of *Dallas*, Ang also finds that the very realistic unhappiness was an unlikely source of empowerment for its female viewers. Ang anticipates arguments against this: as the tragic structure of feeling demands unhappiness for all characters, especially the female ones, it is "incompatible with a feminist sensibility" (Ang, 1992: 123). However, Ang argues:

"many feminist fantasies today are not pleasurable, but are linked with feelings of fury, frustration and pain. Political struggle is directed towards removing the distance between an ideal of the future and a given reality, but the harsh conditions in which this struggle must be waged inevitably to create tensions in everyday life" (133).

Thus, Ang suggests that the unhappiness in women as a disenfranchised group is dramatized in the emotional scenes of *Dallas*, and this realization of suffering is empowering.

With regards to this study, this realization of suffering may lead to either actualization or resistance for viewers. Within the forums, I noted a resistance to the word ‘cunt’ when discussing which words to use a sex story. Ginevra explains her thoughts on the word:

“‘cunt’ is one of the ugliest things you can call a woman. I don’t know how that word got that kind of baggage, but it is ugly enough to end relationships over. Were I dating a man and he whipped that out in an argument, I’d probably dump him. If he weren’t already in the process of dumping me. It’s worse than calling a woman a slut, whore, bitch, or nearly any other single word I can think of at the moment.” (3:00 pm, March 1, 2008, Vocabulary Turn OFFS).

Other fans agree; Monkey Lady writes: “cunt: it makes my hackles rise every time” (8:08 pm, April 19, 2008 – Vocabulary Turn OFFS). For Maidenhair, all other words are fine but “only the word CUNT bothers me. It grates on my nerves when I stumble over it when reading. (probably because of a particularly vicious school mate who used it a lot)” (7:25 pm, June 5, 2008, Vocabulary Turn OFFS).

By identifying the use of the word and their associated feelings with it, fans are identifying with marginalized positions they have occupied presently or at other points in their lives, demonstrating Ang’s views on fans using realism in stories to better their lives. Regarding how exactly they use realism to better their lives, Butler and Jenkins offer some views, answering this study’s question of what empowering thing fans are doing with their play. Jenkins explains: it is when “the reader can strike a balance between personal experience and fictional

narrative, personal ideology and authorial authority, without collapsing into each other” that this “productive interaction may lead the reader toward new insights about both the world of the text and the realm of their own experience” (2006: 118).

By recognizing themselves and their own marginalized experiences, fans can revert their offline marginalized positions. Butler’s (1990) thoughts on resignification expand on these thoughts. She gives one concrete example:

If pornography is to be understood as fantasy, as anti-pornography activists almost invariably insist, then the effect of pornography is not to force women to identify with a subordinate or debased position, but to provide the opportunity to identify with the entire scene of debasement, agents and recipients alike, when those “positions” are clearly discernible in the actions and landscape of masturbatory scenes of triumph and humiliation” (1990b: 114).

The operative words in Butler’s statement is that pornography ‘provide[s] the opportunity to identify’ with the scene of debasement. When discussing her views on pornography in an interview, she places importance on the instability inherent in pornographic representation. As discussed previously, instability is a key theme in *Gender Trouble*; she calls for actions that will ‘resignify’ previously fixed identifies. For Butler, representation in pornography is interesting because of how positions “can be perpetually redrawn” (1990b: 16). She calls pornography “crucial to read” because of “the way in which it fails to correspond to social positions” (1990b: 16). What fans are doing with these texts, then, can be seen as ‘unlearning’ old, subaltern ‘positions’ through recognition of suffering, such as the feelings associated with the use of word ‘cunt’, and may be able to subvert these positions in their offline lives.

ii. **Strategy 2: Rewriting the Scene: Intertextuality and Participation**

While the first strategy dealt with fans using play with reality to destabilize positions in their current lives, I have found another strategy fans use for subverting old positions: to project an image for the future. While fans use the reality of what they presently or have experienced in the past as a strategy for empowerment, fantasizing is linked with the future – what, as I have said, they 'wish' to experience. These two strategies refer to Avarian's words regarding balance, "the key to getting it right is balance" (July 1, 2008 – 3:49 am). To explain how fantasy is used for the subversion of positions, Butler's thoughts on fantasy as potential are particularly relevant. In her only study that referenced pornography directly, Butler (1990b) studied a case in which a senator tried to ban the sexually explicit images of an artist, Mapplethorpe, and argued that relationship between fantasy and reality motivates action. For Butler, fantasy ignores chronology and instead floats in non-historical time. Because of this non-temporal nature, it is possible for one to conceive of fantasy as a future reality—a version of reality that is to come. In this sense, fantasy is, as Butler explains, "not equated with what is not real, but rather what is not yet real, what is possible or futural" (1990b: 105). My last section argued that fans locate their suffering in the sex scenes in order to subvert their subaltern positions. In this section I am suggesting that fans use fantasy to sketch a world which they would like to see come about. To put this another way, recognition realism is a strategy to correct their present or reflect on their past, while preferring euphemism is a strategy to correct the future.

As stated earlier, my findings within the sexual realism category pointed to a preference for euphemisms, denoting a preference for fantasy. Socks4Dobby makes this preference very clear: "Is there no nice-sounding word for that part of a woman's anatomy?" (Jan. 25, 2011 – 11:46 pm, Vocabulary Turn-OFFs). The importance of fantasizing, or the need for a 'nice-

sounding word', is underlined by Ang. I have previously noted that Ang's main contribution to the literature on fanship is her discussion on empowerment through realism and fiction—she observes that fiction's main use for fans is vicarious empowerment. However, Ang notes that the act of fantasizing is important in any case: “it is not primarily a matter of the content of the fantasy, but mainly the fact of fantasizing itself: producing and consuming fantasies allows for a play with reality, which can be felt as liberating because it is fictional, not real” (1985: 142).

This 'liberation' can be seen in the way fans are using fantasy is by 'rewriting' scenes and infusing them with their own fantasies, seen metaphorically by preferring euphemisms. In her review of Japanese slash, Stanley discusses one writer who “invites her readers to develop their fantasy worlds, encouraging them to see this as a trainable skill and praising them for their own imaginations” (2008: 101). Within the forum Vocabulary Turn-Offs, Taziekins writes: “I go for avoidance. While it's obvious what my characters are doing I don't out right name body parts, it's down to your imagination what words to use and how you picture it.” (November 30, 2008—2:09 am). Another invitation comes from DodgeSuperBee within the same forum, “I think a writer in doubt would do better to omit the term altogether and let the reader fill in the action in his or her mind with his or her own acceptable vocabulary words” (February 7, 2008 – 7:33 p.m.). These invitations from the poster to the reader to use imaginations operationalize the inherent collaboration between texts, or the intertextuality, of fanfiction.

This invitation connects well with Busse and Hellekson's (2006: 6) discussion of the “intertextuality of fannish discourse”, as fanfiction as a whole is a sum of parts contributed by the author and the fan author. For Busse and Hellekson, the stories are constantly evolving works of art that are sustained by fan additions. They note that there are inherent invitations for fans to “enter, interpret and expand the text” (2006: 6). They go so far as to name all fanfiction ‘works

in progress', a term used in fanfiction "to describe a piece of fiction still in the progress of being written but not yet complete" (2006: 6). Elaborating on this, they assert that stories are "in part collaboration and part response to not only the source text, but also the cultural context within and outside the fannish community in which it is produced" (2006: 7). Busse and Hellekson (2006) note that fan fiction is:

the result of fandom's pervasive presence online, which, by its mere existence, invites others in. The constant intrusion of personal information between fannish discussions and fiction presents a different mode of interaction in which a writer's personal impression may influence the way we read her fiction and vice versa (14).

Patterson (2004: 211) also points out the participatory nature of porn consumption today; the Internet appears to offer "a sense of interactivity, which brings with it a sense of shared space and a collapse or disavowal of distance". Patterson writes about a sense of "being there" when consuming pornography, rather than simply watching, as there is "a sense of participation with the performer's life" (119). With respect to the advent of new technologies, Hardy (2008: 63) discusses what he terms "the democratization of pornography", which has inverted the traditional model of mediated communication: "the old vertical model of mediated communication, from the corporate producer to the private consumer, is being displaced by a new kind of 'horizontal' communication between private citizen." Paasonen (2010) chimes in with this assessment of amateur porn. Citing Nishant Shah, she writes that porn is "reciprocal" and "the performers and the audience are the same people" (2010:130). These blurred boundaries appear to be especially relevant to slash fan fiction, as fans are creating the pornography, and, in a sense, starring in it by inserting themselves into the fiction.

Baudrillard's (1981) views on hyperreality would be useful as theoretical backing in order to unpack this statement. Expanding on his original thesis statement that signs have taken priority over the things signified, in the introduction to the text Leitch (2001: 1730) comments specifically on Baudrillard's ideas on sexual desire:

The world is remade in the image of our desires. The signs (the images of what we want) exist before we create the thing to which the sign refers. Thus, for example, sexual desire is no longer a response to a person whom we meet and know face-to-face. Rather, sexual desire is stimulated by images promulgated by the media, and we strive to remake our bodies to fit these images.

Stating it more plainly, he writes: "the 'hyperreality' of the model overwhelms the reality of the people we actually live among" (2001: 1731). With regards to this study, Baudrillard's ideas are useful for the thought that reality and fiction blend together to create a third, more complex element. While Baudrillard had viewed his theories on hyperreality as a negative critique on modern consumerist society, I understand his commentary with regard to sexual desires as an empowering tool for female fan writers and readers. Radway's (1991: 93) findings on the transformative power of romance novels are relevant here; she argues that reading connotes a "free space where they feel liberated to perform duties that they willingly accept as their own." As I have noted previously, Brown's (1994: 37) assessment of fanship is "a space for women to construct their world in their own terms." As marginal groups within society, female and homosexual male fans may write fanfiction to make their harsher reality and rosier fiction collapse into each other, creating a better world or a new reality that is, as Baudrillard states, remade in the image of their desires.

In other words, fans are shaping the stories to their own desires when writing fanfiction. This view is reflected within another study completed by Jenkins. In a letter to Jenkins, a fan discloses why she likes fanfiction: "Fanfic rarely sits still. It's like a living, evolving thing, taking on its own life, one story building on another, each writer's reality bouncing off another's and maybe even melding together to form a whole new creation" (as cited in Jenkins, 2003: 289). Put differently, Jenkins is suggesting that the reader is active in the interpretation or the re-elaboration of the text, and that fanfiction can be seen as the result of many different ideas or realities imagined by all authors, fan as well as the original, leading to a 'whole new creation' based on many differing interpretations of the text. My study builds on this idea as I argue that fans, in writing sex scenes and preferring fantastical words, are projecting, as Butler (1990) notes, their fantasy or a future version of reality, onto the fiction. In his discussion on pornography, Hardy (2008: 63) notes: "Researchers working in the new field of 'porn studies' now tend to make it axiomatic that pornography functions to blur the distinction between representation and reality." I mean to suggest that the blurring of reality and representation within the stories show that fans have created a 'new' reality. This reality is one that they vastly prefer and can be seen as a solution to resolving their personal, sexual problems as it projects the image of future reality.

Part 3: Afterglow

Conclusion

i. Power in Participation: Talking back to William Shatner

I began this study by talking about the negative stereotype of fans and the imagery of William Shatner telling his fans to 'get a life.' This study's aim was to show how this is changing;

scholars are slowly starting to see fan fiction as “affective play” (Thomas, 2006: 226; Hills 2002), as the skills acquired through the appropriation of media for recreational purposes can be transferred elsewhere. As I have said previously, the literature on fan studies has repeatedly tried to answer the question of 'why' fans become fans and 'what' is the empowering thing that is occurring through their fanship. This study follows this thought, though I have endeavored to add the question: 'how'. I have been asking: how do fans use pornographic fanfiction, specifically through realism, the identified primary criterion of pleasure, to better their lives? My answers predicated around specific strategies fans use in their lives, suggesting that fans' play with realism and fantasy can have good effects on their offline lives, as seen through their discourses on writing forum posts.

However, another good question to ask would have been 'who' – who are fans, generally? Lindgren (2010: 172) discusses how “both porn and fan studies need to be seen in the light of an emerging form of audience research which challenges a set of established ideas about media consumption.” Specifically, he states that porn use is moving from the individual to the collective experience, from the creation to the use of it: “today’s online porn audience is made up, not of isolated masturbating loners, but of an interactive and creative collective of critical audience members” (2010: 175). In other words, fans are a community. Previously I have stated Jenkins's belief that participation in fanship leads to a "degree of dignity and respect otherwise lacking" (1988: 474). He later states that this respect is gained from the similar participation of others. One fan's description of his or her first convention illustrates this thought: "I have been to so many conventions since those days, but this [first] one was the ultimate experience. I walked into that Lunacon and felt like I had come home without ever realizing I had been lost" (as cited in Jenkins, 1988a: 474). One fan echoes this feeling : "I met folks who were just as nuts as I was,

I had a wonderful time" (as cited in Jenkins, 1988a: 474). This thought is echoed throughout the decades on fan research; Baym, Jenkins's and Brown's emphasis on the importance of talk suggest that media consumption is turning towards a more interactive and social experience, even when the consumption is sexual in nature. This study would have benefited with an examination on the collaborative consumption and production of media within the world many scholars call Web 2.0, within current debates against user generated content and its apparent evils (Keen, 2007; Lanier 2010).

Nonetheless, this study has attempted to show 'who' a fan is in another sense, a developing individual who uses fanship to better his or her own life in the age we call participatory culture. In another sense, the question of 'who' a fan is can be answered with: everyone. In an essay regarding the future of fandom, Jenkins (2007: 363) ruminates: "one starts to wonder—who isn't a fan?" Though Jenkins is being optimistic about the growth of fandoms, it is clear that the advent of the Internet has slowly begun to birth a more active audience that is spending more time participating, analyzing and criticizing media content. In other words, Jenkins (2006: 29) argues that the intense interest and participation of "hard core" fans is indicative of the new, active audience, of which fans are the "early adopters". Interestingly, in 1992 Jenkins wrote: "fans are dismissed as atypical of the media audience because of their activity and resistance" (287). In today's society, it is becoming increasingly evident that fans are the vanguard of the new kind of audience, and it should be of academic and societal interest what these early adopters are doing – specifically how they are finding new ways to engage with the primary media texts.

Jenkins (2006: 247) closes his book *Convergence Culture* by explaining his position on where the greater participation of fans leads society: to "new ways of thinking about citizenship

and collaboration”, and that this “democratic potential” may “lead to a better, more just society.” He writes that empowerment is possible through participation using Pierre Lévy’s (2006) claim of political power emerging from knowledge communities, “which will operate alongside and sometimes directly challenge the hegemony of the nation-state or the economic might of corporate capitalism” (2006: 29). Though he allows that he may have “gone too far” (2006: 246), it is not unreasonable to argue that, as Jenkins does at the end of one case study, “play is one of the ways we learn, and during a period of reskilling and re-orientation, such play may be more important than it seems at first glance” (2006: 29). For Jenkins, the way to be powerful in the new convergence culture is to be “full participants” (2006: 260). This study has endeavored to show how important play can be, and why it is important to keep studying fans and their participation in or with media. Participatory culture is spreading; things have changed since Shatner told his fans to 'get a life.' As I said at the beginning of this paper, I am a fan, and there are many more of us out there—for good reasons.

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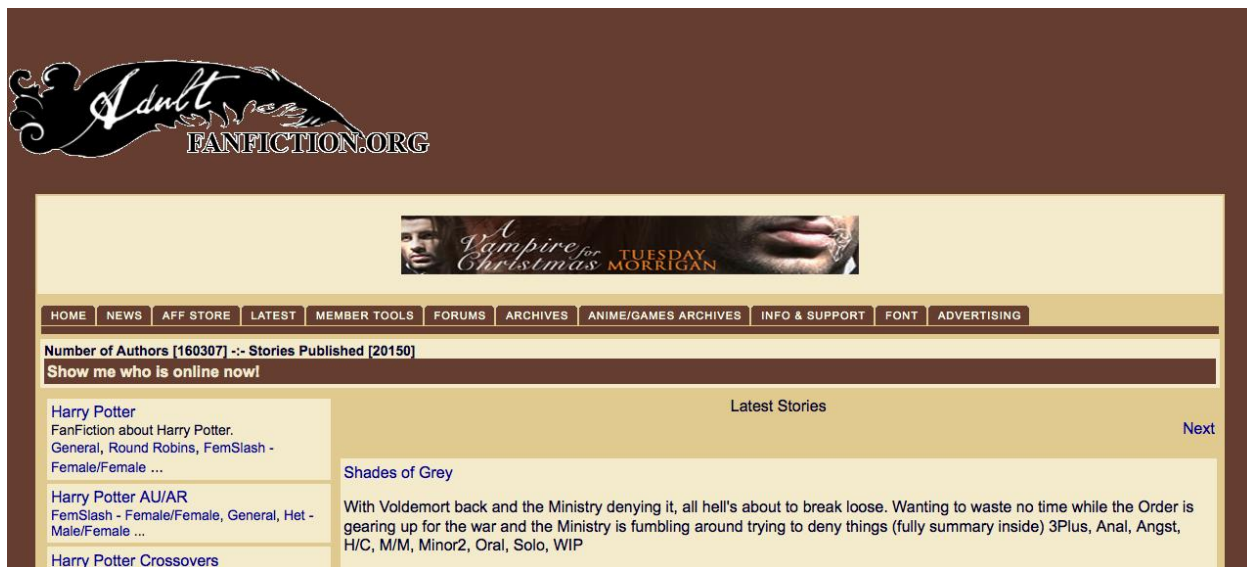
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Appendix 1

Adultfanfiction.org Screen Shot



The screenshot shows the homepage of AdultFanFiction.org. At the top left is the site's logo, which features the word "Adult" in a stylized, gothic font above "FANFICTION.ORG". Below the logo is a banner for "A Vampire for Christmas" by TUESDAY MORRIGAN, featuring a close-up of a vampire's face. A navigation menu below the banner includes links for HOME, NEWS, AFF STORE, LATEST, MEMBER TOOLS, FORUMS, ARCHIVES, ANIME/GAMES ARCHIVES, INFO & SUPPORT, FONT, and ADVERTISING. Below the menu, statistics are displayed: "Number of Authors [160307] :-: Stories Published [20150]" and a link to "Show me who is online now!". The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column lists categories: "Harry Potter" (FanFiction about Harry Potter, General, Round Robins, FemSlash - Female/Female ...), "Harry Potter AU/AR" (FemSlash - Female/Female, General, Het - Male/Female ...), and "Harry Potter Crossovers". The right column is titled "Latest Stories" and features a story titled "Shades of Grey" with a summary: "With Voldemort back and the Ministry denying it, all hell's about to break loose. Wanting to waste no time while the Order is gearing up for the war and the Ministry is fumbling around trying to deny things (fully summary inside) 3Plus, Anal, Angst, H/C, M/M, Minor2, Oral, Solo, WIP". A "Next" link is visible at the end of the "Latest Stories" section.

Appendix 2**Forum Name: "Vocabulary Turn-OFFS"**

248 replies: Feb. 6, 2008 - Nov. 14, 2012

Results Summary:			
Category	Total	Positive	Negative
Sexual Realism Posts	38	22	14
Technical Realism Posts	23	19	5
Totals:	59	41	19
Total Number of Posters: 43			

Detailed Results Summary					
#	Poster Name	Time	Significant Words	Technical or Sexual Realism	(+) or (-)
1	Direafterglow	Feb. 6, 2008 – 7:31 am	Most of mine seem to be either ridiculous or very clinical, neither of which I would want to think of describing something sexy or sensual	Sexual	-
2	DodgeSuperBee	Feb. 7, 2008 – 7:33 pm	More awful by far is describing in detail or actual measurement the guy's size	Sexual	-
3	Ginevra	Feb. 8, 2008 – 12:22 pm	I do hate overly florid euphemisms	Sexual	-
4	ChibiUkon	Feb. 11, 2008 – 9:14 pm	You can easily call it penis or vagina or something more poetic like length or warmth	Sexual	-
5	Solaris	Feb. 12, 2008 – 4:09 am	I was like ugh, he squeezed her pillows	Sexual	+
6	MortiferLasc	Feb 14, 2008	The anus isn't actually meant to be an entrance...I couldn't	Technical	+

	ivio	– 7:14 pm	take the story seriously after that.		
7	Juno	Feb 15 2008 – 3:59 pm	Even skinny chicks have some sort of fat built up over their stomach... I guess it depends on how realistic the author wants their story to be.	Technical	+
8	Cu-kid9	Feb. 15, 2008 – 10:30 pm	It's not like I was using anatomy text book terms.	Sexual	-
9	Guest_dwitefry	Feb. 16, 2008 – 12:17 am	Pillows...It would make me laugh!	Sexual	+
10	Shinigamiinochi	Feb. 16, 2008 – 4:17 am	I do like some exaggeration, but when it gets too much...	Sexual	+
11	Ninjagaijin	Feb. 20, 2008 – 4:25 am	Mentioning deity during intercourse, IMO, takes away the hotness... I know from Western porn that this may be a correct portrayal of how you Westerners fuck, but I just find it not sexy.	Technical	-
12	Ginevra	Feb. 20, 2008 – 11:25 pm	I tend to use those words when I write dialogue during sex scenes.	Technical	+
13	DodgeSuperBee	Feb. 22, 2008 – 2:33 pm	It feels like a progress report on their arousal	Sexual	-
14	Goofball	Feb. 28, 2008 – 10:10 pm	It's just short enough to get out repeatedly when the brain stops working.	Technical	+
15	Ginevra	March 1, 2008 – 3:00 pm	I'm not capable of saying much more than a two word phrase	Technical	+
16	Guest_Allison	March 5, 2008 – 6:46	I feel like I've regressed back to middle school when somebody uses that word. It	Technical	-

		am	turns me off instantly.		
17	Lunaticfringe 13	March 15, 2008 – 4:16 am	I suppose the only thing that would leave me cold/indifferent would be reading nothing but clinical terms in a sex scene.	Sexual	-
18	Shinigamiino chi	April 3, 2008 – 3:06 pm	I don't like when body parts are named after other objects.	Sexual	+
19	Wattersk	April 03, 11:38 pm	My sin is gluttony, and calling something after food tends to squick me.	Technical	-
20	Zimarah	April 13, 2008 – 9:48 pm	But if I read something like 'heat-seeking moisture missile' I might be laughing a bit too hard to continue.	Sexual	+
21	Shingamiino chi	April 16, 2008 – 5:07 am	It's inappropriate and stands out too much	Sexual	+
22	Guest_Zyx	April 28, 2009 – 12:38 am	Is bum only for the British? It sorta sounds soft, in a good way.	Sexual	-
22	Calanthee	May 1, 2008 – 12:50 pm	Dingle Dangle... It's just not sexy!	Sexual	+
23	Birddi	May 25, 2008 – 4:05 pm	Softening the blow might be relatively useless... it reads like two robotic dolls most of the times.	Sexual	-
24	Maidenhair	June 5, 2008 – 7:25 pm	I find talking dirty during sex to be a major turn-on so that might colour my view... it grates on my nerves when I stumble upon it while reading (probably because of a particularly vicious school mate who used it a lot.) My taste on what I like to	Technical	+

			read and the way I write is a reflection on what I like and don't like in the bedroom, I guess.		
25	Avarion	June 27, 2008 – 5:57 pm	They never sound anything like real life.	Technical	+
26	Kettle	June 30, 2008 – 11:27 pm	I like to drag out the sex scene by describing not only what the characters are physically feeling and doing, but also what they're thinking. It helps show the reader the dynamics at work.	Technical	+
27	Jackalman22	July 1, 2008 – 3:49 am	<p>If sex looks or sounds good in my head, I'll get sidetracked during writing it because I just end up getting all randy.</p> <p>Suckle – I fucking loathe that word. I associate this word with infants of any species nursing on the teats of their respective mothers.</p>	Technical	-
28	Avarion	July 1, 2008 – 11:06 pm	<p>I disdain a chronicle of physical events. We all know how the biology works, we all know the sounds that are generally produced; is it really necessary to document them all without adding any substance?</p> <p>The key to getting it right is finding a balance</p>	Sexual	-
29	Kettle	July 1, 2008	There's only so many sexual acts you can describe... what	Sexual	-

		– 5:01 pm	makes each one different is the characters involved and how they feel about each other and what they're doing.		
30	Avarion	July 2, 2008 – 5:30 pm	That's what I think is most important; the feelings of the characters involved and their frame(s) of mind!	Sexual	-
31	Avarion	July 3, 2008 – 12:08 pm	Leaves it hanging in the balance. I know pubic hair is all part of nature and everything but Jesus Christ I do not want to read about it in a fanfic! I hate pubic hair.	Technical	-
32	Altari	July 2 2008 - 7:08 pm	I get a bit miffed when people reference "the soft down".... Whose pubic hair isn't thick and coarse and stiff? It wouldn't serve it's evolutionary purpose (keeping out the nasties) if it was downy fluff. At least be true to basic female anatomy.	Technical	+
33	Avarion	July 3, 2008 – 8:12 pm	Some virginal women already have broken hymens before they have sex; does it really have to factor in every first-time sex scene?	Technical	+
34	Scottishfae	July 8, 2008 – 7:07 am	There is a general consensus... I think sometimes what happens is that people who aren't as wel....versed... in	Technical	+

			the material they are writing about to take the 2 nd hand experience of others and morph that in their fiction writing. Then we get these sloppy, unsexy scenes which we all cringe over.		
35	Anonymous_Nanotyranus	July 31, 2008 – 12:13 am	I like erotica more than smut, so I do enjoy more "flowery, poetic" terms, but not just explosively poetic.	Sexual	-
36	Shingamiinochi	July 31, 2008 – 3:35 pm	I hate flowery terms and euphemisms. I guess I approach literary sex in the same way I approach dating; I want things to be called what they are, not things that sound pretty.	Sexual	+
37	Helluin	August 6, 2008 – 8:31 pm	I'm torn on the poetic/flowery versus blunt vocabulary. I prefer beautiful/sensual language, so I tend to veer toward metaphor.	Sexual	-
38	Pel	August 21, 2008 – 12:06 pm	I will admit to is being devoted to 'come' instead of 'cum'. I hate that word. I don't care if that's the technical spelling, something about it just turns me off.	Sexual	-
39	Yakaji	August 21, 2008	Flower and womanhood sound inspecific and avoidant, much like member and manhood.	Sexual	+
40	Pontaloon	Oct. 2, 2008	I don't want it poisoning my slash!	Sexual	-
41	Kagayaki	Oct. 15 2008, 1:14	It sounds pretty.	Sexual	-

		pm	I like length and shaft better. The reader knows what you're talking about yet it doesn't sound like a high schooler wrote it.		
42	Peace-Love-Yaoi	Oct. 14, 2008 – 8:01 am	I just hate flower analogies. We aren't plants. All I can think of is piles of dirt. They make it sound like come tastes sweet. I guess they have never performed oral sex on a guy. Cum is salty, not my favorite snack, okay?	Technical	+
43	JayDee	Oct. 20, 2008 – 8:02 am	Falls asleep right afterwards.... One of those things that seems to happen a lot.	Technical	+
44	Taziekins	Nov. 26, 2008 – 11:37 pm	I'm sick of seeing the word shaft. Why do a lot of authors sometimes make every little thing people do to each other sound like the most amazing thing in the world?	Technical	+
45	Taziekins	Nov. 27, 2008 – 11:09 pm	I'm just saying I find it hard to believe that people can always have out of this world mind blowing sex first time they do it with someone	Sexual	+
46	Taziekins	Nov. 30, 2008 –	I go for avoidance.	Sexual	-

		12:43 pm	It's down to your imagination what words to use and how you picture it		
47	Xenobia	Jan. 12, 2009 – 1:05 pm	I'll take "penis" over "blue-veined custard chucker"	Sexual	+
48	DodgeSuper Bee	Jan. 29, 2009 – 7:05 pm	For the sake of historical accuracy, it would be rather unusual for someone, female or male, to shave in the all-natural 1970s. I want to get the little details right.	Technical	+
49	Clockwork_knight	Feb. 3, 2009 – 2:11 am	Not even a bull has that much in them, someone is either Godzilla or has someone really, really big balls	Sexual	+
50	Petofsuccubus	Feb. 6, 2009 – 6:01 am	It sounds medical and not sexy at all.	Sexual	-
51	WarlordEnfilade	Feb. 15, 2009 – 3:00 am	I think over the top descriptions make me laugh.	Sexual	+
52	JCullen	March 04, 2009 – 5:34 pm	Original yet keeping realism. It's the details in the fabric that compile a work of art.	Sexual	+
53	Yblue	March 9, 2009 – 11:55 am	What I really dislike is people who try to make gay men seem like girls with a penis. But if you write an incredibly realistic, real life fic, here	Technical	+

			and now, why not let guys just be anatomically male as they are in real life?		
54	Clockwork_knight	May 11, 2009 – 9:59 am	The thing that catches me the most on MPREG is where is the baby growing?	Technical	+
55	Miss_lizabet	July 24, 2009 – 8:03 pm	I don't want to see the word 'penis' within ten miles of my erotica.	Sexual	-
55	Socks4Dobby	Jan. 25, 2011 – 11:46 pm	Is there no nice-sounding word for that part of a woman's anatomy/	Sexual	-
56	ShadowsPale	June 11, 2012 – 9:21 pm	The use of the word penis sends me back to sex ed in school.	Sexual	-
57	Reves_damour	June 17, 2012	I'm more interested in how accurately the words describe the situation than in what words are used. The problem is that preciseness puts an additional burden on the author.	Sexual	+
58	Guardian SoulBlade	Sept. 21, 2012 – 1:55 pm	She's also married and has kids so she actually knows what she's writing about, and has lots of interesting author's notes regarding the subject.	Technical	+
59	Raymy	Nov. 14, 2012 – 6:03 am	Where do you think some of us get our ideas from? I don't think I could write about something I know nothing about?	Technical	+

Appendix 2**Forum Name: "Using Proper Anatomical Terms Over Sex Slang**

20 replies: June 8 – July 28, 2012

Results Summary			
Category	Total	Positive	Negative
Sexual Realism Posts	11	4	1
Technical Realism Posts	3	7	2
Total Number of Posters: 13			
Totals:	14	11	3

Detailed Results Summary					
#	Poster Name	Time	Significant Words	Technical or Sexual Realism	(+) or (-)
1	Danyelle	June 8, 2012 – 1:29 am	They want heat and heat tends not to come from proper anatomical terms.	Sexual	
2	WillowDarkling	June 8, 2012 – 1:36 am	I want to read naughty and heat, not a visit to the doctor's office if you know what I mean.	Sexual	
3	ArcusAlpha493	June 8, 2012 – 1:48 am	I just prefer to using technical terms although I try to use non vulgar terms like flower,	Sexual	

			malehood, or seed but that's about it. But you must remember that not everyone reads it to be naughty.		
4	Danyelle	June 8, 2012 – 1:58 am	They don't want the flowery language in romance/erotica, they want the naughty and the heat generate from it.	Sexual	
5	Foeofthelance	June 8, 2012 – 2:08 am	Reliance entirely on the anatomic terms can quickly turn a sex scene into a "How To" manual, which bores the reader.	Sexual	
6	ApolloImperium	June 10, 2009 – 1:45 pm	It can be very jarring if I'm reading a very erotic scene and all of a sudden I'm jolted to reality by reading...	Sexual	-
7	Kokoa_B	June 10 2012 – 4:05 pm	Being raised in the area I was in, I've always been used to slang, period so it does reflect in my stories.	Technical	+
8	Botticelliangel	June 11, 2012 – 3:14 pm	I guess I just have a hard time with the idea of lumping sexual	Technical	-

			slang used in erotica with a process that deals with providing nourishment to infants.		
9	Dena.gray	June 20, 2012 – 2:14 pm	As a reader, I hate being jarred out of a particularly hot scene by tekky terms.	Sexual	-
10	Windrider Shiva	June 20, 2012 – 4:25 pm	What you want to avoid is completely throw the mood off. Has to fit the mood. The reader gets lost in the moment	Sexual	-
11	McGonagallsBola	July 25, 2012 – 9:05 am	They make it sound all clinical, and that's the last I would like to be thinking about when I'm reading adult ff. I like the more informal terms, as long as they aren't too ridiculous.	Sexual	-
12	KeiMaxwell	July 27, 2012 – 9:11 am	I am just sure of one thing: "birth channel" will never ever sound erotic for me. Uh. Overdone	Sexual	+

			euphemism can be a major turn off as well, though. It's all in the balance.		
13	Ausyandy	July 27, 2012 – 1:39 pm	<p>When it comes to erotic fiction, it seems pointless to me why anyone would bother not using slang and naughty words. That's what makes it hot a lot of the time. It's SEX not some lovey-dovey flowery poem to recite to grandma. Clinical (or even just plain weird) terms just kill the mood.</p> <p>And not to forget the many other ridiculous euphemisms that are used way too much it seems, and are more disturbing than sexy.</p> <p>They're clear terms, not something that sound like you need to look up medical books or solve a riddle to understand, and they don't</p>	Sexual	+

			<p>sound like they're trying to trick people into thinking they aren't dirty or even remotely related to sex. It's raw and to the point, and quite frankly, that's what is hot.</p>		
14	Aysha c.c	July 28 2012 – 7:44 am	<p>I find the word cunt offensive and every time I hear the word cock I get a mental image of a rooster and that totally ruins the mood if you know what I mean.</p>	Technical	-

Appendix 3**Forum Name: "Vocabulary Turn-ONs"**

32 replies: Jan. 13, 2009 - March 15, 2012

Results Summary:			
Category	Total	Positive	Negative
Sexual Realism Posts	6	5	1
Technical Realism Posts	4	3	1
Total Number of Posters: 10			
Totals:	10	8	2

Detailed Results Summary					
#	Poster Name	Time	Significant Words	Technical or Sexual Realism	(+) or (-)
1	DodgeSuperBee	Jan. 13, 2009 – 4:55 pm	I've always thought it was hot when an author skillfully manages to describe an intimate detail explicitly but without sounding crude or juvenile	Sexual	+
2	JadeRyuu	April 25, 2009 – 5:57 am	I think a work is made better by detail. Give me a descriptive word – even better words – and turn your	Technical	-

			characters to life in my mind, and you've just sated my vocabulary-lust		
3	Kimmy Nagaski	June 14, 2009 – 6:09 am	I love description. If there is too little, I feel like I was cheated.	Sexual	+
4	SereneLies	June 26, 2009 – 6:03 pm	I wrote (okay tried very hard) one explicit scene when I was fifteen and I found it difficult then... Then again, I had no experience with the subject aside from romance and erotica novels.	Technical	+
5	Tempestuous	Nov.29, 2009 – 7:39 am	I guess I like it straight-forward. Just so long as there aren't any fancy or silly names for anatomy.	Sexual	+
6	Ausyandy	Nov.29, 2009 – 1:28 pm	I just like simple no-artsy-fartsy-	Sexual	+

			<p>bullshit.</p> <p>I would rather read words that are actually used in the real world.</p> <p>Keep it simple and above all REALISTIC</p>		
7	K.Blood	Feb. 21, 2011 – 12:04 pm	As long as the words a writer chooses are not too out there...	Sexual	+
8	Melsiebug	Nov. 30, 2011 – 6:25 pm	<p>You mean exact measurements down to the last mil of length and girth are not sexy? (sarcasm)</p> <p>I don't like people using too many synonyms either</p>	Sexual	-
9	Naturechild02	Dec. 7, 2011 - 5:13 am	I mostly use the senses to set the mood. The taste of his lips on hers, the	Technical	+

			smell of his hair on her face, that kind of stuff is what makes the sex scene a more intimate one.		
10	Neryx Dax	March 15, 2012 – 7:40 pm	When it comes to reality, however, it is by far closer to a worm than an anaconda.	Technical	+