

Survey about Slash Fanfiction

(December 2010)

1) This email letter was sent to 70 slash writers:

Hello,

I'm a professional writer and literary scholar from Germany and have been invited by the University of Hamburg to introduce fanfiction to the students of Gender Studies. As far as I know, this would be the first attempt to look at slash from a scientific and sociological point of view here in Germany. Reading fanfiction is one of my favorite pasttimes and I know quite a lot about it, but I want to introduce slash as a serious topic for study, so I need a reliable basis in numbers and facts. That's why I have developed the following questionnaire to find out if my theories and assumptions are correct. Perhaps you would be interested in participating?

The survey is anonymous, of course, and you should only answer the questions you feel comfortable with. I don't want to be intrusive! But the more answers I get, the more reliable my study will be. All questions can be answered with a single word, but you are also welcome to go into more detail and add whatever you want.

If you know other people that could be interested in filling out the questionnaire, please send this email on to them! I can include all the answers that I get until Christmas. In springtime next year I will publish the result of this research on my website, in case you want to have a look.

Greetings from Hamburg!
Ulrike Nolte

<http://www.ulrike-nolte.de>

(Sorry if my English isn't perfect.)

2) The questionnaire looked like this:

Why do you write slash?

Would you rather agree or disagree with the following sentences? Please, write "yes" behind the statements that you can identify with and "no" behind the statements that don't fit very well.

- 1) Because homosexuality is natural and should be part of literatur like any other form of love.
- 2) Because I can use fanfiction as a form of activism for more tolerance and gay rights.
- 3) Because the anonymity of the internet allows me to live out fantasies that I have to suppress in real life.

- 4) Love stories are especially interesting if the couple has to overcome difficulties, doubts and social barriers ... making homosexuals better protagonists than some standard heterosexual pairing.
- 5) Because I like the exciting tingle of deviant "forbidden love".
- 6) Because two men together are especially romantic.
- 7) Because it has little to do with my actual life and I use gay fantasies as escapism.
- 8) Because the sex-practices between men are especially varied and hot.
- 9) Because sex between men has a factor of dominance / aggression, that I like.
- 10) Because I have read slash fanfiction, liked special stories and wanted to write something similar.

Can you think of other reasons? Please write them down here:

There is a lot of slash in fanfiction, but very little femslash in comparison. If you have only written about male couples so far, what are the reasons? Would you rather agree or disagree with the following statements?

- 1) There are too few female characters in tv / films / books, that I find interesting enough.
- 2) Until now I haven't read a femslash-story that inspired me to write something similar.
- 3) Female couples are more accepted / blend in more, so lovestories about them are less dramatic.
- 4) Homophobia against male homosexuals is more outspoken and violent, so I can propagate tolerance better by using male couples as example.
- 5) Imagining two women together just isn't very thrilling for me.
- 6) Sex between women is too vanilla.

Can you think of other reasons? Please write them down here:

One of the biggest fandoms at the moment is "Supernatural". Many of these stories contain not only slash but incest as well. If you like to write / read Supernatural-stories, would you rather agree or disagree with the following statements?

- 1) Dean and Sam are just hot together. Who cares that they are supposed to be brothers?

- 2) The rules against incest have to do with genetics. As sex between males can't result in children, this moral code shouldn't apply to them.
- 3) I like sexual fantasies that are dark and forbidden. The incest makes it even better and is a big reason why I enjoy Supernatural slash.
- 4) The incest-theme allows for a lot of additional angst and complications which makes the writing more interesting.

I would like to get some statistical data about the fanfiction community in general. Please, answer only the questions you feel comfortable with!

Are you female (f), male (m), trans or intersex (t)?

How old are you?

Are you heterosexual?

Is English your native language?

Which country do you live in?

Do you live in a big city (over 200.000 people)?

Do you have a higher education (college / university)?

Would you say that you live in a tolerant environment?

Do your friends / family in "real life" know that you write slash?

Have you ever been flamed for writing about homosexual love?

If the answer is "yes", have you been flamed by more than ten people?

Is fanfiction your main hobby?

Do you dream of having something printed by a publishing house some day?

Is the interactive quality of fanfiction (getting comments, building friendships) important for you?

In your opinion, should every kind of fantasy be allowed, because the internet stands for freedom and tolerance?

Or are there topics (chanslash, heavy sexual torture ...) that should be banned or made less easily available?

Do you understand the decision of Anne Rice to forbid fanfiction about the "interview with the vampire"-characters as her intellectual property?

3) Participants

I sent the questionnaire to 70 slash-writers and received 16 answers. All the participants came from fanfiction.net, although I also emailed to writers from three other archives. To get a broader basis in numbers for my university lecture, I also browsed through several hundred profiles in fanfiction.net, where many of the writers offer information about themselves, such as age, gender, living environment and sexual orientation. I will include this additional information in my broader conclusions on page 5. The following paragraph "Survey Answers", however, presents only the facts from the 16 answering letters I received.

As all the statistical data comes from fanfiction.net, it should be noted that this archive has some peculiarities. It is by far the biggest site for fanfiction writers with over two million published stories, but has a stricter moral code than many other archives. Writers of "offensive material" such as explicit gay porn tend to publish elsewhere. Fanfiction.net is also the usual starting site for young and inexperienced writers. So, the writing community at fanfiction.net is probably a little younger in average and a little less gay than at many of the smaller archives.

4) Survey Answers

Almost all participants wrote additional explanations instead of simply answering "yes or "no", which was very helpful for drawing conclusions. I will go into more detail after listing the gist of the answers in a yes/no-statistic.

The numbers do not always add up to 16, because some authors left questions out or gave unambiguous answers.

Questions about slash:

- 1) 16 yes
- 2) 9 yes, 7 no
- 3) 5 yes, 9 no
- 4) 10 yes, 4 no
- 5) 6 yes, 9 no
- 6) 8 yes, 7 no
- 7) 7 yes, 7 no
- 8) 8 yes, 5 no
- 9) 7 yes, 8 no
- 10) 12 yes, 3 no

Questions about femslash:

- 1) 10 yes, 5 no
- 2) 8 yes, 8 no
- 3) 4 yes, 9 no
- 4) 15 no
- 5) 8 yes, 8 no
- 6) 14 no

Questions about “Supernatural”:

Most writers left these questions out. Obviously they were too specific. I wanted to know how slash writers handle sexual taboos because the fanfiction community seems to be extremely relaxed about such themes and about “morality” and legality in general. The last three questions of my survey had a similar aim and most writers answered them in great detail, so I could draw conclusions anyway.

Questions about statistical data:

15 female, 0 male, 1 transgender

average age: 21 y

8 hetero, 5 bi, 3 gay/queer

12 native english speakers (most USA and GB), 1 France, 1 Germany, 1 Belgium, 1 Israel

10 from big cities, 6 from small towns

13 have a higher education, 3 don't

10 call their living environment tolerant, 6 intolerant

8 told their family/close friends about writing slash, 8 didn't

11 have never been flamed, only 2 have been flamed more than once

10 call fanfiction their main hobby, 6 don't

13 dream of becoming a professional writer, 3 don't

15 care a lot about interactivity, 1 doesn't (this clear outcome is probably influenced by the fact that “non-interactive” writers didn't answer the survey)

8 vote for total freedom in the internet, 6 don't

4 would ban certain topics, 9 wouldn't

5 understand Anne Rice position on copyright, 7 don't

5) Conclusions:

Most surprising for me was the fact that slash fanfiction is very seldom written by gay men. The average slash writer seems to be a young well-educated heterosexual woman who lives in a big tolerant city in an english speaking country. She likes to couple two male protagonists because gay fantasies are romantic and sexually thrilling for her.

This also explains the lack of femslash. Heterosexual women obviously aren't interested in lesbian fantasies. But even the bisexual writers had their difficulties. Apart from the lower number of interesting female protagonists in the media some additional offered explanations were: a) Writing about a lesbian couple is too personal and revealing if you are a young woman in the middle of the coming-out-process who is unsure of her sexual identity. b) There is no appropriate ‘sexual language’ for the female body. The words for the sexual organs are either too clinical or too vulgar, so writing sensual femslash is very difficult.

The fanfiction community is indeed very tolerant. It is unusual to be criticized and flamed for writing slash. All writers agreed that “homosexuality is natural and should be part of literature like any other form of love”, although the idea of using fanfiction as a form of political activism was mainly supported by the bisexual and queer writers, not by the heterosexuals. This culture of tolerance makes forbidding any kind of topic or fantasy very controversial. One of the interesting outcomes of the survey was the fact that the last three questions regarding morality and legality were always answered in great length. The internet writers don't show a simple ‘laissez-faire’-attitude but have thought these matters out.

Although most writers described their living environment as tolerant only half of them told their families and friends about writing slash. If they feel they have to hide such a big part of their life and they regard their hobby as shameful in some way, then there still seems to be a big difference between tolerance for gay fantasies in theory and in reality.

An interesting fact was that almost all slash writers dream of having some literary work printed in the future. Many wrote that the interactive quality of fanfiction, the reviews, betas ect. is the perfect preparation for becoming a professional writer. Surprisingly, the internet generation still seems to hold a printed novel in higher esteem than one published on the web, even though it is easier to reach a lot of readers online than with a printed work of limited edition.

(This is only an overview; more detailed information was given in my university lecture. I have published the draft as a pdf-file on my website. It is written in german, though.)