Transformative media fandom has been creating and sharing fanworks for decades, and as fandom communities transitioned from offline to online in the 1990s and 2000s, the ways in which fans described, shared, and stored fanworks shifted. Using various fannish methodologies and analysis of both fanzines and online fandom discussions, this historical study examines the history of science fiction and media fandom community archival practices as fans transitioned from print fandom to the Net fandom. Trends between the eras are identified, and results suggest that fandom may be moving toward consolidating multiple elements of archival practices that were once discrete.
HISTORY OF MEDIA FANDOM COMMUNITY ARCHIVES: THE TRANSITION FROM PRINT TO NET FANDOM

by
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Introduction

*We need a central archive of our own... Something that would... clearly state our case for the legality of our hobby up front, while not trying to make a profit off other people’s IP ... and create a welcoming space for new fans that has a sense of our history and our community behind it.*

Fandom, defined by Fanlore as “a community of fans, participating in [fan activity] and interacting in some way, whether through discussions or creative works,” has a rich and largely unexplored tradition of archival practices. Since the early days of zine publishing, fans have been developing organizational tools and strategies to store, describe, and disseminate fandom-related materials among fans. This project aims to present a history of these practices as fandom has moved from the print to the digital realm, drawing on a variety of disciplines including literary studies and library and information studies to describe the evolution of fandom archiving. Through close readings of zines, essays, born-digital primary sources, and other fan materials, I provide an overview of fandom archival practices from the mid-20th century to the present day. As fandom is a complex subculture with a unique lexicon, a glossary has also been provided as an appendix to this research in order to define any fandom-specific terminology as it has been used in this paper. Given

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the frequency of fannish terminology in the subject matter and sources of this paper, many terms are not defined in the text but are described in Appendix A.

Contemporary fandom, or what we might call pan-fandom, has roots in multiple fandom communities that have developed into a generally collective subculture characterized by similar fan activities such as the production and/or consumption of fanworks, zine publishing, attending conventions, meta discussion, archiving, and community building. The most frequently discussed origins of fandom in fan studies are science fiction fandom and media fandom. Science fiction fandom was originally a literary fandom revolving around American pulp magazines but splintered into media fandom in the 1960s when science fiction television shows and films became popular.3 Star Trek and The Man from U.N.C.L.E. are some of the first major fandoms to come out of this split, shortly followed by Star Wars and Starsky & Hutch. Media fandom takes on a different meaning depending on the context in which it is being discussed; originally, it was used to describe fandom for science fiction shows and movies, but it has also come to mean fandom for all television and film, or it is used as an umbrella term for any popular culture-based fandom, including books, music, television, film, comics, video games, and celebrities.4

Although much of the genealogy of Western fandom can be traced back to early science fiction and media fandom, there are several other large branches of fandom that have had a significant influence on pan-fandom culture and practices. Slash fandom, referring to fandom that revolved around shipping (defined by Fanlore as “the act of supporting or wishing for a particular romantic relationship” between characters or people)

male characters together\(^5\), was popularized by *Star Trek: The Original Series* and was a subsection of media fandom. Animanga fandom, referring to Japanese comics (manga) and animation (anime), has been present as part of science fiction and media fandom in the United States since at least the 1970s and has developed a robust culture of fan translation and a unique fannish lexicon borrowing from Japanese terms.\(^6\) Distinct from manga fandom is comics fandom, generally revolving around American superhero comics from Marvel or DC, but not exclusively. RPF, or Real Person Fiction, fandom also grew in popularity starting with *Star Trek* in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A notable offshoot of RPF fandom is bandom, which focuses specifically on musicians and bands, typically of Western origin. This typically does not include K-pop, J-Pop, or J-Rock, which have uniquely Korean and Japanese fandom-based terminology and practices much like animanga fandom. Popslash and boyband slash are typically not included either. Bandom (capital B) is also used to refer to fandoms relating to popular mid-2000s pop-punk and emo bands, particularly My Chemical Romance and groups signed to Decaydance, Pete Wentz of Fall Out Boy’s record label. Another, yet little explored, branch of fandom that has been growing in popularity internationally with the release of *2Gether: The Series* is that of BL, or Boys’ Love, which is a genre originating with *yaoi* in Japan that has spread across East and South East Asia and focuses on stories of romantic and/or sexual relationships between men.\(^7\) Like other fandoms with Asian source texts, BL fandom has


its own terminology and discourses that are specific to the genre, many coming from the Japanese yaoi tradition and the Thai Y series tradition.

I include this overview of the many branches of fandom in an effort to highlight the diversity of fandom and to draw attention to the fannish practices and presence of fans of color. Rukmini Pande notes that even where the narratives of specifically racialized experiences of media fandom communities could have been the focus of fandom histories, they remain othered and left out of the ambit of what fandom is generally recognized to constitute. […] The structuring force of whiteness in such default modes of analysis has constructed these spaces as both homogenous in their makeup and uncomplicatedly progressive and uninflected by issues such as racism. 8

I aim to disrupt and complicate this trend in fan studies by drawing on examples from nonwhite fans throughout my analysis, though as noted by Pande, this is a perspective that has often been left out of fandom histories, which limits the scope of what I have to work with. I hope that by acknowledging the work and contributions of these fans in the history of fandom archives, I will be able to broaden the current view of fandom history beyond that of white Western fans.

Fan studies as an emerging discipline has been steadily gaining traction since the 1992 publication of Henry Jenkins’s Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture and Camille Bacon-Smith’s Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse describe the field as bringing together “various strands of media studies (particularly TV and film), cultural studies, and literary theory, drawing from ethnography, the social sciences, the languages,

8 Rukmini Pande, Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race, (Chicago: University Of Iowa Press, 2018), 38.
communication studies, Internet/Web 2.0 studies, and the humanities.” There are three widely accepted waves of the fan studies discipline, first outlined by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington in their 2007 book *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. The first wave, coined “The Fandom is Beautiful,” represented fans as disempowered and resistant to normative structures, pulling from de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* as a discursive framework. The following “Fan Cultures and Social Hierarchy” took a more sociological bent, focusing on how fans and fan cultures replicate existing social hierarchies. During this period, scholars still focused on marginalization, but no longer tended to place fandom spaces as uniquely liberating or free from social hierarchies and biases. The third and final wave, “Fandom and Modernity,” followed various schools of psychology and social science. Fan studies scholars began focusing on the intrapersonal relationships between fans and their fandoms, as well as the even broader societal connections between fan activity and structures of society. This wave is commonly described as being interested in fandom as part of everyday life. Paul Booth suggests that fan studies is now entering a fourth wave, “one of meta-analysis, exploration of fan studies itself,” which is heavily focused on online fan cultures.

**Project Overview**

Nearly all academic literature regarding media fandom archives focuses on contemporary digital fanfiction archives. As such, there is a dearth of literature regarding

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the days of pre-Internet fandom’s archival practices and how those practices were translated to digital spaces with the advent of the Internet. The emphasis on fanfiction, while a dominant object of fandom creativity, also neglects other forms of fandom production that may have been stored and disseminated among communities, and perhaps still are. The non-profit organization the Organization for Transformative Works (hereafter the OTW) provides a substantial history of these practices through their wiki project, Fanlore, but the perspective presented therein skews heavily towards fan studies as a discipline.

This research paper chronicles archiving and description practices in fandom from the early days of pre-digital fandom in the mid-20th century, through the transition to the Internet in the 1990s and 2000s, and finally into the current age of digital fandom. Each of these three periods have been examined for its methods of storage, description, and dissemination and how these practices differ from previous traditions. Through this analysis, I illustrate the historical trends related to archiving in fandom spaces. The findings of my close reading of fanzines, essays, and digital primary sources highlight the progression of these trends and how parts of fandom communities came to develop and adopt these new practices.

Through the history of fandom archival practices, several patterns emerge concerning the three core areas this paper focuses on. As access to the internet has grown, fandom archival practices concerning fanworks have become increasingly descriptive and comprehensive. This shift has in turn changed the traditions and practices that fans follow and expect other fans to adhere to, which led to a significant amount of friction between print fans and Net fans during the transition period in the 1990s and 2000s.
Despite this, many newer fandom practices in this realm have direct ties to the traditions and norms of print fandom, and in some ways are simply replicating them in digital form. Linguistic conventions in particular are a major holdover from the print era. The present attitude held by many in fandom regarding labels and warnings also stems in large part from one significant event in Star Trek print fandom, known now as the Sek*WesterCon Porn Debate, which I discuss in Chapter I: Print Fandom. Contemporary talking points on this topic often echo the rhetoric present back then in certain aspects.

However, one of the biggest shifts between print and Net fandom is the consolidation of description and storage. In print fandom, description, dissemination, and storage were all largely separate functions. Description was minimally important, and storage was very individualized, while dissemination was heavily emphasized. As fandom transitioned online, storage became increasingly important, as did description, and now, description is now heavily embedded in storage in at least some capacity. Dissemination, on the other hand, has become a bit obsolete as familiarity with archives and metadata usage has grown. The Internet has created a total shift in how fandom communities deal with archiving, but throughout this evolution, community values and the history of fandom have remained central to how fans operate and preserve their work and history.

Literature Review

To study media fandom community archives, one must first have a basic understanding of archival theory. Among fan studies scholarship, there are three particular works that have been cited most often as they pertain to fandom archives and their function in fan communities. Jacques Derrida’s seminal essay *Archive Fever* asserts the inherently political nature of archives. Archives are controlled by the “archons,” those who both guard and interpret their meaning.\(^4\) The meaning of archival content is shaped by the structure of the archive itself, which is in turn shaped by the sociocultural forces that create it. “The archive is never closed,” as the archivist continually adds to its contents, consequently ascribing meaning to said contents and dictating that which is meaningful and that which is not.\(^5\)

Aleida Assmann also engages with the fluidity of the archive and cultural memory. She frames the archive as a “passive” or “reference memory” of society, in harmony with the “active memory” or canon.\(^6\) “The institutions of active memory preserve the *past as present* while the institutions of passive memory preserve the *past as past,*” allowing this deemed irrelevant for now to be preserved for future use.\(^7\) This is

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\(^5\) Ibid., 45.
\(^7\) Ibid., 98.
contrasted with her concepts of active and passive forgetting. Passive forgetting is unintentional and in many cases not permanent. Conversely, active forgetting involves intentional discarding or destruction, something that Assmann describes as “a necessary and constructive part of internal social transformations” but “violently destructive when directed at an alien culture or a persecuted minority.”\textsuperscript{18} The implications of what is chosen as part of the canon, what is part of the archive, and what is actively or passively forgotten are particularly relevant to fan studies, as much of fandom culture has been lost in some way, shape, or form with the transition to the digital age and due to the archons of fandom history, as Derrida would describe them, who determine what history of fandom is told and remembered.

Similarly, Helen Freshwater complicates the perception of the archive as “a symbol of truth, plausibility, and authenticity” in her 2003 article, \textit{The Allure of the Archive}.\textsuperscript{19} Many archives include content that was preserved as part of a larger system of censorship, which necessarily shapes the way that content is presented. Freshwater also argues that “we still privilege the paper document of authentication” and that “the archive performs a similar authenticating function in the academic realm.”\textsuperscript{20} The transition of fandom communities from the print realm to that of the digital complicates this authentication. She problematizes how much of what is held in archives was originally meant to be preserved as individual performance rather than textual material. Archivists then “control which voices are given the opportunity to speak again to a wider

\textsuperscript{18}Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” 98.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 732.
audience.”21 Positioning the archives as being populated by “ghostly traces,”22 Freshwater demands responsibility on the part of the researcher for the consequences of their reanimation.23 She calls for “a methodology of ethical self-awareness, as well as the adoption of an alternative approach to the archive,” an approach which Freshwater believes “must attend to the singularity of performance as a medium.”24

Derecho uses Derrida’s concept of the archon and the view that archives are ever-expanding and open to develop her theory of “archontic literature,” which she uses to describe fanfiction instead of the often used terms “derivative” or “appropriative.”25 Archontic literature, as defined by Derecho, is intertextual but is “not lesser than the source material” and does “not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather, they only add to that text’s archive, becoming a part of the archive and expanding it.”26 She discusses how archontic literature has historically been used as a tool for social criticism and empowerment for women and marginalized groups. Derecho argues that archontic literature is inherently “literature of the subordinate,” and that by extension, fanfiction has the possibility to be resistant and socially transformative.27

Abigail De Kosnik’s 2016 book, Rogue Archives, is perhaps the most comprehensive scholarly work on fandom archives, though only one chapter is specifically devoted to a discussion of pre-digital archives. Specifically, her chapter “Print Fans versus Net Fans” explores the tensions between pre-digital and digital era

22 Ibid., 738.
23 Ibid., 755.
24 Ibid., 754.
26 Ibid., 65.
27 Ibid., 72.
fans during the transition period. De Kosnik focuses on the difference between repertoire and archive as they pertain to both eras and how they navigated sharing of fanworks and group history. As fandom began moving online, some expressed concerns about the Internet not being an archival medium, which could lead to the loss of group identity as fan culture online became ephemeral. She discusses print fans, specifically women, as living cultural archives, embodying the knowledge and practices of their community. Engaging with Assmann’s concept of active memory, De Kosnik argues that print fans used repertoire, or embodied practices, as a means to preserve and transmit cultural knowledge of fandom, with zines, although serving as passive memory or archive, also being more about experience than physical record. Much of the tension between print and net fans could be attributed to the fear of losing these traditions and objects to less substantial digital surrogates.

De Kosnik also identifies digital fandom archives as part of the “community archives movement” as defined by Andrew Flinn. Flinn describes community archives as the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential. This activity might or might not happen in association with formal heritage organisations but the impetus and direction should come from within the community itself.

As fandom archives are run by fans and are held outside of traditional institutions, they fall under this definition. While this paper does not analyze fandom archives in relation to the community archives movement, it does approach these archives as community archives in the sense that they are independent and nonprofessional cultural heritage

projects created and run by the communities they represent and are therefore shaped by fandom values and traditions rather than by traditional archival practices.

Fiesler, Morrison, and Bruckman’s “An Archive of Their Own: A Case Study of Feminist HCI and Values in Design,” outlines the structure and ideology behind the set-up of Archive of Our Own (hereafter AO3 or the Archive), a project of the OTW, and the values of the OTW, which they attribute to wider fandom community as a whole. They argue that the development and structure of AO3 uses a form of feminist HCI, as developed by Bardzell, that prioritizes participation, pluralism, and advocacy.30 AO3 is designed, created, owned by, and is run by and for fans. During the development of the platform, input from members of fandom communities was highly valued and implemented. In order to avoid adopting a singular and universalist point of view, the Archive also focused on accessibility for disabled users and facilitating easy change and management of multiple identities via “pseuds” and anonymity. Developers also tried to make the platform inclusive to all fans, regardless of their fandom or language. Users and volunteers interviewed also viewed the site as a form of fandom advocacy because they felt they could trust that AO3 would not censor fanworks or disappear from the Internet unexpectedly.31 Important to note, is that this study’s participants were predominantly white and American and that the researchers “did not screen for demographics or attitudes/experiences about the archive.”32

31 See Casey Fiesler’s video essay, The Life and Death of Fandom Platforms, for a history of online fandom migrations and purges.
32 Fiesler, “An Archive of Their Own,” 3.
Versaphile’s 2011 symposium piece, “Silence in the library: Archives and the preservation of fannish history,” traces the history of online fandom archives and communities, discussing how these platforms “affected authorial control, reader accessibility, and general permanence.” They find that privacy and customizability of interfaces are often favored over interfaces that prioritize accessibility and permanence. They detail the movement from Usenet, an ephemeral platform, to mailing lists, to centralized and then specialized archives, to online journaling software as archives were lost or deleted over time. The impermanence of these early online fandom spaces demonstrates the difficulties fandom communities faced when transitioning to digital models of sharing and community.

Shannon Fay Johnson also traces the history of online fandom archiving but does so through the lens of organizing models. She highlights the three primary models used by fandom communities for tagging and organizing works on digital platforms: free tagging, controlled vocabulary, and hybrid folksonomy. Free tagging allows users to describe works in any way they see fit and is extremely customizable, but often results in multiple tags meaning the same thing, making communities less easily searchable. Controlled vocabulary models use a predetermined set of terms and metadata criteria that users can then select from. This allows for standardized searching but lacks flexibility and is reliant on administrators to implement new vocabulary. Finally, hybrid folksonomies combine the previous two models, allowing users to free tag and then

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connecting those tags to synonymous controlled vocabulary to allow searchability. AO3’s
tag wrangling system is an excellent example of this model. Johnson also briefly
discusses concerns with increased ease of metadata usage for fic finding, noting that
“Many of these works could be considered deviant, or touch on social or political themes
that could cause the authors negative social, economic, or legal consequences if made
available to a wider audience.”35

Alexis Lothian’s “Archival Anarchies” takes the OTW as an example with which
to examine fandom as a digital archives culture and the power dynamics that shape what
is and is not archived. Lothian points out that the fandom networks from which the OTW
came to be created “is primarily though not exclusively oriented toward American and
British science fiction television and film.”36 This, of course, is not representative of
media fandom as a whole, and the OTW’s position at the forefront of fandom advocacy
and scholarship can unintentionally skew wider perceptions of fandom towards these
specific properties, glossing over and even erasing the histories and practices of other
media fandom groups. “As the OTW matures into a public-facing organization that
routinely represents fan cultures’ interests to journalists and academics, it becomes ever
more important to ask who and what will be left behind.”37 Lothian also notes that the
fans who founded and in many cases still run the OTW are professional academics, who
although fans themselves, hold institutional influence over other fans and how fandom is
presented to non-fans as a whole. She argues—and cautions—that “The easily archivable

35 Johnson, “Fan Fiction Metadata Creation and Utilization within Fan Fiction Archives.”
36 Alexis Lothian, “Archival Anarchies: Online Fandom, Subcultural Conservation, and the Transformative
Work of Digital Ephemera,” International Journal of Cultural Studies 16, no. 6 (September 11, 2012): 545,
https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877912459132.
37 Ibid., 548.
and comfortably representable are not the only online practices, fannish or nonfannish, that can work transformatively – they are just the easiest ones to fit within prior structures of activism and scholarship.”\(^{38}\) This is a hidden bias that is present in much of fan studies scholarship and something that I engage with throughout this historical survey when possible.

\(^{38}\) Lothian, “Archival Anarchies,” 553.
Methodology

This historical survey was conducted primarily using close readings of various fanzines housed in the Fandom-Related Collections at the University of Iowa. UIowa partners with the OTW on the Fan Culture Preservation Project (FCPP) to collect and preserve fandom-related materials such as fanzines, author’s papers, convention materials, and other ephemera. These zines were accessed via scans provided by UIowa’s curator of Science Fiction and Popular Culture, Peter Balestrieri. Also utilized were zine scans already made available on Fanlore.

For my research about print fandom and the subsequent transition period to net fandom, I did a close reading of several fanzines, most of which are letterzines. Now largely irrelevant in modern fandom practices, letterzines were zines that provided a space for discussion between groups of fans through “letters of comment” before chat rooms and email were widely available. The majority of the material I analyzed is from either Southern Enclave, Bright Center of the Universe, or Comlink. Other zines examined include On The Double, Halkan Council, Pop Stand Express, The Wookiee Commode, The Paladin's Affair, Treklink, and Mi-Anime. These zines were selected because, as letterzines, they include community discussion regarding fandom practices, some of which are related to archiving and description. In my close readings, I looked for conversations about archives, fanfiction, descriptive practices such as headers and age statements, zine publishing, and fandom's transition to the digital realm. For my research
regarding the transition period and net fandom, I focused my reading on fan-written essays, born-digital primary sources such as chat logs, and secondary source literature.

I adopted Milena Popova’s “follow the trope” methodology to conduct this study. This methodology draws from established fan studies methodologies, most notably insider ethnography and life writing approaches. She explains that online fandom communities are “semiopen research setting[s],” and uses positionality as both a fan and researcher to facilitate navigation of these spaces. As a member of the community I am studying, I am better able to find information that is of particular interest to my research due to my familiarity with fandom community spaces and resources. I used this methodology primarily in discovering which zines would be useful for me to analyze content from, which I did by “following the trope” through Fanlore, the OTW’s fandom wiki. I also used it to identify related topics, such as disclaimers, age statements, and early digital fandom platforms, that would be relevant to explore in this survey. This approach is similar to “source mining,” in which the references and works cited in one article are examined to find other relevant sources.

As fan studies is heavily interdisciplinary and somewhat niche, there is no foundational framework with which fan studies scholars are taught to do research. Hart and Olejnik outline three threshold concepts that they have found to be the most universally accepted in the discipline through their own fan studies journeys:

1. Fan fiction is a valid form of literature and writing that is worth scholarly attention.

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39 Jenkins, Textual Poachers, 6.
40 Matt Hills, Fan Cultures (London: Routledge, 2002).
2. The creation of fan works is not just copying another’s creative work and can be generative and meaningful for creators and audiences alike.
3. Fan studies researchers must respect fans’ agency and consent when conducting research on them and their works.43

Dym and Fiesler further discuss ethical issues, particularly in relation to the anon/pseudonymity of fans. They emphasize the importance of “obtaining permission, obscuring data, attribution, giving back, and learning community norms” when conducting research in fandom spaces.44

A Note on Positionality and Acafandom

The relationship between fandom and academia has long been fraught. Fandom, as viewed by fans, is a hugely diverse participatory culture, one that exists primarily for pleasure. Academic coverage of fandom cultures has historically been critiqued by members of fandom as being wildly inaccurate to their lived experience of fandom. As such, it is only natural that many fans are averse to being studied by academics who are not also fans themselves. It feels invasive and othering. Additionally, much of fandom revolves around an implicit culture of anonymity or pseudonymity, which is threatened by exposure through academia. Conversely, it can be difficult for academics who are fans to navigate the tension between both perspectives. These so-called acafans must consider their positionality as both fan and researcher. As such, I employed several fan studies methodologies developed by acafans throughout this process.

My research operates under a framework that draws from Hansal and Gunderson’s “fannish methodology,” which in turn draws from Sara Ahmed’s writing on affect theory, particularly her 2014 book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, in which she “suggests that emotions and affect are valuable for academic research because she is convinced that ‘theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin.’” They argue that “applying Ahmed's affect theory to fan studies and reflecting upon one's own emotional involvement in fan communities might also be of special use when it comes to analyzing hierarchical structures and discriminatory practices within fan communities.” Their fannish methodology embodies the following characteristics:

1. A fannish methodology critically reflects upon and questions the dichotomous and oppositional conceptualization of emotion and rationality and its hegemony in academic thought…. A fannish methodology generally understands emotions as beneficial to the research process and views affective responses as clues for research questions, issues, and problems.

2. A fannish methodology accepts that fan studies scholars write from a specific position, where they oftentimes are both researchers and fans, both participants and observers. Rather than denying existing emotional entanglements, the dual position as fan and researcher is both actively embraced and critically reflected upon.

3. A fannish methodology is collectivist and community-based. Research is conducted based on the premises of cooperation and reciprocity, seeking to provide value both to the field of fan studies and to the fan communities it draws upon. … By examining the social conditions in which both positive and negative feelings arise, it does not overlook existing power imbalances and discriminatory practices.

4. Fannish methodologies are irreverent toward authority and canons, as fan studies cannot be confined in one distinct definition and/or discipline…. Consequently, a fannish methodology encourages academic textual poaching—drawing on different traditions, disciplines, and fields, bringing them together in potentially new and unexpected ways.45

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As an acafan, I want to pay close attention to the implications of my work on my community while also using my membership in said community to enhance my scholarship. I believe, as Ahmed would argue, that the emotional connection I have as a fan to the community I am studying is both a resource and beneficial to my work.

**On Race and Fan Studies**

It is important to note that the recorded history of fandom as explored in this paper is overwhelmingly white and Anglo-centric. Much of fandom can be considered marginal and socially, as well as creatively, transformative as the majority of participants are women, many of whom are also queer-identified, but still white. For that reason, this research cannot be accepted as a complete survey of fandom practices across demographics, but rather as an overview of the history of the dominant fandom community practices. Rukmini Pande has written a substantial amount on the intersection of race and fandom, particularly on the discursive absence of race in much of fan studies research. In her 2020 article “How (Not) to Talk about Race: A Critique of Methodological Practices in Fan Studies,” Pande outlines how rhetorical strategies used by white fan studies scholars to address race reify “white supremacist logic through deferral, disavowal, and deflection.” She suggests two main strategies for addressing this gap in scholarship: 1) naming whiteness, or in other words, treating and acknowledging whiteness as a racialized identity and 2) “rehistoriciz[ing] the accepted narratives of media fandom so as both to highlight the historical and ongoing presence of nonwhite fans in fandom and to register their participation in the development of widely lauded (and assumed white) fandom infrastructure projects, such as the development of Archive Of Our Own.” Another key
aspect of her methodology is to “balance Hills’s (2002) caution to not take fan talk as direct evidence of fan experience by foregrounding the ways in which fan accounts often clash and disagree with each other while also highlighting where they interrupt more accepted histories of fan cultures.”

In her 2018 book, *Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race*, Pande discusses ways in which “non-white fans have been part of the infrastructure of fandom spaces from their inception.” I have tried to incorporate the contributions and influence of these fans of color into my historical analysis of fandom archives with the resources available at the time of writing. Pande’s work has been instrumental in guiding this aspect of my research and has highlighted further gaps in available literature and resources that warrant further attention in future scholarship. I include this brief discussion in my methods in order to highlight that which is lacking in this area and to attempt to ensure that I do not default to deferral, disavowal, or deflection in my work.
I. Print Fandom (1960s-1980s)

In the earliest days of fandom, we owned the servers. Of course, the 'servers' then were just smiles and words, pen and paper, staples and stamps. We were intimate and secretive—and also small. Fan works passed hand to hand, and there were no unintended audiences, no critical outside eyes. We controlled channels of distribution; we controlled which ears heard our stories.⁴⁶

Contemporary media fandom originated offline in the 1970s, inheriting many traditions from early science fiction fandom.⁴⁷ Communities were insular and tight-knit, and new fans generally had to stumble into fandom on their own before being fully integrated into the community by other fans. Fans communicated either via fanzines or at in-person events like fan club meetings or conventions. Dissemination of fanworks was an embodied practice led by an unspoken repertoire of fannish tradition and was relegated to the “underground” to avoid scrutiny from outsiders and copyright holders.⁴⁸ Description of fanworks was also very minimal, as fans were considered to be adult enough to curate their own content. Fanwork creators felt that including an extensive description of their works or providing content warnings was not their job as creators, and moreover objected to the possibility of spoiling their story with descriptive

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⁴⁸ De Kosnik, Rogue Archives, 213.
information. Storage of fanworks was decentralized and the vast majority of archives were personal collections rather than publicly accessible, though not for lack of trying. It wasn’t until the late 1980s that fans began to build comprehensive archival infrastructure.

**Repertoire as Embodied Archives**

One of the earliest iterations of transformative fanwork was Drawerfic. Drawerfic was a term that referred to fanfiction that a fan had written solely for themself or for a select small group of friends. The term comes from the idea that many fen had stories and art tucked away in their desk drawers, never to see the light of day. Drawerfic was never meant to be widely disseminated, though some zines did reference drawerfic when putting out calls for stories. In Starsky & Hutch fandom, drawerfic was known as The Black Notebook. Paula Smith described it as “the big black three-ring binder, or expandable manila folder, or large cardboard box, in which are kept the early drafts, critique galleys, or complimentary copies of a fan's own or someone else's unpublished stories.” She referred to drawerfic as “an artifact of the second period of the fan literature, late 1980 to 1982, the hush-hush period.” Some fen have cited fear of legal action from The Powers That Be as a reason to keep drawerfic unpublished, especially slash fic or graphic stories. In her discussion of The Black Notebook, Smith echoes this sentiment:

… the reason that it was so encrypted was the fear and occasional paranoia that Spelling-Goldberg would sue the writers. Hence “The Zine With No Name”;

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52 Ibid., 6.
CODE 7 I. There are no editors, no artists, no writers credited in this 1981 publication. Other stories remained buried because their authors gafiated before they were finished. From time to time some [sic] incanabula surface, but sadly, most may molder away, in obscurity, forever.54

An evolution of drawerfic was circuit libraries, the most notable being The Professionals Circuit. Circuit libraries were essentially large drawerfic networks. Being “in the circuit” referred to fics that were distributed around to friends through the postal service, and some fans eventually collected these stories into a library that loaned out copies that fans could read and copy for themselves before sending them back.55 To make it easier to discover what was available in the circuit, fans developed the Hatstand Index. A flyer at ZebraCon in 1984 describes the index as “a series of 3x5 index cards, one for each Professionals story currently in circulation,” with descriptive information to help identify the story.56 Having each story on a separate index card allowed fans to keep the index in alphabetical order and to easily update their catalog with new entries. The Professionals Circuit is notable for being one of the longest-running fanfiction archival projects, spanning both the print era and the digital era.

If a fic didn’t remain hidden away in a desk drawer for all time or wasn’t added to a circuit, it may eventually have found its way into a zine. Fanzines were one of the primary vehicles of fandom other than conventions in the days of print fandom. They came in a wide array of types, from amateur publishing associations (APAzines) to letterzines, which functioned as a sort of analog listserv. Many zines included fic and fanart, and many also included advertisements for other fandom groups, events, or zines that were collecting material to publish (adzines).

55 De Kosnik, Rogue Archives, 362.
Zine publishing and fandom conventions often went hand in hand. Almost all cons included a “dealer’s room” where zine editors and artists could set up tables and sell their products.57 Starting in 1978 with the Star Trek World Expo Convention in New York City, some cons began hosting “reading rooms” as well, a space where fans could borrow zines for the weekend or just sit down and browse in the convention hall without having to buy anything, though it was encouraged to head over to the dealer’s room to buy copies of zines you liked.58 The first reading room consisted of zines that belonged to a nearby library’s collection. A fan recalled in a convention report:

The zines were loaned by the Paterson (N.J.) Public Library from their large collection. Copies of old and current zines were avidly scanned and probably enjoyed. The Paterson Library is unique, as far as we know, in having such a collection. Roberta Rogow of TREKINDEX is responsible for the Library starting the collection and many zine publishers have generously donated copies for the collection (hint to those who haven’t!). Hopefully, we will hear of other collections in public libraries in the future, now that fans know it can be done.59

MediaWest*Con began offering a zine reading room in 1982.60 Other conventions developed their own permanent collections over the years, while others were made up of temporary donations from convention staff.61 ZedCon 2001, for instance, loaned zines out from the personal collection of a fan named Sharon, and lending was done out of the trunk of her car.62

60 “Fanzine Reading Room,” in MediaWest*Con 36 Progress Report 1 (convention progress report), (April 2016), 8.
Outside of Western fandom, similar fan practices were developing in Japan. In the 1980s, doujinshi, fanzines that looked more like comic books and had previously been more focused on original stories, began to expand into fandom spaces. “Manga and anime fan clubs produced parodies of characters from commercial manga and animated cartoon characters. It was the parodies that set the stage for yaoi and boys’ love,” analogous to Western slash, though with different tropes and cultural markers. These were also distributed through conventions such as Comiket, a convention founded by doujinshi circles in 1975 and dedicated entirely to fans wanting to buy and sell amateur publications. Fansubbing also originated in the 1970s or 1980s, and fans would distribute anime with fan-translated subtitles via VHS tapes. One of the first Western anime fan clubs, the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization (C/FO), was trading tapes across the United States as early as 1977. Fans would host screenings in hotel rooms at science fiction conventions, and eventually, “these clandestine showings became regularized attractions at science fiction cons and had their own dedicated subset of fans.”

All of these practices relied on the physical world and human interaction. Zines changed hands either in person or through the mail, and fans connected with one another at conventions or through zines themselves. The repertoire inherent in being a fan

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constituted a sort of embodied archive. Traditions were taught directly from fan to fan, and without them, the community would not exist. Even fanwork production relied heavily on human interaction, as most zines wouldn’t publish fanfiction until it had undergone a rigorous editorial process. Fanworks themselves were physical—in order to read them, one had to hold a zine in their hands, a zine which had more than likely been hand-crafted by one or more fans who collaborated on the project to make it the best it could be. Conversations in zines and at conventions developed fannish language and practices that became widespread throughout fandom communities. The intimacy of human connection in the physical world strengthened fandom, and without it, none of what had been built could exist.

The SekWester*Con Porn Debate and the Rise of Age Statements

In the days of print fandom, description of fanworks, what one could think of as analog metadata, was fairly minimal, especially in zines. Fan historian K. S. Langley describes the environment in fandom concerning labels and warnings during the print era in her essay “The Times They are a’ Changing”:

Being a fan pre-Internet also required more . . . call it self-reliance, and certainly a greater sense of adventure. The concept of story warnings (and labels and categorizations) to the nth degree did not exist. … Expectations were different in the zine-only era. Fanzines did not carry spoilers, labeling was almost nonexistent (the aforementioned adult and slash), and categorization was basically a matter of which fandom the zine featured. Fans would get some descriptive information, as detailed or sketchy as space allowed, from zine ads and flyers.

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In general, it was implied that a fan could expect to find content that they found objectionable in fanzines, but that it was their responsibility to curate their own experience. As Langley stated, “It is not the responsibility of an author to try to second guess every possible element in her story that somebody could be ‘squicked’ by and warn for it—in effect, expecting the author to spoil her own story for the convenience of some readers.”  

Fanzines typically revolved around one particular pairing or theme, so any fan that bought a copy should have known, at least somewhat, what they were getting into when reading it, and it was on readers, not writers, to determine what kind of content they wanted to engage with.

Given the lack of description and specific labeling in most zines, one of the best ways to learn more about a given story was second-hand, either via reviews or flyers conventions. Some zines had review sections, others included letters of comments that include fic reviews. A handful of zines were dedicated review zines, solely dedicated to sharing fans’ thoughts on certain stories. Flyers were frequently distributed to advertise zines, but occasionally would be posted for specific stories. These flyers could contain relevant fanart, a summary, or quotes from the fic. In many cases, however, fans would just discover stories through friends or by purchasing zines and hoping that the works included would be enjoyable.

There was, however, some discussion of content warnings, largely for legal or moral reasons, which was launched into the wider fandom community in 1977. Following that year’s SeKWester*Con, a fan known as Mary Lou published an open letter regarding

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explicit fanworks that was sparked by her experience at the convention. The convention hosted two panels that year titled “Kirk and Spock: Do They or Don’t They?” and “Pornography and Sex in Star Trek.” That year, some art featuring nudity was also available at the art show, and Leslie Fish, a slash writer, won the first Fan Q Award celebrating quality fan writing. Mary Lou was appalled by this development, declaring “I do not enjoy being invited to a Star Trek convention, only to find instead a pornography con; I do not relish having pornography shoved down my throat!” This event was a turning point for fandom communities as it sparked a larger discussion about content warnings. Though Mary Lou’s stance was highly controversial, many in Star Trek fandom began labeling explicit sexual content or requiring age statements to verify that a fan was old enough to be engaging with said content. Langley notes that “not every publisher of adult or K/S material obliged, but it eventually became common for K/S material, followed by other slash, to identify itself as such.”

Soon, many zines began to require age statements from buyers in which a fan would have to confirm that they were above a certain age, either through written acknowledgment or by sending the editors of the zine some form of proof. Interstat, a Star Trek letterzine that replaced the long-running The Halkan Council in 1977, didn’t allow ads or other flyers for zines that required age statements beginning with its first issue, though this was allegedly followed less rigorously for het zines than it was for

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75 K. S. Langley, “The Times They Are A’ Changing.”  
slash.\textsuperscript{77} Others began including minimal content warnings, such as \textit{The Paladin's Affair}, which used a key of four different hand-drawn icons in the table of contents to indicate implied slash, death, graphic violence, and “very, very silly plot.”\textsuperscript{78} The previously mentioned Hatstand Index in \textit{The Professionals} fandom also included genre notes as part of the information on cards. A similar project in the Star Trek fandom, known as TrexIndex, was a resource zine that attempted to list all existing Star Trek fanzine stories. TrexIndex included lists of stories by fanzine, author, episode number, subject heading, and character.\textsuperscript{79}

\textit{Help Us, Ming Wathne; You’re Our Only Hope}

For the most part, there was no centralized storage for fanworks as most collections were personal and owned by an individual. Some fen contributed parts of their personal collections to zine reading rooms at conventions.\textsuperscript{80} If a zine or a story wasn’t on a circuit it was highly frowned upon to copy and share them. Following Mary Urhausen’s essay “Ethics and Etiquette: A Proposal for the Buying and Selling of Fanzines” publication in a Star Wars letterzine in June 1989, zine piracy became a hot topic in the zine’s letters of comment. Mary argued that it was unethical to photocopy zines without permission from either the publisher or from authors/artists, even if the zine in question was out of print and inaccessible.\textsuperscript{81} Other fans, such as Ming Wathne, felt that if it was

\textsuperscript{78} “Table of Contents,” in \textit{The Paladin's Affair} #1 (fanzine), ed. Eileen R. (Twinbear Press, 1986), ii.
impossible to get ahold of a publisher for an out of print zine, it was preferable to photocopy if the alternative was losing that zine forever.\textsuperscript{82} 

Throughout this period, there was frequent discussion among fans about the desire to have some central archive for fandom content that all fans could have access to. One fan, Don F., commented in an LOC for \textit{Comlink}:

“Yes, it’s regrettable (and sometimes infuriating) that there’s no central fan/historical library; some individuals and Universities have collections, but they aren’t really accessible."\textsuperscript{83}

Other fans expressed interest in fandom-specific archives, and several projects were attempted but failed to take off. As early as 1973, Star Trek fans were proposing archive projects such as Memory Alpha, which collected out-of-print zines to preserve on microfiche.\textsuperscript{84} Sharon Ferraro, who initially proposed the project, reported that the archive had been accepted by the National Air and Space Museum,\textsuperscript{85} though a letter from the museum to Jacqueline Lichtenberg about collecting Star Trek zines states “it is our intention to collect representative Star Trek material, certainly not every ‘fanzine.’”\textsuperscript{86} The letter also notes a lack of staff and resources for cataloging and seeking out materials through correspondence, but encourages donations of complete collections. Mentions of the project faded out around the mid-1970s.\textsuperscript{87} The desire for a central collection of Star Trek zines was mentioned again in 1976 in an LOC for \textit{The Halkan Council}:

Being a librarian makes me think of a ST fanzine library -- like Memory Alpha... I mentioned an idea of requesting permission and copies of out-of-print ST fanzines

\textsuperscript{82} Ming Wathne, Letter of comment, in \textit{Southern Enclave #22} (fanzine), ed. Cheree C. (1989), 44. 
\textsuperscript{84} Sharon F., Letter of comment, in \textit{A Piece of the Action #17} (fanzine), ed. Helen Y. (Star Trek Welcommittee, 1974). 
\textsuperscript{85} Sharon F., Announcement, in \textit{A Piece of the Action #19} (fanzine), (Star Trek Welcommittee, 1974). 
to reprint them so fen will not be forever deprived of these ‘classics’ of ST literature.\textsuperscript{88}

The following year, a fan named Susan LaLoge announced the creation of a Star Trek circuit library:

Do you like to read (or write) Star trek stories? Here's an organization you've got to join. It's a circulating library, of sorts, and operated for fun, not profit, so everyone can afford it. The initial deposit is $1 for bookkeeping fee, and $2 Xerox deposit. (In case you lose a story, we can get it back into circulation without delay). Stories will come to you in turn from the person ahead of you on the list, and you will mail them to the next person. Simple, no?\textsuperscript{89}

Like other projects, this circuit library did not seem to take off as there is no mention of it in later issues of \textit{A Piece of the Action} or other letterzines and adzines. Roberta R., the founder of \textit{TrexIndex}, mentioned collecting zines for the Paterson Fanzine Library in 1982, though the collection is now MIA.\textsuperscript{90} In 1983, a fan, identified as P T began collecting “classic Trek zines, both PG and Adult, for a non-profit lending library.” They noted that “condition is unimportant so long as the zine is legible; unbound copies are fine. Anyone willing to part with a copy or an authorized xerox of an O.O.P. zine, kindly contact me.”\textsuperscript{91}

Outside of \textit{Star Trek} fandom, there was one notable attempt among \textit{Dark Shadows} fans to start a lending library in 1981. The editor of \textit{Inside the Old House}, a \textit{Dark Shadows} gen zine, described his idea:

I'm not going to get into the particulars right now, here is basically what I have in mind: To form a sort of ‘rental’ service of the various Dark Shadows items for the reviewing of the fans. I’d have allst of the items that I have in the ‘library’ and you would say which ones you would want to look at/listen to. There would be a

\textsuperscript{88} Letter of comment, in \textit{The Halkan Council #18} (fanzine), ed. Shirley H. and Sandy Y. (1976).
fee for each item which would cover the cost of postage and you would be allowed to borrow them just like a library book.\textsuperscript{92}

Readers expressed interest in the project in their responses to the issue, describing the project as “very worthwhile” and “a unique way of enjoying all the neat DS items without having to declare bankruptcy.”\textsuperscript{93} Unfortunately, in the Spring 1982 issue of the zine, only two issues after the initial proposal, the editor announced that the library project would not be moving forwards as it “proved to be too impractical.”\textsuperscript{94}

One semi-successful lending library was run in Seattle for a number of years that was focused on Star Wars zines. This library was known by a few different names, primarily the SWzine Lending Library. It was also occasionally referred to as the George Lucas Fan Zine Library due to the collection’s origins. Beginning in 1978, Lucasfilm asked zine editors to send in copies of all of their zines for a collection. Craig Miller, Director of Fan Relations at Lucasfilm, helped solicit and curate the collection.\textsuperscript{95} After the Star Wars Official Fan Club closed in 1986, Lucas decided to stop the project, and the future of the collection was uncertain.\textsuperscript{96} A group of fans in Seattle known as the First Terran Enclave convinced Maureen Garret, the President of the Official Star Wars Fan Club at the time of its closing, at MediaWest Con to hand over the collection into their care.\textsuperscript{97} They opened the SWzine Lending Library, a temporary project that operated from

\textsuperscript{94} Dale C., Editorial, in \textit{Inside the Old House} #17 (fanzine), ed. Dale C. and Mark E. (Old House Publishing, 1982).
\textsuperscript{95} Craig Miller, Letter on behalf of Lucasfilm, in \textit{Against the Sith} #3 (fanzine), ed. Nancy D. and Tracy D. (1979).
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
January 1 to December 31, 1987, before working on finding a permanent home for the collection in a scholastic library.\(^98\) Once again, the future of the collection, and now the valuable service provided by the lending library, was in jeopardy.

The group spent two years trying to find a home for the zines. Through letterzines, especially Comlink, fans floated around suggestions for rehoming the collection. Some raised concerns about whether giving the collection over to an institution would impact fen’s ability to access the materials or that zines would be “filed away or sold at the next book fair.”\(^99\) One fan who was a special collections librarian argued against the idea of interlibrary loan, explaining that

…no top-notch special collections librarian I know would agree to allowing the fanzine collection out on interlibrary loan once s/he comprehended the value of the material. S/he would, instead, catalog the collection, make its availability known through a nation union catalog (probably OCLC), perhaps have a good bibliography produced, and then either personally supervise photocopying of material requested or require the scholars to come to the library themselves.… they’re not available even for browsing, much less for interlibrary loan.\(^100\)

This fan was in favor of such a system, writing that she would “like to see our fanzines respected and cared for in that way.”\(^101\) However, this wouldn’t address concerns about access and therefore wasn’t necessarily a potential suggestion for a lending library project.

In November of 1989, Ming Wathne announced the reopening of the library under its new name, the Corellian Archives.\(^102\) She explained that the Santa Barbara Science Fiction Alliance had taken over custodianship of the collection and that she would be

\(^{100}\) Carol M., Description, in Comlink #33 (fanzine), ed. Allyson D. (1987),12.
\(^{101}\) Ibid., 12.
serving as curator, with a project opening date of March or April 1990. She also made clear her intentions of making this project a multifandom archive, unlike previous monofannish projects. The library’s goal was “to make available to new fans the early zine materials, [sic] must of which has already been lost as Editors lose interest and turned to other things.”

The library would only make one photocopy of original zines, and the copy was what would be circulated for a small fee. Only out-of-print zines would be available to borrow, and any donations of still-in-print or on-the-market zines would be held until they were no longer available or until the editors gave permission for them to be circulated.

Over the following months, Ming solicited donations of out-of-print zines and editor permission to circulate across multiple fan publications, including *The Wookiee Commode*, *Bright Center of the Universe*, *On The Double*, *Southern Enclave*, *The Blackwood Project*, and *The Monthly*. By early 1991, Ming claimed that the library had “about fourteen clients who are fairly regular, and seven or eight who place an order every now and then” with an inventory of “about 300” fanzines, approximately 65% of which were Star Wars zines. A 2002 flyer in the Escapade program book claims that the library had a circulating collection of over 300 fanzines and a permanent

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103 Ibid.
collection of over 3,000 titles. At its closing in 2008, the Library held zines from over 100 fandoms.

Ming implemented two different used models: the Standard account and Long Term Deposits (LTD). Standard account users could send in a postcard listing the zine they would like to borrow, and once received, Ming would mail back information about availability and a deposit amount. The deposit cost was determined by the price of shipping and insurance, rental fee, and a return guarantee. Once the deposit and the cost of the zines were received, Ming would send out copies. After a copy was returned, the deposit cost would be returned to the borrower. LTD account holders had higher deposits but could request at least eight zines at once, which could then be borrowed in sets of two. The higher deposit allowed users to save on postage until their account ran down the Standard account deposit amount.

After the success of Ming’s library, smaller, fandom-specific archives started opening in the 1990s with much more success than attempts prior to the Fanzine Lending Library. Two separate libraries were known as the S&H Lending Library, one for both gen and slash and one for just gen zines, operated from 1990 to 2006 and 1997 to 2000 respectively. The ATeam Library opened in 1995, lending both zines and DVDs.

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111 Flyer, in *Escapade XII: One Con to Bring Them All and in Slash Fandom Bind Them* (convention program), (2002), back cover.
113 Ming Wathne, Fanzine Archives flyer, in *Bright Center of the Universe #8* (fanzine), ed. Ming Wathne (Soaring Wings Press, 1998).
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
tapes, and TV scripts. Its current operating status is unknown. The STAG (Star Wars Action Group) Postal Lending Library ran from 1992 to 2000 for UK fans, starting with lending books and then expanding to zines. The K/S Library opened for US fans in 1997 and UK fans in 1998, providing K/S zines and books. The library is still operational in the US and in Austria, where the European branch moved in 2014 and is accessible to all members of The K/S Press. The Crystal Rose Lending Library for Beauty and the Beast gen and het zines has been open since 1991 and is home to over 1000 titles as well as other memorabilia.

Another innovative addition to the fanzine archive world in the 1990s was The Zine-Taping Service for Blind and Print Handicapped Readers, which launched in 1992. This project, after gaining permission from zine editors, developed a master library of tapes with recordings of fanfiction read aloud. This allowed fans who were visually impaired or otherwise unable to read print media the opportunity to engage with fanfiction. The tapes were specifically remastered to only work on government-issued tape machines for visually impaired people, so if anyone tried to listen to them using a normal cassette player, all they would hear is gibberish. Projects like this one

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121 In The K/S Press #29 (fanzine), ed. Shelley B. and Jenna S. (Beyond Dreams Press, 1999).
demonstrated the desire to make fandom accessible to all who wanted to be a part of it, something that has been the goal of many fan communities and archival projects for decades.
II. The Transition Period: Early Net Fandom (1990s)

The internet altered the very substance of fandom; fan artifacts were no longer physical, and geographical boundaries no longer existed. Without these barriers, participation in fan creation communities grew by leaps and bounds. It also meant that posting a story online required relinquishing some control ... And suddenly, for the first time, the platform mattered.127

The dawn of the digital age was rife with tension in fandom communities. On one hand, the Internet allowed faster and more widespread communication between fans. However, print fans had concerns about the loss of their traditions and modes of being as embodied practices became increasingly sidelined in favor of the Net. Equally concerning was the visibility of fandom online. This was the age of increased discoverability and description, though archiving was still sporadic. Warnings became commonplace in fan communities, though the scope of metadata and the way it was formatted varied immensely depending on what part of fandom you were in. Newsgroups like Usenet and private listservs created a social space for fandom discussions, while also facilitating the dissemination of fanworks. Some fandom-specific archives were created, including a few that had previously existed as print archives.128 Not all fanworks existed in archives, though, and the ephemerality of content on the Net became a major point of contention

127 Fiesler, “Owning the Servers.”
128 See discussion of Proslib later in this chapter.
between print and Net fandom. Loss of fan content, and by extension fannish traditions and practices, was a major fear.

The Cyborgification of Fandom

As access to the digital realm grew, new fans were increasingly moving their activities online, often to the dismay of print fandom. De Kosnik cites three main reasons that print fans were resistant to Net fandom: “it is elitist, it encourages bad writing and communication, and it is not an archival medium.” Especially in the early days of Net fandom, the Internet was not widely accessible to those who did not have some kind of institutional access or the resources needed to get online on their own. Fen feared that moving fandom online would exclude those who were unable to follow. Additionally, the immediacy of the Internet allowed fen to post their writing whenever they and wherever they wanted, skirting the long editorial tradition upheld in zine publishing and therefore leading to lower quality writing. Finally, and to many, most importantly, the Internet was impermanent. Print fandom operated, to borrow Assmann’s concept of archive and memory, through embodied practices that constituted the working memory of fandom at large and used the physical object of a zine as a form of passive memory or archive. Eliminating the zine and the modes through which fans shared them threatened not only the traditions of pre-Internet fan communities, but the historical record of those communities.

129 De Kosnik, Rogue Archives, 195.
130 Ibid., 200.
131 Ibid., 200.
133 De Kosnik, Rogue Archives, 213.
Print fandom, as rooted in repertoire as it was, struggled with the loss of in-person fandom and the simultaneous acceleration of fan activity over the Internet. De Kosnik argues that the shift online and the anxieties in fandom communities that surrounded it are analogous to science fiction narratives about cyborgs and loss of identity through the loss of the body. As “partly print- and flesh-based, partly digital, and majority women, fandom was a female cyborg entity.”134 Print fans worried that this change would marginalize their embodied practices and reduce the community aspect of fandom that was so important to their modes of being fans.

However, while some print fans resisted the move to online spaces for these reasons, others found new ways to bridge the gap between both print and the Net. Henry and Cynthia Jenkins recall fan groups using the Internet to facilitate more widespread discussion and fannish conversations by bringing the digital world into the material world. Fans with internet access would print out online content and bring it to in-person meetings to pass around, allowing fans without internet access to gain “transmediated access to the network through their fellow fans’ efforts.”135 Henry also remembers fans offering “peer to peer mentorship of technical skills” and crowdsourcing resources and equipment to help provide Internet access.136 Another fan called Arduinna recalls using online communities to facilitate in-person meet-ups and to exchange zines and videotapes.137 In this sense, Net fandom served to further connect fans in the offline world and allowed them to more easily engage with the embodied archives of print fandom.

134 De Kosnik, Rogue Archives, 197.
135 Ibid., 196.
136 Ibid., 202.
137 Ibid., 198.
The Professionals Circuit Library was one of the more innovative projects that helped bridge the gap between print and Net fandom. Alexfandra introduced Proslib in the mid-1990s, a mailing list for circuit stories. Volunteers typed up transcriptions of stories that were in the circuit or mailed to Alex, and the stories were then shared on the new mailing list. In 1995, Morgan Dawn brought the collection, which at the time contained about 200 stories that were stored across eleven formatted diskettes, to ZebraCon for others to copy. She brought the collection to Escapade for the same purpose the following year. The number of stories available had more than tripled by 2000 and had since been moved to CDs. Stories were removed from the mailing list after several months and archived on these CDs, which fans could then request copies of. Most stories were available on other archives, but a few existed solely on disks due to the authors not wanting their work to be shared online.

Aside from embodied archival practices, fandom has historically had a tradition of being underground, wherein members of fandom communities operate under varying levels of secrecy and pseudonymity in order to protect themselves from social or legal threats. While in the early days of print fandom in which fanworks were distributed in person or through the mail, often in the form of fanzines, there were plenty of fans who used their “wallet name,” the use of pseudonyms (more commonly called “pseuds”) was

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142 Ibid.
still fairly widespread depending on the fandom in question and the real-life positionality of fans. One fan explained:

(Many of) the people who had pseuds back [in the 1970s] were either in sensitive professions, in the south, or had family concerns. Most of us were not worried about the public at large finding out - we had the expectation that something as geeky as fandom would be totally off the radar of most people.¹⁴³

Marnie, a prominent slash fan in Houston during the 1980s, also noted:

At the time almost — I would guess ninety percent or more of people in fandom used pseudonyms, because so many of them were in professions that had morals clauses, or that backlash from where they lived or what have you, would mean possible loss of job if not criminal charges.¹⁴⁴

Moving fandom activities online reignited these risks as the Internet was a public domain. Fans could more easily find each other, but so could outsiders, or even other fans who were more hostile to a specific fan community. Some fans wanted to develop new systems to remain hidden online, while others felt that trying to hide online was futile.¹⁴⁵

The increased visibility of the Net was a double-edged sword, and the desire to “keep it secret, keep it safe” was becoming more of a challenge.¹⁴⁶

Nothing Old Can Stay: Ephemerality and Specialty Archives

Newsgroups and mailing lists marked the beginning of fandom’s transition to the Net. Usenet is generally considered to be the first major online platform for fandom communities.¹⁴⁷ The interface functioned somewhat like a digital bulletin board where

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¹⁴³ CatalenaMara, Private correspondence with Morgan Dawn, (1 February 2014). Quoted on Fanlore with permission. [https://fanlore.org/wiki/Pseudonym](https://fanlore.org/wiki/Pseudonym)
fans could post updates or start discussions that other fans could then respond to. The system was first made available in 1980, and fandom communities began adopting it a few years later. Posts on Usenet would be deleted after a few weeks, so unless content was archived or otherwise saved, it would quickly vanish from the community.\textsuperscript{148}

Mailing lists offered a more private alternative to online communities. Through email, fans could more closely monitor who they were communicating with and remove the risk of being stumbled across on the Web by outsiders. Female fans in particular adopted mailing lists as a way to avoid “varying degrees of harassment and denigration on the male dominated forums.”\textsuperscript{149} Women in slash fandom endured harassment in the early days of Net fandom, and private mailing lists were one of the best ways found to combat it.\textsuperscript{150} Morgan Dawn recalls how Virgule-L, possibly the first slash mailing list, had intense requirements to join, including sharing your wallet name and signing a statement that no one else would be reading your email and that you wouldn’t talk about the list publicly online.\textsuperscript{151} The downside to these private mailing lists was that outside of members’ personal inboxes, the record of their history is inaccessible and may never be preserved.

The archives that existed online around this period were typically specialty archives that were dedicated to a specific niche kind of fic in a given fandom. This meant that there were usually pairing or character-specific archives, or sometimes thematically grounded collections. Many fandoms did not have a large, centralized archive, though

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Versaphile, “Silence in the Library.”
\item \textsuperscript{149} Rhiannon Bury, \textit{Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online} (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 2.
\item \textsuperscript{150} De Kosnik, \textit{Rogue Archives}, 211.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
some of the larger fandoms did. The Gossamer Project, an X-Files archive, was a notable example of a centralized single-fandom archive that was ideal for finding a huge variety of content easily. But archives like this only existed for the largest fandoms, and those that didn’t have extensive archival infrastructure were at high risk of being lost forever if anything went wrong.

Web-based fandom platforms require continuous maintenance, or they are at risk of disappearing. Any number of events could lead to the loss of archives and fanworks. Some fans would lose interest and move on to other fandoms, while others fully gafiated, leaving websites and archives unguarded and inaccessible. Domains expired, servers failed or needed to be moved, hosting services changed, and links broke. As many print fans would argue, “hard copies have a permanence that newsgroup posts, mailing-list e-mails, or blog posts may lack.” If an archive went down, years of fandom history could go down with it, and nothing could be done to save it.

**DIY Metadata and the Challenges of Discoverability**

Where zine fic rarely had much information other than a title and author included with fic, and maybe a note about relationship depending on the specific publication, netfic gave rise to the prominence of headers. Early headers included information about archiving permissions, and archivists would then fill in any descriptive metadata as required by their archive:

Authors would post their stories to Usenet, including a header indicator about archive status (Archive: Yes; Archive: Gossamer, others ask, etc.), or submit them directly to the archivists. Archive volunteers would collect and format these stories.

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153 Versaphile, “Silence in the Library.”
file them, and preserve them for viewing. Authors were able to decline archiving, or request removal of stories already archived, but most fiction was stored for as long as the archive was kept alive.\textsuperscript{154}

Though many non-archive platforms did not have dedicated fields for descriptive metadata, fen would frequently include a section at the top of their works that indicated basic information about the work. Some of the most common things included were relationship(s), content ratings, word count or file size, perhaps a genre note (sometimes as simple as “AU”), and a one- or two-line summary or quote. The genre note was often tacked on to the end of the summary. Some fic would also note the point of view the work was written from (i.e. which character, 1st or 3rd person). Many also included a disclaimer, usually about copyright, but sometimes about content being graphic or the author not being an expert on something included.

The formatting of header metadata varied widely across fandoms, particularly the metadata pertaining to relationships and ratings. Many fandoms continued to use the slash (/) that was popularized in early Star Trek fandom, and that formatting is still generally preferred today.\textsuperscript{155} However, some fans would use characters’ names with the slash (Kirk/Spock) while others would simply use initials (K/S). In the 2000s, popslash fandom popularized the use of portmanteaus for relationships, which spread out to other music fandoms and others.\textsuperscript{156} Western fandom generally didn’t hold much weight with the order of characters in ship names, focusing more on what sounded best (for example, some contemporary Trek fans refer to Kirk/Spock as Spirk, but very few use the

\textsuperscript{154} Versaphile, “Silence in the Library."
alternative name “Kock,” for rather obvious reasons). Japanese fandom, and by extension other Asian fandoms, on the other hand, used linguistically and culturally specific rules for ship names. Fans of yaoi use an “x” instead of a slash, and portmanteaus are almost always four syllables with the first letter of each character’s name capitalized (e.g. SasuNaru).\textsuperscript{157} Yaoi fandom also held the order of names as important, as it indicated the sexual role of each character, with the first name being the dominant or active partner.\textsuperscript{158} This name order still exists in some contemporary Asian fandom, particularly among Chinese fans.\textsuperscript{159}

Rating systems also varied widely between fandoms and archives. Some fandoms used the standardized ratings from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), but the MPAA was actively resistant to this practice, sending out notices to fic archives in 2005 telling them that the rating system was trademarked.\textsuperscript{160} Some archives had their own rating systems in place based on the source material. One popular archive for the 1992 movie musical \textit{Newsies}, The Refuge, used a rating system based on characters’ names that roughly corresponded to the characters’ ages. For instance, a work rated “Les,” the youngest named character in the movie, would be equivalent to a G rating, “Suitable for all audiences, even tiny sheltered boys with enormous eyes.”\textsuperscript{161} The archive

\textsuperscript{157} “Portmanteau,” Fanlore (Organization for Transformative Works, n.d.), \url{https://fanlore.org/wiki/Portmanteau}.

\textsuperscript{158} “In Japanese Fandoms,” Fanlore (Organization for Transformative Works, n.d.), \url{https://fanlore.org/wiki/Portmanteau#In_Japanese_Fandoms}.

\textsuperscript{159} In my experience as a tag wrangler for Archive of Our Own, we often get tags in Mandarin from Chinese users such as “对不起这个 relationship 是反的其实是旭左求右” (translated by OTW volunteers as “I’m sorry the relationship is reverse; it should be top!lee giwook/bottom kang hyungu”), referring to AO3’s policy of ordering Relationship tags alphabetically by family name of characters, in this case being “Kang Hyungu | Kanghyun/Lee Giwook | Cya”.


used this system “because the MPAA sued several archives for using their ratings. We preferred to [sic] be be creative and fandom specific, rather than use the generic fiction ratings found at sites such as fanfiction.net.” Many fic archives and repositories also required any works that included any semblance of queer content to be rated higher than gen or het fic with similar content, typically following the belief that it was inappropriate for younger fans. Others outright banned explicit sexual content, leading to more creative rating systems that users implement to circumvent moderators on larger sites like FanFiction.net.

What was known as the Citrus Scale was very popular on FanFiction.net. Citrus ratings originated in anime fandom with “lemon” being used to refer to explicit sexual content. The term is taken from the popular 1980s hentai anime “Cream Lemon.” Though other citrus designations were occasionally used, typically “orange” for the tamest content and “grapefruit” for the most extreme, lemon and lime were the most common in usage. Writers would mention lemon or lime (equivalent to a PG-13, sometimes bordering M, rating) in the summary or title of their works to let readers know that there would be erotic content without being flagged by moderators. The Citrus Scale had a minor resurgence in 2019 when Tumblr instituted an adult content ban but is now mostly prevalent in anime fandom, where it originated.

162 Help,” The Refuge.
163 Martine, “Slash warnings, please write them!!!!,” alt.tv.x-files.creative, The X-Files fan forum (15 June 1997).
166 xchrononautx, Tumblr, “NSFW will be tagged as #lemon,” 31 January 2019.
Disclaimers were especially widespread in early Net fandom, in large part due to the experiences of print fandom with The Powers That Be. Rather than using disclaimers as an attempt to ward off legal trouble, print fans typically operated in an underground capacity and tried to keep fanworks and other fan activities out of sight from IP holders. Early slash fans had to deal with concerns about obscenity laws, which in some states made it illegal to distribute queer or sexual content through the U.S. postal service on the grounds that it was indecent or pornographic. Some zine editors, such as Bill Hupe of MI-Anime, outright banned slash for fear of legal repercussions:

I have been asked if I will accept homosexual fiction if the characters are portrayed in such a manner, but I cannot. Homosexual fiction, as well as fiction along the lines of Creme Lemon are illegal in many states, including Michigan. In other words, it is illegal for me to publish it here, as well as transport it into many states. Sorry folks…167

In 1981, a series of letters were sent to zine publishers from Maureen Garrett on behalf of Lucasfilm threatening potential legal action if “X-rated” content continued to be published in Star Wars fanzines.168 These letters, though not the first cease-and-desist letters sent to fans, were some of the most impactful notices sent to fanwork producers, contributing to a tradition of disclaimers in fanfiction that continued well into the 2010s.

Fear of copyright claims from rights holders was also common before fanworks were clearly understood to be protected under Fair Use. There were several prominent creators of media properties who targeted fans for creating and distributing fanworks, even if those fans were not making money for their work.169 If the Lucasfilm letters were

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significant contributors to print fandom disclaimers, Anne Rice was one of, if not the most, prominent reason for their increased presence in online fandom spaces. In 2000, Rice declared her dislike of fanfiction, called “specs” in the Vampire Chronicles fandom, and prohibited the creation of fanworks based on her books.\(^{170}\) This proclamation was followed by a series of attacks against fanwork creators, including:

…e-mailed threats regarding not only the writing of fanfiction but any writing that any fanfic author attempted to engage in (regardless of who owned the copyright), attacks on businesses that the fanfic authors owned and weeks of harassing personal letters sent to fanfic author’s e-mail addresses and guestbooks.\(^{171}\)

Many of these threats included personal information about fans’ real-life identities.\(^{172}\)

Anne McCaffrey, the author of the Dragonriders of Pern series, took a similarly aggressive stance regarding fanworks, though she focused most of her attention on role-play communities, and had a strict set of guidelines for what could and could not be used in fanworks.\(^{173}\) She, and later her son, would threaten to sue unapproved derivative works, regardless of whether the group or site in question had a disclaimer.

Meanwhile, disagreements about whether there should be warnings on stories continued to proliferate throughout the transition period. Aside from the same arguments about graphic content, a major point of contention in the 1990s was slash warnings. A Sentinel and X-Files fan known as Bagheera addressed this issue in a 1998 post:

Polite fanfiction culture includes story warnings, it seems, for just about everything. I don’t mind that--it helps me determine if a story is what I’m in the mood for at the moment, and I’ve known people who needed the warnings to avoid being squicked.
And we have to apply slash warnings even when the story is completely G-rated

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\(^{171}\) “Where Has Anne Rice Fanfiction Gone?,” Anne Rice fan meta (Croatoan Fanfic, April 2000), https://www.angelfire.com/rant/croatoan/.

\(^{172}\) Ibid.

and the relationship barely mentioned, or people have conniption fits. I can deal with that (not the conniption fits, but using the warnings). What I want to know is why can’t the gen writers use het warnings too?¹⁷⁴

Bagheera weighed in on this topic again in 1999 as part of a related discussion in alt.tv.sentinel, a Sentinel-focused Usenet group. In response to a fan called LHGraphics who argued that requiring slash warnings was not problematic because “we require labels on death stories and rape stories too,”¹⁷⁵ Bagheera elaborated on how the practice of requiring slash warnings, but not het warnings came across as homophobic:

It really isn’t a question of requiring warnings for things like death and rape stories. It’s the fact that the labels are required for one kind of love but not the other. Like I said, if het stories were consistently required to be labeled, I wouldn't object in the least to slash stories being similarly labeled. It’s the double standard that bugs me.¹⁷⁶

As with previous discourse in the print era, a lot of these discussions involved concerns about certain kinds of graphic or triggering content. Some fans felt that stories should, at the very least, warn for rape and death, while others still held the belief that readers should not expect authors to coddle them or spoil their stories for others’ comfort.¹⁷⁷ However, print fans felt that Net fans “expect (and even demand) an ever-growing list of categories, labels, and warnings, as a means to manage their time and pinpoint, as narrowly as possible, the stories that fulfill their reading desires.”¹⁷⁸ Some fans found this “strong sense of entitlement” bothersome,¹⁷⁹ whereas others expressed frustration with the lack of precision that labels and warnings presented. Beyond fandom,

¹⁷⁸ K. S. Langley, “The Times They Are A’ Changing.”
“uber-genre” (referring to “the eternal trinity of slash-het-gen”), character or pairing information, and rating, the line between sub-genre and disturbing content was often unclear.\textsuperscript{180} Was “death story” a genre or a warning? Did all stories that contained death count as death stories? What about rape? This so-called sliding scale of story information could be used equally to avoid and seek out certain content.\textsuperscript{181}

The wide variety of metadata standards and the lack of centralized and permanent archives often made it incredibly difficult for fans to find what they were looking for. As much as the Internet expanded access to fannish communities and fanworks, without structure and cohesive organization, there were significant challenges with discoverability. One fan, T’Mar, referred to this problem as the “virtual swamp,” saying

\begin{quote}
I realise that it’s not always feasible to have one all-inclusive archive for fanfic and other stuff. That’s fine. But when people make it incredibly difficult to find anything to read, I’m sure you will empathise with my annoyance…. How difficult is it to actually show the pairing featured in the story? A rating? A summary?\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

In an ideal world, they wanted a central archive for all fan fiction, one that had clearly defined categories and was easy and intuitive to navigate. Presently existing archive platforms were too sporadic, too niche, and impeded discoverability with poor UX and a dearth of metadata. And as fandom settled more firmly into the Net, that much-needed change was soon to come.

\textsuperscript{180} Cereta, “The Sliding Scale of Story Information.”
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} T’Mar, “The Virtual Swamp, or Navigating the Web without a Map,” The Fanfic Symposium, March 2, 2004, \url{https://trickster.org/symposium/symp142.html}. 
III. Net Fandom Today (2000s-present)

*The problem with platforms is that they have their own agenda. ... But once fan creators moved past staples and stamps, platforms were a necessity. We co-opt technologies, bending them to fannish uses, moving across platforms the same way we move across texts. And though this journey can fragment us, there is still an underlying community, regardless of the technology that helps bring it together.*

Nowadays, offline fandom is nearly gone, relegated to the fringes of most fan communities with only a few exceptions. The vast majority of fanworks and fandom communication happens online, primarily using digital repository platforms and social media. Merchandise collecting is still popular in certain circles, especially in music-related fandoms. K-pop fandom in particular still emphasizes collection fairly heavily. Albums for idol groups are often more akin to photobooks and merch bundles with a CD included than the typical album that can be found in Western stores. Most K-pop albums include one to three photocards as part of the package. These are small cards with selfies taken by idols, which are highly collectible, and there is a thriving market for photocard collectors. Similarly, artzine production is still booming in some fandoms, especially anime and

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183 Fiesler, “Owning the Servers.”
manga fandoms. Doujinshi is also still popular among Japanese fans. However, the majority of fandom activities, especially related to the preservation and sharing of fanworks, takes place in the digital world, and the policies and structures that govern that world are growing with it.

**Multifandom Archives, Content Purges, and Platform Migration**

Storage platforms make up the bulk of fanwork-related activity now. As fan communities began truly settling into Net fandom, various platforms had their rise and fall as the most popular options for posting and sharing fanworks. Currently, AO3 dominates the scene, but platform choice still varies slightly depending on the fandoms a person is in and the type of fanworks they consume. Content policies on certain platforms led to widespread fannish migration to new archives and repositories as they sought out online spaces that would not police or commercialize their work.

In the early 2000s, online journaling software such as LiveJournal became the primary site of fandom communities, allowing for some tagging and privatization of works while still maintaining social groups and public access if writers so chose. Casey Fiesler and Brianna Dym also note LiveJournal as one of the few exceptions to the general practice of having social sites and archival sites separate. The privacy settings were one of the biggest draws for fans. The platform “allowed users to control the visibility of each post, filtering content to be private, for friends or certain groups, or available publicly.

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LiveJournal also allowed users to create communities that filtered both content and members into smaller spaces.” Fans could post content on their personal journals and crosspost their content to communities. Personal journals were the site of social interaction while communities served as archives. Communities also had the ability to be locked, creating an opt-in rather than an opt-out model for many groups.

Around the same time, but especially towards the mid-late 2000s and early 2010s, FanFiction.net was also an incredibly popular platform for posting and reading fanfiction. FanFiction.net was notable for being a multifandom platform, allowing fic from any number of source materials as opposed to archives dedicated solely to one character, fandom, or relationship. The site launched in 1998, and quickly became a popular platform for writers and readers across a sweeping variety of fandoms but fell out of favor in the mid-2000s. Today, the platform is still used widely but is no longer the first archive fans turn to. FanFiction.net includes advertisements, something which fans dislike, and has restrictive content policies that drive many fans elsewhere.

The general timeline of fandom migration in relation to LiveJournal and FanFiction.net has conflicting information. LiveJournal was founded the year after FanFiction.net was founded. The first major wave of fans joining LiveJournal was in 2000-02, and numbers increased in 2003 when the invite code requirement was removed. Many fans left FanFiction.net in favor of LiveJournal through the 2000s as

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FF.net instituted more sweeping content bans and purges. The site regularly banned content for works by authors who had stated their opposition to fanfiction. In 2002, the platform banned both fanfiction about real people (known as Real Person Fiction or RPF) and fanfiction containing explicit content, which had previously been allowed on the site.193 Chat and script format was banned in 2004194, and songfic (fanfiction that included lyrics) was banned in 2005.195

The online landscape of fandom saw a major transformation in 2007, paving the way for contemporary fandom archive infrastructure and practices. That March, FanLib, a highly controversial for-profit website, entered beta.196 Profiting off fanworks has long been taboo in fandom communities, especially given the tenuous relationship fanworks had with copyright holders for many years, so this project, despite some of its more interesting features, was generally met with quite negative reactions.197 A few months later in May, FanLib became more publicly visible. That same month on the 29th, LiveJournal users found that large swathes of their friends lists had been suspended from the platform with no warning. Journals that had been suspended had their handle crossed out, leading the event to become known as Strikethrough.198 Journals subject to the purge were generally targeted due to certain types of sexual content, and as a result, large

swathes of fandom accounts were suspended.\(^{199}\) The purge was in part due to complaints raised by right-wing conservative Christian group Warriors for Innocence.\(^{200}\)

In their 2020 study on online platform migration in fannish communities, Fiesler and Dym found that “For a migration to occur, there has to be both a compelling reason to leave and a viable alternative option.”\(^{201}\) LiveJournal was unique in that it could function as both an archival and a social platform for fandom, but as the site and its terms of service became increasingly hostile to fandom, the need for a new platform grew. Some fans moved to Dreamwidth, a journal site that could integrate with LiveJournal that launched in 2009.\(^{202}\) However, what would eventually become the two most popular fandom platforms of all time were both in the works. Microblogging platform Tumblr launched in 2007 and has seen slow but steady growth as a home for fandom’s social activities ever since.\(^{203}\) In May 2007, the same month that FanLib went public and just under two weeks before LJers would be subject to Strikethrough, astolat posted to her LiveJournal to express her frustration with the state of fandom platforms and to offer ideas for a potential alternative:

… We need a central archive of our own, something like animemusicvideos.org. Something that would NOT hide from google or any public mention, and would clearly state our case for the legality of our hobby up front, while not trying to make a profit off other people’s IP and instead only making it easier for us to celebrate it, together, and create a welcoming space for new fans that has a sense of our history and our community behind it.

… I know we have project managers in our community -- and coders and designers -- can’t we do this? Seriously -- we can come up with a site that would be miles better and more attractive to fanfic writers/readers than anything else out there, guys, because we actually USE the stuff.\(^{204}\)

\(^{202}\) fjbryan, “LJ/DW history in a nutshell,” Fan meta (Dreamwidth, 13 September 2014).
\(^{204}\) Astolat, “An Archive Of One’s Own.”
The post garnered over 600 comments in under a month with fans weighing in on potential features and drawbacks. On May 30, 2007, the day after Strikethrough, the domain names transformativeworks.org and archiveofourown.org were registered, and the first official post about the creation of the OTW was shared on September 28, 2007. Fanlore soft-launched in September 2008 and left beta in December 2010. The Archive of Our Own started closed beta in October 2008 and entered open beta in November 2009. The Fan Culture Preservation Project was announced in August 2009, and Open Doors imported its first archive in March 2012.

Archive of Our Own reflects the values of the community that built it, and as the platform has evolved, it has changed to meet the needs of fans that have been expressed throughout both the print and Net eras. It is a multifandom archive with very few restrictions and a groundbreaking tagging structure that lends itself to easy discoverability. Fiesler, Morrison, and Bruckman argue that the Archive operates from a pluralist point of view that values participation and emphasizes advocacy. It is

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212 Fiesler, Morrison, and Bruckman, “An Archive of Their Own,” 4.
multifandom, built and run by and for fans, and fights to defend the legal right for fanworks to exist. One of the founding members of the organization, author Naomi Novik, has expressed the Archive’s goal of being inclusive of all fans:

We support everyone. We support the slash hiders. We support people writing explicit stuff. We support anybody writing anything that is legal. None of us were willing to give our time, frankly, to a site that didn’t have as one of its principles that “This is not my cake, but I will defend to the death your right to post your fanfic.”

In the spirit of this ethos, AO3’s broad content policy allows anything as long as it is legal under United States law, which some feel can lead to the Archive being unsafe for certain fans. An extensive tagging and filtering system is in place to help mitigate these concerns, but there is still more that could be done to make the platform safer for all fans, especially fans of color, many of whom have been outspoken about their encounters with racist content on the Archive. The “our” in Archive Of Our Own has yet to be truly representative of all fans, but new features, such as blocking, and the OTW’s search for a Diversity Consultant Research Officer, are indicators of potential future change that will make the Archive safer for every part of its user base.

Outside of these three platforms, there are a few other venues where fans share fanworks. Wattpad hosts a good deal of fanfiction, though the site also hosts original writing. Asianfanfics.com hosts works about Asian fandoms and is particularly popular with K-pop RPF fans. The Audiofic Archive, originally hosted by a fan using the handle...

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jinjurly, hosts podfic, fanfiction read out loud. The archive’s server was corrupted in 2016 and thousands of audio files were lost, a huge blow to the podfic community. In 2022, Squidgie, who had hosted the project for several years, began working on reviving the archive.

Metadata of Our Own

Throughout the Net era of fandom, multifandom archives and platforms have become the norm, but the metadata structures used across these platforms have varied significantly. Shannon Fay Johnson has identified three models for metadata creation used in online fandom: free tagging, controlled vocabularies, and hybrid folksonomies. Each of these three models corresponds with the three major archive platforms that Net fans have used in the twenty-first century.

Free tagging was the model used by LiveJournal. Users could type whatever they desired into the tags on their posts. This model, while highly customizable for individuals, made searching for content incredibly difficult:

Since descriptive metadata within LiveJournal is dependent on tagging, it is up to the author and readers to correctly interpret what others would see as the relevant terms that apply to the work…. As with all tagging, there is also the risk of syntactic variation and uncertainty.

Some communities would develop their own guidelines for content creators to help with discoverability, but there was no standardization by and large. Headers were often

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219 Johnson, “Fan Fiction Metadata Creation and Utilization within Fan Fiction Archives.”
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
relatively uniform, but without consistent tagging, that information didn’t help users who didn’t know how to find content to begin with.

FanFiction.net took the opposite approach and instituted a controlled vocabulary. Users had to select metadata from a predefined menu when posting, and the metadata that was provided was often not specific enough for many works. Some users developed a shorthand for fannish terms that would be included in the summary section of a work, though there was a limited word count. Smaller fandoms especially struggled with this model because they lacked controlled vocabularies, leaving users to resort to keyword searching. However, the existing controlled vocabularies did allow for far more robust filtering options than LiveJournal.

Archive of Our Own’s greatest strength is its innovative tagging system, which is a combination of both models. AO3’s metadata model is a curated folksonomy, a system that allows users to continue free tagging if they so desire while simultaneously developing a controlled vocabulary that both reflects fannish terminology and allows users to filter works. Freeform tags are connected to “canonical” tags behind the scenes by a team of volunteers known as tag wranglers. This is a deliberate choice by AO3 as they believe that actual fans are the best way to determine if tags are synonymous. Other parts of the metadata structure require a certain set of archive warnings, including Rape/Non-Con, Major Character Death, and Underage, all of which have been

222 The Citrus Scale was often used for this reason.
223 Johnson, “Fan Fiction Metadata Creation and Utilization within Fan Fiction Archives.”
224 Johnson, “Fan Fiction Metadata Creation and Utilization within Fan Fiction Archives.”
longstanding concerns in fandom communities. However, the Archive also includes an option, Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings, which allows authors to not disclose information about their works if they so choose, honoring both sides of the warnings debate. Users are able to both include and exclude tags through the filtering panel, including archive warnings.

**Recommendations and the Dying Art of Dissemination**

The popularity of digital repositories has led to a significant decline in methods of dissemination for fanworks. Fans typically know to seek out fanfiction on these platforms, and with the ever-improving metadata available, there is subsequently less of a need to use other means to discover content. Artists and writers will sometimes self-promote their works on social media, Twitter and Tumblr being two of the most used sites, but fans generally just use filters on archive platforms to find what they’re interested in.

One of the few ways that fans still circulate stories, though this practice is also waning, is through reclists. With the sheer quantity of fan content easily available and accessible online nowadays, reclists are a way for fans to communicate with each other about which fics they think are worth reading. The practice is not dissimilar to fanzine reviews during the print era. Some fans host their lists on separate platforms like Pinboard and Delicious.io, while others use their journals, blogs, or other social accounts to share them. Some fans on Tumblr have a separate page on their blogs dedicated to sharing recommendations, while others will post or reblog fics and tag them in a way that visitors to their blog can easily find them. Blogs or websites dedicated entirely to sharing

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recommendations are also common.\textsuperscript{228} Reclists have hugely varying levels of metadata depending on both the fan and the platform they chose to host their list on. Dedicated platforms like Pinboard allow for extensive metadata if a user desires\textsuperscript{229}, whereas, on purely social platforms, metadata is entirely freeform. Some fans use star ratings or other emojis to indicate favorites. Others organize their lists by pairing or by fandom, though most fans tend to keep separate reclists for each of their fandoms. Lists could include anything from a full scope of warnings, labels, and a summary, or they could simply be a list of titles or URLs.

Fans use more passive methods to find fic to read as well, engaging in recommendation culture without actually communicating with other fans. Some fans peruse their favorite authors’ bookmarks on their AO3 profile to see what they’re reading and enjoying, circumventing the direct social aspect of other recommendation methods.\textsuperscript{230} AO3 has an option for users to “Ree” a work when they bookmark it, but many fans use others’ bookmarks as a sort of miniature archive within the larger platform, creating a list wherein the works are guaranteed to be of a higher quality because a writer they enjoy thought they were worth holding on to.

Outside of recommendations and self-promotion, fans communicate in order to actively seek out certain works. If a fan discovers that a work they loved is no longer available, they might choose to crowdsourse a copy of it on social sites. Reddit is a popular


\textsuperscript{229} Johnson, “Fan Fiction Metadata Creation and Utilization within Fan Fiction Archives.”

\textsuperscript{230} Silks (@whenasinsilks), “begging you all (fic writers) to stop making your bookmarks private, how else am I supposed to get fic recs if not by stalking the bookmarks of authors I like,” Twitter, November 1, 2021, 4:44 a.m.
platform for this.\textsuperscript{231} This practice is somewhat akin to a modern, digital version of circuit libraries, wherein fans send their personal copies of fanworks to each other directly, one-to-one, rather than through larger, more nebulous community channels or from a centralized repository.

\textsuperscript{231} Lost Fic, \textit{r/FanFiction}, Fan forum. 
https://www.reddit.com/r/FanFiction/?f=flair_name%3A%22Lost%20Fic%22.
IV. Conclusion: Cultural Heritage and Preservation Efforts

Who can say where technological or cultural evolution will bring fan creation communities next? But it does seem clear that, in all the best ways, we’ll continue to do it on our own.232

Today, there are many organizations and institutions, as well as fan projects, dedicated to preserving fanworks and maintaining archives of fan materials. The most well-known by far is the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), the nonprofit behind Archive of Our Own and Fanlore. The OTW is a registered nonprofit fully devoted to the preservation of fanworks and fandom cultural heritage. It runs multiple different projects, AO3 and Fanlore being two of them, that address various aspects of fandom history and preservation.233 Other projects include Transformative Works and Cultures, which is a peer-reviewed fan studies journal, and Open Doors, which is dedicated to rescuing at-risk fannish content. Open Doors imports and archives netfic and archives on AO3, and any physical fan materials such as zines are referred to the University of Iowa, which has partnered with the OTW for the Fan Culture Preservation Project (FCPP).234 UIowa houses thousands of zines and other fandom-related materials, including the contents of Ming Wathne’s Fanzine Lending Library. Her collection was

232 Fiesler, “Owning the Servers.”
one of the first donated to UIowa after the partnership began, signaling the closing of the library as Ming’s health grew poor with age.  

The Internet Archive also hosts a significant amount of fandom projects, especially those run by fans. One fan, known by his handle nerdguy1138 on Reddit and Entropy11235813 on the Internet Archive, has uploaded and frequently updates a backup of all works posted to AO3 and FanFiction.net. This project is often used as a way to find old fics that have since been deleted from their original platform. As of April 2022, he had roughly 700 gigabytes worth of fanfiction files hosted on the Internet Archive.

The debate over whether it’s okay to save and share other’s works that have been removed is ongoing, however, and the comment section of the project frequently includes comments from authors demanding their works be removed from the files. Another fan-run project is Squidge.org. Squidgie is a long-time fan that has been active in fan communities for years. His website hosts various projects, including multiple fandom-specific and multifandom archives. Most recently, in late 2021 and early 2022, he acquired the Audiofic Archive from its original moderator and began crowdsourcing missing podfic from fans who had copies saved. As of April 2022, 75.5% of lost podfic have been located and 56.2% of missing files have been restored to the archive, now available via both file downloads and streaming links.

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240 Squidgie, “Jinjurly Audio Archive.”
241 Squidgie, “About This Site,” audiofic.jinjurly.com (Audiofic Archive).
Fandom archival practices will continue to grow and change as we move forward into the 21st century. Print fandom now exists largely in an archival capacity, though collectibles and artzines are still popular, and many traditions and practices from that era still exist in an altered capacity in Net fandom today. Major trends right now point toward the consolidation of description and storage as digital archives become commonplace. Dissemination methods are also waning in favor of individualized searching strategies, in part due to the accessibility of centralized archives. While fear of The Powers That Be is largely in the past, the fannish norm of pseudonymity is still going strong. The push for warnings has also drowned out any concerns about coddling and spoilers, sometimes to an extreme degree. However, there are still major concerns about equity and accessibility in fandom archives and their practices, particularly for fans of color. As fan communities and platforms grow, serious conversations must be had concerning racism in fandom and how archival practices can adapt to accommodate both fannish values of anticensorship and the very real issue of safety for fans of color in these spaces. Present practices are influenced by a long history of secrecy, wank, and legal concerns, but that does not mean that they cannot be updated to reflect the diversity of fandom and ensure that it is truly representative and inclusive of all fans.

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Appendix A: Glossary

All definitions are taken from Fanlore unless otherwise noted.

**Acafan** – an academic who identifies as a fan.

**Age statement** – a positive affirmation by a fan that they are of a certain age (usually eighteen).

**Alternate Universe (AU)** – a descriptor used to characterize fanworks that change one or more elements of the source work’s canon. Broadly, an AU may transplant a given source work’s characters to a radically different setting, shift the genre in which their adventures occur, and/or alter one or more of their professions, goals, or backstories.

**Animanga** – an umbrella term used by fans to refer to anime and manga at the same time, particularly in the context of a single, large, combined fandom.

**APA** – Amateur Press Association.

**Archive of Our Own (AO3)** – a multi-fandom archive website owned and operated by the Organization for Transformative Works, which largely hosts fanfiction.

**Asianfanfics.com (AFF)** – a fanfiction archive website specifically for Asian fandoms. It is best known for its significant K-pop population.

**Audiofic Archive** – a multifandom podfic archive.

**Bandom** – used to describe RPF fandoms based around real-life musicians and bands, mainly North American and European rock bands. The term is applied somewhat inconsistently but does not usually include K-pop, J-pop, J-rock, or boyband slash (aka popslash).

*OR* the name given to a Real People Fiction fandom featuring a large but specific group of American bands, many of whom became popular in the mid-2000s. The three “core” bands are My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy, and Panic at the Disco.
**Beta** – the fannish term for a fan who looks over fanworks for errors or places they could be improved before the creator posts the fanwork for public consumption. The word "beta" comes from the world of software design, in which an unfinished version of the software (the beta version) is released to a limited audience outside of the programming team.

**The Black Notebook** – the big black three-ring binder, or expandable manila folder, or large cardboard box, in which are kept the early drafts, critique galleys, or complimentary copies of a fan’s own or someone else’s unpublished stories. Used in Starsky & Hutch fandom.

**Circuit** – a way of trading stories around without the formality of publishing them as zines.

**Citrus Scale** – a range of variant terms to describe different levels of explicit content contained within their stories, all oriented around citrus fruits.

- **Grapefruit** – the X-rated or truly bizarre lemons, but it is not widely used.
- **Lemon** – a term from anime fandom used to designate a work with explicit erotic content.
- **Lime** – a toned-down version of lemon; a work with non-explicit sexual content. At some point, there will be sexual intercourse, but it’s not shown in the story which usually ends with a fade to black.
- **Orange** – used for kissing, hugs, and some more touching beyond that that begins to have a hint of sexuality.

**Community archives** – documentation of a group of people that share common interests, and social, cultural, and historical heritage, usually created by members of the group being documented and maintained outside of traditional archives.

**Con** – short for convention; a pre-arranged gathering of fans at a specific place and time

**Doujinshi** – Japanese works in visual or textual form including manga and novels that are not created for or by the professional market; that is, they are produced by amateurs. Many but not all doujinshi are fan comics, and sometimes the term is used as a synonym for “fancomic in a manga style.”

**Drawerfic** – fanfiction that is never shown to other fans, or that is only shown to a few friends.

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**Dreamwidth** – fandom-friendly LiveJournal code fork site (rather than a clone), which implements some changes to the LJ codebase to offer improved and new features.

**Fan Culture Preservation Project** – a joint venture between the OTW and the Special Collections department at the University of Iowa to archive and preserve fanzines and other non-digital forms of fan culture.

**Fandom** – a community of fans, participating in [fan activity] and interacting in some way, whether through discussions or creative works.

**Fanfiction** – a work of fiction written by fans for other fans, taking a source text or a famous person as a point of departure.

**FanFiction.net** – a fanfiction archive that launched on October 15, 1998. It may be the first multi-fandom automated archive and was arguably the largest fanfiction archive on the internet at one time.

**FanLib** – a commercially-owned site whose content was generated by fan creators. It was widely perceived as an attempt by outsiders to profit from the work of fans.

**Fanlore** – a multi-authored site for, about, and by fans and fan communities that create and consume fanworks. It uses a wiki model, based on MediaWiki software. Fanlore is a project of the Organization for Transformative Works.

**Fannish** – the quality of being a fan.

**Fanworks** – a creative work produced by one or more fans, generally intended for other fans.

**Fanzines (aka zines)** – short for ‘magazine’; used for several types of amateur periodicals from different communities.

  - **Adzine** – a specific kind of non-fiction zine that listed upcoming zines and available zines for sale.
  - **APAzine** – a kind of fan publication in which all the materials, generally letters, would be sent to a central person, who would simply copy the entire packet in the cheapest possible way.
  - **Letterzine** – non-fiction zines that allowed discussion and chat among groups of fans before email, mailing lists, and the Internet were available.

**Fansub** – a video that has been subtitled for release by fans.

**Fen** – Plural for fan, used in early science fiction fandom.

**Flyers** – a single-leafed paper advertisement that can be posted on walls, distributed by hand, or sent through the mail. Fans have made and used flyers to advertise conventions,
clubs, or zines for sale. Flyers can convey useful information. Flyers can also be pure artistic fannish expression in themselves.

**Folksonomy** – the result of personal free tagging of information and objects for one’s own retrieval.\(^{245}\)

**Gafiate** – an initialism, made from Getting Away From It All, that media fandom took from science fiction fandom. At first, it meant escaping from the mundane world via [fan activity], but now it means leaving fandom and fannish activity.

**Gen** – a label for a fanwork that contains no romantic or sexual content, either het or slash.

**Headers** – often used at the top of a fanfic or a post announcing other fanworks to convey important information to the reader/viewer.

**Het** – heterosexual; a subgenre of romantic or erotic fanfiction. It generally indicates that a fanwork is focused on a heterosexual relationship or male/female encounter.

**Internet Archive** – a digital library “of millions of free books, movies, software, music, websites, and more.”

**Wayback Machine** – a service created by the Internet Archive that stores and provides access to old versions of websites.

**K/S** – Kirk/Spock, the first officially slashed couple of media fandom.

**Letter of Comment (LOC)** – a letter written by a fan and sent to a professional SF magazine or to a fanzine and published in a lettercol, a section in a print zine or a comic book where fans’ LoCs were printed.

**LiveJournal** – a social networking site and blogging platform where many fans post their fanfiction, meta, and other works, leave feedback, and have personal interaction. The website gained popularity in fandom in the early 2000s, which declined about a decade later.

**LJers** – LiveJournal users.

**Media fandom** – first appeared in the 1970s to describe fans of televised or filmed science fiction as opposed to literary science fiction but is now often applied much more broadly. It is an umbrella term that encompasses an eclectic assortment of individual fan communities that share values, practices, vocabulary, and history.

**Meta** – used to describe a fan-authored piece of non-fiction writing discussing any aspect of fandom, fanworks, or the source text. This can include discussing characters and their

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motivations, fanfiction tropes and trends, fan activity, particular plot elements, choices by

canon creators, alternate possibilities for canon, and much more.

**Migration** – the mass movement of fans between communication platforms.

**Multifandom** – refers to using or following source texts from many different fandoms.

**O.O.P.** – Out of print; refers to an item, typically a print zine that is no longer being

published.

**Open Doors** – a project of the Organization for Transformative Works that is dedicated to

preserving fanworks for the future, particularly fanworks which are at risk of disappearance.

**The Organization for Transformative Works (OTW)** – a nonprofit organization

established by fans to serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the

history of fanworks and fan culture in its myriad forms and to advocate for fans who need

assistance when faced with legal issues or media interest due to their fannish pursuits.

**Pan-fandom** – refers to media fandom overall, in a meta sense—not just the sum total of

all possible fandoms (and fans), but also things like zine-based fandom, cons, fanfic in

general, fanart in general, widespread story tropes, vidding, fannish lingo, etc.

**Podfic** – an audio recording of fanfic, read aloud by a fan (or several).

**The Powers That Be (TBTP)** – a term used to describe those with creative control or

legal control over a media product.

**Pseud** – pseudonym.

**Reclist** – a list of recommendations, generally made by an unrelated third party who has

read fanfics (or watched videos, or viewed art) and found them to be worth bringing to

the attention of other fans.

**RPF** – short for Real Person Fiction or Real People Fiction; fanfiction written about

actual people, rather than fictional characters.

**Science fiction fandom** – formed in the 1920s around American pulp magazines and has

expanded in scope since its humble beginnings with the development of science fiction

novels, television, and movies.

**Shipping** – the act of supporting or wishing for a particular romantic relationship—that is,

a het (different-sex), slash (male/male), femslash (female/female), or poly (three or more

partners) ship—by discussing it, writing meta about it, or creating other types of fanworks

exploring it. Fans who have and promote favorite ships are called shippers.

**Slash** – a type of fanwork in which two (or more) characters of the same sex or gender are

placed in a sexual or romantic situation with each other. Slash can also be a verb; to slash

is to create a slash fanwork or to interpret the chemistry between the characters in the source

text as homoerotic. The adjective form is slashy.
**Boys’ Love (BL)** – The manga and anime genre of fictional male homosexual romance, created for a female audience.

**Yaoi** – a term used by Western anime and manga fans to refer to explicit male homoerotic works, generally created by women and for a female readership, either canonical or fan-created.

**Squick** – a term commonly used in fannish discussions about fanworks or professional media that describes anything that is a deep-seated, visceral turn-off for the fan.

**Strikethrough** – an event that took place on May 29, 2007; LJers woke up to find that their Friends lists were showing a large number of names that had been crossed out, or strikethrough ‘ed. LiveJournal had permanently suspended over 500 journals based on the users’ interest lists.

**Tag Wrangling** – the process by which volunteers link together tags with the same meaning so that readers can browse AO3 more easily.

**Tumblr** – a micro-blogging platform with social networking features that allows users to post text, images, audio, and video. It is a popular tool for fannish picspams and gifsets.

**Usenet** – one of the oldest discussion tools for computer networks and predates the World Wide Web by almost a decade. It can be accessed using a reader such as Outlook Express or through Google groups.

**Wallet name** – a shorthand term for “the name that appears on your government-issued ID.”

**Wank** – a loud and public online argument; a catchall term for objectionable or contemptible fannish behavior; or elaborate canon-rationalization or theorizing.

**Warriors for Innocence** – an online-based organization whose stated goal is “hunting pedophiles where they fester.” It was a group that was reportedly behind the complaints that led to Strikethrough.

**Wattpad** – a combination of original and fanfiction hosting, social networking, contests, and commercial/advertising venture.
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