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RUNNING HEAD: FANDOM, SLASH, IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

If one is sexy, two is even sexier:
Dialogue with slashers on identity and the internet.

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Abstract

Slash has been a part of female fandom since the first pairings of Kirk and Spock in fan magazines, and perhaps earlier. The internet has expanded this practice, making it commonplace among female fans and reaching mainstream popular and academic discussions. Understanding the mores and motivations for this particular type of fan consumption and production remains an area of debate. Oftentimes in dialogues about people, which is one way of describing what is a research study, the people studied are not included to speak for themselves. From interviews and surveys I have conducted, I shall add how these women see themselves to this dialogue. A structured conversation with 10 slashers led to several main points about how they see slash and their love of it, how the internet facilitates this activity, and what they would say to non-slashers to spread understanding of their passion. The focus of this discussion is on the role of the internet in slash, the construction of identity for slashers, and a dialogic research method and a foundation upon which to foster understanding of this sub-subculture.

Paper's Purpose

Over the past several decades of research from a variety of fields, the activities of people who consider themselves to be aficionados of popular culture and various media products¹ have received increased scrutiny for a number of reasons. First there was the diligence of cultural studies to elevate the consumption of popular culture to a subject worthy of academic study. Then there was the work of a number of self-proclaimed fan-scholars and researchers who have focused on everyday aspects of engaging with these pop culture products in a media saturated world. Now, the rise of the internet has allowed fans to converge and become more noticeable to the academic world, engendering scrutiny merely with their presence.

Looking to the future, the continued study of fans, their fandoms, and their fan activities remains important due to the increased presence of the internet in mediating people's interpersonal relationships as well as the relationship between the producers and consumers of these media products (MacDonald, 1998; Théberge, 2005). The internet is pivotal in how fans engage with one another in the formation and maintenance of communities, the distribution of their fan activities and knowledge, and the demonstration of their fan identities. Additionally, the presence of the internet has impacted the production-consumption dichotomy, from disrupting it entirely to allowing traditional producers to further control consumption by co-opting fan activity (Deuze, 2007; Reinhard, 2008).

Due to these various factors, how we study online fandom and represent these fans requires as much scrutiny as what the fans are doing online. This paper was conducted to test a methodology that promotes a more valid and reliable representation of fans who engage in an activity many in academia and the public perceive as odd if not deviant. This paper utilizes the fan activity of slash to discuss both the phenomenon and the methodological approach.

The importance of the internet as the prevalent medium for slashers will be highlighted in terms of how the medium is involved in the individuals' self-construction of their identities. Methodologically, the paper employs a dialogic approach believed to improve the representation of a subgroup of fans that are a minority group within the specific fandoms from which they arise and to world at large. This approach was utilized to study this phenomenon as I claim myself to be a slasher, in production and consumption, but I am by no means an expert in either aspect. As a slasher, I feel that being a researcher of slash means being a representative of slashers

¹ Media products range from technologies (e.g., television, computers, digital gaming devices) to genres (e.g., horror, science fiction, romance) to specific texts (Star Wars, Desperate Housewives, The Daily Show, SportsCenter).

and being an activist for slash as a legitimate fan activity to be understood and accepted as any other activity. It is with this perspective that this paper is written.

Primer on Slash

Of the various definitions of fandom and what constitutes being a fan, the most referenced comes from Henry Jenkins and his discussion of membership with a participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992a, 1992b). To Jenkins, being a fan requires more than just acknowledging a routine consumption of some media product; being a fan requires the individual to actively participate in the culture that develops around this media product. The fan may engage in discussions, attend gatherings, and/or produce work that utilizes some aspect of the original media product. It is the last type of fan activity, referred to as "textual poaching", that studies the production of fan fiction ("fanfic"), fan songs, fan art, and fan videos. Across all these types of fan activity can be found people who slash.

Linguistically, slash is a verb and a noun². It is an act of doing something with the original content, or canon, of the media product. It is also the existence of a particular fan activity based upon a specific reworking of the canon. As either an activity or action, slash is the representation of two heterosexual characters from the canon, who were not engaging in either a romantic or sexual relationship, as having a homosexual relationship.

Slash as a term arose from the use of the symbol "/" to indicate who was being paired, or "shipped", together. The use of this symbol to demarcate fan activities involving such homosexual relationships is said to have arose with Star Trek stories where Captain James T. Kirk and Science Officer Spock became romantically involved. Labeled as "K/S", the use of the slash symbol became synonymous with the interpretation and action of taking characters portrayed in canon as heterosexual and placing them in homosexual relationships. As with fan activities that explore heterosexual relationships that are either portrayed or suggested in canon, slash can vary from fluffy romance, to dramatic angst, to outright pornography.

Given the genealogy, slash has typically focused on gay relationships, slashing together two straight male characters or real life men. When a slash story deals with women, the term "femslash" is typically applied to make the distinction. Related to slash, but derived from Japanese media products, are the labels "yaoi," referring to gay relationships, and "yuri," referring to lesbian relationships. However, while slash is commonly considered to be a fan

² For further recent reviews of the term "slash" and the history of this fan activity, see Bury, 2005; Kustriz, 2003; Salmon & Symons, 2003; Scodari, 2003.

interpretation and creation, or existing only in "fanon," yaoi or yuri relationships do exist in canon, and even serve as the main draw for some Japanese media products.

What have captured the interest of academics are two fundamental aspects of slash as well as the role of the internet in slashing. First, there are the decoding and recoding processes whereby fans interpret the portrayal of a heterosexual relationship as being homosexual and create their own products based on this interpretation. From a cultural and literary perspective, such interaction with the canon raises many questions about the fluidity of semiotic meaning in the text as well as the determining position of the individual in that text's meaning. Studies interested in this aspect focus on analyzing the structure of the text to determine what are the cues the fan is interpreting in slashy ways, with various theories drawn upon to explain why this interpretation of that particular structural feature occurs³.

Second, there is the fact that slash began with and still largely consists of both heterosexual and homosexual female fans engaging in these decoding and recoding practices (Skuld, 2002). It is this point that fuels much academic interest in the phenomenon: why do women enjoy producing and consuming homosexual relationships of men previously portrayed as heterosexual? Numerous studies have sought to explain what, to outsiders, appears to be an aberrant fascination -- traditionally, women have been thought to enjoy their romances as being heterosexual relationships, a la Harlequin novels, "chick flicks" and soap operas (Salmon & Symons, 2003).

Research on explanations for such "aberrant" behavior typically consists of theorists discussing their ideas of why women slash and less on grounding their ideas in conversations with slashers, using their interpretive stance to develop theories. The results of such studies have theorized the woman's ability to identify with either male partner (Penley, 1992), a reaction against society's restrictions on gender and sexuality norms (Cicioni, 1998; Kustriz, 2003; Penley, 1992), and a sexual gratification akin to men's reported gratification of consuming lesbian pornography, although more focused on the emotional attachments than the sexual acts (Cicioni, 1998; Kustriz, 2003; Scodari, 2003). There are studies consisting of interviews and questionnaires with actual slashers that refute some of these theorizations, but there remains a divide in how others see them and how they see themselves (Green, Jenkins & Jenkins, 1998).

The internet has impacted all aspects of fandom and fan activities. This impact is being well documented in a variety of studies. In these studies, two aspects of the internet's impact have received the substantial consideration: fostering an individual's identity construction; and, forming an emergent community. Symbolic interactionism and social constructionism theories

³ For examples, see Allington, 2007; Kustriz, 2003; Saxey, 2001; Scodari, 2003; Woledge, 2005.

have been used to explain how identities are negotiated through interactions with people of similar and dissimilar tastes, and how communities have emerged, formed boundaries, and maintained themselves (Bakardjeva & Smith, 2001; Fernback, 2007). Both of these approaches can be used to discuss how slashers see themselves and their interactions with one another, and these approaches will be discussed in the results of this paper.

Before the rise of the internet and the dominance of the World Wide Web, slash fan production was relegated to fanzines or "zines", magazines produced and distributed by fans through the mail or at conventions (Kustriz, 2003). Because of the resources required in the maintenance of such fanzines, few rose to high levels of consumption and recognition beyond a specific fandom community -- and it could be hard for people unfamiliar with the fanzine and its content to come in contact with it. The seemingly infinite resources and connectivity of the internet has changed the dynamics of the production and distribution of fan productions, like fanzines, and allowed for the substantial growth of what was once a very obscure aspect of communities that were already subcultures (Bury, 2005; Kustriz, 2003).

In the past, studies that have focused on slashers online have tended to focus more on the construction of communities, or online sites dedicated to slash. The internet has been seen as a medium that allows slashers to create their own space free from society's imposed values - a cybertopia in which they are allowed to connect with other "deviants" who share their interest in slashing (Bakardjeva & Smith, 2001; Bury, 2005; Rambukkana, 2007; Shave, 2004). The internet is said to provide a "heterotopia" that is less structured by the discourses of society, and thus less rigid in the application of the society's norms and values. This cyberspace provides individuals with the ability to construct a resistant and even subversive alternative to the mainstream sociocultural environment. However, such conceptualizations again are created a priori and applied to slashers -- the question remains if slashers see this construction of heterotopias and cybertopias themselves, or if their conceptualization of the internet's role in their slashing is less political and more personal. That is, to what extent do slashers see the internet as playing a role in the construction and/or performance of their identities.

Methodology

As slash has its "covers torn off" and becomes more recognized/patronized/normalized in mainstream, what is required is a dialogic interaction such that the different perspectives on slash -- from slashers and non-slashers in the public and academy -- can more easily understand each other's interpretive stance. This study's methodology is built on the grounds of feminist critiques of representing minority cultures and subgroups (Alcoff, 1991; Talbut, 2004). I

believe a necessary step to achieving valid and reliable representation is through a process of negotiating emic and etic positions with the culture or subgroup being studied, and to reconceptualize those being studied not as subjects to one's observation methods but as participants in the creation of understanding. More politically balanced presentation is said to require negotiating etic/emic perspectives in prior knowledge and knowledge seeking procedures (aka methodology). In this negotiating am I joined by a growing conceptualization of the fan-scholar, and count myself among others who both study slash and are themselves slashers (Allington, 2007; Cicioni, 1998; Penley, 1992; Woledge, 2005).

My emic versus etic positions

I came upon slash after being introduced to the idea of the "bishonen" or pretty boy⁴ and their prevalence in Japanese yaoi. In researching yaoi, I stumbled upon the website FanFiction.net (www.fanfiction.net). The website is a storehouse for fan fiction from a variety of fandoms for a variety of media -- from television to video games to anime to comic books, the website further separates into specific texts, which may have thousands of stories⁵. Of these millions of stories at this one website, only a fraction is slash fiction -- the actual percentage has not yet been calculated.

I was impressed by this website's variety, amount, and position as a central hub for productive and consumptive fans. At first I only consumed non-slash, and I even attempted writing a House fanfic during its first season on the air. My first slash readings were from the Harry Potter fandom, as so much was being discussed in fan circles about J. K. Rowling's dislike for her fans' appropriations of her work. From there I read slash based on my own fandoms, but it wasn't until Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith in 2005 that I became a more devout slasher. The portrayal of Anakin Skywalker's relationship with Obi-Wan Kenobi in the film seemed immensely slashable, to myself and others, especially as it cumulated in Obi-Wan's cry of "You were my brother, I loved you". As I was becoming more interested with the phenomenon of slash, as a fan and a researcher, I took the step from consumer to producer when, under my nom d'plume FoxMarie, I wrote and posted my own Star Wars slash fanfic to FanFiction.net, Down the Wrong Path. The following is an excerpt from the 165 page story:

It was not a slow dance. It was years of knowing each other intimately through their bond finally being realized. They knew each other well enough, were in such perfect sync, that

⁴ The bishonen is typically characterized as a feminized male in appearance, with angular features, larger eyes and longer hair than typical masculine characters. They can be heroes or villains, but their actions tend to be more refined and less brutal.

⁵ As of February 24, 2008, fandoms with the most stories: *Harry Potter* 388,864; *Naruto* 180,362; *InuYasha* 84,951; *Kingdom of Hearts* 40,487; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* 33,823; *Star Wars* 20,954.

their hands did not awkwardly linger anywhere longer than was needed. They knew how to touch each other to maximize the sensation, to hold onto it and lengthen the pleasure they could derive with their fingers, their tongues, their noses. It was a perfect ballet of give-and-take, of two bodies of equal power crashing over each other, fighting to give more to the other and take less. Neither won this battle, but neither lost.

It was due to this story that doors to slasher communities opened to me, as slashers invited me to join their groups and I began correspondences with several slashers, who I contacted to include in the conversation in this paper.

However, even after my preliminary research, consumption and production of slash, I would not consider myself a tremendous expert on slash. How I am etc is due to three factors. First, I am not experienced with all the facets of slashing, such as role-playing. Second, while being a slasher has impacted my relationships with canons, slash is not the primary means by which I engage with a fandom.

Third and perhaps most important, I continuously consult fans whom I do consider to be experts due to their more active participation (in time, production and consumption) with slash and slash communities. Commonly my questions focus on understanding the jargon used among slasher communities. The terms slashers use to describe their activity is one means by which they construct and maintain the communities, by structuring the knowledge requirements that determine outsiders from insiders. As I do not know and commonly use all the jargon, I would not consider myself a complete insider.

Symbolically, I am a guest in the community, and, for the most part, we engage in a relationship akin to Greek *xenia* -- with respect for one another. As outlined in *xenia*, my goal is to be respectful, non-burdensome, and to leave my hosts with a parting gift -- namely, this research as a faithful representation of them to the world at large.

Impetus for dialogue

When the relationship between researcher and study of phenomenon is built on the principles of *xenia*, then this respectful "give-and-take" must be considered when designing the study of that phenomenon. Methodologically, this means the selection of research tools that reflect this relationship and will, through their utilization, operate to reduce the potential for the power dynamics between researcher and researchee, inherent in any study, that empower the researcher and disenfranchise the researchee (Dervin, 2003; Kvale, 2006). By approaching the study of a contested phenomenon with this balance, the researcher can treat the participants with respect, which promotes the idea that you are treating the phenomenon, dear to them, with respect. Building respect with a population leads to a more valid and reliable representation of

the phenomenon. Thus, not only can we learn more and better, but we can do it in a way that insures we can continue to engage with the people we want to learn more about.

The approach to research needs to be participatory, interactive, iterative, and dialogic. The researcher needs to be humbled by negotiating between the polarities of emic and etic, recognizing that both insider and outsider status have their windfalls and shortfalls. The person being studied needs to be engaged with the research to the extent that s/he can comment back on what the researcher has "concluded" based on the study. Research tools need for the researcher and the researchee to be alternatively in power -- from being in control of the data gathering and checking to being in retreat, allowing the other to forward a question or an answer. Dialogic approaches can be found in studies when the researcher includes a member check, asking people to read and respond to the researcher's conclusions. The dialogic approach being taken here happens during the process of data gathering, as it reflects the ongoing conversation with slashers.

Why does researching slash require a dialogic approach? To be a good activist one must be respectful to participants who may be dissuaded based on previous experiences and/or typical representation in academic and popular press. Fans, particularly science fiction fans, are understandably wary of engaging in research about their fandom and fanshipping due to the traditional portrayal of such fans as socially deviant (Jenkins, 1992a; 1992b; Penley, 1992); while academics, especially those operating from positions of intellectual elitism, have been skeptical of fans abilities to know and represent themselves (Green et al, 1998). An online discussion at LiveJournal exemplifies this wariness, which can become outright anger, at the feeling of being used and misrepresented (Calanthe, 2008). By proceeding with a dialogic approach, research *on* fans becomes research *with* fans.

For this reason the method employed in this study involved a dialogic approach during the data gathering phase of the study. What I report here is similar to a form advocated by Brenda Dervin (2003), where dialogue must be structured communicatively to ensure equal distribution of power. I engaged with slashers through iterative rounds of conversation on the phenomenon of slashing. The method presented here is preliminary and experimental as a way of conducting audience reception studies, but the results that it yields illustrates the fruitfulness of such an approach.

Interviews

The first means by which data was gathered occurred through traditional interviewing procedures. In the winter of 2006, I interviewed two women on a) their history as a fan and a slasher in particular, b) what they see slash is, c) how they saw themselves as a fan and a

slasher and d) their interpretations of why they engage with their fandom in the ways they do. The interview was semi-structured, as I had specific questions prepared to address my areas of interest, but new questions to explore a topic were brought up during the interview. These interviews were then coded, using grounded coding procedures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Codes focused on a) how the women defined slash, b) how they saw slash as a fan activity, and c) their reasons for slashing. The codes generated by this process are not reported here, as their primary purpose in this study was to inform the next data gathering method.

Survey

In the spring of 2006, the codes generated by the interviews were used for the second means of data gathering. Along with research from academic sources and online fan sources, the codes served as the basis for the generation of a survey that was completed online by 305 slashers⁶. The survey focused on a) history as a slasher, b) activities as a slasher, c) seeing self as a slasher, d) reasons for slashing, e) participating in slasher communities, and f) feelings of being identified as a slasher. Along with providing close-ended items generated by the codes, slashers were also allowed to add their own reasons for slashing if such reason was not covered by the previous coding. In this way, the database of how the fans saw their slashing activity and why they did it was expanded. As with the interviews, the actual results of this survey are not revealed here. The survey is mentioned due to its role in the conversation with slashers that serves as the primarily data gathering method reported here.

Conversation

From January to February of 2008, nine slashers participated in the deliberative conversation about their experience with slash. The tenth slasher was myself. While it may seem that I bifurcated myself in this study, including myself as a participant is a recognition of my negotiating the emic/etic polarities -- I would be wrong in assuming objectivity by disavowing my status as a slasher, even if I am not as involved as the other slashers in the study. Including myself in the conversation did not mean that my answers overpowered the conversation, as I did not identify myself to the other slashers as a participant. Likewise, my answers did not predetermine my analysis of the study as I grounded my analysis in the actual answers of all participants.

The conversation occurred for the most part over email. One woman was interviewed as she was a local contact. All communiques were structured -- five questions served as the framework for the conversation. All participants were asked to email their answers to the five

⁶ I refer to the survey respondents only as slashers, as no question was included in the survey to determine their gender. While the majority of slashers are women, I prefer not to make this assumption, and only refer to my study's participants as women when I know that their biological sex is indeed female.

questions, and these answers were collected into a single document that contained only their answers -- no names were included. These questions were:

- 1) What in your mind is slash?
- 2) What originally led you to slash?
- 3) What leads you to continue to write or draw or read slash?
- 4) What in your mind is the internet's role in your experience with slash? What has the internet helped you do?
- 5) If you could say something to people who don't understand you as a slasher, what would you say?

The collected answers to these questions constituted Round 1 of the conversation.

In order to be a dialogic approach, the collection of answers for Round 1 could not be the termination of the study. All participants in Round 1 were given the database of collected answers from Round 1, as well as the answers collected in the survey, and asked to read these answers to make connections between others experiences with slash to their own. To promote this process of making connections, slashers were asked to answer four questions. These questions were:

- 1) What do you see in the answers that you agree with?
- 2) What do you see in the answers that you disagree with?
- 3) What do you see in the answers that is similar to your own experience?
- 4) What do you see in the answers that is dissimilar to your own experience?

Of the ten slashers who participated in Round 1, six participated in Round 2 (five slashers beside myself).

The analysis of the conversation considered the survey results and Rounds 1 and 2 equally -- all grounded coding was conducted over these databases in three passes. The first pass consisted of reading the answers to become familiar with the general points being made by the slashers, and this reading occurred as the answers were received and compiled into their respective databases. The second pass occurred after all databases were completed and provided the preliminary coding categories. Several days later, the databases were read for a third time to verify that the coding categories were mutually exclusive enough to be discussed separately. The resulting categories from this final pass are presented below.

Content of the Conversation

There are three main foci being reported here. The first focus is a continuation from previous interviews and survey -- namely, how slashers see their reasons for slashing. The

second focus is on the role of the internet in their slashing activities. The third focus is on how slashers would approach non-slashers in a dialogue to explain their activities.

How slashers see their enjoyment in slash

This first section refers to why slashers enjoy slash as a fan activity, regardless of the form of it or where it is located. This is the general interest in consuming or producing a homosexual relationship in place of a heterosexual relationship. The codes here reflect reasons why they started in this fan activity and what compels them to repeatedly engage in it. As has been shown in other research on why we do what we do, there are a myriad of reasons, and each individual slasher may have different reasons that change depending on the fandom and the particular work of slash (Green et al, 1998). Because of this, there are a number of reasons, most with subcategories, that are listed in Table 1 and discussed here as the main categories.

A common reason associated with why a person engages in any leisure activities, from hobbies to mediated entertainment, is that it helps the person in **escaping from daily life**. Often times this reason is given as the sole reason for such activity, but escapism can also be more complex, and probing this answer can yield more reasons as to why such escapism is needed (McQuail, Blumler, Brown, 1972). For the slashers in this conversation, escapism was mentioned as a way to cope with the stresses, or grind, associated with daily life, which may include an artistic escape for those who would otherwise not have one. This escapism may be furthered by a sense of slash as being beyond the norm as content and activity; from a consumption and production standpoint, the uncommonness of slash further removes it from the routines of daily life, making it easier for the slasher to forget the demands of life.

An unexpected reason, as it contradicts the conception many have of slash online and the formation of communities, was found in participants saying they enjoyed slash as a means of **experiencing something for oneself**. Slashers described enjoying the activity because it was personal, private, a solitary experience, one that doesn't have to be shared or done with family and friends. Here they are not discussing *having* to keep private about their slashing, but that they *want* to keep it private, a time to be alone to maintain the boundaries between self and other and thus not completely collapse the needs of the self into the demands of the other. This does not necessarily contradict the conception of online slash communities, as will be discussed below, as a person may sometimes wish for a solitary engagement with slash, and may at other times, for other reasons, engage with other slashers.

As slash typically involves romantic and sexual relationships, where depictions of sex can become very elaborate and even pornographic, many slashers reported how the consumption of slash can be **titillating and sexually gratifying**. This reason has been

mentioned and commented on by other slash researchers, as it is not commonly thought that women would be sexually aroused by depictions of homosexual acts (Salmon & Symons, 2003). Women who mention this reason for why they enjoy slash have said that if men can become aroused by depictions of lesbian sex, why can't women become aroused by gay sex? (Scodari, 2003) As one slasher commented:

Tara: *Geesh, men watch slash all the time. The female/female movies are everywhere. Why shouldn't us girls have the same fun watching guys?*

However, it is important to note that most portrayals of sexual acts in slash tend to be either static images, either art or comics, or text stories, such that the men are rarely *seen and heard* performing sexual acts. As discussed in other studies, there is also less identifying with the actions of sex and more with the underlying thoughts and feelings involved in sex (Salmon & Symons, 2003; Skuld, 2002). Regarding slash fanfic, what matters is not *what* is being portrayed in the sexual act but *how* the sexual act is being portrayed.

Indeed, the next two reasons are commonly theorized in slash research in how they relate to women's consumption of slash for sexual gratification. In the conversation, slashers said they enjoy **experiencing different sexuality**. As discussed in other studies (Skuld, 2002), this reason can refer to a woman's desire to experience sex as a man, assuming the socially sanctioned dominant male role initiating and controlling sex as well as considering the mechanics of male reproductive organs in a sexual act. However, in the conversation, slashers also mentioned how slash, like other fan products, can explore aspects of sex less commonly experienced in real life, such as sadomasochism or various sexual fantasies.

Related to the previous two reasons, the slashers mentioned **exploring relationships with beloved characters**, where the imagined relationships could range from identification to romantic and sexual attraction. Other studies have discussed how sexual acts between two men can be seen as enjoyable as the woman is not forced to identify with a woman in a more traditional submissive role; instead, the woman has the freedom to identify with either man in the sexual act, even if there remains a dominant/submissive dynamic in the act (Penley, 1992; Salmon & Symons, 2003; Scodari, 2003). While the slashers in this conversation did not so obviously reference this scholarly interpretation, they did mention that the absence of a woman also removes feelings of jealousy and threat, as well as giving homosexual fans representations of such characterizations that are infrequent in any canon. Additionally, the slashers refer to how the fan products can create characterizations that are more emotionally and mentally complex than how the characters appear in canon. These complexities make such characters appear more real, which allows for the people who are attracted to them to

justify their attraction in a society that continues to label people as odd who form parasocial attachments to people they cannot realistically know.

Continuing with the idea of parasocial interaction⁷ with the men they slash, the slashers mentioned how slash allows them to **further their engaging with beloved characters**. These engagements do not involve sexual gratification or romantic fantasies, but instead are a way of elaborating upon and perpetuating the enjoyment received from the fandom. Slashing can be seen as other fan activities where the fan attempts to wrestle control for their enjoyment away from the original producers, who largely control when and where original content for a fandom is doled out. The slashers discussed this reason as occurring through their desire to, in their slashing, give the characters something they perceive will make the characters happier -- to, in essence, give back to those creations the enjoyment they receive.

Another reason commonly studied comes from a critical perspective, seeing slash as inherently resistant to the patriarchy that structures how men and women are allowed to see themselves, particularly as sexual beings (Penley, 1992; Scodari, 2003). In the conversation, especially the survey, the slashers did indicate how slash is a means for **testing the boundaries of society**. This reason indicates recognition of the sociocultural expectations that shape how men act towards one another and how women and men act together, especially in sexual and romantic situations. In the conversation, this recognition does not inherently reflect the somewhat hostile resistance scholars depict. When it was mentioned, it was more hopeful, referencing slash's ability to show how things should and could be.

The final reason mentioned in the conversation reflects not slash as a portrayal of a homosexual relationship, but the act of creation required to depict the portrayal. Here slashers say the appeal comes from **appreciating the fanon**. Here is an aesthetic appreciation for what the fans have produced, treating and appraising the slash in ways similar to how the canon is appreciated. There is also a recognition of the challenge of producing slash, with the desire to stay close to canon and "in character", but also to build upon the interpretation of the perceived latent meaning -- to create the "missing scene" as if stepping into the role of the original creator. Much of the appreciation comes from standard art and literary criticisms, which is then coupled with the tension that the quality should be on the level of the canon, and add to the content of it.

How slashers see the internet

⁷ Parasocial interaction comes from the discussion by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe the level of attachment a media user feels towards a media personality, real or fictional, to the point where the media user comes to see this media personality as a friend or other more intimate connection.

The reasons in the previous section were focused on the enjoyment of the *content* in slash, whereas the reasons to be discussed in this section focus on what the *structure* of the internet provides these slashers. The internet as a medium is not judged separate from what it allows the slashers to do with it. As mentioned above, the role of the internet in this particular subset of fan activities has been the subject of various studies. The conversation with slashers revealed five main categories of how they see the internet as a facilitator in their enjoyment of slash.

Many of the slashers agreed that if it wasn't for the internet, they probably would not be aware of slash; in this way, the internet served as **introducer** to the activity and action. They agreed that it was the vast resources of the internet and its powerful search functions that led them to discover, even stumble upon, slash. A number of slashers said their first exposure to slash happened when they came upon some piece while actively pursuing or passively receiving other fan production, such as a mailing list for the anime Gundam Wing or reading online fan fiction for television show Babylon 5 or movie Star Wars. In this way, the internet for most slashers served as their introduction to this branch of fan activity. In an interpretive lifeworld imbued with the internet, this may be the internet's initial function, displacing the traditional print fan magazines in which slash first originated.

After the internet has facilitated this role as introducer, there are a number of other ways slashers say the internet has mediated or moderated their enjoyment of slash. As with the reasons for why they like slash, the ways in which the internet facilitates their activity do overlap, such that people cannot be easily compartmentalized as one having this reason all the time -- indeed some of the quotes clearly overlap. My discussion of the reasons here separates them only for conceptual clarity.

As has been studied across a variety of fields, including a focus on slash (Kustriz, 2003; Shave, 2004), the internet is seen by the slashers as a **connector**, connecting people to each other, fostering social interaction and the emergence of a community of slashers. The communities emerge around both the general enjoyment of slash and within the subset of fan activity around particular fandoms (such as Star Wars and Gundam Wing) and specific pairings (such as Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker, often referred to as Obi/Ani). Several slashers commented on how networking sites, such as LiveJournal, are principal in the formation and distribution of such targeted communities.

Sue: I love LiveJournal, I will never stop talking about how great LiveJournal is. Now you'll find that certain Journal websites are more tailored to certain groups. ... LJ is an amazing networking device because you can be members of multiple communities, you can see what other people are members of that community because you can read the community's friends page. ... LJ makes finding, producing, consuming, posting, spreading

out -- all sorts of access to slash, productive and consumptive, really, really easy. ... The internet has completely changed how we organize and go about sort of puzzling through fandom.

Because the internet provides the cyberspace for interaction with likeminded individuals, slashers are able to express an aspect of their self they may not otherwise express offline.

Mary: The internet has everything to do with slash, as far as I'm concerned. It is the only way I met other people who share the same interests in writing and fandom pairings. I don't let many people I know in my daily life into that secret.

It is perhaps this last aspect of online community engagement that receives the most attention, especially as slash is still perceived to be a deviant activity, even as fan activity overall slowly becomes more socially acceptable. How the online community provides for the slasher in terms of conceptions of self will be discussed in more length at the end of this section.

Before moving to the consideration of identity construction, slashers discussed other ways in which the internet facilitated their consumption and production of slash. Such views on the internet mirror work that has focused on fan fiction in general (Parrish, 2007) and shows how slash should not be considered as wholly unique in comparison to general patterns found in other fan activities.

In terms of consumption, the internet is seen not only has having introduced them to slash and slashers, but as the primary means by which they can further their enjoyment of experiencing what others have done. Slashers have done what they can, through their communities, to ensure that there is enough material out there to satisfy each other. Thus the internet serves a role of being **provider**.

Abby: Just about all of the fanfiction I have ever read is online, or was originally online. I make sure that my own work is available online and shows up on search engines.

Eve: Through the internet I've been able to connect with other people who like the same pairings I do, therefore I have an audience for my fics and have a selection of fics that I can read at my leisure.

The internet is seen as being a storehouse for a depth and breadth of material, and the technological structure of the internet means that this storehouse can be accessible from anywhere, at any time, in private, in ways that are faster and cheaper than had been previously available.

Jane: I agree that the internet is key to enjoying slash and that going to conventions is something I did in the past. It is also much cheaper, once you get past the initial cost of a computer

Ivy: Without the internet I would have never found [Star Wars] slash and would have no access to it. I am not a SW fan who goes to conventions or joins SW groups, so I would have no way of accessing fan fiction that is printed in zines or in other ways. I don't even know if I have any friends who are SW fans. It is really just a compartmentalized part of my life.

The internet's role in fostering this consumption occurs for all slashers, regardless the extent to which the slasher participates with an online community. For those slashers who at times only want to consume some new fanon, the internet is the medium of choice to gratify this desire.

For those slashers who are interested in also being producers of slash, the internet is seen as a way to improve their craft, skills specific for slashing or creating any art and literature. As a storehouse of products, the internet networking allows for fan producers to share their work, and in this sharing the slashers highlighted two ways in which they can improve their work. For some, simply being able to read each other's work, seeing what they do and how they do it, helps people learn how to produce their own slash and other creations not related to slash. For these individuals, at these times, the internet serves as an **instructor**.

Mary: For me, the internet's role in my slash experience was to make me a MUCH better writer. I started writing these fanfics when I was 14, so they were clumsy and very vague on details. Reading other authors' works helped me to get a better grasp on what worked and what did not, pushed me into trying my hand at writing my first explicit scene.

Also, slashers mentioned the importance of getting feedback in the form of reviews and constructive criticism.

Mary: Internet sites -- starting with FanFiction.net which in turn led me to LiveJournal -- are the best places to meet fellow authors and fans of slash, make friends who you can bounce ideas off of or get a second opinion on a story. And, of course, garner reviews which are the best thing to inspire more writing.

While some reviews and discussions over a fan product can be negative, those in the conversation highlighted how oftentimes the feedback is very positive and encouraging, and that any problems with the product are handled in respectful ways. In this way, the cyberspaces of the internet provide slashers with fertile grounds in which to improve their creative skills, allowing them to explore and strengthen their identities as producers (Parrish, 2007).

It is this question of identity -- from exploration to construction -- that is also of great interest to many who study the internet (for example, McKenna & Bargh, 1998; Turkle, 1995; Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). Oftentimes this discussion in academia centers around people using the anonymity structured into the internet as a means by which to play with and explore facets of their identity that they could not in reality, and is often tied into the discussion of heterotopias outlined above. Exemplifying the split between fans and academics, this discussion did not overtly surface in the conversation.

Instead, slashers discussed other aspects that can be related to issues of identity. Slashers discussed slash and sexuality, in terms of how their engagement with slash involved some learning about their own sexuality. Given the central role of the internet in providing people with access to slash, by extension slash can facilitate this gathering of ideas about one's self as a sexual being. In a way, then, the internet serves the role of **experimenter**.

Pam: I don't know why, but I get excited reading about two men having sex. Whenever I would read slash when I was younger I would get a funny feeling, that later translated into sexuality. (Sorry if I'm weirding you out with this).

Lara: The internet is my only source for slash, so its role is essential. Through reading slash on the internet, I've expanded my sexual horizons, learned a lot...

Eve: I agree that being adult is enjoying sex, that branching out of reading gen only or het only is mindstretching, and that unless one works in a hospital, one sees little male/male touching, and in a hospital the touching is dispassionate.

This aspect of identity exploration correlates with the discussion in the previous section as to the slasher's parasocial interaction, free identification with the male characters, and the testing of society's limitations. The focus is on the slasher's sense of gender as a social construction -- what is expected of a person's sexual behavior as dependent upon their biological sex. It may not mean that the slasher will explore bisexuality or homosexuality in relation to their slashing; but it does appear related to an expansion of egalitarianism when it comes to the sexuality of others, which may impact how they interact with people of various sexual orientations.

While some slashers discussed their self-learnings regarding sexuality, other slashers commented upon what has already been mentioned -- their active separation of their online and offline selves. As other quotes have indicated, some slashers have no real desire to identify themselves as such to people they do not know to be slashers.

Ivy: My interest in slash is not known to any other persons who know me personally, including my husband. It is just a part of my life that I choose to keep entirely personal. I guess in part because I have no desire to explain myself.

Mary: ...I don't tend to let people who wouldn't understand me as a slasher know that I slash...

Sue: There is, admittedly, also the allure of reading and writing something that is the utter antithesis the ordinary day-to-day routine, and having this completely separate facet of my personality that very few of my non-internet friends know about.

However, in these discussions, it didn't appear that all slashers are embarrassed or humiliated about their enjoyment of slash. In fact, in response to a comment about slashers needing to overcome the stigma of being odd, one wrote: "I have always felt odd, and so this did not trouble me." Perhaps keeping this aspect of oneself private reflects the reason for enjoyment discussed in the previous section.

However, based on the comments of other slashers, it may likewise be that they just do not want to broach the subject of trying to explain their enjoyment to people who do not know slash. The challenge of explaining oneself may be daunting when it requires considerable and even imbalanced communication to create a basic understanding that can counter initial barriers

to listening. Bifurcating oneself can be seen as both a nonchalance and a trepidation in the face of how others would respond to an interest in "two boys bonking".

How slashers want others to see slash

It is this last point, about how to act in the face of people who do not understand you, that served to bring the conversation to a close. As slash is receiving more academic and public attention and scrutiny, slashers have been sought to give their opinions on what they do and why they do it. Rarely have they been asked how they would address non-slashers and those who either don't understand their passion for slash or in some way see it as immoral and deviant. As the goal of this study was a conversation with slashers, it is also hoped that relaying the thoughts of slashers would help the larger conversation between the insiders and the outsiders.

To that end, when asked what they would say to people who don't understand them as a slasher, those in the conversation mentioned a number of key themes to structure such a dialogue. What is interesting to note is how these key themes reflect the reasons why slashers enjoy this fan activity. The underlying idea from this part of the conversation is that forming a dialogue to foster understanding and tolerance is best accomplished by basing it on what a person does rather than what a person is.

Importance of slasher community. The first theme centers on the slashers creation of communities, as discussed in the previous section, which allow them to connect with people who share their interest.

Mary: Slash provides an outlet for creativity for me, in a community that is friendly, open, and accepting of anyone.

Many of the slashers engage in the production of imagery or literature to exhibit their creative abilities. Exhibiting oneself in this way can be tenuous, as one may receive criticism that can cut deep to how one imagines oneself. This is particularly true if your creative expression of your inner passions involves a subject matter that is considered deviant or taboo by a majority of people (McKenna & Bargh, 2008). Because of these trepidations, slashers will frequently discuss the importance of the community of like-minded individuals they can share their thoughts and products with as a reason for why others should understand them; it is, after all, a common desire for most humans, to find somewhere one belongs (Jenkins, 1992a).

Reverence towards canon. While slashers acknowledge that some people are critical of slash due to how slashers treat canon, as canon may be considered sacred to some (Jenkins, 1992a), slashers also point out their production and consumption is simply another way of engaging with beloved characters.

Sue: Slash is not just about people writing something for getting off -- it is a type of involvement with the character's psychology and history, with their relationships.

Beth: It gives me a different way of seeing characters I like. Like trying on a new outfit for them. Some fit better than others, but they are all interesting to see. ...all I want to do is tell people about this and try to get them to see it not as aberrant but as an interesting way to play with these things we are given in the media.

Here again is raised the concept of parasocial interaction, which itself may be seen as a deviant activity that could lead to dangerous fanaticism (Jenkins, 1992a). However, engagement with fictional characters is a common activity, from childhood to adulthood, and can also be seen in how people engage with individuals they only know through the media, from journalists to politicians to sports figures.

Slash, as an activity, can be seen as a more involved and involving sort of engagement. It requires a certain type of active interpretation and production and/or consumption activities -- anyone that involved in the canon must be doing so for a reason. Indeed, several slashers commented on how it is their way of paying homage and showing respect to the canon they love.

Abby: We slash what we love, not what we hate. We are magnifying and celebrating our subject matter -- iconic characters.

Beth: Slash is just another way of fans expressing their love of the characters, and another way to show the people who made these canon that we really appreciate what their creation has brought to our lives. That we don't mean any disrespect when we treat your characters in ways you didn't intend, or that society may look down upon -- we just want our favorite people to be happy.

This last comment seems directed to those who may consider their creations of slash as a distortion of the canon and what the original producers intended. In this way, it also speaks to the "looseness" of meaning, as has been discussed in reception studies since the interpretive turn began (Holub, 1984). As one slasher pointed out, what this dialogue may need to address is the chasm between those who see the "author-as-meaning-maker" and those who see the "audience-as-meaning-maker" -- with perhaps an understanding of the need to see the interaction of text/audience as the focal point for meaning-making.

Creating, extending love. Related to the theme of engaging with beloved characters and canons, several slashers focused on the idea of love. To them, slash is a way of writing romances and nurturing love for those characters they feel need or deserve it but are not given it, either in the canon or by the normative values of society (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Cicioni, 1998). One slasher pointed out the oft-mistaken assumption that slash is just gay pornography is erroneous, saying the focus is more on creating loving relationships.

Eve: *Slash is not about writing gay sex scenes or making straight guys/girls gay. It's about shipping two characters that feel to you, as the author, are the perfect match for each other.*

Indeed, some slashers reflected upon the nature of our sociocultural environment's restrictions where men in particular are constrained in their ways of showing affection for each other. There is an affectionate utopia glimpsed in these thoughts.

Beth: *What a nicer world this place would be if we would stop meddling in people's love lives and just let them love whomever they wish.*

Abby: *...[male/male pairings] are lovely, but so is all loving coupling, in theory if not in practice. Perhaps fanfiction is where we can make a difference in this.*

Statements like this one reflect other slashers' desires for a world that does not exist, but one they hope could exist. Indeed, several slashers commented on how it would be nice if their slashing activities could in some way foster such a change, while also recognizing the impossibility that slash could have such a profound impact.

Fostering tolerance for diversity. However, while some slashers would like to see a sociocultural change, perhaps associated with the distribution of slash, many others recognized the need to focus on the idea that each person has his or her own tastes. The idea of pluralistic tastes is increasingly common to societies that adopt a postmodern outlook on human interaction, and is a source of both consternation and optimism. Here the slashers focus on individual differences in what interests people, including sexually, hoping to foster acceptance for this pluralism.

Lara: *It's all about what interests you or what turns you on. However, when people ask me why I like it, I just say that if one guy is hot, two guys is even hotter.*

Sue: *I would say that the best way to deal with slash and slashers is to remember that not everybody shares your tastes and you're not going to share everybody else's. And there is a need for a sort of all inclusiveness.*

They stress the importance of personal choice as an expression of having a right to privacy.

Pam: *What a person does -- or reads -- behind closed doors isn't important.*

Jane: *I agree that what goes on behind closed doors is in one's solipsistic universe.*

Perhaps this final theme can be seen as both the end-all and the be-all for how slashers approach others. Until there is a point where slash is no longer seen as deviant, slashers need to stress the importance that as long as they are not hurting anyone, that they should be left in peace to engage in activities that bring them pleasure. At the same time, the basic value of this theme would remain should the affectionate utopia and all-understanding society be achieved. A benevolent acceptance of pluralism may provide the best foundation for a dialogue to generate understanding and tolerance. The question remains, how to create such a benevolent

acceptance, as the logic between the two is exceedingly circular, as both must preexist for the other to occur.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was not simply a primer on slash, nor a discussion on the internet in modern fan activities. Both of these aspects were discussed, and the coverage of them were necessary as a means to showcase my desire to outline a preliminary understanding of a research methodology I feel is necessary for studying this phenomenon, in particular, and reception studies in general. Approaching a field of study and the people who inhabit and embody it through dialogue is beneficial for all parties involved in the study. The negotiation of emic and etic positions requires the researcher to be self-reflexive and humble towards the phenomenon and field of study. The depth of information gathered helps the researcher to understand and ultimately to communicate this understanding. The distribution of power helps the researchee to feel integral rather than objectified. Through this method of iterative turns, engaging in a conversation with fellow slashers, a richer understanding about how they see themselves, their communities, and non-slashers was obtained. This richer understanding can then be used to further the conversation with non-slashers.

Slashers and the internet

The main phenomenon under scrutiny in this paper was slash, with a focus on identity. However, the structure of the dialogic approach did not force this focus into the spotlight, as slashers were allowed to be more spontaneous in what they discussed in the conversation. As such, the three sections about the conversation did not contain focused analyses of identity construction; instead, an understanding of identity construction from the slashers' interpretive stances can be found through a process of abstraction, again in keeping with grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In doing this, we can see the various reasons for enjoying slash, in general and online, as different ways of experimenting with identity, concepts of who one is and how one engages with others based on this self-concept. Slashers discussed finding themselves through private online experiences with slash, such as engaging with certain characters in preferable ways, or within a community of likeminded individuals, whether or not it allows the individual to push back against society's forces of normalization.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the comparison of the self to others, whether it be media products or actual people, serves as a tool for constructing a sense of who one is and what is one's place in society (Blumler, 1969). The individual sees what is out there as the

potential, compares it with what one personally feels is important, and from this interaction develops a sense of how to proceed. From a social constructionism perspective, negotiating the boundaries of "reality" with a community can provide the same type of information an individual would need to construct her sense of self (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As reality is constructed by the interactions of similarly-minded people, the individual can develop a sense on what is allowable and modify her behaviors -- from thoughts and feelings to observable actions -- in accordance with the constructed reality. In the case of slash online, it also means that individuals who are not content with the reality constructed offline can produce an online reality more inline with their personal desires.

Thus slash online focuses on a concept of identity driven by personal needs and desires -- the internet allows the individual to find what it is they want, slash, which allows them to inform and reinforce an ideal self that may be less nurtured in their offline dealings with others. In other words, this identity construction is based on personal choice driving activities that are based on one's desires, which the internet can fuel by providing the materials for these activities as well as the individuals, who in their sharing of these activities, can reify the individual's activities as rational, important, and non-deviant.

In this way, one's self-concept design is not given to us by instruction but continually negotiated through imagination. The slashers' perception of their activity as being an aberration may lead some to not communicate their identity offline, but then this is only part of their overall sense of self and other parts can be built and reinforced through online interaction. Such a conceptualization of the internet's role in identity construction can be applied to many other online activities, for those who perceive themselves in the minority offline due to their personal choices as well as those who maybe in the majority, which would be reflected in online content and communities.

Additionally, this approach also appears to be highly agentic, given the focus on personal choice driving information gathering for identity construction. However, we must also recognize the limiting structures that are inherent in all aspects of this formulation. The larger structures of society and culture are considerably discussed, as in slashers' recognition of the limitations on gender and sexuality. However, there are also structures in the internet that can impact the identity construction process. While the internet can foster the access and variety of slash available to those in the conversation, there may be also men and women who would be interested in this material but do not have the access to the technology. Even those with access to all aspects of the internet may be faced with the structuring of communities as they set up their own boundaries for what constitutes insider status -- failure to meet such requirements

could result in feelings of ostracism and incomplete identity construction. There is a balance between the individual pursuing their personal choices and the structures which provide the information to satisfy such perusals.

The construction of the dialogue

Methodologically, the focus of this paper has been on the construction of a conversation to involve slashers in a way that other research approaches have not. Indeed, the conversation as presented here is not terminal. I sent to all conversants an early draft of this paper; the reaction from them was positive in how I represented them and their identity as slashers, as Lara discussed in an email I received December, 3, 2008:

This was a fantastic paper. You explained slash superbly and integrated your research with us very logically. You were sensitive to the subject and its fans, as well as scholarly and objective in your analysis. I think the combination of emic and etic served you well in this instance. As for the methodology, I believe you achieved everything you wanted to achieve. I can tell you that as a researchee, I felt empowered and I enjoyed the dialogue (even though I only participated in half of it). It's a great way to get honest answers out of people. You being a slasher yourself made you more relatable. I thank you for that.

I would also like to expand upon the themes discussed in the last section of my analysis as a means to build a dialogue between slashers and non-slashers, those in the public and the academy.

The participants have already provided a solid start for the construction of a larger dialogue by providing key themes we could use to elicit communications from non-slashers. To produce a dialogue between slashers and non-slashers, a value-free communication space needs to be constructed before the initiation of a dialogue and represented as one where the free-flow of ideas is encouraged without pressure to conform to some expectation for communication behavior (Reinhard, 2007). These themes could then be used to elicit responses on both sides of the slash divide. In a deliberative fashion, those responses could be used for prompt more responses, and so on, with the hope that circling this divide through a number of iterative passes would ultimately result in the narrowing or disappearance of the divide -- at least in terms of understanding.

Indeed, the representations of slashers as gathered in this paper, using their interpretive stance to empower them, serves as another possible location around which to structure such a dialogue. To ethically research and thoroughly understand a minority population, one must represent them as they see themselves and as I see them -- negotiating this balance of emic and etic perspectives. The internet as a research tool greatly helped with this practice as it facilitates both unobtrusive observation and dialogic conversation. In this sense, the internet has changed my identity of a researcher, allowing me to construct how I conduct research in

ways previously unknown. Hopefully the internet can also serve as the foundation to construct cybertopias of dialogue, where the shackles of sociocultural norms on how we are expected to communicate can evaporate in ways similar to the online spaces slashers have created for themselves.

As a researcher who desires to increase understanding and tolerance for the pluralities of post-modern lives, the results of this study are encouraging. As a researcher and a fan of slash, I am heartened by the active engagement and excitement generated by the participants, as many are interested in furthering this conversation amongst us and others. As a slasher, I hope I have done justice by my "slasher buddies" in representing who they are to all of you.

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Table 1. Main and subcategories of reasons why slashers enjoy slash

Main category	Subcategory	Illustrative Quotes
Escaping from daily life	N/A	"I needed an artistic escape from the grind of real life." "Slash is the total removal of reality from my day to day goings on that lets me escape from the grind."
Experiencing something for oneself	N/A	"There is, admittedly, also the allure of reading and writing something that is the utter antithesis to the ordinary day-to-day routine, and having this completely separate facet of my personality that very few of my non-internet friends know about." "My interest in slash is not known to any other persons who know me personally, including my husband. It is just a part of my life that I choose to keep entirely personal. I guess in part because I have no desire to explain myself."
Titillating, sexually gratifying	N/A	"Catharsis, for I haven't had sex in some time." "Honestly, there is also a pure sexual component. Reading about two hot characters being together is a turn on for me." "A means of achieving sexual gratification via characters with whom you already have a strong visual sense of their physical attributes and with whom you already have an established emotional connection or understanding, thus distinguishing it from other forms of erotica."
Experiencing different sexuality	N/A	"...because I'm curious, I don't have those parts, I don't know how they work, this is fun and interesting and new and strange..." "Allows a reader/author to experience things that may be too dangerous in real life."
Exploring relationships with beloved character(s)	No women means no competition, jealousy	"Slash provides a relationship where you feel little or no competition. No female to feel aggressive towards. It's almost as if the characters are both yours -- but for myself, the lack of a female means I don't get territorial. Or annoyed." "I guess, subconsciously, every girl feels a little jealous because it is someone else (even if fictional) who gets to have that guy she likes (even if fictional)."
	Easier to identify with/relate to	"The characters I write/read about are not interested in women, therefore they are not interested in me, therefore they are not a threat to me, and I feel comfortable identifying with them." "Not enough gay characters in SF [Science Fiction] and fantasy for me to read about."
	See character more real, complex	"To me, slash allows me to view the character/person as a real person, not just one I view on TV/in a book." "The characters seem far more real and thought out, and I also think that slash actually tends to show, depending on the author, more of a plot and emotional feel than a lot of het."

Main category	Subcategory	Illustrative Quotes
Further engaging with beloved characters	Expressing emotional investment	"...you feel so much for them that you just want them to be happy, and if slashing them together would make them happy then don't you have like an obligation to do that?" "When one is invested in characters and stories as much as I am, it's quite moving to see them express themselves in a loving way."
	Exploring relationships between characters	"Slash intrigues the mind by exploring possible relationships between leading male characters." "Slash allows for the belief/knowledge that, at least in fandom, our favorite characters are being taken care of -- they have found someone to love."
Testing the boundaries of society	Explore non-traditional gender roles, norms	"I think slash is important in our ability to accept the changing society of today, and to accept others as how they are rather than how people perceive they should be." "Slash is often a way of examining possibilities that could exist if the stereotypical limits of the concept of morality did not exist to prevent more intimate interaction between certain characters..."
	Being hopeful of what could be	"...because you can't help but wonder at how things would be better if men were just able to act like we slash them to act." "Reading and writing smut has no other end. Though it would be nice to broaden ethical horizons and sow the seeds of world peace with it."
Appreciating the fanon	Marveling on text's quality	"I think slash authors do a good job often, of developing characters and exploring issues with them." "Slash fiction is more likely to be willing to deal with emotional themes than het/gen fiction. Not sure why, but the writing quality also seems to be better."
	Challenge of making close-to-canon slash	"However, what always intrigued me was the challenge of writing slash. The difficulty of finding a moment of connection between two characters in canon that is not explicit, and being able to take that interpretation and spin it out into something convincing and, hopefully, entertaining." "It's usually very hard to stay canon tight while writing slash but that's part of the fun, to see how your vision of the character fits with what you are given to work with in canon." "And I get a kick out of hewing as close to the canon as possible, the whole 'missing scene' trope."

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