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# **Expressions in Fan Culture**

*Cosplay, Fan Art, Fan Fiction*

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## Abstract

This composition is a BA thesis for Japanese Language and Culture at the University of Iceland. In this essay, I will give the reader a little insight into the world of fan culture and will be focusing on how fans express themselves. Fans get inspired by books, movies and television programmes to create all kinds of fan work; whether it is fan fiction, fan art, doujinshi, cosplay, or any other creations. Furthermore, the thesis will explore fan culture as it presents itself in Japan and compare it to fan culture in Europe and the USA. I will discuss the effect these creations, although mainly fan fiction, has on authors of popular media and on social media and how the Internet has made it easier for fans all over the world to connect, as well as for fans and creators to connect.

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## Introduction

Fans can be found everywhere. Sports fans who wear clothes based on their favourite team and music fans that collect every album released by their favourite artist. But what is a fan? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary a fan is: “an enthusiastic devotee, as of a sport or a performing art, usually as a spectator, or an ardent admirer or enthusiast, as of a celebrity or a pursuit, such as science fiction fans. (Merriam-Webster, 2017). In other words, and in the context of this thesis, a group of people who like the same fictional universe.

When fans interact with each other and create a community involving their interests, they call it Fandom. That term will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, some fans go one or more steps further into the fan culture than others. These fans are often focused on literature, films, video games or television programs. Often, these individuals are associated with geek or nerd culture.

With modern technology, the world is more connected than ever before and it is easier to reach out to people with similar hobbies and interests. This is especially convenient for fans because they can easily connect, share, and discuss their fandoms. It also becomes a way to share and create art and stories, based on these fandoms.

In a recent news article, Elizabeth Flaum, a hard-core fan, explains this when she talks about how she found and became involved with fan culture. When she discovered the TV show *Doctor Who* her life changed considerably.<sup>1</sup> She found herself so attracted to the show that all her hobbies started to centre upon it. Unlike

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<sup>1</sup> A popular British science fiction television series featuring an extraterrestrial being, known to Earthlings as Doctor Who, who travels through time and space in a space ship called TARDIS, fighting evil and/or troubled beings in order to save people and even whole civilisations. This programme has been in production since 1963.

before, when she knew nothing of this particular TV show, she was now suddenly fangirling over fictional characters.<sup>2</sup>

This is something that many fans relate to as having had similar experiences when they began to express their fan culture with fandoms. It is not enough for them to watch the show or read the books, they crave something more.

There is often the assumption that fans are passive receivers, just being spoon-fed with what authors of popular media have to offer, but nothing could be further from the truth. In his article, “Folklore Studies and Popular Film and Television: A Necessary Critical Survey”, where he studies fan culture, among other things, Mikel J. Koven quotes Peter Narváez who says:

Fans engage in complex manipulations of mass mediated culture for purposes of status and communication. . . . There are those who display or present signs of favorite performers, and the simulated performances of those entertainers, out of emotional involvement and love, hoping to convert their peers to fandom or at least an appreciation of meaningful cultural events. In communicating and appreciating similar popular performances friendship networks and cultural scenes develop and are reinforced in multifarious domestic and public contexts (Koven, 2003, p. 188).

And as Flaum puts it: “Something about being a fan drives people to make things. When they love something, they want to make more of it, to make different versions of it, to make it better.” (Flaum, 2014). Even though there are many ways for fans to express their love for fictional characters, it was fan fiction, or when fans write stories based on their fandoms that was especially fascinating to me. As someone who also

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<sup>2</sup> Fangirling is when a fangirl expresses herself about her fandoms in an overexcited way, reading and writing fan fiction and making costumes based on characters from the show.

considers themselves as a member of several fandoms, I had read many fan fictions on the Internet but I wanted to explore it even further.

In Japan, the main fandoms revolve around manga and anime. In fact, it almost has the same popularity as novels and films (Schodt, 1996, p. 19). When I was living in Japan in 2016, I often saw fan-made comics being sold in book stores. These comics were made by amateur artists and were of variable quality, from the very basic to highly intricate. Never before had I seen fan fiction being presented in such a socially acceptable way or even respected in public like that, I had only seen it published on the Internet. Furthermore, when I attended *JumpFesta* in 2016, I also saw what I perceived to be many differences in comparison to corresponding conventions I had previously attended in Sweden and Iceland.<sup>3</sup> Neither was it comparable to documentation I had witnessed from large gatherings and conventions such as Chicago Comic Con. For example, I often saw that more space is reserved to accommodate fan-made comics at the conventions.

Fandoms tend to have very specific rules within the communities and these greatly differ between countries. I noticed that in Japan, fans have other rules when it comes to cosplay than I was used to at conventions in Europe. In Japan, cosplayers will refrain from wearing cosplay around publicly, as it may shock other people and is considered disrespectful. When going to a convention, the fans will carry their cosplay with them in suitcases as there are dressing rooms at the convention, separately for male and female cosplayers (personal communication, February 20th, 2017), whereas in Europe and in the USA, these rules are more relaxed.

I found this cultural difference to be very intriguing and it made me wonder about the different experiences fans from diverse cultures have in fan culture and

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<sup>3</sup> A fan convention in Japan dedicated to the popular manga series issued in the manga magazine *Shonen Jump*.

whether they led to any other differences. Furthermore, when it comes to fan culture you can see that it is made up of many things, creating fan works just being one of them. There is a place for everyone to express themselves the way they feel comfortable with and are skilled at, writing a fan fiction or drawing fan art being just examples of the many ways they have to convey their fantasies and share their imagination with fellow fans.

Thus, the question arises; does writing fan fiction and belonging to a fan community serve a function? How does writing a story based on a fiction that already exists, help fans to connect with each other and express their love for movies or TV series? Furthermore, what are the greatest differences between European/US fan fiction communities and the Japanese ones and how are these expressed? In order to answer these questions, we must first delve into the history and development of fan culture.

## What is Fan Culture

Before engaging in exploring what fan fiction is and how it works, it is necessary to further define fan culture and subsequent communities.

Pop culture is a big part of modern society and whether people actively realise it, it has had a significant impact on the daily lives of those constantly exposed. This applies not only to die-hard fandom members but also casual audience because pop culture can be found permeating all of society. Disney characters and Superheroes such as *Micky Mouse* and *Batman* have been around for such a long time, have become iconic and can be found from the highest level of government, to the average kindergarten.

However, when it comes to pop culture, a community where people share the same interests in popular media, such as television and movies, some people are more expert in it than others. People with the interest and knowledge for the same movies, TV series and even video games have a tendency to create communities based on this common dedication and manufacture a space where they can discuss and express their love for their fandom.

What differentiates between the fandom perception of pop culture and the average viewers is that fans do not only view it as temporary entertainment but get inspired by it and feel the urge to create more by adding their twists and turns as well as their own universes.

Where pop culture is concerned, general media perception has through the years been negative, where fans seem to be criticised and often have a bad reputation in the media. However, there has been a considerable change in recent years, although the common perception is still to some extent that they are considered crazy. Perhaps the perception that collecting toys is infantile is partly to blame. However, those are

only public stereotypes and what goes on inside the fandom community is so much more than childish games (de Kloet and van Zoonen, 2007, p. 322).

Fans feel like there is so much more you can do with a story and when writing a fan fiction or drawing fan art, fans add possibilities that could have been written or drawn, what they feel is missing from it. For example, characters could have another sexuality, different skin colour or even disabilities. These are things that the media isn't always offering and people want a story they can relate to (personal communication, March 24, 2017).

### **What is a fandom?**

As previously mentioned, a fandom is a group of people that are very interested in a certain popular medium. Furthermore, being a member of a fandom can give people the feeling of being a part of something important. Some people, and particularly teenagers who have a tough time to fit into society, might find a safe haven within fan communities.

Usually, fans do not consider themselves a part of only one fandom, but of several fandoms. However, to fans, fandoms are only the fictional universes that they cherish the most and the community revolving around them. It is the communities they choose to actively be involved with, as they feel an emotional connection to that universe. Therefore, people can be a fan of and enjoy a medium but not consider themselves a part of that fandom.

In the community, fans will create a name that they refer to when talking about each fandom. For example, many people are familiar with *Trekkies*, a term used for *Star Trek* fans.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, a *Trekkie* could also find themselves to be a *Sherlockian*; a

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<sup>4</sup> *Star Trek* is a science fiction television series about Captain Kirk and his team of space travelers that dedicate their lives to exploring planets and life in space. The original series first aired in 1966, but since then many additional series, and some films as well, have been released.

fan of Sherlock Holmes<sup>5</sup>, a *Whoian*; a fan of Doctor Who, or even a *Potter-head*; a Harry Potter fan.<sup>6</sup> Fans usually use a specific wordplay in making a name for a fandom, something that indicates that they are a part of a community, while it is something that is related to each fandom as seen in previous examples.

Seeing as this is a great part of their hobbies, fans usually bring their fandoms into their homes by using fandom related things to decorate their surroundings. Having the fandom merchandise in their surroundings at home is important for devoted fans. "The form of the objects is not as important as their material presence in the environment. Buttons, which may be a part of dress at a convention, often are arranged as display items." (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 76).

Some fans, however, are more obsessed than others and tend to include what the society considers too much fan merchandise into their space, which is most likely one of the reasons they are often referred to as crazy. However, fans do not let the society's expectation of how homes should be decorated bring them down.

Fans must often defend themselves from ridicule and outside pressure to change their decorating habits. Much fan humour revolves around the shock of outsiders and the amazement of the neophytes at the fan room. The women in the fanzine community withstand the ridicule and resist the pressure from outsiders, family members and nonfan friends, because their material display creates a space identifiable with other like spaces in the community. In these spaces participants feel safe to give free rein to their cultural identities in the fan writing community (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p.77).

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<sup>5</sup> Sherlock Holmes is probably the most famous detective of all time, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Potter is the protagonist in seven novels written by J.K. Rowling. These novels take place in England in our times and tell the story of the boy who survived the death curse. All seven novels have been made into films.

Another way fans show and express their interest is for example how they choose to dress. Many members of the fan community buy and wear T-shirts and badges with a picture or a text that refers to their fandom. (Bacon-Smith, p.163). In Japan, fans often collect badges of their favourite anime character and put them on bags especially designed for that purpose as they have plastic covering the bag, and therefore protecting the badges.

Within the fandom community there are many ways fans can express their admiration, furthermore there are sub-communities inside the fan community, for example fan fiction community and cosplay community.

One of the first television shows that had academic articles written about it was *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*<sup>7</sup>, with *Harry Potter* in the second place. The show has inspired many writers, considering all the novels, novelization and many books that have been written about the show. Furthermore, the show has a very active online community that has also inspired other fandoms to make online chatrooms and forums (Adams, 2003, p. 4). However, according to a recent news article from *The Mercury News*, when it comes to fan fiction, the most popular series is *Harry Potter* with 627,208 works of fiction on *fanfiction.net*; a popular website where fans can upload their fiction, therefore way in the lead as the second most popular is *Twilight*<sup>8</sup> with only 206,126 fan-made stories. (Hill, 2016).

When people get involved in fan culture, they will eventually learn that there are terms and slangs that are used within the community, the most common is using letters like AU for Alternate Universe.

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<sup>7</sup> Buffy the Vampire Slayer is an American television series created by Josh Weadon that aired from 1997-2003. The story revolves around a girl who fights vampires and demons while she also has to deal with her normal teenage life.

<sup>8</sup> A romantic fantasy book series by Stephine Meyer about a girl that falls in love with a Vampire and the troubles she has to go through because of it. The first book was published in 2006; all three novels have been made into films.

There are other terms used by the fan community, such as, for example when something is canon it means that a situation or ideas are confirmed to be true in the TV show. However, if the fans make up something that majority of the fandom agrees on being a possibility is it called *fanon* or sometimes *head-canon* (Bacon-Smith, 1992).

### **Cosplay**

Another form of expression that is popular is cosplay, or when fans dress up as fictional characters. Even though cosplay is often believed to be a recent phenomenon, it has been around for centuries. Most people may know it from the anime and manga fandom; that is Japanese animation and comics, as Japanese fans have been extremely dedicated to it. Furthermore, it is also often considered to have originated from Japan. The first cosplay was however in 1939, when the first science fiction convention was held and that was also the first time a fan showed up in a costume based on visual media. It was a costume from the Wells film *Things to Come* (Bacon-Smith, 1992). When Takahashi Nobuyuki, founder of the anime study Studio Hard, attended the science fiction WorldCon in Los Angeles in 1984, he became interested in the costumes the sci-fi fans were wearing and then introduced the idea to Japanese fans. It was him that came up with the term we know today and called it cosplay or *kosupure*, a combination of the words costume and play (Winge, 2006; Caffrey, 2015).

Cosplay can be bought in stores but most cosplayers try to make the cosplay themselves. There are cosplay competitions and the best made cosplay wins. It is common to see cosplayers at conventions but many cosplayers also wear their costumes to take photos to share their creations with the community. When cosplay

was brought to Japan, Japanese fans mixed it into their own fan culture, which resulted in it to become even more popular as well as more eye capturing.

### **Internet, community and connections**

Joining fan clubs and going to conventions is a fantastic way for fans to meet people that have similar interests and are as devoted to their favourite genre or medium as they are.

Since the first science fiction convention, many other fan communities have been inspired to host conventions all around the world.

Most participants at a convention wear some sign of their participation, buttons with quotes or aphorism on them, T- shirts with pictures or verbal messages, identifiable items like idics (the symbol for universal tolerance) that refers back to the source product, while others wear full costumes as clothing (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 74).

Because conventions are not held in every country, and some countries hold them more frequently than others, some people may travel for the purpose of attending a convention. Thus, because of that the Internet becomes really important for fans to interact with other fans. On the Internet, there are many websites dedicated to the fandom community. There are boards and forums where people meet and discuss the show, their friendship and interests, not to mention blogs and chatrooms (Adams, 2003, p. 6). Thus, the Internet has made a significant impact on fan culture, making it more visible, not to mention accessible to everyone.

Furthermore, because of the Internet, writers of popular TV shows and such are now so much more connected to the fans. With social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and even Snapchat, fans and the artists are now much more able to interact and the artists can get instant feedback from the fans.

The creators of popular media know about the fans and the fan fiction and sometimes they include that element in the show. The representation of the fans in TV shows and movies are often hard-core fans of the main characters in the show, trying to impress them. In a popular series, *Supernatural*, fanboys and fangirls are often included.<sup>9</sup> Sam and Dean, the main characters in the show find out that there is a TV show about them and they have fans in the show. Based on how they have fans here in the real world, moreover Sam and Dean are also fans of popular culture as well (Cherry, 2011, p. 207).

On the other hand, fans are not always happy about how they are represented in the show, as they are not all crazy and obsessive fans and sometimes find the fan character rather ridiculous and annoying (Cherry, 2011, p. 214). Fandoms bring people with similar interests together and many fans have told stories about how they met their friends or even their significant others through an Internet chat and forums or at a convention (Cherry, 2011, p. 208).

In a recent interview with a couple who met in an Internet chatroom for fans of the popular manga series, *One Piece*, they say that people are drawn to people with similar interests and despite living in different countries, it doesn't affect the love they have for each other. The two of them often travel to each other's countries and cosplay together (personal communication, March 24, 2017).

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<sup>9</sup> A television series about two brothers who follow in their father's footsteps as hunters who fight supernatural beings, often demons or monsters. The show was created in 2005.

## What is Fan fiction

Throughout history, people have always been fans of various things like music and theatre for example. Historical and religious art based on royalty and religious figures was a common element in Renaissance paintings. Moreover, the Japanese Ukiyo-e paintings were often based on popular Kabuki actors and celebrities. Art has always played a big part in every culture and in modern days it is not so much different. Contemporary art and fiction is accessible through social media and it has become easier for anyone with Internet connection to share and view art. In the 1960s when television and movies were becoming more and more popular, especially science-fiction, an interesting phenomenon started to be more visible. Fan fiction first started to get popular when female science-fiction fans got their fan writings featured in fanzines. In the 1960s, the television show *Star Trek*, about space explorers who “boldly go where no one has gone before” made science-fiction very popular. This was art and fiction made by fans for fans. Fan fiction is a work of literature where fans take characters and other aspects from an already existing fictional universe and write their own stories about them. The reason why they write about characters that other people have created is not because they are lazy, unoriginal or can't think up something new. On the contrary. The fans are creative and write these fan fictions because they were inspired by the original source and want to express their admiration or desires. For example, the idea the main characters could be a couple, even though they are not in the canon story, could be something the fan is really passionate and curious about and therefore writes a love story featuring these characters.

Fan fiction and fan art, along with other forms of creations based on visual media were not popular to begin with. In fact, because fan fiction is for the most part written by female fans it was first done rather secretly. The reason was that being a

fan of science-fiction and fandom was not really considered ladylike and it also had to do with copyright issues. Today however, because of the Internet and social media and because it has been around for such a long period of time people are more aware of it, it has become a bigger topic of discussion (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 4).

Abigail Derecho has been exploring fan fiction and has called it archontic literature. She defines it as “a virtual construct surrounding the text, including it and all texts related to it” Fan fiction are located within the archontic literature and therefore they are stories that have an original foundation, but on the other hand they are like an extension of the original story (Derecho, 2006, p. 61-78).

Moreover, Mikel J. Koven refers to a theoretical model of fan culture, laid down by Henry Jenkins in which he likes fans to poachers, and quotes:

Like the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness. Like other popular readers, fans lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence entertainment industry’s decisions. Fans must beg with the networks to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of favorite characters. Within the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors, a recognition which must contextualize our celebration of strategies of popular resistance (Koven, 2003, p. 188).

### **When writing fan fiction**

There are no limits when it comes to creativity and time and space are not an issue for imaginative fans. They will write about the childhood or the possible future of their favourite characters, discuss culture, family, personality traits and the personal life of their characters of choice. The villains in a popular media are often a popular

subject analysed by fans and they enjoy discussing the trauma and experience the character might have had. Furthermore, fans like to see character development (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 64).

What is interesting about fan fiction is that although it is not an original work of fiction it is based on an already existing fiction. Therefore, it is something that is always changing and evolving. Ideas from fans, which they want to add to their favourite universes, are not canon and can be changed, the same events may even be rewritten from many points of view. “Fan fiction is at its most basic structural level constitutes the writerly text: ever changing, growing, ever entwining the creative lives of its writers in the interwoven progress of communicating through narrative the life of the community.” (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 67).

Fans new to fan fiction are usually introduced to it by their friends, may it be friends from real life or the Internet. Then as the fan explores every fan fiction out there that catches their eyes and have reach the point where the majority of their spare time goes into reading they might feel inspired to write a story of their own, and if confident enough, publish it on *fanfiction.net*. Most fans have already been creating stories in their head even though not all fans will write them down or if they do so, they might not post them online. However, on the Internet, the fans can post their stories anonymously, which makes it easier to post anything regardless of how strange or inappropriate it may be (personal communication, March 24, 2017).

Fans that are new to writing may make their stories rather humorous than serious because they may not know what points you need to have in a story that can meet all expectations of what fans appreciate and don't in their serious readings (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 153). A great example of an amateur fan fiction is *My Immortal* where the writer writes long description of what everyone is wearing. This

work of fan fiction has become well known in the fan fiction community because how badly it is written, people often refer to it as one of the worst fan fictions ever written. The reader can immediately see that it is written by a moody teenager who is going through a rebellious phase and that is something older fans can relate to, as they might also have had that regretful period in their lives. (Riesman, 2015). But this is exactly what fan fiction is about; no matter what the quality of the fiction is, it is a form of expression.

### **Genres in fan fiction**

When fans move deeper into the community they notice that there are certain themes and use of language that are used repeatedly. These themes are scenarios, situations, or actions that characters perform. The codes in fan fiction combine descriptions of images from each popular media that fan fiction is written about and only fans that are in that particular fandom can understand what the codes are. It is somewhat like a private sense of humour, as it makes the fan fiction more enjoyable to read, when hinting at things that happened in the show (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 159).

Furthermore, because the fan fiction writers are writing about characters in a fiction that already exist, the genres in fan fiction writing are somewhat different than normally in novels and movies. The most common genres can be divided into two main categories; stories with female protagonist and stories with male leading roles. Because the majority in the fan fiction community are female, these groups are divided as “us”; females in social, sexual or romantic relationships with men and women, and “them”; that is men in those situations (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 52). Then these categories can be split up into more specific ones.

The one with the males in the key role are very popular among fan girls. For example, these are stories about the non-sexual relationship between two men from the TV show or movie. These stories focus on the bond they have for each other, may it be in friendship or as a romantic relationship. In recent times the term “*fluff*” has stuck to this type of fan fiction.

*Hurt/comfort* stories are stories that are about two male characters from a show, where one character goes through a lot of difficulties and pain to be comforted in the end by the other character.

*Slash* fiction is the most popular type of fan fiction, stories about imagined romantic or sexual relationship between two fictional male characters. In recent times, it has also been called “ship” on the Internet, and the fans supporting a pairing called “shippers”. Slash shippers see a potential for romance between these characters and do not care that they are not sexually attracted to each other in the original source (Bacon-Smith, 1992. p.53).

The name for this genre of fan fiction comes from the slash symbol “/” because it is used to indicate the pairing in question, for example Kirk/Spock. Even though the two characters are not romantically interested in each other in the actual show or a movie, fans may feel a strong desire that these characters should be together. It may be because of their friendship in the original show or how they interact with each other. The first slash pairing was in fact Captain Kirk and Spock from the TV series *Star Trek*. Enemies are also often a popular source of a ship (Adams, 2003, p. 33). Fans usually have many favourite ships and often refer to them as *OTP* or “one true pairing”. Furthermore, there are also other ways to indicate the pairing features in the fan fiction; fans will sometimes mix the names of the characters together, making a unique word for each ship. For example, Sherlock Holmes and

John Watson have the slash name *Johnlock*. There are even more ways to indicate a pairing; writing the letter “x” between the names of the characters for instance.

The main category with a female lead character are most of the time stories with a fan made character; often called *OC's*, a short for original characters, often based on the fangirls themselves. This character often happens to have the same characteristics, resulting in a character type known as Mary Sue. This character is often an intelligent, beautiful and popular young woman, as well as usually the love interest of an attractive main character in the show. These stories would fall under the *Mary Sue* category. Still, the *Mary Sue* character is often looked at negatively by the community, for it is not seen as a realistic or original character.

Furthermore, a story where the main heroine has a sexual relationship with a character from the show is called *Lay-xxx* story. The name of the character she is involved with comes after the hyphen. However, in recent time this term is has fallen out of widespread use and has rather been put under the term *Mary Sue*.

*Hurt/comfort* stories where there is a female character that goes through great troubles to be comforted in the end by a character from the show.

*Femslash* would fall under this main category as it, as the name indicated, focuses on the sexual relationship between two women.

Moreover, there are genres that do not fall under these two categories discussed. An example of this is *crossover*, where the writer mixes two or more fictional universes together, as if the fan was to mix the *Harry Potter* universe with the *Doctor Who* universe. This genre allows the fans to make characters from two fandoms to be able to interact and communicate.

Furthermore, a story in which the whole setting on the original story is altered is called an Alternate Universe and is an iconic genre in the fan fiction community.

This is when fans change the genre of the original story, giving the reader a whole new setup from the start without explaining why and it is not even questioned. An example for this could be making all the good guys bad, portraying the main characters as animals or transferring a story that originally was supposed to take place in the middle ages into modern society. The writer might even be more serious by making an originally light comedy as a dark emotional story or the other way around. The fans might also write a story where a character that was killed in the story is still alive (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 62).

Moreover, while it retains most of the markers of the source product, some fans feel that homoerotic fan fiction differs so markedly from the overt characterizations of the source product that the entire genre should be categorized as alternate universe. Ostensibly universe changes only the way in which the main characters relate to each other, from comradely affection to sexual attachment (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 62).

However, as the whole setting of the story or the characteristics of the characters are not altered, it is hard to put slash fiction into this category. The other genres listed above are not mutually exclusive. In fact, fans will also mix together other genres, for example *slash fiction* could also be a crossover or take place in an alternative universe, and a *Mary Sue* could also be a *hurt/comfort* story.

What is more, some fans will write fan fiction and only focus on the aesthetics of the story. To be more specific, ignore the genres and write it like a poem or a work of art. Some works of fan fiction would rather fit into the same category as the original story like adventure, horror and action movies (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 54).

### **Fanzine**

With the coming of the Internet, it has become easier for fans to publish their work, share and sell their art. Anyone can upload their work online without much effort and anyone can read it. Before the time of the World Wide Web, fans would write and publish their own fanzines. A fanzine is a magazine that fans would create and sell at conventions. The fanzines include several types of fan work, such as fan fiction, artworks, letters and discussions (Bacon-Smith. 1992, p. 45).

### **Fan art**

Fan art is fan fiction but instead of text it is a piece of artwork. By this the fan artist can make their favourite characters do anything they fantasize about but visually. In an interview with a 23-year-old university student and an active fan artist, when asked what her reasons for making fan art were, she says that she loves fan art and because it means more content for the show, game or book that she loves and that it is fun to see peoples' interpretations of characters in different art styles. Then she tells me that she makes fan art to show her love for characters or fandom and so she can see more of that character in situations that would maybe never take place in the original work. Moreover, her favourite characters are almost never the main characters so having fan fiction and fan art for them who have a little screen time is very nice (personal communication, March 24, 2017).

### **Doujinshi**

In Japan, fan comics have been a popular way of fan expression and reached high popularity in the 1990's. In Japanese fan culture, fan comics are called doujinshi and are often amateur works. That is, everyone can make doujinshi; you don't need to be a professional, just to have the desire to draw them (Schodt, 1996. p, 41).

The amateur manga movement became really popular from 1988 and into the 1990s and in 1992 quarter of a million young people attended a convention dedicated to fan-made comics. However, doujinshi has been around since 1960's and many well-known manga artists began their career in a doujinshi fan group, also known as *sakuru* or fan circle. In his book, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, Schodt talks about his experience at Super Comic City; a Japanese comic book convention. Just like the fanzines in the science fiction conventions in USA these comics are created by fans for fans (Schodt, 1996. p. 40; Kinsella, 1998, p. 296).

Doujinshi is a fun and creative way for fans to share their ideas but also to satisfy their own need to draw. In an interview, the young fan artist mentioned above states that the number one motivation is that she is doing it for herself; that is, she enjoys the time spent drawing fan art, and after that comes sharing it with fellow fans (personal communication, March 24th, 2017). Likewise, Bacon-Smith writes about what many fan artists from the science-fiction community have explained; that they get emotionally attached to their pictures and that they aren't necessarily making it to sell. Even though there is a market for fan art and some of their work may be ideal for the marketplace, the decision to draw fan art is simply out of love (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p.70).

The genres in doujinshi are not different from the genres used in western fan fiction as the ideas are very similar. However, Japanese genres in doujinshi are often the same as genres used in manga, considering that manga is one of the biggest fandoms cultures in Japan.

These genres include; *bishojou*, meaning beautiful girls, and *bishonen*, meaning beautiful boys. These genres focus on the art style being beautiful and the stories are often either about high school kids or fairy tale fantasies.

*Lolicon* or *loli complex*, is a popular genre in Japan, especially among men. They are stories where extremely cute girls are in the leading roles. These girls are rather young, and are often seen in a romantic way, even though they are underage. The art style used in these comics is often described as *moe*, a style people often link with manga; that is cute girls with big eyes. *Moe* focuses on making the girls extra cute, unlike *bishojou*, where the focus is on beauty and elegance.

What is more, in Japan there is a genre that is like slash fiction, that is; where two male characters are paired up in a gay sexual and romantic relationship. It is called *yaoi*, the word coming from the Japanese *yama-nashi, ochi nashi ima nashi*, that means no climax, no punch line, no meaning. Another term for this is also *BL* or *Boys Love* also known as *Shonen-Ai*. The term for femslash is *yuri*. Even though doujinshi are most of the time manga, some are written in the form of a novel like western fan fiction (Schodt, 1996, p. 37). Just like fan fiction from America or Europe, doujinshi are mostly made by teenagers and young women. All the same, the most popular genre to write fan fiction about is *slash fiction*. (Kinsella, 1998, p. 289). In fact, slash fiction is so popular in Japanese fan culture that they even have their own term for girls that love slash fiction and call them *fujoshi*.

In her article, Kinsella calls doujinshi artists *amateur artists* because they draw and pay for printing their manga themselves and are not sponsored by a company. Doujinshi is a part of youth culture that has been flourishing in Japan since the 1960s and has been looked down upon by older generations for linking things that are considered immature, like reading comics and watching television. But in 1988, the amateur manga movement began to expand rapidly and Japanese fans, who want to escape from the pressure the society puts on them, maintain doujinshi helps them to do so (Kinsella, 1998, p. 291).

Doujinshi are not only sold at conventions, sometimes they are also sold in anime stores. For example, the store Animate in Akihabara in Japan has a whole floor dedicated to doujinshi. Nonetheless, the most popular place for fans to get their hands on doujinshi is at doujinshi markets at conventions. Some conventions are even especially made for the doujinshi market.

To help the fans find artists or a doujinshi they are looking for, the convention prepares a catalogue that is given to the fans as they walk in. In the catalogue the fans can see pictures of what doujinshi are available and they can even find previews of the doujinshi (Schodt, 1996, p. 38).

The first doujinshi convention in Japan was Komiket or Comic Market and was first held in the year 1975. It is now the biggest convention in Japan, dedicated to doujinshi and is held in Tokyo in August and December. Doujinshi are more popular among female fans, but 40% of the attendance is male. Like the convention culture in America, Komiket resulted originally from the science fiction fandom (Schodt, 1996 p. 37).

In most cases, authors of popular media are more than happy for fans creating work based on their creations, because this is how they show their love for it. However, sometimes the authors think that the fans go a little too much over the top, especially with erotic fan arts and fan fiction.

Tim Surette writes about this in an article called “TV’s craziest Fanbases... With Video Proof”, where he explains that there is a great difference between a normal fan, a pretty big fan, and then a hard-core fan. Surette says that while the normal fans are the ones that simply enjoy the show, hard-core fans write fan fiction and he refers to them as insane and creepy, the reason being slash fiction (Surette, 2010). Fan fiction writers often do not let social standards and norms get in the way of

their creative writings and many fans write about kinks and sex in slash fiction. Their stories may even include incest, paedophilia, or something else not acceptable in our society. For example, the main characters from *Supernatural*. Sam and Dean are often paired together as a couple, even though they are brothers. And then we may not forget the “*m-preg*” fan fiction, but these are stories where males can get pregnant. Like everywhere else, the most shocking things get the most attention, making fans who write fan fiction sometimes appear like Surette puts it, uncanny to the normal audience.

To take an example. Anne Rice, who is most famous for being the author of *Interview with the Vampire*, writes on her blog that she does not allow fan fiction because her characters are copyrighted. She does not like the idea of fans making her characters do anything unusual, things that are not in accordance with the original story (Rice, 2009).

In Japan, copyrights are rather relaxed and therefore it is not forbidden to sell doujinshi. The doujinshi does not have a negative effect on the sales of the original work, in fact it can even help with the sales. As long as it is written somewhere that this is a fan work everything is rather relaxed. “The publishers of manga benefit from happy fans, and some even send scouts to doujinshi markets to find aspiring artist.” (Schodt, 1996 p. 42).

Fan culture is always becoming more and more accepted in our society. For instance, new *Star Wars*<sup>10</sup> movies and *Marvel superheroes* are being made and the merchandise is bought not only by dedicated fan girls and fan boys but also by the casual audience. However, the stereotype of the unpopular “nerds” comes from how people were made fun of for liking these same things. But nowadays, fans will call

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<sup>10</sup> Science fiction movies created by George Lucas in 1977

themselves “nerds” or “geeks” without worrying about people making fun of them. In Japan, they would have been called an *otaku*, a Japanese word that means “your home” or “you” but in the 1980s, people started using the word to refer to young people that were obsessed with popular culture. Because of this, the word developed a negative sense, for *otaku* were seen as people with bad social skills and not caring about their looks, unhealthy, apathetic and according to the stereotype; having a tough time of getting a romantic partner. However, in modern times it has become more of a translation of the word “nerd” in English. Furthermore, because it is a Japanese word, western fans of Japanese animation might also call themselves *otaku*, not thinking about it as a negative word, simply just that meaning that they like anime (Tobin, 1998, p. 109).

## Conclusion

Fan fiction plays a significant role in the life of many people, especially for women and teenagers. The majority of fan fiction writers are female and with fan fiction, women find a way to express their fantasies as well as sexual desires. It is a way for them to express their love for fictional universes and characters as well as adding their own ideas to the original story. Fans develop a strong connection to their favourite popular medium, whether it is books, television series or cinema, and eventually they become a part of a community where people that admire the same medium can communicate, create and share their ideas about it. It is called a fandom and being a part of one or more can help many young people when they feel lost and lonely. They find a community over the Internet where people across the world share the same interests as they do. Fans are not passive consumers and are eager to add more to a story, as well as making theories considering their favourite medium. This results in countless of fan fictions, fan arts, cosplays or other kinds of fan art work. The motivation fans have for creating fan works is not to profit from it but for their own pleasure and expression. However, fans do often sell their works at conventions or over the Internet.

In Japan, it is popular to draw or read doujinshi, comics by amateur artists. The genres in Japanese doujinshi are somewhat different from the fan fictions from America or Europe. However, in both cases homoerotic fan fiction is the most popular genre. The genres in fan fiction and fan comics, both in Europe, USA and Japan are different than from original novels, movies or television series.

Not only does having a hobby that encourages writing and creating help fans to express their admiration for fiction, it also helps them to acquire skills in writing or drawing, if they want to write their own story or draw their own comics.

Even though fans of pop culture may be criticised by modern society, they do not let it change their passion for fictional universes.

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