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## Fanfiction today: An analysis of publishing trends on Archive of Our Own

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**Fanfiction today:  
An analysis of publishing trends on Archive of Our Own**  
By Lauren Moore

Readers: Dr. Stacy Creel, Dr. Sarah Mangrum

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fan spaces offer a unique opportunity for fans to come together and interact with people who share their interests. Today, you can find fandoms for almost every piece of media, person, or group (Ewens, 2020). These can be rich communities that produce both digital and physical works related to their interest. The physical works that predated the digital have included things like fan-published zines which were often shared at a convention. While these are still popular, the last few decades have seen more and more digital spaces emerging. Artists are selling works on sites like Etsy, Redbubble, and Gumroad. Digital art is shared on all social media platforms. There are even specific sites dedicated to written fanworks, including Live Journal, FanFiction.net, and Archive of Our Own (AO3). AO3 was formed and is run by the non-profit, The Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), and depends on hundreds of volunteers and donations.

Though all ages participate in fandoms, it is often seen as a space for the young (Ewens, 2020). In a lot of ways, young people are the lifeblood of fandoms. They tend to have more free time to dedicate to participating in fandom through both discussion and creation. Teens see their fandom as part of who they are and bond with their peers over shared interests. This included the growing creation and consumption of fanfiction which is largely disseminated online. These born-digital works are “the fastest growing form of writing in the world” (Fathallah, 2020, p. 858). Though some might view fanfiction as derivative since it is based on another’s work, it should not be overlooked as it is a form of creative writing that many young people take part in. Observing creation patterns will allow for a better understanding of this diverse medium. This can allow librarians to meet teens where they are with their creating and reading habits.

## ***Purpose Statement***

The purpose of this study is to observe notable patterns in fanfiction production among fandoms of different sizes on the website Archive of Our Own.

## ***Research Questions***

*R1. What differences can be observed regarding the author-assigned rating statistics of the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?*

*R2. What differences can be observed regarding the length of works in the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?*

*R3. What differences can be observed regarding the completion rates of works in the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?*

*R3a. Are there differences in terms of abandoned works in these fandom groups?*

*R4. What differences can be observed regarding relationship and non-relationship-focused works within and between the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?*

## ***Definitions***

*Archive of Our Own (AO3):* “A fan-created, fan-run, nonprofit, noncommercial archive for transformative fanworks, like fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, and podfic”; “features “more than 53,000 fandoms, 5,089,000 users, and 10,030,000 works”; “The Archive of Our Own is a project of the Organization for Transformative Work” (Archive of Our Own beta, n.d., para. 1).

*Fandom:* “fans of a story, text, game, movie, or song who wish to develop new, unsanctioned works, based on those existing root-texts” (Hill & Peckoskie, 2017, p. 843).

*Fanfiction:* “the unauthorized rewriting or adaptation of popular media narratives, utilizing corporately owned characters, settings and storylines to tell an

individual writer's own story" (Fathallah, 2020, p. 858); can be abbreviated as fanfic or fic

*Gen*: a tag specific to AO3; stories with this tag are non-romantic in focus (Sauro & Sundmark, 2018).

*Kudo*: A way in which AO3 users can interact with fanfiction to give the author positive feedback; users can only leave one kudo for the entire work (i.e. a kudo cannot be left for each chapter) (Archive FAQ, n.d., para. 14).

*The Organization of Transformative Works (OTW)*: "A nonprofit organization established by fans to serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture in its myriad forms"; "projects include Archive of Our Own, Legal Advocacy, Fanlore, Transformative Works and Cultures and Open Doors" (The Organization for Transformative Works, n.d., para. 1-2).

*Orphaning*: "An alternative to deleting a work which [the creator] no longer want associated with [their] account"; "orphaning will permanently eliminate all [the creator's] identifying data from the selected work(s)" (Archive FAQ, n.d., para. 23).

*Ratings*: AO3 "requires that creators either warn for—or explicitly choose not to warn for—a short list of defined warnings"; they "measure the intensity of a work's content and give users an idea of the suitability of the work for them" (Archive FAQ, n.d., para. 18). Ratings are as follows:

- *Not Rated*: "This is the default option. For searching, screening, and other Archive functions, this may get treated the same way as mature and explicit-rated content" (Archive FAQ, n.d., para. 18).
- *General Audiences*: "The content is unlikely to be disturbing to anyone and is suitable for all ages" (Archive FAQ, para. 18).
- *Teen and Up Audiences*: "The content may be inappropriate for audiences under 13" (Archive FAQ, n.d., para. 18).
- *Mature*: "The content contains adult themes (sex, violence, etc.) that aren't as graphic as explicit-rated content." (Archive FAQ, n.d., para. 18).

- *Explicit*: "The content contains explicit adult themes, such as detailed sex scenes, graphic violence, etc." (Archive FAQ, n.d., para 18).

*Tag*: "A keyword or phrase that provides information about a work; can be created by the author or by users when they bookmark the work" (Archive FAQ, n.d., para. 12).

*Tagwranglers*: A group of AO3 volunteers "whose role it is to assign metadata, check metadata submitted by contributors, and maintain bibliographic control to ensure disambiguation of persons and root texts" (Hill & Peckoskie, 2017, p. 851).

### ***Delimitations of the Study***

This study looked at works published on AO3, leaving out physical and other web-based sources of fanfiction distribution. It also only looked at fandoms involving fictional works. Fandoms that involve living or historic people were not considered; those include athletes, politicians, musicians, actors, and other public figures. This study looked at the ten fandoms with the most tag iterations and then ten fandoms with less than 10,000 tag iterations.

### ***Assumptions***

AO3 is a living archive that is open to anyone in the world. Anyone with an account can publish, read, and interact with the works hosted on the site. A good deal of works can be read without an account. For these reasons, statistics are changing constantly. It is known that things like the number of published works and their attributes can change daily or even hourly. As such, exact numbers will fluctuate depending on when they are recorded. Data collection took place in as small a window as possible to mitigate these variables.

It is also known that some authors mark a work as complete when they are abandoning the work. These instances are assumed to be low enough that they can be overlooked while still getting an accurate overview of work patterns.

### ***Importance of the Study***

Not all fandoms are the same. Differences can arise between them based on the type of media they surround and the size of the fan community. There are benefits and drawbacks to both small and large fandoms. A smaller one may allow for a closer sense

of community while also limiting the options of what is available for reading. Within larger fandoms, there can be niches and sub-communities for exactly what is desired. At the same time, they can be daunting to enter for the first time due to unspoken tropes or subgroups. Comparing publishing patterns between fandoms of various sizes allows for insight into these differing communities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### An Overview of Fanfiction

The term fanfiction came into popular use in the 1940s (Edwards, 2018). The concept grew out of responses to science fiction pulp magazines, with works being primarily written by women who had been shut out of the more professional writing roles by their male counterparts (Jenkins, 2019). It both crosses and blends all manner of genres and encompasses many formats of writing. The works can be anything from poems to chapter-length works. Leavenworth (2015), who describes fanfiction as being a highly personal experience, notes its importance in terms of literary critique in that it shows the unique ways readers can interpret the same source material differently, noting that “each story represents an individual reading of events and characters” (p. 94). Fan works can also offer something other works cannot: the familiar characters, settings, or themes cause audiences to “experience a sense of homecoming” (Leavenworth, 2015, p. 93) when reading a piece of fanfiction. Each work “provides instant immersion, because the recipient is spared the cognitive effort of building a world and its inhabitants from a largely blank slate” (Ryan & Thon, 2014, p. 1). Though fanfiction’s roots lay in physical and print formats, like many other things, it has gone digital in the past decades. Fandom participants were on the web almost as soon as it went public (Jenkins, 2019). Sites dedicated solely to hosting these works have sprouted up all over the internet. Some are generalized while some focus on specific fandoms or interests. The movement toward online environments has led to an explosion in production as well as increased means of preservation (Hill & Peckoskie, 2017). Fathallah (2020) furthered this idea by stating that this born-digital medium is “the fastest growing form of writing in the world” (p. 858). Hill and Peckoskie (2017) argued that increased availability has taken fanfiction

from being a niche pursuit while also contributing to fandom preservation and growth. One way the latter occurs is through increased ease with which outsiders can gain fandom-specific knowledge, observe its themes, witness its culture, and perhaps eventually become a member of that community.

Leavenworth (2015) divided fanfiction into two core categories: stories that fill in the gaps of the source material and ones that expand the world of it. The former tends to build off of small story details and minor characters. These stories can insert scenes or alter interactions. The latter tend to be works that expand beyond the scope of the original materials. This would also include stories set in alternate universes (AUs). The two categories can be summed up by whether the writer wants “more of” or “more from” the universe the author created (Leavenworth, 2015, p. 99). Leavenworth referred to the source material as a blueprint from which the fan work is built. It is also important to note that fanfiction communities have developed a language and system all their own. “Fanfic has specific sets of conventions and genres related to, but distinct from, those found in professional fiction” (Fathallah, 2020, p. 861).

### *The Significance of Fanfiction*

As stated above, fanfiction is nothing new. Fathallah (2020) compares its use of tropes to “pre-Gutenberg societies [expecting] stories that were variations on the themes of popular favourites” (p. 860). The fact that works can be directly downloaded in multiple formats from AO3 means that they can come to have more in common with print mediums and grants the works “a kind of permanency and stability more frequently associated with print” (Fathallah, 2020, p. 858). It also contributes to the long-term preservation of the works. Edwards (2018) has argued that many aspects of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* mirror the way fanfiction has been and is created, particularly the gift-giving and archival nature of the works. Likewise, Leavenworth (2015) has also argued that fanfiction is not derivative, as it has been traditionally seen since the stories are archives in and of themselves. To Leavenworth, they perform this function by holding artifacts, such as “characters, plot lines, [and] settings” (2015, p. 96) from the original that the present writer simply withdraws before depositing their unique creation. Jenkins (2019) went a step

further in the defense of fanfiction by saying that all “culture builds on the raw materials left behind by other expressive practices” (p. 83).

The communities from which fanfiction is born defy the idea that the works should be ignored. “Fanfic is communal, frequently hypertextual and multimodal, and metaleptic” (Fathallah, 2020, p. 858). The communal aspects of fanfiction have been with it since the beginning. When pulp magazines started printing the information of those who wrote in to them, fans started reaching out to each other (Jenkins, 2019).

A large part of the communal nature of fanfiction today is “beta-reading”. Similar to proofreading, beta-reading is where another member of the fandom reads the piece of fanfiction before it is published so corrections or edits can be made. Jenkins (2019) likens this to a form of mentorship since the beta-reader is often more experienced though not necessarily older. Changes to the work can also come from comments or messages from readers. Some authors ask their audience directly for ideas of what to include in the story. The fact that these support systems are built directly into the creation of fanfiction leads Jenkins to describe the process not as a single act of self-expression but as a “collective cultural production” (2019, p. 82). Fandoms at large allow for the formation of “collaborations and partnerships between diverse populations working for social justice” (Jenkins, 2019, p. 84).

Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik’s (2018) research upheld previous findings by showing that online fandom communities, even those dedicated to creative expression, are places rife with political engagement. De Kosnik (2006) noted that fanfiction is “a medium of political and social protest” (p. 67). From the beginning, writers’ stories were shaped by their politics (Jenkins, 2019). Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2018) noted the dissonance between how young people discuss politics online and how the same texts are taught in formal settings or presented in traditional media. Sauro and Sundmark’s (2019) work showed that creating fanfiction can be a useful exercise for advanced language learning classes. They also found that fanfiction created in their study matched patterns of works published on AO3. Duggan’s (2022) work

highlighted the connection between online and offline selves.

Fanfiction is important as a source of representation and identity exploration. The manipulation of characters and stories in the reading and the writing of fanfiction can lead to someone knowing themselves better. “Fandom often attracts marginalized populations and has therefore been envisioned as dissenting, resistant, and subversive...[It] creates opportunities for the ongoing lack of diverse commercially published texts to be undermined” (Duggan, 2022, p. 704). Many works “reimagine how racial, ethnic, and national identities are constructed within popular narratives” (Jenkins, 2019, p. 84). Duggan (2022) goes so far as to say that representative transformative works act as a form of what Rudin Sims Bishop famously described as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” (p. 704). They stated that “fannish attachments can therefore deeply influence queer youths’ identities and sense of self” (Duggan, 2022, p. 705). The ways fanfiction plays with gender can “affect trans and nonbinary readers’ material, interior, and social lives” (Duggan, 2022, p. 715). One of the people Duggan (2022) worked with found that his experience with fanfiction allowed him “to try on or experiment with various queer identities” and to eventually find trans representation “beyond those he encountered offline” (p. 715).

### ***An Archive of Our Own***

AO3’s name is an homage to Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. The archive grew out of a need for a stable repository for fanworks and relies on around 700 volunteers (Fathallah, 2020; Santos, 2021). At the time of its creation, people were seeing “the mass deletion of fan accounts on blogging platforms like LiveJournal and [a] resultant loss of hundreds of previously public fanfiction stories on legally shaky grounds” (Edwards, 2018, p. 52). This evolution is still observed in the work of the OTW in the defense and expansion of Fair Use (Targeted News Service, 2019). It actively seeks to recruit specialists such as “researchers in strategic planning and nonprofit governance” (Santos, 2021, p. 1) as well as “speakers of lesser known languages.” Works are available in over 70 languages, including some highly specified ones. For example, AO3 supports works

written in Chinuk Wawa, a language that has only recently been revitalized through concentrated effort (Robinson, 2016; Selkirk, 2018). In 2019, AO3 won a Hugo Award for Best Related Work, a renowned science fiction and fantasy award (Jenkins, 2019). According to Jenkins (2019), when attendees were asked to stand if they had participated in the production of fanfiction, all manner of professionals did. This prestigious award and the display seen at the ceremony show how far fanfiction has come from the days when writers were encouraged to delete all evidence of their fan works if they wanted to appear professional.

AO3 is a constantly evolving site “whose codes are refined and modified based on user input” (Fathallah, 2020, p. 859). According to Santos (2021), these “constant updates to the site accommodate and legitimize fanworks” (p. 1). The site has to simultaneously develop in a way that benefits both writers and readers (Fathallah, 2020). Some of the fans that built and worked on AO3 were taught coding by fellow fans to build the infrastructure required by the site (Jenkins, 2019).

### ***Tagging on Archive of Our Own***

Though AO3 is a generalized fanworks site in that uploaded works can be related to any fandom, there are a few rules regarding what can be uploaded and the way it should be organized. The prior mainly regards works not breaking any laws while the latter applies to their complex tagging systems. Tags can act much like linked text or metadata. Clicking any of the tags on a specific work will bring up all works that feature that tag that are hosted on AO3. Tags are based on fan-specific preferences. Their ability to be unique and specific “encourages greater reader interactivity at the level of archive and sorting” (Fathallah, 2020, p. 858) and thus “the process of finding a story to read can be intensely interactive” (p. 861). Tags can also be a means of search filtration. The archive features both simple and advanced searches. Results can be modified to eliminate or only include certain tags as well as for things like completion status and language. Results can be sorted in nine specific ways depending on the author, the title, publication date, length, and reader interactions.

Since an author is responsible for tagging their work, tagwranglers are needed to keep the site properly organized. This is especially the case when different people tag the same topic differently. Tagwranglers insure a uniform naming method for repeated characters, relationships, and themes across a fandom. For example, ships (or relationships) of certain characters will always have a specific character listed first and the spelling of the characters’ names will be kept uniform. Tags of abbreviated ship names will be assimilated into the proper ship tag. Hill and Peckoskie (2017) compared the way tags function to Library of Congress headings. Furthermore, they said tags have the added advantage of flexibility which “provides for a more true reflection of society that more accurately maps societal thinking and includes terms that are easier for users to understand and navigate” (Hill & Peckoskie, 2017, p. 853).

While there are many benefits to AO3’s robust tagging system, Fathallah (2020) brought up concerns that it might contribute to gatekeeping through unintentional biases. They note that “software is never neutral” and “programming is always political” as aspects of those who develop it always end up in the final product to some extent (Fathallah, 2020, p. 859). Fathallah also expanded this worry to the work of tagwranglers. It is important to note that not everyone feels this way. Duggan (2022) specifically states that fanfiction “circumvents gatekeeping” (p. 704). Furthermore, Price and Robinson’s (2020) research found “no evidence for gatekeeping or bibliographic control” (p. 338) in their tag analysis for AO3.

### ***Similar Studies***

Studies on fan culture have increased over time though there has been a want of focus from the library and information sciences (Hill & Peckoskie, 2017). We are currently in the “third-wave” of fan scholarship (Burkhardt et al., 2022). Floegel (2020) and Sauro and Sundmark (2019) both did studies with specified searches of AO3 as part of wider interview-based studies. Floegel (2020) searched both AO3 and FanFiction.net to get results for a particular fandom, limiting the search to obtain the most recent works at the time of their study. Sauro and Sundmark’s (2019) study also focused on a particular fandom. They performed a search with highly specific limiters to get a set of stories that could be more readily compared to

the stories study participants wrote in class. Their work used keyword analysis. Burkhardt, Trott and Monaghan (2022) performed a similar tag analysis of a single ship on the social media site, Tumblr. Their work focused particularly on anti-fandom creations. Beyond the user tags, they observed the content of the posts and collected information with a data scraping tool. Price and Robinson (2020) did an extensive tag analysis across three platforms (AO3, Tumblr, and Etsy). Again, they focused on a particular aspect of a fandom by looking only at results for one ship. They chose one that was smaller to make the data more manageable. Regarding AO3, their research focused on the work of tagwranglers. They used a web crawler to collect their data and two programs to record and work with their data. All of these studies were more qualitative, focusing more on the content of results than the quantities of them. They also all focused on a particular fandom or sub-fandom.

In some ways, tags function act in a similar way to keywords in other research fields. Ishida et al. (2020) looked at the usage of keywords pulled from a controlled vocabulary for scientific research retrieval with a focus on how keywords relate to metadata. They observed the number of annotated keywords related to different databases (Ishida, 2020). A 2019 study also looked at keyword usage in the sciences; they specifically looked at them within Library and Information Sciences. According to their findings, many of the keywords applied to works by their authors are “ephemeral” and “more than half are never used again” (Peset et al., 2019, p. 462). They downloaded journal data from citation indexes to obtain a hierarchy and gathered data on keyword usage and tracked their frequency.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Information on work totals was gathered from AO3. These numbers were then broken down into subgroups based on certain limiters that were readily available from AO3 using the “Sort and Filter” options. Subgroup numbers were compared to the total for the fandom. Individual fandom numbers were compared to each other on an individual basis and by fandom size.

## ***Information Sources and Procedures***

Fandoms were selected based on the data released by AO3 in 2021. The data were organized so fandom tags were ranked from largest to smallest. The ten with the most tag iterations were chosen to be the large fandom set. The ten biggest with less than 10,000 tag iterations were chosen to be the smaller fandom set. In selecting fandoms, derivative fandoms of ones priorly selected were skipped. For example, if “Marvel Cinematic Universe” is followed by “Captain America (Movies)” in the list, the latter was skipped. “No Fandom” was also skipped because there is no way to pull up stories that are not tagged. One fandom was also excluded from the small fandoms because its title could not be determined. It was likely a fandom for a foreign property whose title was lost in translation between the data being harvested and being published by the archive. It showed up in the data as “ä...è□Æé<<~æ%o< - è□'è□¶è“□ | QuÃ;jzhÃ-GÃ□oshÇ'u - HÃ°diÃ© LÃjn.”

All research started with loading the fandom’s landing page, also known as its works page, on AO3. Since authors can choose to lock their works so that only registered users can view them, all searches will be done while logged into an archive account. This will ensure that all works possible will be counted.

After navigating to each specific fandom’s landing page, works were first separated by their ratings using the filter functions of the site. The number of works in each rating category was recorded in Excel. Percentages of the whole were then taken.

Works were then separated using the “Word Count” feature. They were separated into groups of works consisting of 0-1,000 words, 1,001-10,000 words, 10,001-100,000 words, and 100,001+ words. Numbers for each category were recorded in the Excel document and percentages of the whole were calculated.

Next, the total works were separated into complete and non-complete statuses. The total for each category was again recorded in the Excel sheet with percentages of the whole being calculated.

Incomplete works were then separated based on the date they were last updated. This was done by filtering the works that have not been updated in one year or

less, one to three years, three to five years, five to seven, seven to nine, and nine years or more. Numbers were recorded in the excel document and percentages of the whole were calculated.

To tell how many works focused on relationships and how many do not, the works were then filtered for inclusion and the exclusion of the tag ‘gen.’ Numbers for both relationship focused and non-relationship-focused works were recorded in the Excel document and percentages of the whole were calculated.

**Limitations**

This study started from the selective data AO3 choose to release in March 2021. This means that the numbers used for selection differed from the fandoms’ current work counts. Because of this, rankings have changed. This was most noticeable in the smaller fandoms as their rankings are the most fluid since there is the least difference between fandoms. It was anticipated that the smaller fandoms will have grown past 10,000 works in the interceding time.

It was also understood that sub-fandoms will have works not included in the parent fandom. For example, not every work tagged for “Marvel” will also be tagged with “Marvel Cinematic Universe.” The sub-fandom was still skipped to get the most widely representative spread of fandoms.

**Results**

All data was collected on February 6, 2023, between 2:00 PM and 3:45 PM. The fandom tags were entered exactly as they were in the data released by AO3. They have been abbreviated in the results and discussion for ease of representation. The order was also maintained. The fandoms are arranged from largest to smallest in which they were found in the source data. It is maintained throughout the results.

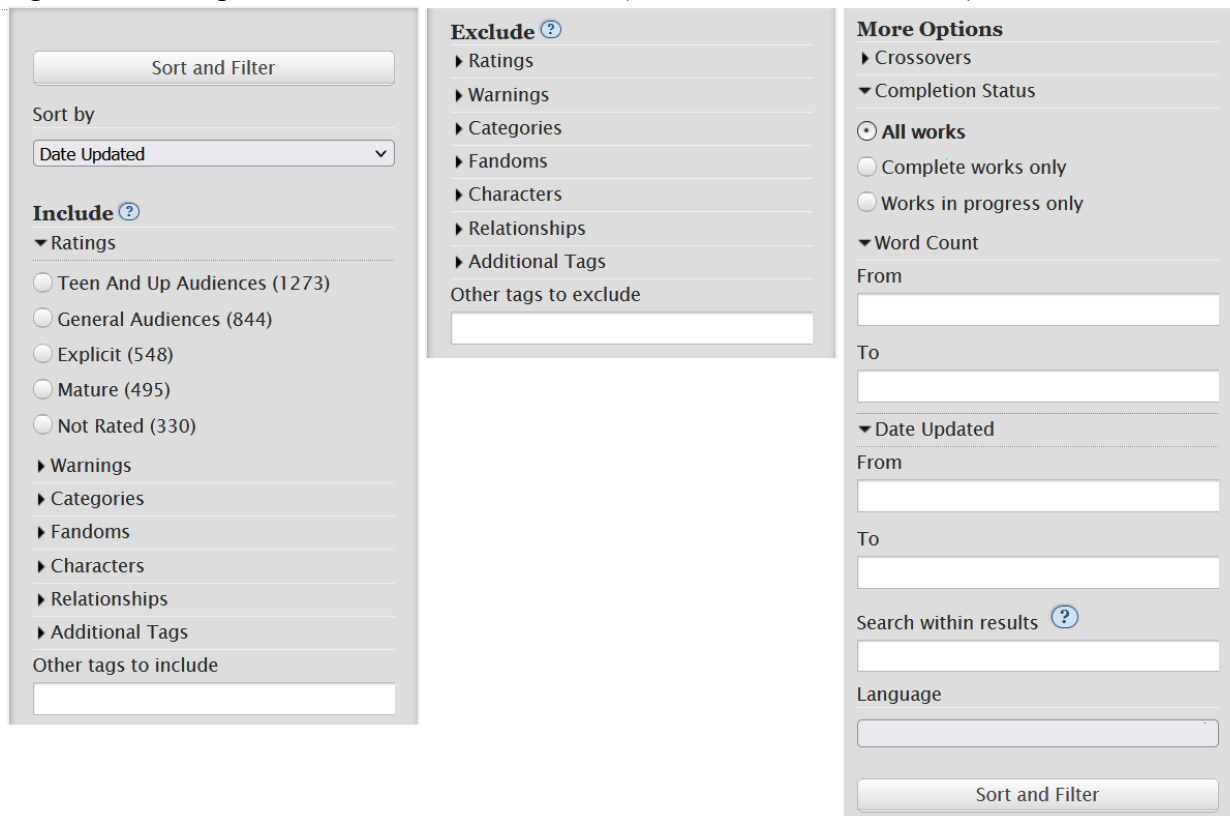
Table 1. Fandom names (n=20)

Exact Fandom Name	Shortened Name
Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling	Harry Potter
Supernatural	Supernatural
Marvel Cinematic Universe	Marvel
Teen Wolf (TV)	Teen Wolf (TV)
Sherlock (TV)	Sherlock (TV)
Haikyuu!!	Haikyuu!!
Original Work	Original Work
Naruto	Naruto
Star Wars - All Media Types	Star Wars
Homestuck	Homestuck
Compilation of Final Fantasy VII	Final Fantasy VII
Hunger Games Trilogy - Suzanne Collins	Hunger Games
Twilight Series - Stephenie Meyer	Twilight Series
Law & Order: SVU	Law & Order: SVU
The West Wing	The West Wing
Danny Phantom	Danny Phantom
Daiya no A   Ace of Diamond	Daiya no A
Transformers Generation One	Transformers
Devil May Cry	Devil May Cry
Pocket Monsters   Pokemon (Main Video Game Series)	Pokemon

Total numbers varied slightly between filtered searches and the total works found on the fandom landing page. The majority of discrepancies were in the larger fandoms. The greatest difference was between the total works and the total works with the focus filters in the Star Wars –All Media Types fandom at 167.



Figure 1. Filter options on Archive of Our Own (Archive of Our Own 2023)



The average difference between rating totals and total works was 1.35. The average difference between word count totals and total works was 23.91. The average difference between completion status totals and total works was 1.61. The average difference between focus totals and total works was 1.57. All totals were less than 0.1% different. See Appendix A. for the full difference breakdown. Raw data can be found in Appendix Ba-Fb.

**RQ1. What differences can be observed regarding the author-assigned rating statistics of the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?**

On average, for the larger fandoms, 9.81 percent of works were not rated, 26.60 percent were rated for general audiences, 30.48 percent of works were rated for teen and up audiences, 14.83 percent were rated as mature, and 18.28 percent were rated as explicit. For the smaller fandoms, 7.18 percent were not rated, 27.16 percent were rated for general audiences, 33.36 percent were rated for teen and up audiences, 15.81 percent were rated as mature, and 16.49 percent were rated as explicit. Percentages for all ratings across all fandoms are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Table 2. Average Fandom Ratings (n=2,368,029)

Fandom Size	Rating				
	Not Rated	General Audiences	Teen and Up	Mature	Explicit
Large	9.81%	26.60%	30.48%	14.83%	18.28%
Small	7.18%	27.16%	33.36%	15.81%	16.49%

Figure 2. Larger Fandom Ratings (n=2,203,814)

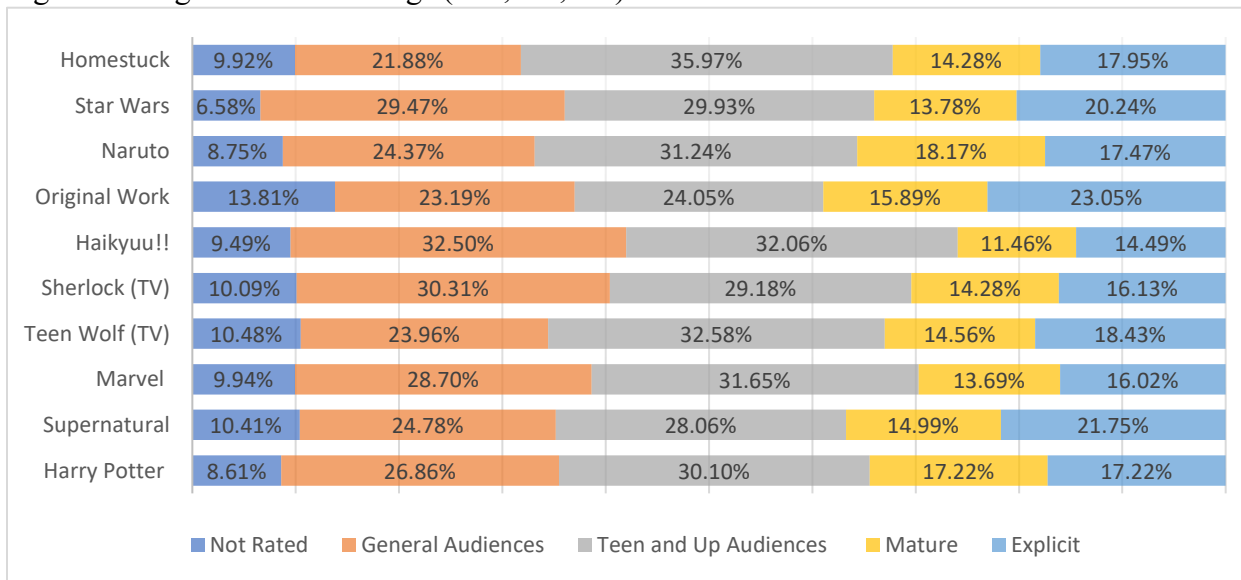
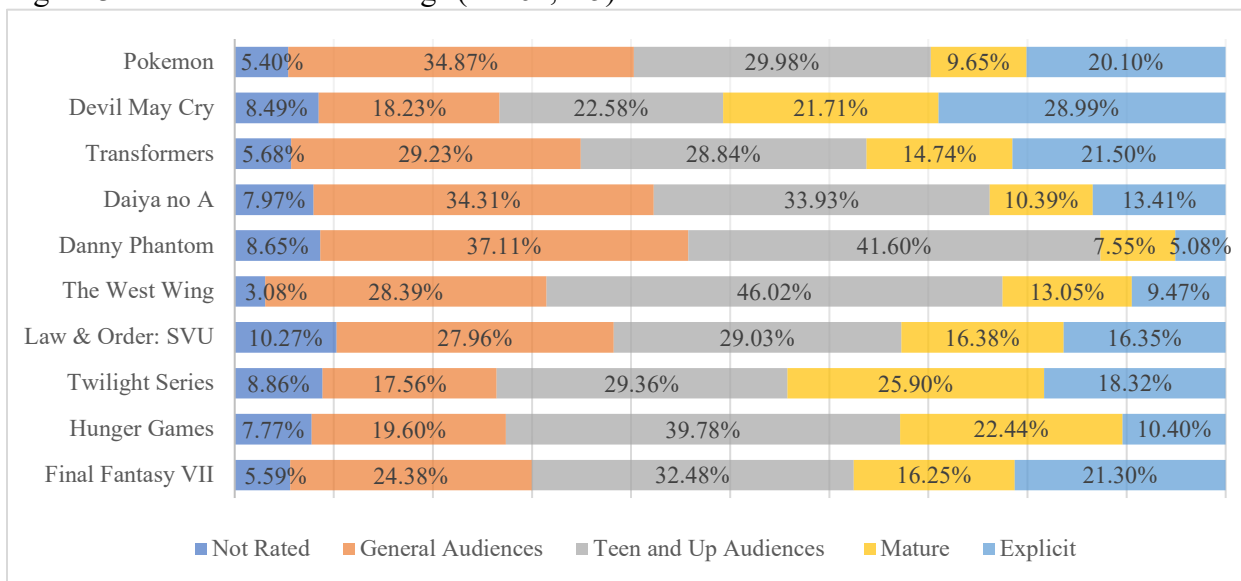


Figure 3. Smaller Fandom Ratings (n=164,215)



**RQ2. What differences can be observed regarding the length of works in the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?**

On average, 27.05 percent of works in the larger fandoms were less than 1,000 words, 57.87 percent were between 1,001 and 10,000 words, 14.04 percent were between 10,001 and 100,000, and 1.04 percent

were over 100,001 words. Between the smaller fandoms, an average of 21.66 percent of works were less than 1,000 words, 60.60 percent were between 1,001 and 10,000 words, 16.2 percent were between 10,001 and 100,000 words, and 1.54 percent were over 100,001 words. Percentages for all work lengths across all fandoms are given in Figures 4 and 5.

Table 3. Average Word Counts (n=2,367,452)

Fandom Size	Work Length			
	0-1,000	1,001-10,000	10,001-100,000	>100,000
Large	27.05%	57.87%	14.04%	1.04%
Small	21.66%	60.60%	16.20%	1.54%

Figure 4. Larger Fandom Word Counts (n=2,203,255)

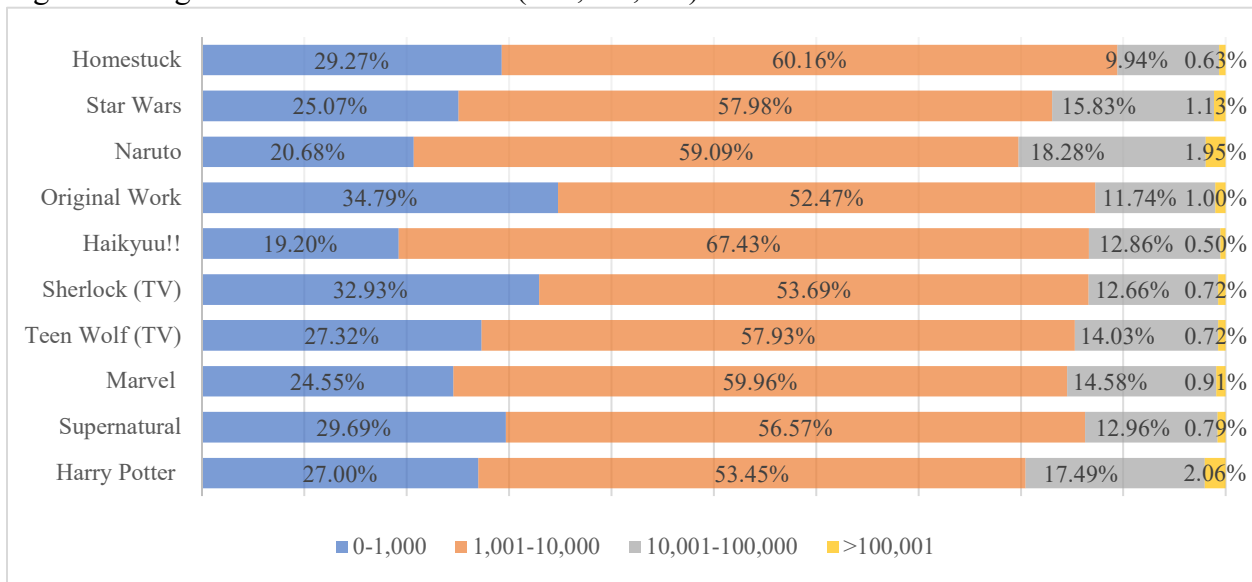
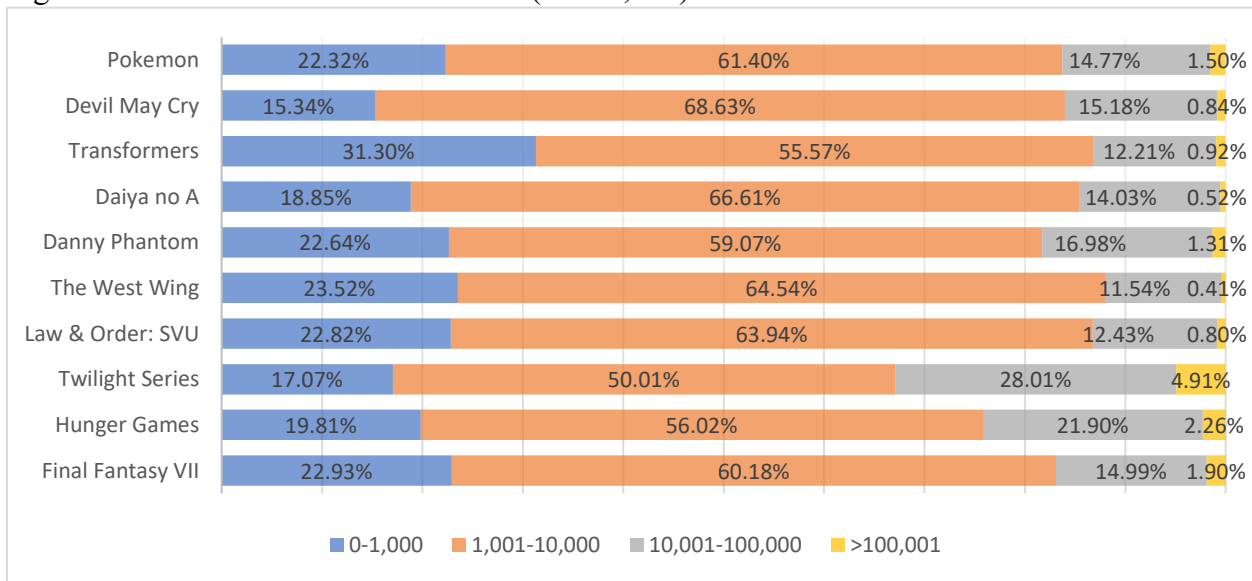


Figure 5. Smaller Fandom Word Counts (n=164,197)



**RQ3. What differences can be observed regarding the completion rates of works in the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?**

On average, 82.77 percent of larger fandom works were marked complete while 17.23 percent were incomplete (Table 4). For smaller fandoms, 81.46 percent were marked complete and 18.54 percent were marked incomplete. Percentages for individual fandoms are depicted in Figures 6 and 7.

Table 4. Average Completion Status Rates (n=2,367,963)

Fandom Size	Completion Status	
	Complete	Incomplete
Large	82.77%	17.23%
Small	81.46%	18.54%

Figure 6. Larger Fandom Completion Statuses (n=2,203,747)

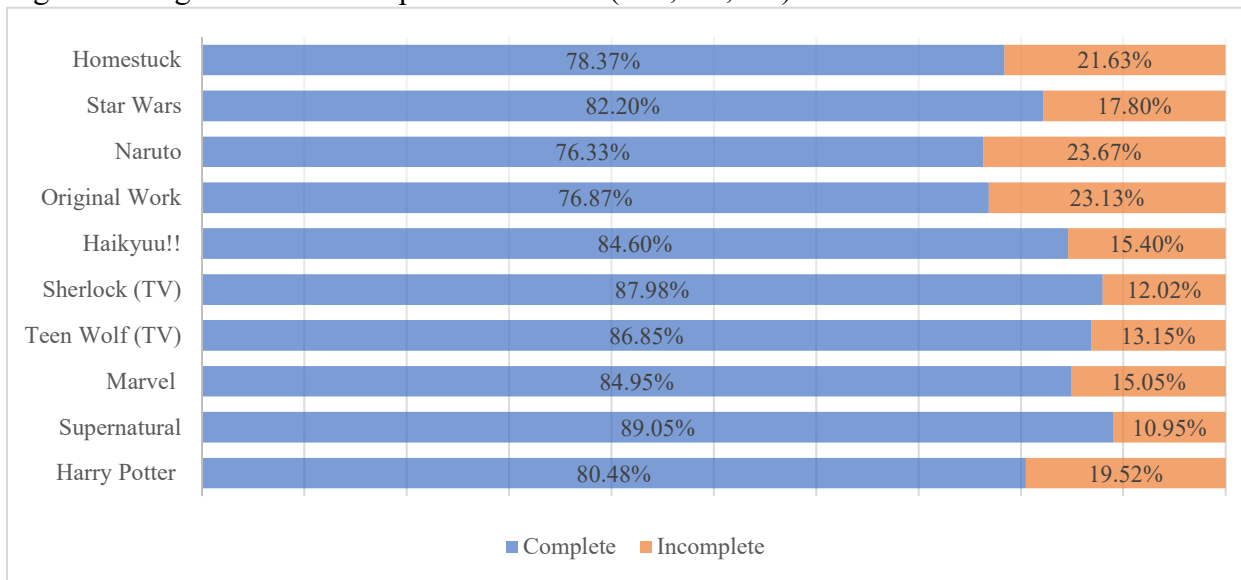
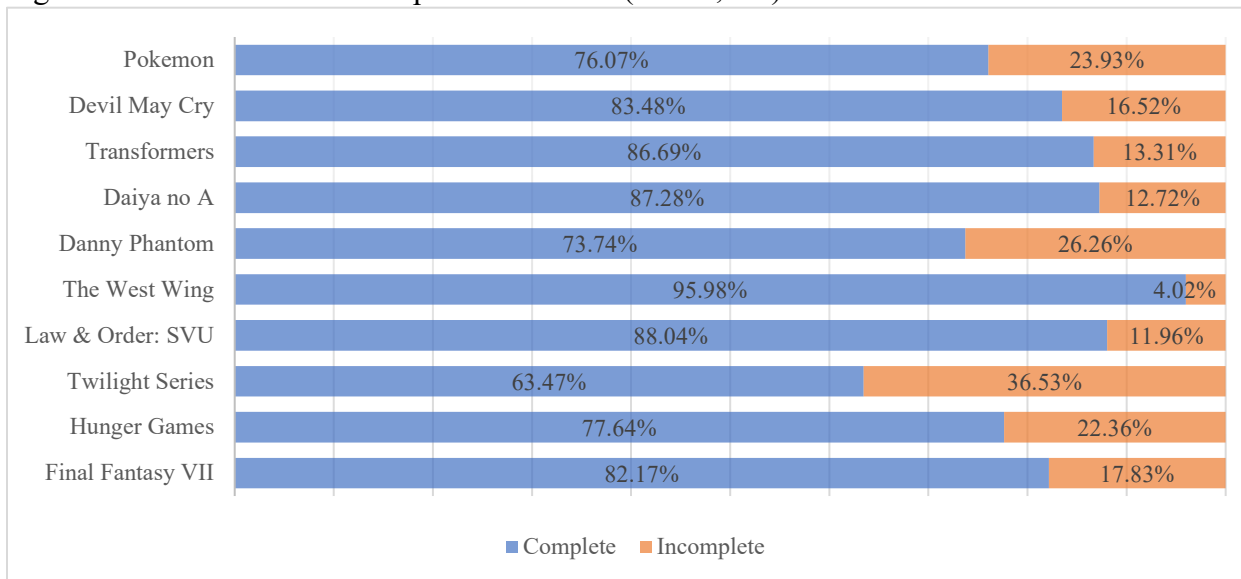


Figure 7. Smaller Fandom Completion Statuses (n=164,216)



**RQ3a. Are there differences in terms of abandoned works in these fandom groups?**

Works filtering for years since the last update was only performed on incomplete works to get a better look at abandoned works (Table 5). On average 22.58 percent of larger fandom uncomplete works were updated less than a year ago, 27.13 percent were updated between one and three years ago, 14.74 percent were updated between three and five years ago, 14.54 percent were updated between five and seven years ago, 12.99 percent were updated between seven and nine years ago, and 8.02 percent were updated over nine years ago.

For smaller fandoms, an average of 31.16 percent were updated less than a year ago, 31.04 percent were updated between one and three years ago, 13.85 percent were updated between three and five years ago, 10.42 percent were updated between five and seven years ago, 7.74 percent were updated between seven and nine years ago, and 5.78 percent were updated over nine years ago. Percentages across all years and fandoms are depicted in Figures 8 and 9.

Table 5. Average Time since Last Update for Abandoned Works

Fandom Size	Years Since Last Update					
	<1 years	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-7 years	7-9 years	>9 years
Large	22.58%	27.13%	14.74%	14.54%	12.99%	8.02%
Small	31.16%	31.04%	13.85%	10.42%	7.74%	5.78%

Figure 8. Larger Fandom Updates (n=368,713)

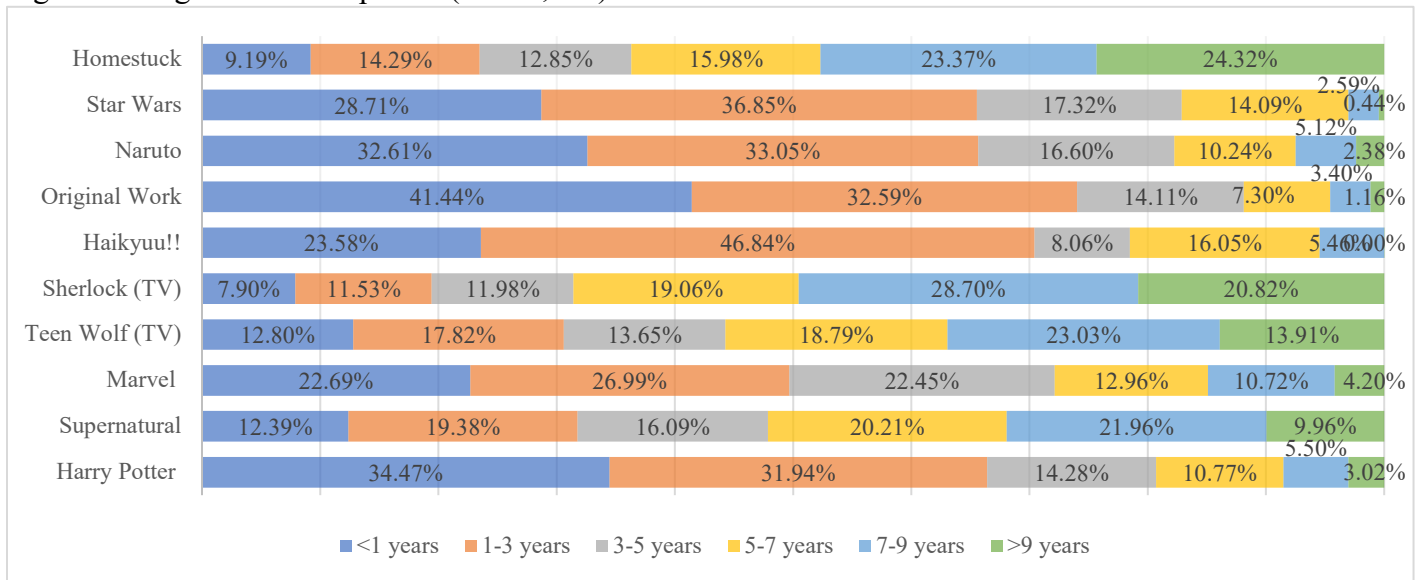
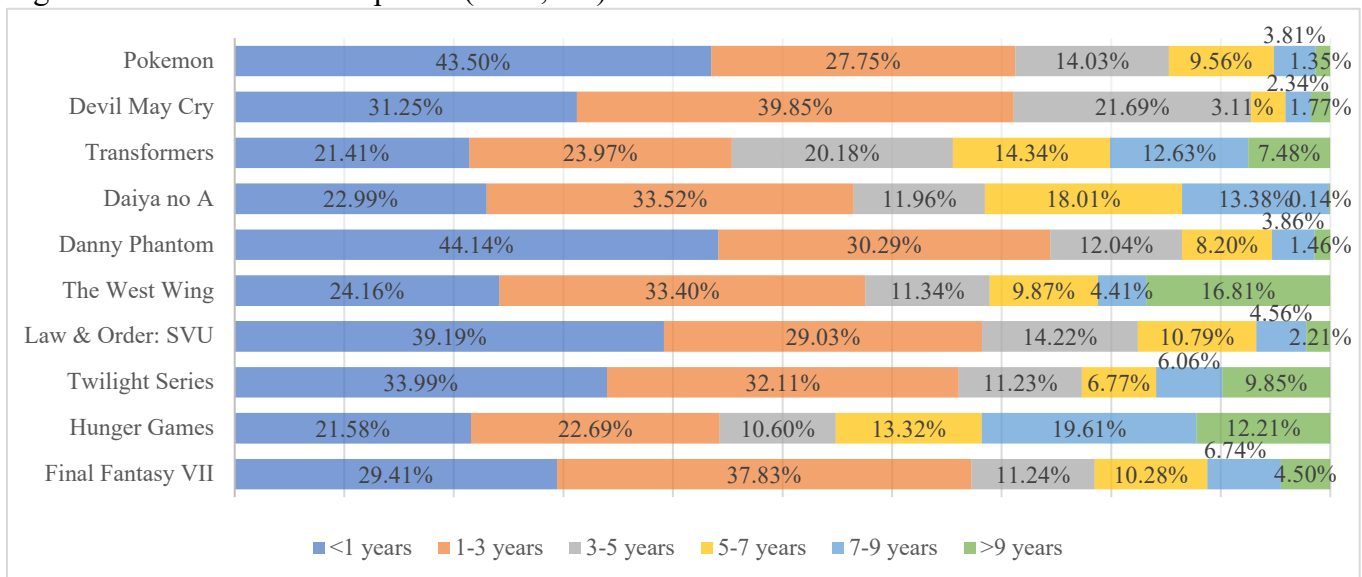


Figure 9. Smaller Fandom Updates (n=30,036)



**RQ4. What differences can be observed regarding relationship and non-relationship-focused works within and between the top 10 fandoms on Archive of Our Own and the 10 selected smaller fandoms?** On average, 19.38 percent of larger fandom works were not focused on romance while 80.62 percent had

a romantic focus. For the smaller fandoms, an average of 22.22 percent of works were non-romantic in nature while 77.78 percent had a romantic focus. Percentages for all fandoms are depicted in Figures 10 and 11.

Table 6. Average Work Focus (n=2,367,716)

Fandom Size	Work Focus	
	Non-Gen	Gen
Large	19.38	80.62%
Small	22.22%	77.78%

Figure 10. Larger Fandom Focuses (n=2,203,406)

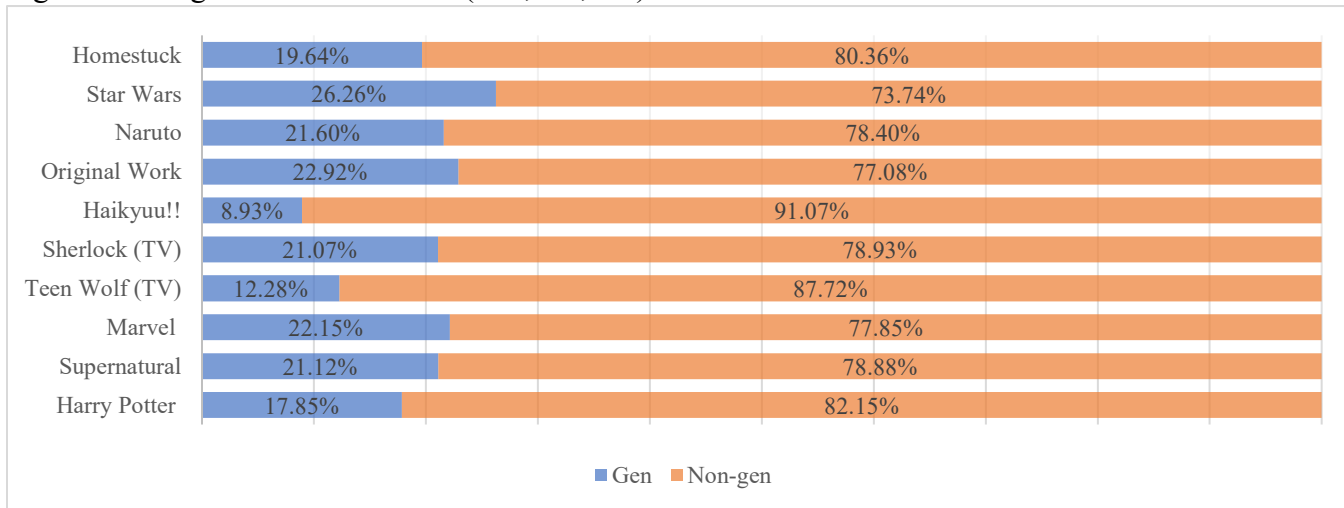
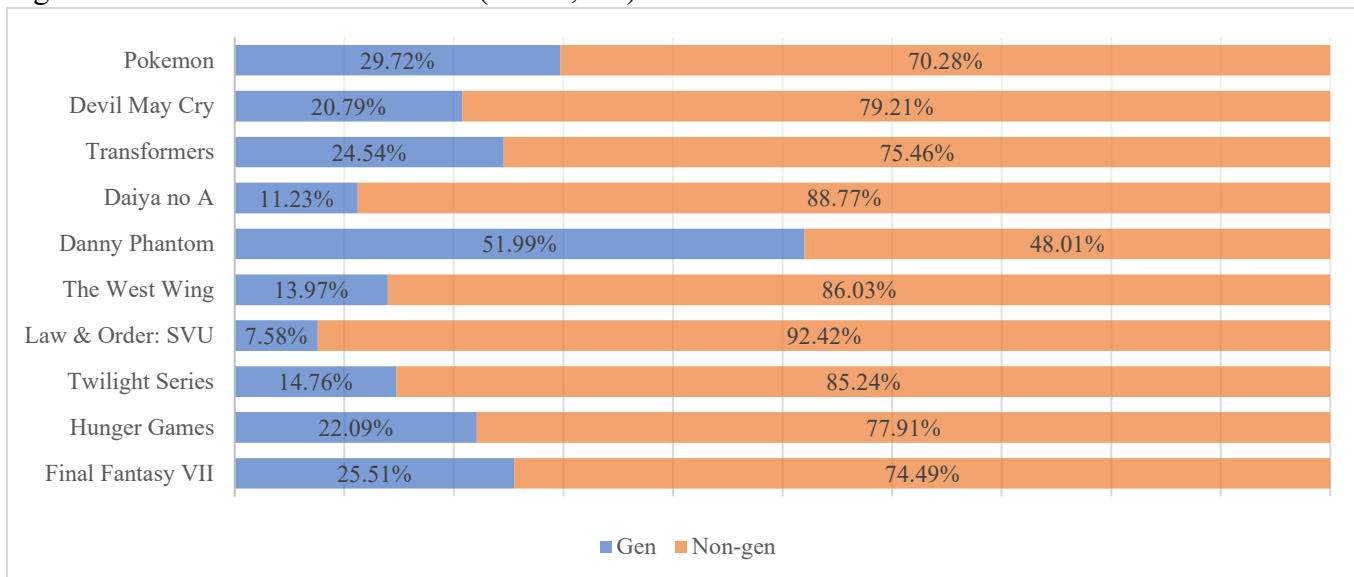


Figure 11. Smaller Fandom Focuses (n=164,310)



## Discussion

The same general trends were seen between the large fandom group and the small fandom group in terms of author-assigned work ratings. For most fandoms, the works were most likely to be teen and up and least likely to not be rated. The only exceptions were in the small fandom group. *Pokemon*, *Transformers*, and *Daiya no A* had more general audience works than teen and up audience works. *Danny Phantom* was less likely to have explicitly rated works than non-rated

works. These differences might be due to their fanbases being younger compared to the other fandoms examined.

For almost every fandom, the works were most likely to be 1,001-10,000 words followed by 1-1,000 words and 10,001-100,000 words. They were all least likely to have works over 100,001 words. For comparison, *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway is 27,000 words (Prescott 1952) and *Harry Potter and*

*the Philosopher's Stone* by J.K. Rowling is 76,944 words (WordCounter 2015). The only exceptions were *Twilight* and *Hunger Games* works which were more likely to be 10,001-100,000 words than less than 1,000 words. For almost every fandom, works were over twice as likely to be 1,001-10,000 words than 0-1,000. The only exceptions were Original Works, *Sherlock*, *Supernatural*, *Harry Potter*, and *Transformers*.

At least two-thirds of all fandom works were marked as complete. The only exception was *Twilight* which was just under two-thirds. The fandom with the largest ratio of completed works was *The West Wing* with 95.98% of all works being completed. This is 6.93% higher than *Supernatural* which had the second-highest completion rate. This might be due to the age of the target audience being older than the majority of the other fandoms. This idea is supported in part by *Law & Order: SVU* having the third highest completion rate at 88.04% of works being marked complete. Shows like *Naruto*, *Pokemon*, and *Danny Phantom*, which have younger audiences, had three out of five of the lowest completion status percentages. The other two were Original Works and *Twilight*.

For the most part, the number of works updated went down the farther back in time you went. The only exception is that smaller fandoms were more likely to be less than a year out from their last update than larger fandoms. The overall trend could be linked with the archive's growth over time. While there were similar trends between both fandom groups on average, there were no discernable trends within the larger fandoms and the smaller fandoms.

Almost every single fandom had more works focusing on romantic stories than non-romantic stories. The works for *Danny Phantom* were a large exception with 51.99% not focused on romantic stories. This could be due to the younger nature of the property's audience. The next highest one was *Pokemon* with 29.72% being focused on non-romantic stories. That is a difference of 23.27%. In comparison, one study found that romance made up 25% of all books sold while another found that they made up 39.3% of genre fiction (Kjellberg, 2022). Other genre fiction often has a romance subplot just like romance is not necessarily

the focus of works tagged "gen" on Archive of Our Own.

## Conclusion

Publication trends in ratings, work length, completion status, and work focus was the same among all fandoms observed. Trends were more homogenous within the larger fandoms. Of outliers, a common probable cause was the age demographic of the fandom in question. Future research is needed to definitively draw links between fandom demographics and publication trends. There was a slight difference between the larger fandoms and the smaller fandoms in terms of years since the last update with the two most common update spans being switched.

This research can be expanded upon by examining the content of publications in terms of the type and audience of the fandom. Looking at publication trends directly following the release of new media within fandoms could speak to the reason for work creation. It would also be useful to cross-examine publication trends with readership trends to better understand the consumption trends of this media.

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**Appendix A.** Discrepancies between Category Totals and Total Works (n=11,839,159)

All differences were less than 0.01% of the total work count

Fandom	Total Works	Ratings		Word Counts		Completion Statuses		Focuses	
		Total	Difference	Total	Difference	Total	Difference	Total	Difference
Harry Potter	417544	417568	24	417398	146	417544	0	417545	1
Supernatural	274142	274142	0	274092	50	274142	0	274142	0
Marvel	504918	504918	0	504851	67	504918	0	504918	0
Teen Wolf (TV)	133324	133326	2	133315	9	133324	0	133324	0
Sherlock (TV)	131070	131071	1	131055	15	131070	0	130972	98
Haikyuu!!	151383	151383	0	151354	29	151383	0	151383	0
Original Work	204225	204225	0	204096	129	204189	36	204112	113
Naruto	104160	104160	0	104147	13	104160	0	104160	0
Star Wars	222006	222009	3	221941	65	222006	0	221839	167
Homestuck	61011	61012	1	61006	5	61011	0	61011	0
Final Fantasy VII	23452	23452	0	23449	3	23452	0	23576	124
Hunger Games	10882	10882	0	10881	1	10882	0	10882	0
Twilight Series	10479	10479	0	10479	0	10480	1	10480	1
Law & Order: SVU	18521	18521	0	18516	5	18521	0	18521	0
The West Wing	11847	11848	1	11846	1	11847	0	11847	0
Danny Phantom	12809	12809	0	12807	2	12809	0	12779	30
Daiya no A	11047	11047	0	11047	0	11047	0	11047	0
Transformers	23787	23787	0	23786	1	23787	0	23787	0
Devil May Cry	12669	12669	0	12669	0	12669	0	12669	0
Pokemon	28722	28722	0	28717	5	28722	0	28722	0

**Appendix Ba.** Fandom Ratings Raw Data (n=2,368,029)

Fandom	Rating				
	Not Rated	General Audiences	Teen and Up Audiences	Mature	Explicit
Harry Potter	35970	112138	125677	71891	71892
Supernatural	28541	67924	76937	41101	59639
Marvel	50187	144888	159803	69137	80903
Teen Wolf (TV)	13968	31949	43433	19408	24568
Sherlock (TV)	13231	39733	38242	18720	21145
Haikyuu!!	14371	49198	48539	17347	21928
Original Work	28205	47361	49118	32459	47082
Naruto	9110	25384	32539	18929	18198
Star Wars	14613	65416	66456	30590	44934
Homestuck	6055	13351	21943	8710	10953
Final Fantasy VII	1311	5717	7618	3811	4995
Hunger Games	846	2133	4329	2442	1132
Twilight Series	928	1840	3077	2714	1920
Law & Order: SVU	1903	5178	5377	3034	3029
The West Wing	365	3363	5452	1546	1122
Danny Phantom	1108	4754	5329	967	651
Daiya no A	880	3790	3748	1148	1481
Transformers	1352	6952	6861	3507	5115
Devil May Cry	1075	2310	2861	2750	3673
Pokemon	1551	10016	8610	2773	5772

**Appendix Bb.** Fandom Ratings Percentages (n=2,368,029)

Fandom	Rating				
	Not Rated	General Audiences	Teen and Up Audiences	Mature	Explicit
Harry Potter	8.61%	26.86%	30.10%	17.22%	17.22%
Supernatural	10.41%	24.78%	28.06%	14.99%	21.75%
Marvel	9.94%	28.70%	31.65%	13.69%	16.02%
Teen Wolf (TV)	10.48%	23.96%	32.58%	14.56%	18.43%
Sherlock (TV)	10.09%	30.31%	29.18%	14.28%	16.13%
Haikyuu!!	9.49%	32.50%	32.06%	11.46%	14.49%
Original Work	13.81%	23.19%	24.05%	15.89%	23.05%
Naruto	8.75%	24.37%	31.24%	18.17%	17.47%
Star Wars	6.58%	29.47%	29.93%	13.78%	20.24%
Homestuck	9.92%	21.88%	35.97%	14.28%	17.95%
Final Fantasy VII	5.59%	24.38%	32.48%	16.25%	21.30%
Hunger Games	7.77%	19.60%	39.78%	22.44%	10.40%
Twilight Series	8.86%	17.56%	29.36%	25.90%	18.32%
Law & Order: SVU	10.27%	27.96%	29.03%	16.38%	16.35%
The West Wing	3.08%	28.39%	46.02%	13.05%	9.47%

Danny Phantom	8.65%	37.11%	41.60%	7.55%	5.08%
Daiya no A	7.97%	34.31%	33.93%	10.39%	13.41%
Transformers	5.68%	29.23%	28.84%	14.74%	21.50%
Devil May Cry	8.49%	18.23%	22.58%	21.71%	28.99%
Pokemon	5.40%	34.87%	29.98%	9.65%	20.10%

**Appendix Ca.** Fandom Word Counts Raw Data (n=2,367,452)

Fandom	Word Count			
	0-1,000	1,001-10,000	10,001-100,000	>100,001
Harry Potter	112712	223111	72989	8586
Supernatural	81379	155043	35509	2161
Marvel	123952	302707	73611	4581
Teen Wolf (TV)	36424	77234	18701	956
Sherlock (TV)	43154	70365	16596	940
Haikyuu!!	29059	102063	19468	764
Original Work	70997	107096	23952	2051
Naruto	21535	61541	19040	2031
Star Wars	55633	128673	35123	2512
Homestuck	17858	36700	6061	387
Final Fantasy VII	5377	14111	3516	445
Hunger Games	2156	6096	2383	246
Twilight Series	1789	5241	2935	514
Law & Order: SVU	4226	11840	2302	148
The West Wing	2786	7645	1367	48
Danny Phantom	2900	7565	2174	168
Daiya no A	2082	7358	1550	57
Transformers	7445	13217	2905	219
Devil May Cry	1944	8695	1923	107
Pokemon	6411	17633	4242	431

**Appendix Cb.** Fandom Word Counts Percentages (n=2,367,452)

Fandom	Word Count			
	0-1,000	1,001-10,000	10,001-100,000	>100,001
Harry Potter	27.00%	53.45%	17.49%	2.06%
Supernatural	29.69%	56.57%	12.96%	0.79%
Marvel	24.55%	59.96%	14.58%	0.91%
Teen Wolf (TV)	27.32%	57.93%	14.03%	0.72%
Sherlock (TV)	32.93%	53.69%	12.66%	0.72%
Haikyuu!!	19.20%	67.43%	12.86%	0.50%
Original Work	34.79%	52.47%	11.74%	1.00%
Naruto	20.68%	59.09%	18.28%	1.95%
Star Wars	25.07%	57.98%	15.83%	1.13%
Homestuck	29.27%	60.16%	9.94%	0.63%
Final Fantasy VII	22.93%	60.18%	14.99%	1.90%

Hunger Games	19.81%	56.02%	21.90%	2.26%
Twilight Series	17.07%	50.01%	28.01%	4.91%
Law & Order: SVU	22.82%	63.94%	12.43%	0.80%
The West Wing	23.52%	64.54%	11.54%	0.41%
Danny Phantom	22.64%	59.07%	16.98%	1.31%
Daiya no A	18.85%	66.61%	14.03%	0.52%
Transformers	31.30%	55.57%	12.21%	0.92%
Devil May Cry	15.34%	68.63%	15.18%	0.84%
Pokemon	22.32%	61.40%	14.77%	1.50%

**Appendix Da.** Fandom Completion Statuses Raw Data (n=2,367,963)

Fandom	Completion Status	
	Complete	Incomplete
Harry Potter	336049	81495
Supernatural	244130	30012
Marvel	428938	75980
Teen Wolf (TV)	115797	17527
Sherlock (TV)	115316	15754
Haikyuu!!	128068	23315
Original Work	156952	47237
Naruto	79504	24656
Star Wars	182499	39507
Homestuck	47817	13194
Final Fantasy VII	19270	4182
Hunger Games	8449	2433
Twilight Series	6652	3828
Law & Order: SVU	16306	2215
The West Wing	11371	476
Danny Phantom	9445	3364
Daiya no A	9642	1405
Transformers	20620	3167
Devil May Cry	10576	2093
Pokemon	21849	6873

**Appendix Db.** Fandom Completion Statuses Percentages (n=2,367,963)

Fandom	Completion Status	
	Complete	Incomplete
Harry Potter	80.48%	19.52%
Supernatural	89.05%	10.95%
Marvel	84.95%	15.05%
Teen Wolf (TV)	86.85%	13.15%
Sherlock (TV)	87.98%	12.02%
Haikyuu!!	84.60%	15.40%
Original Work	76.87%	23.13%
Naruto	76.33%	23.67%

Star Wars	82.20%	17.80%
Homestuck	78.37%	21.63%
Final Fantasy VII	82.17%	17.83%
Hunger Games	77.64%	22.36%
Twilight Series	63.47%	36.53%
Law & Order: SVU	88.04%	11.96%
The West Wing	95.98%	4.02%
Danny Phantom	73.74%	26.26%
Daiya no A	87.28%	12.72%
Transformers	86.69%	13.31%
Devil May Cry	83.48%	16.52%
Pokemon	76.07%	23.93%

**Appendix Ea.** Fandom Updates Raw Data (n=398,749)

Fandom	Years Since Last Update					
	<1 years	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-7 years	7-9 years	>9 years
Harry Potter	28094	26031	11640	8780	4485	2465
Supernatural	3718	5817	4830	6066	6591	2990
Marvel	17238	20506	17061	9844	8142	3189
Teen Wolf (TV)	2243	3123	2393	3293	4037	2438
Sherlock (TV)	1245	1817	1888	3002	4522	3280
Haikyuu!!	5498	10921	1880	3741	1274	1
Original Work	19590	15407	6668	3453	1607	548
Naruto	8040	8150	4092	2525	1263	586
Star Wars	11342	14559	6841	5565	1025	175
Homestuck	1213	1885	1695	2109	3083	3209
Final Fantasy VII	1230	1582	470	430	282	188
Hunger Games	525	552	258	324	477	297
Twilight Series	1301	1229	430	259	232	377
Law & Order: SVU	868	643	315	239	101	49
The West Wing	115	159	54	47	21	80
Danny Phantom	1485	1019	405	276	130	49
Daiya no A	323	471	168	253	188	2
Transformers	678	759	639	454	400	237
Devil May Cry	654	834	454	65	49	37
Pokemon	2990	1907	964	657	262	93

**Appendix Eb.** Fandom Updates Raw Data (n=398,749)

Fandom	Years Since Last Update					
	<1 years	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-7 years	7-9 years	>9 years
Harry Potter	34.47%	31.94%	14.28%	10.77%	5.50%	3.02%
Supernatural	12.39%	19.38%	16.09%	20.21%	21.96%	9.96%

Marvel	22.69%	26.99%	22.45%	12.96%	10.72%	4.20%
Teen Wolf (TV)	12.80%	17.82%	13.65%	18.79%	23.03%	13.91%
Sherlock (TV)	7.90%	11.53%	11.98%	19.06%	28.70%	20.82%
Haikyuu!!	23.58%	46.84%	8.06%	16.05%	5.46%	0.00%
Original Work	41.44%	32.59%	14.11%	7.30%	3.40%	1.16%
Naruto	32.61%	33.05%	16.60%	10.24%	5.12%	2.38%
Star Wars	28.71%	36.85%	17.32%	14.09%	2.59%	0.44%
Homestuck	9.19%	14.29%	12.85%	15.98%	23.37%	24.32%
Average	22.58%	27.13%	14.74%	14.54%	12.99%	8.02%
	Years Since Last Update					
Fandom	<1 years	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-7 years	7-9 years	>9 years
Final Fantasy VII	29.41%	37.83%	11.24%	10.28%	6.74%	4.50%
Hunger Games	21.58%	22.69%	10.60%	13.32%	19.61%	12.21%
Twilight Series	33.99%	32.11%	11.23%	6.77%	6.06%	9.85%
Law & Order: SVU	39.19%	29.03%	14.22%	10.79%	4.56%	2.21%
The West Wing	24.16%	33.40%	11.34%	9.87%	4.41%	16.81%
Danny Phantom	44.14%	30.29%	12.04%	8.20%	3.86%	1.46%
Daiya no A	22.99%	33.52%	11.96%	18.01%	13.38%	0.14%
Transformers	21.41%	23.97%	20.18%	14.34%	12.63%	7.48%
Devil May Cry	31.25%	39.85%	21.69%	3.11%	2.34%	1.77%
Pokemon	43.50%	27.75%	14.03%	9.56%	3.81%	1.35%

**Appendix Fa.** Fandom Focuses Raw Data (n=2,367,716)

Fandom	Focus	
	Gen	Non-gen
Harry Potter	74519	343026
Supernatural	57900	216242
Marvel	45362	393090
Teen Wolf (TV)	16367	116957
Sherlock (TV)	27593	103379
Haikyuu!!	13524	137859
Original Work	46783	157329
Naruto	22494	81666
Star Wars	58259	163580
Homestuck	11983	49028
Final Fantasy VII	6015	17561
Hunger Games	2404	8478
Twilight Series	1547	8933
Law & Order: SVU	1403	17118
The West Wing	1655	10192
Danny Phantom	6644	6135
Daiya no A	1241	9806
Transformers	5838	17949
Devil May Cry	2634	10035
Pokemon	8537	20185

**Appendix Fb. Fandom Focuses Percentages (n=2,367,716)**

Fandom	Focus	
	Gen	Non-gen
Harry Potter	17.85%	82.15%
Supernatural	21.12%	78.88%
Marvel	22.15%	77.85%
Teen Wolf (TV)	12.28%	87.72%
Sherlock (TV)	21.07%	78.93%
Haikyuu!!	8.93%	91.07%
Original Work	22.92%	77.08%
Naruto	21.60%	78.40%
Star Wars	26.26%	73.74%
Homestuck	19.64%	80.36%
Final Fantasy VII	25.51%	74.49%
Hunger Games	22.09%	77.91%
Twilight Series	14.76%	85.24%
Law & Order: SVU	7.58%	92.42%
The West Wing	13.97%	86.03%
Danny Phantom	51.99%	48.01%
Daiya no A	11.23%	88.77%
Transformers	24.54%	75.46%
Devil May Cry	20.79%	79.21%
Pokemon	29.72%	70.28%