An Archive of Their Own: A Case Study of Feminist HCI and Values in Design

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Creator chose not to use Archive warnings, AO3, fan fiction, feminist HCI, online communities, values in design, mermaids, meta, ACAFANDOM, no really this stuff is awesome

In which AO3 is examined through the lens of feminist HCI, based on interview data and historical analysis.

Language: English   Words: 10,031   Chapters: 1   Comments: 1,442
On Sunday night, if you're not checking out a local lab tour, attending a workshop dinner, or picking up an award at the SIGCHI awards dinner, please consider stopping by a little cocktail shindig that I'll be hosting at the
What happens when a community builds something “of their own”?

- Designing for existing values and norms
  (Value-sensitive design: Friedman et al., 2006)
- Incorporating and designing with feminist values
  (Feminist HCI: Bardzell, 2010)
- Mitigating value tensions through design
“Fanfiction is not about simply churning out more and more iterations of existing characters and worlds, or rather, it’s not just about that. It’s about doing things with those existing characters and worlds that their creators couldn’t or wouldn’t do.

—LEV GROSSMAN

from fic

SMARTPOPBOOKS.COM/FANFICTION

#fanfics
Because the story’s not over until we say it is.

johnstached:
sherlockmafloy:
fudgeflies:
what’s the film industry gonna do when they run out of books to make movies out of?

fanfiction

SHERLOCK SERIES 3
**NEW ETA**: we're going to take a stab at putting this together. For more information and discussion, please join and/or watch 🎉 _otw_news_.

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**ETA**: If you are coming to the conversation late, 🌀 _xenacryst_ has helpfully collected up a bunch of links to a subset of noteworthy discussion threads, over here!

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First, why fanfic is not illegal and why YOU should stop saying that it is even if you don't agree, by 🌀 _cesperanza_. Please read it.

That said, the people behind fanlib (talked about many places, see 🌀 _astridy_ here) don't actually care about fanfic, the fanfic community, or anything except making money off content created entirely by other people and getting media attention. They don't have a single fanfic reader or writer on their board; they don't even have a single woman on their board. They're creating a lawsuit-bait site while being bad potential defendants, and they deserve to be chased out being pelted with rocks.

But even if they were, which I doubt is going to happen, because hey, they have people and money, we're still left with this problem: we are sitting quietly by the fireside, creating piles and piles of content around us, and other people are going to look at that and see an opportunity. And they are going to end up creating the front doors that new fanfic writers walk through, unless we stand up and build our OWN front door.
I know we have project managers in this community — and coders and designers — can’t we do this? Seriously — we can come up with a site that would be miles better and more attractive to fanfic writers/readers than anything else out there, guys, because we actually USE this stuff.

We need a central archive of our own.
A fan-created, fan-run, non-profit, non-commercial archive for transformative fanworks, like fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, and podfic.

more than 21420 fandoms | 839400 users | 2252000 works

The Archive of Our Own is a project of the Organization for Transformative Works.

With an AO3 account, you can:

- Share your own fanworks
- Get notified when your favorite works, series, or users update
- Participate in challenges
- Keep track of works you've visited and works you want to check out later

The OTW is Recruiting Elections Staffers
Find your favorites

» All Fandoms
» Anime & Manga
» Books & Literature
» Cartoons & Comics & Graphic Novels
» Celebrities & Real People
» Movies
» Music & Bands
» TV Shows
» Video Games
» Uncategorized Fandoms

News

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# Fandoms

## Anime & Manga
- Shingeki no Kyojin | Attack on Titan (28395)
- Haikyuu!! (19749)
- Hetalia: Axis Powers (18257)
- Naruto (16176)
- Kuroko no Basuke | Kuroko's Basketball (13498)

## Books & Literature
- Harry Potter – J. K. Rowling (94507)
- Sherlock Holmes & Related Fandoms (90103)
- TOLKIEN J. R. R. – Works & Related Fandoms (37236)
- Doctor Who (36952)
- Arthurian Mythology & Related Fandoms (26207)

## Cartoons & Comics & Graphic Novels
- Marvel (171366)
- The Avengers – Ambiguous Fandom (79608)
- The Avengers (Marvel) – All Media Types (77359)
- DCU (50868)
- Homestuck (38761)

## Celebrities & Real People
- Real Person Fiction (114248)
- Actor RPF (38934)
- Video Blogging RPF (33282)
- Bandom (28965)
- Internet Personalities (27760)

## Movies
- Marvel (171366)
- Marvel (Movies) (147858)
- Marvel Cinematic Universe (130521)
- Harry Potter – J. K. Rowling (94507)
- The Avengers – Ambiguous Fandom (79608)

## Music & Bands
- One Direction (Band) (46751)
- K-pop (29636)
- Bandom (28965)
- Music RPF (27488)
- Rock Music RPF (23444)
Scandal On Brookline Street by HalfshellVenus for laura47

Academic Institutions (Anthropomorphic)

No Archive Warnings Apply, Harvard/MIT, Harvard University – Character, Massachusetts Institute of Technology – Character, Yuletide Madness, Anthropomorphic

Prestige alone cannot conquer the beast that is envy.

How did the developers of Archive of Our Own incorporate the community’s existing values and norms into the design of the site? Are there lessons for other online communities?
Are you a fan fiction writer who uses Archive of Our Own?

pipeline-gt:

We are seeking participants in a research study about online creative activity and communities of creators. We are especially interested in people who have used multiple sites over time (e.g., Tumblr, Livejournal, AO3). We want to learn more about how you use AO3 and these other fan fiction spaces, and how the site design impacts the ways that you share and interact online.

We are offering compensation in the form of a $6 Amazon gift card for study participants!

If you have any questions about this research study, you can check out our FAQ here and, of course, submit any other questions to our ask or via email to our primary investigator, Casey Fiesler.

If you would be willing to share your experiences in a one-hour interview over the phone or online, please contact Casey Fiesler at casey.fiesler@gatech.edu to set up an interview time.

Boosting the signal for my friend Casey, who’s doing a study of those who read fanfic online, and have done so in multiple places through the years.

(via pipeline-gt-deactivated20150811)
28 participants
• 6 developers/designers
• 5 staffer-users
• 17 users

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Semi-structured interviews
Thematic analysis
Inductive → deductive
Feminist HCI: imbuing the design of interactive systems with sensitivity to the central commitments of feminism

- Participation
- Advocacy
- Self-disclosure
- Pluralism
- Ecology
- Embodiment
Participation

ETA: If you are coming to the con looking for a bunch of links to a subset of novels, yay you.

First, why fanfic is not illegal and we agree, by @cesperanz. Please read.

That said, the people behind fanfic do something that off content created entirely by others. They're single fanfic reader or writer on their board. They're creating a labor and they deserve to be chased out.

But even if they were, which I don't actually care about fanfic, there's still piles of content and money, we're still left with the task of creating piles and piles of content and see an opportunity. And they're just wanna fanfic writers walk through, unless

I love this. I really love this.

More dream features.

* Automated rec lists 2.0 - suggestions based on what's recommended by people who share tastes/interests
* Okay to remix? - allow posters to flag their fic as remixable or off-limits according to their comfort levels; then generate frequent remix challenges using whatever's remixable in a fandom, theme, tag, etc.
* Lots of insta-challenges in general - keep people coming to the site and exploring, not just sticking things in an archive, by using community data to identify good challenge ideas, underappreciated fandoms, or whatever else can be mined.

* An API.
* A pony.

These are all AWESOME. I love the okay-to-remix flag! And YES YES to the API -- let people build whatever clients they want!
“We need our own site. We need to put up our own front page that basically says, ‘This is the fannish community, and this is for us, by us, and we support everyone.’” – Naomi

“How are we going to get enough people to not just build this thing, but maintain it? … We’re going to have to grow our own.” – Naomi
“We worked really hard on announcing any site changes in advance, talking to users in comments... to explain why stuff was happening.” – A (dev)

“The changes on other websites come from companies not listening and just being like, ‘We think this would be better’... Then those changes are really annoying. AO3 doesn’t have that problem because it’s user-driven.” – Kirsten (user)
Participation

blissfire @fizzandvinegar - 29 Jul 2015
@AO3_Status I HAVE FOUND THE PROBLEM
YOU HAVE A KITTEN IN THE TUBES
SEND HALP

AO3 Status
@AO3_Status
We're looking into what's causing the current
downtime. Our apologies!

RETTWEETS  LIKES
214        532

11:40 PM - 28 Jul 2015

Alicia Brown @EnoughAll - 29 Jul 2015
@AO3_Status I wish you luck. Thank you all for your hard work! Where can I send
cookies/cake to, once this is over?

Izzy Wright @misogiwasaken - 29 Jul 2015
@AO3_Status No problem! Just glad you're on it. Thanks for all the hard work!
You are welcome at the Archive of Our Own.

No matter your appearance, circumstances, configuration or take on the world: if you enjoy consuming, creating or commenting on fanworks, the Archive is for you.

This archive is a permanent, panfandom place for fanworks, built by fans for fans. Whichever way you use the Archive, you’re part of this, powering it, shaping it through your use and your feedback.

We, the Archive team, know that we won’t get everything right on the first try, and we won’t be able to make everyone equally happy. But we strive to find a good balance, and we promise to respectfully consider your feedback and to take it seriously.

You are free to express your creativity within the few restrictions needed to keep the service viable for other users. With servers in the United States, we need to follow U.S. laws, but the Archive strives to protect your rights to free expression and privacy; you can read about the details in our Terms of Service.

We know that there are some essential parts that are still missing to make the Archive truly panfandom: the ability to host fanworks other than text, an interface in languages other than English, and more ways for you to connect with each other, to name just a few. But with your support, we’ll get there.

We are building this archive because we believe it’s possible for people of all opinions and persuasions to come together and share with each other.

We are building this archive for you. Come be a part of it.
"The whole archive was designed from the ground up with accessibility in mind. Everything had to be accessible; otherwise it’s not added. We had people with assistive technology provide feedback." – Betsy (dev)

"My mother has vision problems. There is thought about that built into AO3 in a way there isn’t into other websites. If more places would be like AO3 and consider feedback the Internet would be a better place." – Mira (user)
Pluralism
### Tags

- Abduction
- Abuse
- Action/Adventure
- Age Difference
- Age Play
- Alcohol
- Aliens
- Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics
- Alternate Canon
- Alternate Universe
- Angst
- Anxiety
- AO3 Tags – Freeform
- Apocalypse
- Art
- Asexuality Spectrum
- Asphyxiation
- Audio Content
- Awkwardness
- Bathing/Washing
- BDSM
- Birthday
- Biting
- Blood
- Bodily Fluids
- Body Modification
- Bonding
- Bottoming
- Boys' Love
- Break Up
- Canon Related
- Canon Universe
- Character Study
- Character(s) of Color
- Children
- Clothing
- Coercion
- Comfort
- Complete
- Confessions
- Consent
- Crack
- Crimes & Criminals
- Crossdressing
- Crossovers & Fandom Fusions
- Crushes
- Cuddling & Snuggling
- Dancing and Singing
- Dark
- Dating
- Death
- Deviates From Canon
- Disability
- Domestic
- Drabble
- Drama
- Dreams and Nightmares
- Drugs
- Education
- Fairy Tale Elements
- Falling In Love
- Family
- Feelings
- Feels
- Female Characters
- Female Relationships
- Ficlet
- Fights
- Fingerfucking
- Firsts
- Fix-
- Fluff
- Food
- Friendship
- Frottage
- Future
- Gen Work
- Gender Related
- Getting Together
- Gore
- Happy Ending
- Harm to Children
- Hatred
- Heterosexuality
- Historical
- Holidays
- Homophobia
- Horror
- Human
- Humiliation
- Humor
- Hurt
- Hurt/Comfort
- Hurtful
- I Don't Even Know
- I'm Sorry
- Illnesses
- Implied/Referenced Character Death
- In Public
- Incest
- Infidelity
- Injury
- Inspired by...
- Intoxication
- Introspection
- Jealousy
- Kink Meme
- Kinks
- Kissing
- Language
- LGBTQ Themes
- Light-Hearted
- Loss
- Love
- Male Slush
- Manipulation
- Marriage
- Medical
- Memory Related
- Mental Health Issues
- Misunderstandings
- Modern Era
- Music
- My First...
- Mystery
- Mythical Beings & Creatures
- N Things
- Non-Consensual
- One Shot
- Orgasm
- Original Character(s)
- Out of Character
- Pain
- Panic
- Past
- Pining
- Plot
- Podfic & Podficcled Works
- Poetry
- Polyamory
- Porn
- Possessive Behavior
- Post-Canon
- Post-Season/Series
- Posted Elsewhere
- POV First Person
- POV Second Person
- Pre-Canon
- Pregnancy
- Prompt Fill
- Protectiveness
- Reader-Insert
- Reincarnation
- Relationship(s)
- Religion
- Restaurants
- Romance
- Roughness
- Sad
- Science Fiction & Fantasy
- Secrets
- Self-
- Sexual Content
- Sexual Inexperience
- Shapeshifting
- Short
- Slash
- Slavery
- Slice of Life
- Slow Build
- Smut
- Soulmates
- Spoilers
- Sports
- Substance Abuse
- Suicide
- Supernatural Elements
- Team
- Teasing
- Teenagers
- Tension
- Threesome
- Time Travel
- Topping
- Torture
- Tragedy
- Trauma
- Travel
- Tumblr
- Underage – Freeform
- Unrequited
- Violence
- Voyeurism
- War
- Weapons
- Weather
- Yuletide

@cfiesler
Pluralism
Pluralism

“We knew that people called things by different names... if you wanted to write a Buffy/Spike fic and you really wanted to call it Spuffy, we didn’t want to stop you from doing that. Thinking about how you manage creating tags for a potentially infinite universe of source texts... and what people will want to say... is where the tagging system came from.” – Michele (dev)
“The failure of fanfiction.net is that you could only kind of say, “This has one or two of these things.” Archive of Our Own has the ability to say, “Okay, you want something that has all of that, plus it’s got lemonade.” – Kimberly (user)
“I think AO3 handles everything better than Livejournal. **Everyone involved in the running and creating of the site has been there because they love it.** We’re not going to change something because we think this will help advertisement. We’re not going to change it because it helps a different feature of the site that doesn’t involve fannish activity. **It’s a labor of love.**” – Kirsten (user)

… what about **challenges** in designing for values and norms?
History vs Control

“A lot of people wanted the feeling, early on, that they could just wipe out their fannish identity in an instant if they had to. They wanted to be able to disappear. Of course, that becomes considerably more difficult on the Internet in practice. Very frequently, you wipe out entire swaths of a community’s history with you.” – Naomi
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Designing to Influence Values

This work is a remix, a translation, a podfic, or was inspired by another work

URL

For a work in the Archive, only the URL is required.

Title

Author

Language

This is a translation

Summary:

1981. Sirius attends a cricket match that Remus suspects will be incredibly dull. But when the Dark Mark appears over the Kirkstall Lane End, things begin to heat up...

Notes:

Inspired by Boys of Summer by AJ Hall.
“We had baked in right from the beginning that you could post a work to the archive that was a remix based on another fannish work. As long as you gave credit, you didn’t need permission... I think that’s an example of where the archive got a little bit ahead of the broader community’s internal values. That was a deliberate concerted decision on our part.” – Naomi
Success Factors in Archive of Our Own

- Designing for existing values and norms
- Commitment to values like participation & pluralism
- Mitigating value tensions with design
- Empowering a community to build something “of their own”
Thank you!

Co–Authors: Amy Bruckman, Shannon Morrison
National Science Foundation, IIS–1216347

Finally, thank you to everyone who participated, volunteered, or shared, because this kind of work isn’t possible without awesome people to talk to. And you can read the full paper at the link at the top of this post!