Article

Reframing Monetization: Compensatory Practices and Generating a Hybrid Economy in Fanbinding Commissions

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Abstract: Monetization of fan-made crafts and texts remains a contentious issue in fandom. The existing literature documents fans' rejections of explicitly for-profit, authorized spaces for fanfiction publication, such as Kindle Worlds and FanLib, but tenuous acceptance of crafts and practitioners who demonstrate adherence to gift culture principles. Fanbinding—the practice of binding fanworks into codex form—brings to the fore concerns of author permission, intellectual copyright, and compensation for artistic labor prevalent in arguments regarding fanfiction monetization. Our research draws from survey data collected from thirty-one fanbinders and examines how they justify their decision-making on taking commissions through perceptions of acceptable fannish behavior and definitions of gift culture. We found that binders who do take commissions overall reject an explicitly for-profit enterprise and instead reinvest funds back into their craft, strengthening binders and commissioners' ability alike to contribute to the fandom gift economy. Here, binders offer a concentrated model for how to navigate competing concerns about fannish self-preservation, gift economy, and sustaining a costly craft, offering insights into how practitioners of other fancrafts might similarly navigate a third-space hybrid economy to justify compensation.

Keywords: fanbinding; bookbinding; fandom; compensation; gift culture; monetization; hybrid economy

1. Introduction

Monetization is a long-standing and contentious issue in fandom. Fans have historically rejected monetization in favor of a broadly defined "gift culture" that understands the exchange of fanworks as affective labor, motivated by love, interpersonal relationships, and not for profit. There are fan cultures, however, that welcome saleable fanworks, such as apparel to fill gaps in the market left by an official media enterprise. Fan opinions on monetized fanworks remain a tricky arena to navigate, but generally fans are receptive to compensatory practices that can arguably fall within the parameters of fandom gift culture.

Fanbinding, or the practice of binding fanfiction and other fan texts into physical books, provides a provocative locale for studying fandom compensatory practices because it brings to the fore several complexities related to fanwork monetization. Firstly, fanbinding requires high-cost tools and materials, and commissioning fanbound works to cover these costs alleviates the financial burden of an expensive fancraft hobby. Fan creators sell other fancrafts on online platforms with little to no backlash, in part due to the understanding that creating physical objects adds an extra expense compared to digitally circulated works (Jones 2014).

Secondly, fanbinders most often use fanfiction as their source material, which historically carries the largest stigma against monetization attempts, largely in part due to third-party corporate interference most often targeting this format. These take the form of FanLib and Kindle Worlds, which sought to sell fanfiction through licensing programs and pull-to-publish examples such as *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which replaced all copyrighted

material in the fanfiction *Master of the Universe* and published it as original fiction. While on the surface fanbinders appear to operate as a new third-party fanfiction publisher, fanbinding is distinctly a one-to-one fan-run practice.

Finally, binding fanfiction introduces ethical considerations regarding remixing existing fanworks. Fans often hold conflicting viewpoints related to fanfic authors' control over their own works versus the celebration of fandom's remix culture (Busse 2015). While fanbound works can be considered transformative works based off of other fanwork, fanbinders also face potential accusations of theft and profiting off another's work.

The commission-based practice of select fanbinders enacts Lessig's (2008) concept of a hybrid economy, which Noppe (2011) introduced as applicable to the practices of fandom gift economy. The hybrid economy is accessed through the binder's and commissioner's intent to contribute to the gift economy, even as that practice is supplemented by compensation. Drawing additionally from Turk's (2014) expansion of the gift economy to include labor as well as objects, this practice suggests that we can reconfigure money in the hybrid economy as compensation, or remuneration commensurate with labor and materials used, rather than monetization, or explicitly for-profit driven. Compensation generates new arenas of participation in gift culture by allowing participants without the skills or time to contribute to making fanworks and circulating gifted work.

This article examines the fanwork monetization debate through the lens of fanbinding, a fancraft with a newly formed community and developing community practices. Analyzing fanbinders' views on monetization and compensatory practices offers a unique opportunity to explore an established topic with the added factors of the hobby's high expense, increased ethical considerations, and sensitive source material relative to other fancrafts. Fanbinders offer a case study of how fanwork practitioners navigate compensation while accounting for the complications of author permission, intellectual copyright, artistic labor, and under what circumstances one might be able to compensate a binder for their work.

2. Fandom and Monetization: A Review

2.1. Fandom Gift Culture and Approaches to Compensation

Fan communities have an established history of creating works based on popular media sources. Fuller-Seeley (2018) describes fan practices of creating scrapbooks of articles, theater programs, and photos dating to the early nineteenth century. Throughout the twentieth century, fans also created and circulated fanzines containing commentary on the original content, fan discussions and news, and fanworks such as fanfiction and fanart (Coppa 2006). Today, fanworks and fan objects include nearly every visual and textual medium: texts, artworks, songs, videos (Jenkins 1992), prop replicas (Hills 2014), costumes or "cosplay" outfits (Scott 2014), customizable action figures (Godwin 2014), jewelry and knitting patterns (Jones 2014), and more. These fan-created objects fall into one of two categories: "mimetic," which are closely accurate to canonical depictions, and transformative (Hills 2014). Rehak (2018) explores the "complicated relationships between canonicity and creativity" in fan creation as some fans focus on creating objects that faithfully reflect canon material, such as Star Trek fans building replicas of the Starship Enterprise (Rehak 2018, p. 114). Others use canon as a starting point for transformative works that intervene in, disrupt, or outright reject the features of canon media, often explored in media like fanfiction.

Fandom is well-known for championing a gift economy over a commercial one in creating fanworks, and many scholars have discussed fans' definitions of gift culture and traditional fan practices within the gift economy (De Kosnik 2009; Hellekson 2009; Stanfill 2018; Hills 2002; Turk 2014). The gift economy is traditionally understood as a one-to-one exchange between fans within media-centered communities of gifts created out of love and without expectation of remuneration, but instead community affirmation (Turk 2014). In the fandom gift economy, fans can gain status by providing high quality fanworks to their communities. The understood rules of the gift economy dictate reciprocity in the

form of comments, feedback, or other works, though these customs have noticeably shifted towards unresponsiveness in recent years (Stanfill 2018).

In examining fanbinding, we further adopt Turk's (2014) expansion of the gift economy to include gifts of labor, such as content moderation, tag wrangling, and conference organizing, to name a few. Broadening the gift economy to include labor as well as objects and crafts introduces new pathways to consider compensatory practices for that labor.

The history and practices of fandom gift culture, as well as the evolving coexistence of fandom gift culture and compensatory practices for fanworks, are well-documented in the scholarly literature (De Kosnik 2009; Hellekson 2009; Stanfill 2018; Hills 2002; Santo 2018; Hellekson 2015; Dym and Fiesler 2018). While fan communities tend to favor a gift culture and create fanworks primarily for fun or through affective motivation for their communities, some fan creators increasingly seek and receive monetary compensation for the fanworks they produce. The methods of compensation vary and continue to evolve, but overall fan-driven monetization of fanworks remains largely small-scale and limited in scope and profit.

While fans have sold and continue to sell fanzines, fanart, and other fan-made objects alongside licensed merchandise at conventions (Jenkins 1992; Jones 2014; Fanlore 2020), the rising popularity of online marketplaces provides an easier and more economically viable option for fans to sell their objects on commerce sites. Online platforms like Etsy (http://www.etsy.com, accessed on 10 February 2022) have made it easier for fan creators to sell hand-crafted items, allowing some fan creators to develop their hobby or side-business into their primary stream of income (Santo 2018; Busse 2015). Etsy and comparable platforms, however, place the burden of creating, promoting, selling, and shipping the items on the fan creator (Jones 2014). Print-on-demand websites like Redbubble (https://redbubble.com, accessed on 10 February 2022) allow for fan creators to simply post a design and select which items—such as t-shirts, phone cases, and notebooks—they want the design available to print on. Redbubble manages the production and distribution of items sold on its platform in return for a percentage of the sale price, but fan creators do not set the prices or control these terms (Jones 2014). Other platforms like Ravelry (https://www.ravelry.com/, accessed on 10 February 2022) allow for fan creators to sell knitting patterns instead of a physical object (Cherry 2016).

Commodification of fandom has recently evolved to include subscription and influencer models on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Twitch. These are particularly popular with cosplayers, who use social media platforms to cultivate a brand and draw in sponsorships and other paid opportunities such as modeling or convention appearances (Haborak 2020; Rouse and Salter 2021).

Some fan creators have adopted a donation model, relying on fans' enjoyment and recognition of their work for revenue through platforms such as Ko-fi (https://ko-fi.com/, accessed on 10 February 2022), Patreon (https://www.patreon.com/, accessed on 10 February 2022), or OnlyFans (https://onlyfans.com, accessed on 10 February 2022) (Rouse and Salter 2021; Dym and Fiesler 2018). Archive of Our Own (AO3), a popular fan-run fanwork archive, does not allow links to such donation accounts on their site but fan creators can still advertise their acceptance of donations on social media accounts (Murdock 2017). This compensatory model enables creators to freely circulate their works online while allowing for other fans to provide optional monetary support in return. These opt-in monetary donations provide another, if less popular, mode of affirmation, similar to feedback or comments in return for fanworks in fandom gift culture.

While fandom gift culture is often positioned as dichotomous to commercial economic practices (Jones 2014; Scott 2009; Stanfill 2018), these two economies have coexisted throughout fandom history in various iterations. Fans have adopted compensatory practices that receive little to no backlash from fan communities, such as the aforementioned fanwork presence in digital stores and donation-based payment models. Hills (2002) explores the contradiction between fans' "anti-commercial beliefs" and fan consumption that has always existed within fandom (Hills 2002, p. 29). Santo (2018) further argues that the fandom

gift economy is not entirely absent from fans selling their fanworks because "the terms of transaction are folded in with demonstrations of fannish affinity" and fan creators will often share design ideas and accept input on their creations (Santo 2018, p. 334). Although the end goal is to sell these objects, the creators are most often fans themselves, providing a shared community basis within the buyer-seller relationship absent in typical economic transactions. The inclusion of fanon concepts into fanworks further ties these creations to their fan communities because fanon is created collaboratively through fannish discussion and production (Goodman 2015).

With these collaborative features at play, fans are increasingly receptive to certain compensatory practices that fall within the dimensions of the gift economy. For example, fans accept monetary practices that fill gaps in the canonical offerings of an authorized market, where for-purchase fanworks offer items that reflect strictly fan-interpretations of source materials. Conversely, when fans participate in monetary transactions for fanworks, "they are not perceived as a form of purchasing but as a form of gifting" (De Kosnik 2009, p. 121; Hellekson 2009). The expansive definitions of fandom gift culture open the specifics of acceptable practices up to interpretation, and participants often locate gift culture in intent.

Even operating with a gift ethos, fans frequently receive some mode of monetary compensation for the fanworks they produce for fan communities, creating forms of money regulated by social conventions (Zelizer 2017). To account for the links and differences between a gift economy and a profit-driven commercial economy, Noppe (2011) posed a hybrid economic model for fan communities, which allows for gift culture and monetization to coexist by "straddl[ing] the commercial and sharing sphere without harming or erasing either". Noppe identifies a potential model for a fandom hybrid economy in open-source software:

> The best-known and most developed hybrid economy currently in existence is that of open-source software. In fact, one way to make the commodification of fan works easier to envision for all parties involved is to imagine fan work as a sort of "open source cultural good" (Hughes et al. 2007) that could be exchanged in a hybrid economy comparable to the hybrid economy surrounding open- source software.

She also provides the example of dōjinshi, or fan-made manga, in Japanese and other Asian fan communities as a successful execution of this economic model. While she notes that fandom overall may not be ready to implement such a model, citing fan concerns of corporate third-party intrusion, accusations of copyright infringement, and fears of damage to fandom culture, fan creators have started adopting practices in the last decade that align with the definition of a hybrid economy.

2.2. Debating Monetization

Despite the introduction of optional monetary return for fanworks, fans do not universally accept systematizing fanwork circulation and profit to third-party platforms. Fans and scholars alike continue to debate the ethics and potential consequences of monetizing aspects of fandom, and fanfiction remains the most contentious medium regarding monetary compensation for fanworks (Stanfill 2018; Jones 2014). While pre-internet fandom practices included fanfiction in for-purchase fanzines, fandom's migration to online environments resulted in widespread rejection of monetized fanfiction. Illustratively, in response to a user question regarding fandom's strict rejection of paying for fanfiction on the Dreamwidth community "Fail. Fandom. Anon." (FFA), an anonymous discussion forum, one respondent wrote:

> I hate it because of two reasons. (1) Because I think this has the potential to change fic-writing culture for the worse. It makes it less of a hobby, raises the stakes, and changes the spirit of the interaction between fic writers and readers. I want people in fandom to be peers, not customers and vendors. I don't want fandom to become commercialised. (2) Because as long as fic isn't making money,

it's much less likely that copyright holders will slam down on us like a ton of bricks. If they see fans making profit off their work, there's a huge increase in the risk that action will be taken. I like fanfic too much to find that risk acceptable.

(Anon 2016)

Fanfiction writers generally feel that their works should not be sold for profit even though the volume of fanworks and fan activity suggests a large potential market for fanfiction (De Kosnik 2009). Their hesitation stems from three concerns: an interest in preserving fandom gift culture and fandom practices (Hellekson 2015); a belief that fandom content would not be successful in traditional publishing practices (De Kosnik 2009); and a fear of copyright infringement lawsuits or content takedowns from copyright holders and online platforms (De Kosnik 2009; Hellekson 2009; Noppe 2011). Stanfill (2018) notes that this fear of legal censure has lessened somewhat in recent years, exemplified by the rarity of disclaimers attached to fanfics posted online, which was once standard practice.

These concerns of quality, community, and legality contribute to the contentious arena of fanfiction, compensation, and fanworks. Fans' hesitance to monetize fanfiction in particular raises provocative questions regarding fanbinding commissions. Fanbinders most often bind fanfiction, so their perspectives on monetizing fanworks provide insight into compensation, the gift economy with regards to fanfiction, and how changing attitudes may play out in other mediums.

Unlike other fancrafts, fanfiction has no pathway to monetization within acceptable limits of a gift culture. Jones (2014) discusses the cost of materials associated with physical fancrafts in comparison to digital works, which typically do not share that financial burden: "electrons are perceived as free, but creating a Harry Potter–themed scarf requires buying yarn and equipment" (Jones 2014, section 4.2). By providing free digital access where possible (e.g., posting fan art on social media) and selling only physical objects, often at cost, fan creators can monetize their crafts while still operating within a gift economy. In contrast, avenues for for-profit fanfiction have remained limited to publication through corporate third-parties, resulting in a net-loss to the fan communities as for-profit publication necessitates a takedown from freely available fandom archives (Jones 2014).

Fans' hesitance towards fanfiction monetization derives in part from long-standing concerns over copyright infringement, generated by early-2000s internet policing and purges of fanworks (Fanlore 2021). Continued resistance towards monetary compensation for fanfiction may also stem from disastrous third party attempts to circumvent fans' copyright infringement fears through licensing schemes. For example, in 2007 the platform FanLib created a commercial portal for fans to publish fanfiction based on popular movies and television shows in exchange for prizes, e-publication opportunities, and the attention of television production partners (Hellekson 2009; Jenkins 2007; Scott 2009). In 2013, Amazon created Kindle Worlds, which allowed fanfiction writers to publish their works for sale on Amazon's website for participating brands (Tushnet 2014). Both FanLib and Kindle Worlds operated by partnering with copyright holders of specific shows, movies, or books, and providing fan creators with licenses to post fanfiction based on those media sources. Both ventures garnered minimal support from original content creators, resulting in a limited list of fandoms for fanfic writers within the constraints of the licensing programs. Both platforms further constrained fan creators with content restrictions that varied for each media source (Tushnet 2014).

Fans repeatedly questioned FanLib's understanding of the fandom gift economy within the context of its closed circulation of platform fanworks, with Scott (2009) noting that the platform fundamentally misunderstood fan communities. Jenkins (2007) further explains that by posting fics to FanLib, fans relinquished their intellectual property (IP) rights to their fanworks. On their LiveJournal blog, fan writer astolat posted that, "the people behind fanlib . . . 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" (Astolat 2007). The overwhelmingly negative fan response to FanLib precipitated its shutdown just over a year after it launched in 2008 (Hellekson 2009). Fans responded

similarly to Kindle Worlds a few years later. According to Fanlore.org, many fans felt that the platform tried "corrall[ing] [fans] into a controlled environment, something that for many fans, was the antithesis of writing fanfic" (Fanlore 2020). The platform shuttered in August 2018.

Fan writers can also seek publication through traditional means after "filing off the serial numbers," or removing identifiable copyrighted material from their fics to publish the story as original fiction (Jones 2014). Though arguably no longer fanfiction by definition, these works shared the creative constraints and access restrictions of fics submitted to FanLib and Kindle Worlds and often faced similar backlash from fan communities. All three publication avenues remove fanworks from fan-controlled spaces and return nothing of value, by the standards of the gift economy, to the fan communities that produced the works (Jones 2014).

One hallmark of the fandom gift economy is producing and circulating fanworks with no access restrictions. Turk (2014) characterizes fandom gifting as "not just one-to-one but one-to-many" (Turk 2014, section 3.1). Many creators reconcile this idea with compensatory practices by offering digital access to works freely while providing an option for fans to support them monetarily, often by providing links to donation accounts or online stores offering physical formats of the fanwork for purchase. Both approaches allow for creators to receive monetary support from other fans (one-to-one) without restricting access to any fanworks (one-to-many) by placing them behind a paywall, indicating that these creators prioritize community access to their fanworks over profit.

FanLib and Kindle Worlds misunderstood the basic tenets of fandom, spurring fan rejection of corporate intrusion on fanmade works. Hellekson (2015) notes that any attempts at monetization "must be initiated by and embedded within the fandom in question" instead of a third party (Hellekson 2015, p. 126). Monetization structures developed within a fan community allow participants to preserve the key aspects of fan culture and work within the fandom gift economy. In a hybrid economy, fandom's sharing economy can not only coexist with but benefit from a commercial economy. Lessig (2008) describes a possible hybrid economy as "a sharing economy that builds a commercial entity to better support its sharing aims," which closely resembles monetary practices in fandom (Lessig 2008, p. 177). Such a model, which reinvests remuneration into the fanwork practice, is pertinent to fanbinders, some of whom note that their costly hobby necessitates commissions to support their craft. Fanbinding provides a potential avenue for fanfic authors to sell physical objects of their work without publishing through traditional means and removing the fic from free circulation, thereby preserving the distinguishing characteristics of fic.

Fanbinding is situated at an intersection of handcraft and writing: the fanbound object incorporates an often-original typesetting of the fanfiction—the text of which is freely available online and generally not acceptable to sell for profit—with the handmade binding. Fanbinding commissions thus provide an opportunity to examine the evolving monetary practices in fandom with the added complexity of three extra factors. Fanbinding is an expensive hobby, and some binders cite compensation as a requisite to continue to purchase materials for their practice. Further complications arise in that fanbinders often are not the authors of the fics they bind, introducing ethical considerations regarding author permission and profiting off a product created using another's work. Finally, source material for fanbound works is most often fanfiction, which fans historically hold the strongest objection to monetizing. Fanbound works bind together, in a sense, complications of author permission, intellectual copyright, artistic labor, and under what circumstances one might be able to compensate a binder for their work, making it a compelling case study to examine trends in fandom monetization and how these three factors may distinguish binders' approaches to compensation in their practices.

3. Methodology

Fanbinding is the practice of binding fan works, particularly fan fiction, into codex form, and fanbinders practice their craft in a variety of ways: nearly all of the binders typeset

the fic text using various programs (e.g., Word, Affinity Publisher, or Adobe InDesign), and many employ hand-binding techniques to bind the final text block, though some use self-publishing services. Regardless of the methods, fanbinding is a time-, labor-, material-, and financially-intensive hobby (Buchsbaum 2022; Kennedy 2022). Many fanbound works are produced for personal use, at personal cost, and often as a gift for the fic author, though some fanbinders receive commissions for varying degrees of compensation.

Renegade Bindery is a global community of fanbinders of all experience levels and interests hosted on the chat communication app Discord. The server welcomes fanbinders from all age groups, requiring only that they are over eighteen years of age when they join. In June 2020, fanbinder ArmoredSuperHeavy founded the server to connect people and meet an increase in fanbinding activity and interest in the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the summer of 2020, the server comprised approximately 30 members, which grew to over 100 by mid-autumn, and reached 400 members in the summer of 2021. As of May 2022, the server counted over 730 members.

The server offers a localized space for people to discuss and exchange fanbinding ideas, methodologies, and resources, as well as celebrate completed projects, participate in exchanges and challenges, attend fanbinding and fan-studies-related events, swap materials, make recommendations, and be in community together. In August 2020, members of the Bindery formed Renegade Publishing, a public-facing collective of fanbinders associated with the server listed on their Tumblr page. While Renegade Publishing members work independently to complete their projects, they may choose to incorporate the collective's printer's device alongside their own imprint. Renegade Publishing's site also offers a directory and denotes which binders accept commission requests; the page otherwise promotes completed projects by RP members and circulates resources.

Renegade Bindery itself is not a fandom: members share an interest and practice in a specific fancraft and fanbind materials from fandoms across media, including books, movies, television shows, podcasts, and table-top games. The fanbinders' wide range of ages, interests, motivations, and skill levels create a diverse community in the server. Most fanbinders are fans and involved in fandom to some degree as many primarily bind fanworks; others come to the server from another point of interest, such as bookbinding, and have little to no experience in fandom spaces (Buchsbaum 2022). Our previous research has explored fanbinders' motivations for pursuing a time and cost-intensive hobby; we found that fanbinders are "motivated to bind fic for a variety of reasons, including reducing screen time, the challenge and craft of book making, a desire to give book objects as gifts, and a desire to affirm the work of fic writers" (Buchsbaum 2022). We additionally found that while preservation is not a primary motivator for most binders, they understand it as a desirable effect of their work (Kennedy 2022; Buchsbaum 2022).

The emphasis on craft and community rather than specific fandoms or even fannish opinions makes Renegade Bindery hospitable to a range of opinions regarding fandom trends, such as monetization and fan craft. As we explored in our literature review, Renegade Bindery epitomizes how social norms may coalesce in fandom but no central authority persists: while the server locates many practitioners of the same craft, they all operate with different allowances towards commissions, compensation, and profit in their work.

The primary evidence for this study derives from survey responses collected from 31 bookbinders via Discord and Google form. We recruited participants by coordinating with the founder of Renegade Bindery, ArmoredSuperHeavy, to post an open call on the "general" channel that provided an overview of the project, how we planned to use the data, and who was eligible to participate. Participants were required to be 18 years or older but could have any level of fanbinding experience, and we encouraged server members with any range of opinion on monetization to participate. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects in this study, and participants chose whether their responses could be quoted or were for reference purposes only. This study was granted exempt status by the Stony Brook University IRB Office of Research Compliance.

Interested participants were added to a locked channel on the server where we posted a link to a Google form, which includes the study information and consent form as well as three series of questions about commissions, author permissions, and fandom monetization (Appendix A). We periodically posted the questions in the locked server to provide participants the time to think about their responses and remind participants to submit responses. Participants were welcome to respond to the questions in the chat as an opportunity to generate discussion, and 10 chose to do so, while the remaining 21 responded through the Google form. Participants were not required to respond to each question and in many cases did not. Each section had a varying average response rate: commissions (90.3%), author permissions (61.2%), and fandom monetization (58%). We account for the differences in response rate when reporting specific numbers and characterizing responses.

The resulting data underwent a content analysis by reading each qualitative response and identifying trends and outliers. We organized the data by each section of questions and grouped responses according to emerging themes. In the "Commissions" section, themes related to why respondents did or did not take commissions; concerns about compensation and funding; professionalization of a hobby; pressure to deliver; finding a variety of new fics; sustaining the gift economy; and the legal questions of purchasing in fandom. We also analyzed responses according to what circumstances respondents took commissions: for friends, through solicitation or request, or special occasion; we also analyzed responses based on how respondents calculated a price for their work.

In the "Author Permissions" section, we analyzed responses according to whether binders discussed personal copies versus commissioned copies. Trends of how binders approach permissions emerged for each category, including notions of the public domain, degrees of enforcement, and exceptions for permission. In the "Fandom Monetization" section, we analyzed responses according to themes of rejection of commercialization in fandom, the gray area of compensation, pro-compensation, perceptions of gift economy tied to a "traditional" mode of fandom, and the distinguishing characteristics of commissions in fanbinding.

In line with fan studies methodology, we made this paper available to participants to review their comments and ensure accurate interpretation of their meaning. As participants ranged in the means by which they wanted to be referred, we refer to binders with numeric IDs (FB for fanbinder) for consistency's sake and to respect their privacy.

4. Analysis

4.1. Compensation and Commissions

Approaches to fanbinding commissions offer insight into the role of compensation in fan craft and attitudes towards monetization in fan spaces. Of our thirty-one survey respondents, eleven said they do not take commissions, seven reported that it depends, four said they would but have not yet, seven said yes, and two did not respond to the question (Figure 1). Overall, approximately one-third of respondents said they were comfortable taking commissions in some manner, nearly equal to the number of respondents who did not take commissions at all. Where one might assume that those comfortable taking commissions automatically accept the role of monetization in fandom, their additional responses indicate a reticence to adopt any formalized for-profit model, such as those of Kindle Worlds and FanLib.
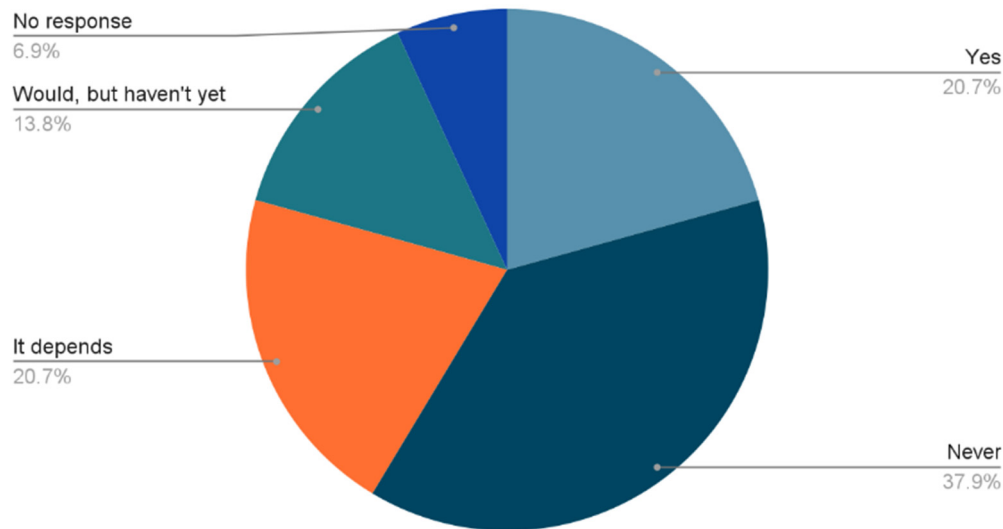
Figure 1. Fanbinders Accepting Commissions.

One of the primary distinctions between FanLib and KindleWorlds versus fanbinder commissions is the methods fanbinders use to receive commission requests, locating the exchange of fancraft for compensation in one-to-one interactions rather than mediated by a distant, impersonal platform that offer digitally published fanworks on a large scale. Of the respondents who currently take commissions, four noted they only take requests, either through direct ask or through the Renegade Publishing directory. One noted that they solicit commissions through Ko-Fi every few months. One only takes commissions for gifts or special occasions, and another noted that they take commissions exclusively for friends and family as presents because they enjoy gifting and rebuke the business aspects of circulating fanbound works. Each of these methods requires direct communication through established profiles rather than a third-party marketplace interface.

One respondent suggested a potential approach for receiving commissions that amounts to the closest example of a larger-scale commission-based operation from the survey data: this binder theorized offering commissions for fics they are currently binding or have already bound–essentially offering a pre-order to determine the print run for whichever fic they plan to typeset. This process would allow the binder "to make the things I would have made anyway, and anyone interested can join in on the journey" (FB-10). Rather than create a direct-to-order enterprise, however, this respondent's proposed system expands a single commission into slightly larger, but still relatively low volume, output of bound works.

These direct lines of communication allow binders and commissioners alike to ascertain one another's intent for commissions, a recurring concern among the respondents. One respondent understands commissions as "giving the commissioner a way they can contribute to fanbinding without the tools or skills themselves" by supporting the binder's practice (FB-31). Others perceive taking commissions as a means of expanding the genres or works they bind and read that they would not find on their own, thereby circulating fanworks in new arenas. Three respondents explicitly aligned taking commissions with participating in the fandom gift economy. One respondent accounted for this by offering fic authors a copy of the bound work and perceives commissions as allowing readers to "get more involved" with the gift economy as well (FB-10); another noted that they did not see the gift economy and fair compensation as mutually exclusive (FB-11); a third sees fanbinding as a means to motivate themselves to bind and preserve works they otherwise would not (FB-12). Here, binders who do take commissions, and even a few who do not, expressed the critical role of the intent to contribute to or show appreciation of a community

in taking commissions: "The further the monetization gets away from that idea and into the realm of profit just because something is popular, the more I'm going to question it" (FB-31). Evaluating that intent seems to be a one-to-one process, located in direct interactions with commissioners; the sterility of third-party platforms, which ostensibly exist to profit from fanworks, evacuates commissions of the gift economy potential that binders enact in their practices. The threshold of accepting or declining commissions is the intent of the requester and the binder—emphasizing creation of fanworks to share with the original fanartists or ficwriters and their fans over generating profit (Buchsbaum 2022).

For the binders who accept commissions, compensation drives fanwork production because it allows them to continue to bind and contribute fanworks to their communities: Four respondents mentioned extra funds as an incentive to help support the costs of the resource-intensive hobby. Those who do accept commissions do not abide by standardized pricing rules, however. The request-based system offers a small-scale mode of processing and confirming commissions, which is crucial both for binders' time and resources. Of the respondents who take commissions, four calculate the cost through materials, shipping, and labor (accounted through word count, complexity, and/or hours). One calculates the cost through materials, another through materials and shipping. In their responses, the binders expressed reluctance towards charging full price, more often acknowledging that they at best break even on these projects and are content with that plateau in favor of offering commissioners "the opportunity to hold a story they love in their hands in a physical form" (FB-12). Altogether, these motivations align with our previous findings that fanbinding is a labor-, time-, and resource-intensive hobby primarily driven by fannish love and enjoyment of the craft (Buchsbaum 2022; Kennedy 2022). Compensation enters the equation to directly support the practice, rather than financially sustain a larger for-profit enterprise, operating in Lessig's third-space hybrid economy, where compensation supports collective aims instead of profit.

While taking commissions serves as a small source of income invested back into the hobby for some respondents, many respondents who do not take commissions calculated that fair prices for their labor and materials render the objects prohibitively expensive for the people and communities for whom they matter. Many binders are uncomfortable with this cost barrier and refuse to charge for the bound works at all. That said, many of these binders still answered our query about how to price commissions: three said hypothetical commissions would cost materials and shipping, refusing to introduce profit into the commission system. One said that calculating the cost was insurmountable due to the value of their labor and that "in my philosophy, fandom is not for sale" (FB-22) Here, binders indicate that they can conceptualize the monetary cost of binding in terms of labor, materials, and shipping, but cannot translate certain philosophical beliefs about fandom into compensation.

This reluctance towards profit in hypothetical price points reflects these binders' attitudes towards not taking commissions at all: Eight (8) respondents mentioned hesitancy relating to the professionalization of their hobby and the quality of their work, including needing to further develop their skills before offering commissions (FB-9) and a dislike of "being beholden to other people's artistic sensibilities" (FB-1). Four binders specifically mentioned not wanting the pressure to deliver and not wanting the deadlines given stressful jobs. One binder in this camp wrote, "I fear that to take money into account would be to lessen my enjoyment of making these books, in addition to the added responsibilities regarding ensuring the books gets to where it needs, how to price them" (FB-7). Another echoed, "If I treated my hobby as a business transaction I'd feel more constrained or under pressure" which "takes all the fun out of it" (FB-14). Three respondents additionally mentioned variations of wanting to protect the gift economy. Although one respondent additionally noted that "I also believe in artisans charging a fair price for their art," the printing and materials costs alone are prohibitive, and gifting objects contributes to the fandom gift economy without burdening the recipient (FB-11). Here, binders who do not take commissions link the expectations of commissions and compensation with an

undesirable professionalization of their hobby that intrudes on the affective labor of the gift economy.

In rejecting commissions, five (5) binders expressed further concerns relating to the legality of printing fanfiction and the "legally grey area of fanfiction" in general, with one binder emphasizing that fanfiction "survives under fair use" (FB-5). These binders unanimously expressed hesitation with making money off of another person's work posted for free online, which itself is based on other person(s)' intellectual property. Another respondent wrote that fellow binders had been accused of "'piracy' and 'illegally printing' PDFs," introducing complications of gaining author permissions to the commissions process (FB-1). Moreover, these fanbinders expressed reluctance to offer their projects for sale or bind on commission because they do not feel they can properly credit authors in that way, which we explore further in the next section. Concerns regarding fanfiction's status under fair use persists in downstream fanwork production—for these binders, the degrees of separation gained from placing fanworks into new object forms do not negate the thorny consequences of copyright violation or personal insult.

Overall, the binders' emphasis on lack of professionalization, wariness of money as a beholdening factor in their practices, and concerns regarding fair use and author acknowledgement align with existing hesitancies regarding the systematization of fanwork production. This mixed reasoning demonstrates that reluctance towards compensation stems from a variety of principled and personal factors, rather than a cut-and-dry rebuke of profit in fandom spaces; simultaneously, those binders that do accept commissions offer insight into how fancraft practitioners might reconcile gift culture and compensation within a hybrid economy.

4.2. Permissions and Commissions

That fanbinders bind fanfiction and other fanworks most often created by others introduces additional complexity regarding potential monetization. Even when not receiving compensation for their craft, fanbinders grapple with ethical questions regarding author permissions. This concern aligns with existing fandom discussion regarding the extent of fan authors' control over their work once posted publicly online. Fandom "polices itself with regards to plagiarism," but more complex practices like remixes based on other fanworks, a category into which fanbinding possibly falls, rely on a shared understanding of "community norms, politeness, and respect," which vary considerably (Busse 2015). Similarly, fanbinders provided varied, and often contradictory, responses regarding author permission guidelines in their binding activities, coalescing into three distinct camps of thought.

The first group comprises fanbinders who believe that works posted publicly on the internet do not require author permissions. Some binders in this group likened binding a fanwork to using the download feature on Archive of Our Own (AO3) or printing out the fic to keep in a folder. Others arrived at this conclusion by arguing that fanbound books are transformative works and therefore do not require the original author's permission (FB 9, 10).

Fanbinders in the second group view acquiring author permissions as respectful and seek it if possible. In most cases, these fanbinders will still bind the work if they cannot get in touch with the author to receive permission. One fanbinder described their practices simply as "[a]sk the author, if they say yes, I bind. If unreachable, I'll bind" (FB-16). Oftentimes these fanbinders' permission-seeking is an effort to participate in the fandom gift culture by either offering the author a copy of the bound work or simply letting them know their work is appreciated.

In the third group, fanbinders view author permissions as essential and will not bind a work without it. Only a small percentage of respondents indicated that they would not bind a work even if they could not reach the author to receive permission. Sometimes these stricter guidelines derive from a fear of repercussions. As one fanbinder explains, "I definitely ask for written, dated consent just to cover my ass in case anything happens"

(FB-6). More often, fanbinders emphasize permission-seeking out of respect for the original fanwork author.

The majority of fanbinders shifted their position on these stances depending on the purpose of the binding, again demonstrating the centrality of intent in fandom etiquette. Out of the eighteen respondents who provided answers to this section of questions, fourteen of them indicated that their guidelines for permission-seeking change depending on how they categorize their projects: private personal books, publicly-shared personal books, or commissioned books.

For personal copies of fanbound works, seventeen of the eighteen respondents (94.4%) felt that such projects do not require author permissions. Eight of these respondents qualified their response depending on whether photos of the project would be shared publicly, with one noting, "If I'm planning to post about the work and make it identifiable, I'll ask for permission" (FB-8). Half of the respondents make no attempt to ask for permission for personal copies, reasoning that online works, and those posted on AO3 in particular, are publicly available and that the consumption format (i.e., through a screen or in print) is irrelevant:

> sites like ao3 provide a built-in download function for ebooks, and I see this as making an analog copy of digital creations, which exist in a less ephemeral medium. By posting on ao3, an author has implicitly given me permission to download, and I don't feel like printing is enough MORE that it requires permission (FB-1).

Another fanbinder in this group compared fanbinding to creating fanart based on someone else's fanfiction, pointing out that "fanartists don't ask for permission before drawing something for a fic" (FB-10). In addition to perceptions of fandom etiquette, some fanbinders do not seek permission for more personal reasons. For some, the idea of reaching out to a stranger to ask permission is too anxiety-inducing. For others, the volume of projects they work on would make permission-seeking for each one burdensome.

Generally, the remaining respondents view permission-seeking for personal copies as "a nice gesture" (FB-3) or "polite" (FB-2) but not a "moral imperative" (FB-1). Nearly all of the fanbinders who attempt to contact authors before binding do so in order to bind and mail a second copy for the author or show their appreciation for the fanfiction. In this way, binders can participate in traditional fandom gift culture practices by either returning a gift to the author or providing feedback on the original text (Buchsbaum 2022; Kennedy 2022). Orphaned works are viewed as the exception to most of these guidelines, with one fanbinder writing that "orphaned works are kind of like public domain: fair game" (FB-14).

Out of the eighteen respondents for the author permissions section of the survey, fifteen respondents shifted their guidelines in favor of permission-seeking when potential commissions were introduced (Figure 2). One fanbinder elaborates, "I don't feel like I need to ask permission to burn through money on behalf of someone's work. But if I was PROFITING off their work, it would be a completely different story" (FB-1). Of those fifteen fanbinders, thirteen reported stricter guidelines regarding author permissions when binding on commission, with one arguing that "if money changes hands, permission is essential" (FB-11). Three of the binders retain the same guidelines for personal copies and commissioned projects, and one binder specifically does not ask permission for commissioned work. Overall, respondents felt it important to receive author permission when binding on commission with varying amounts of leeway in certain circumstances. For example, two fanbinders again noted orphaned works as a common exception to their permission-seeking guidelines, and others extended this exception to any project where the author was unreachable.

Permission Seeking Guidelines When Binding on Commission

No permission-seeking
5.6%

Permission preferred
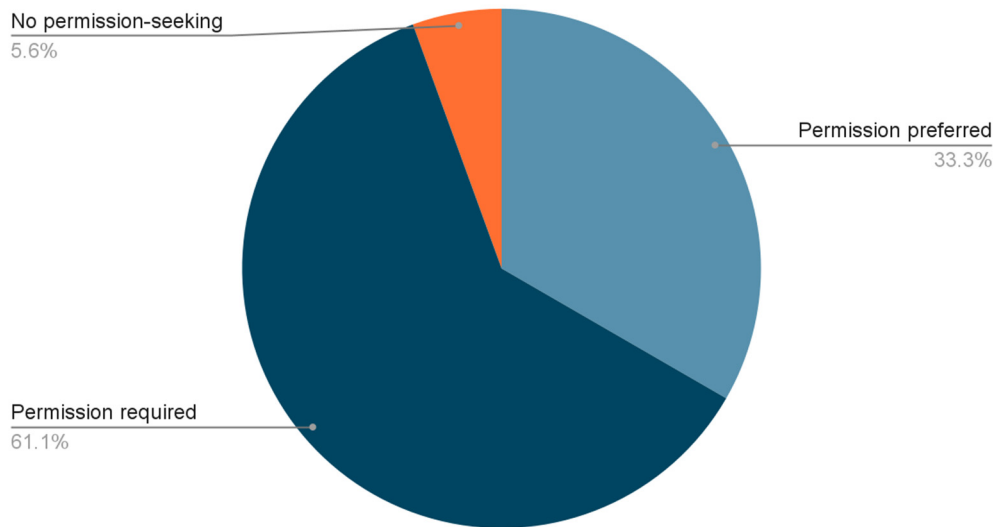33.3%

Permission required
61.1%

Figure 2. Permission Seeking Guidelines When Binding on Commission.

Practices regarding contacting authors when binding on commission also vary by fanbinder. Eight of the eighteen respondents have strict policies and make sure to receive permission from authors directly before accepting a commission. Another eight delegate permission-seeking to the commissioners and either require proof of permission or assume they received permission before commissioning the work. Three fanbinders noted an exception in cases where the commission is a gift for the author. Within those exceptions, the commissioners would need to "prove they're close enough friends of the author to be sending this gift" or the fanbinder would have to be "reasonably sure the commissioner wasn't lying" (FB-30, FB-10).

Permission-seeking also functions to clarify binder intent in commission-based projects. Five respondents indicated that they require permission, and even prefer to speak to the authors directly, for this reason. Although binding on commission implies profit, some binders only charge the cost of materials and shipping. One binder asks permission in order to clarify this pricing to the author, saying "I want to make it abundantly clear that I'm not profiting off their work" (FB-10). Of the binders that charge for labor in addition to materials and shipping, two of them said they reach out to authors to either "give some of the money to them or to a charity of their choice" or "give them the opportunity to say no, take a small cut, ask that that a portion be donated, etc" (FB-24, FB-16). One mentioned that if they could not contact an author, they would donate their cut of the profit to AO3 in support of fanworks.

Several of the fanbinders we surveyed indicated that their opinions on author permissions in fanbinding practices stemmed from their understanding of fandom culture. Although fandom gift culture models one-to-one and one-to-group gifting and reciprocation of objects and labor, respondents' definitions of fandom and acceptable fannish behavior vary widely, allowing them to arrive at opposing practices of gift culture. For example, some fanbinders who prefer to ask permission before binding do so because they see it as respectful and standard fandom practice. Yet other fanbinders reasoned that fanbound works based off of another fanwork fall within the boundaries of fandom practice and do not require additional consent as long as the original fanworks are credited. Though fanbinders hold varied opinions on this topic, they arrived at their conclusions via their understanding of acceptable fandom practices and traditions of fandom culture.

4.3. Reframing Monetization

Our third set of questions addressed the respondents' conception of gift culture and monetization as well as their experiences participating in compensation for other fanworks, which received seventeen responses. Even though the binders may have clear-cut practices—they do or do not accept commissions—we found that like attitudes towards author permissions, attitudes towards compensation were far more nuanced rather than fall along a simple yes-no axis, an allowance derived from their definitions of gift culture.

Many respondents cited gift culture as a reason to avoid accepting commissions; when asked to define "gift culture," seven of our seventeen responses included the word "love". Eleven of the seventeen responses to this question included key words relating to free or gratis, reciprocation, or an absence of money, and one respondent wrote that gift culture is "when creators make content for one another as part of an exchange or directly due to existing relationships" (FB-16). We can locate sources for these similar definitions in the environments from which the respondents learned about gift culture. Five gleaned the information from the public Tumblr and Dreamwidth posts of ArmoredSuperHeavy, the founder of Renegade Bindery, where they discuss their gift- and preservation-oriented motivations to bind fanworks, as well as the Renegade Bindery writ large, where conversation often notes the gratification of participating in gift culture. Likewise, seven respondents learned about gift culture through fandom participation osmosis. Two explicitly cited gift culture as a feature of "The Olden Days" and "the old times," referring to fandom mores in the late 1990s and early 2000s during the emergence of Web 2.0 that emphasized fanwork generation out of love rather than necessarily monetizing hobbies (FB-11, 13). Binders who do take commissions also align their practice with gift culture, however, as an allowance that draws on those same pre-existing relationships and creates objects in service of a fan's love of the material.

In addition to gift culture, fanbinders' understanding of fair use contextualizes their perspectives on monetization and compensation, and the specter of legality hovers over the monetization of works involving characters or settings not in the public domain. In response to the question "Does your opinion differ on each type of fan craft monetization (buying/selling, donations, third party platforms)," ten of the seventeen respondents characterized fanbinding commissions as in a legal gray area. The respondents drew a line between monetization—that is, explicitly for profit—and compensation, or paying at-cost for materials and shipping, which controls remuneration for the physical craft alone and not for working copyrighted intellectual property. One respondent specifically associated for-profit fanwork, particularly fanfic, with the potential destruction of fandom via takedowns, lawsuits, and similar ilk. Here, respondents who do not take commissions noted that they believed in fair compensation for artistic labor but perceived that compensation in conflict with fair use laws, not just gift culture. One binder countered, however, that "fandom is really weird in generally being okay with fanart sales but hypersensitive to people selling fic, which makes zero sense to me" (FB-4), expressing that fic writing is also a craft that merits compensation. At play in accepting and refusing commissions is the practical implementation of gift culture as a means of circulating objects without violating fair use, entering into the physical realm of crafted objects a safeguard developed from understandings of fanfiction's legal status online.

Respondents also balanced concerns about the hustle culture and crafts necessarily being available for profit alongside the moral and financial value of fair compensation (FB-1). While some respondents were reluctant to stifle the gift economy, perceiving any exchange of money as potentially threatening that affective-based circulation of creative works (FB-14), three others expressed degrees of comfort with compensation. One took no issue with "offsetting the cost of producing crafts, especially in the current economic situation" (FB-8), and these binders articulated that they cared more about the motivations behind commissioned creations rather than the actual exchange of funds. One respondent put it succinctly: "If you're putting time into creation, you deserve to be paid" (FB-16). A fourth noted that compensation sustains a hybrid gift economy:

In total, someone paying for the materials and time for an artist to do a fancraft is giving that artist the means to contribute that craft to the community or show appreciation for that community. (FB-31)

Conceptualizing the exchange of objects for money as compensation rather than as necessarily monetization creates practical space for fanbinders to both affirm a gift economy and support their hobby in financially dire environments. Like freely-available digital art with hard-copy purchase options, bound fic offers fic readers and writers a means to obtain physical versions of works without engaging in traditional publishing avenues (which possibly necessitates filing-off-the-serial numbers) and without removing the digital copy from online circulation. The barriers to entry, however, remain time, skill, and cost; commissioning binders to create bound objects allows readers to support fanwork creation and participate in the gift economy, provided the binder creates an additional copy for the author.

This distinction between monetization and compensation allows us to accommodate the role of compensation in fancrafts. As long as that compensation returns objects into the fan communication circuit by producing further fanworks, then the compensation contributes to rather than detracts from the gift culture. In that sense, fanbinders who take commissions reconcile these initially incongruent ideas and practices to generate a hybrid economy. Moreover, whereas other monetized fancrafts are often mediated through non-fannish third-party enterprises, fanbinding commissions are located in one-to-one relationships between the fanbinder and fan consumer, eschewing the large-scale publishing agreements championed by platforms such as Kindle Worlds and FanLib and further affirming the community-centric circulation of objects.

5. Conclusions

Fanbinders who accept commissions distinguish themselves from large-scale third-party monetization in several ways: the binderies are low-volume operations with products made by fans for other fans. Personal interactions allow binders and commissioners alike to evaluate one another's intent and scope of compensation introduced in the fanbinding process. Binders explicitly reincorporate funds into their practice, either breaking even on materials and shipping or using compensation to fund their next project, whereas the use of third-party profit is opaque and not necessarily reincorporated into the fandom gift economy. Even when a fan sells an object to another fan, they still operate within the shared space of fandom. Whereas third-party platforms have no other intent besides profit, patently failing on fannish cultural grounds, fan creators and consumers can evaluate the role of compensation as progressive and productive in generating new fanworks, thereby philosophically incorporating it into their practices.

Fanbinders generally adhere to a traditional understanding of affectively-driven fandom gift culture; those who do take commissions similarly align themselves with the principles of gift culture. These binders' interest in fan-to-fan operations and insistence on compensation contributing to their craft locates their practice in a hybrid economy, where intent and reincorporation of funds into their practice align commissions more with gift culture than a for-profit enterprise. Fanbinding is a worthwhile case study regarding attitudes of gifting and monetization because its many factors relating to permission, profit, craft, and intent cohere rapidly. Future studies might employ book historical approaches to evaluate concerns regarding author permissions and reprints in the context of historic printing piracy and recirculation of "unauthorized" texts. Additional research may be undertaken to determine if and how transformative object making falls under fair use, potentially ameliorating persistent concerns of copyright infringement. Understanding how the hybrid economy accounts for the nuances in the definition and practice of gift culture poses opportunities for similar studies of other fancrafts and compensatory practices to evaluate how changing fannish attitudes increasingly accept compensation.

Appendix A. Survey Questions

Section 0: Informed consent, participation, and consent to quotation form.
Section 1: General

1. How old are you (either exact or approximate is fine)?
2. How long have you been involved in fandom?
3. When did you begin fanbinding works?
4. How many fanbound works have you made?
5. When did you join Renegade Bindery?
6. How do you keep track of the works you bind? (e.g., spreadsheet, word doc, files, not at all)

Section 2: Commissions

7. Do you take fanbinding commissions?
8. Why or why not?
9. Under what circumstances do you take commissions? (Request, solicitation, special occasion, gift, etc.)?
10. How do you determine price for your commissioned works?
11. What factors do you consider?

Section 3: Author Permissions

12. In general, what guidelines do you follow regarding acquiring author permission for your fanbound copies?
13. For fanbinding commissions, do these guidelines change? Why or why not?
14. Will you bind a fic on commission without author permission?
15. If you don't take commissions, what are your thoughts on acquiring author permission in general?
16. If you do take commissions, do you require the commissioner to contact the author and obtain permission?

Section 4: Fandom & Monetization

17. What is your familiarity with gift culture in fandom?
18. How do you define fandom gift culture?
19. How have you learned about gift culture?
20. What is your familiarity with these types of monetization of fan crafts?

    a   [Buying/selling fan crafts]
    b   [Commissioning fan crafts]
    c   [Accepting donations for fan crafts (ex. Ko-fi)]
    d   [Third-party monetization of fan crafts (ex. FanLib)]
    e   [Subscriber model (ex. YouTube channel for fandom-based content)]

21. What are your opinions on monetizing fan crafts?

22. Does your opinion differ on each type of fan craft monetization (buying/selling, commissions, donations, third-party platforms, subscriber model)? If so, why?
23. Have you ever purchased a fan craft? (If so, what?)
24. How do your feelings on fandom monetization contribute to your attitudes on fanbinding commissions?

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