

Spring 6-11-2021

The fan/producer duality in microfandoms: Examinations of collaboration, creativity, and capital

Abby Kirby
DePaul University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cmnt>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kirby, Abby, "The fan/producer duality in microfandoms: Examinations of collaboration, creativity, and capital" (2021). *College of Communication Master of Arts Theses*. 38.
<https://via.library.depaul.edu/cmnt/38>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Communication at Digital Commons@DePaul. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Communication Master of Arts Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@DePaul. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

THE FAN/PRODUCER DUALITY IN MICROFANDOMS: EXAMINATIONS OF
COLLABORATION, CREATION, AND CAPITAL

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 28th, 2021

BY

Abby Kirby

Department of Media and Cinema Studies

College of Communications

DePaul University

Chicago, IL

Abstract

This paper explores the fan identity as being synonymous with the identity of media producers through the lens of microfandoms. Microfandoms are co-created by the fans of an already existing piece of media, but act as their own independent fandom. By completing an illustrative case study through surveys, interviews, and data analysis, the author was able to view the production of a microfandom and the roles that fans inhabit within that space. Conclusions were reached regarding the role of hierarchy and social capital within tight-knit microfandoms, demonstrating that the means of fan production are informed by an individual's status within their community.

Keywords: fandom, fanfiction, online platforms, hierarchy, collaboration

To my fellow fans

Acknowledgements

I would like to express the gratitude to my committee Dr. Paul Booth and Dr. Samantha Close for their encouragement, knowledge, and patience during the course of this research. Even throughout a global pandemic, they provided the best possible advice and education. They have made me into a better, more thoughtful, scholar and fan- I am incredibly lucky to have been their student.

I would also like to present my deepest thanks and appreciation to the participants of this study, the fans of *Gravity Falls* Transcendence AU. Their creativity and sense of community have inspired me from the very beginning. I would also like to express my appreciation to those who were unable to participate in this study, I still find great value in your words and in your work. I hope that this thesis suffices as my love letter to the fandom and as a sign of my dedication.

I want to thank my parents for their love and support during my time at DePaul. I thank them for believing in me and allowing me to pursue my education and interests. I am incredibly blessed to have this opportunity that they have given me. I am also grateful to my friends, for supporting me through the highs and lows of writing a thesis.

And finally, I want to express my admiration and gratitude to Dane and the students in our fanfiction classes. Without you I would have never come this far or discovered my love of fandom. You inspire me to learn more every day and to see the incredible potential of fanfiction. My greatest asset has always been being in your classroom.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Table of Contents	5
Introduction	7
Literature Review	12
Defining Microfandom	16
Research Methods	21
Summary	25
Chapter 1	28
Big Name Fandom	29
Lurking on Fandom	36
Heterarchy and Alternative Authority	38
Summary	42
Chapter 2	44
Hyperdiegetic Narratives	45
Inter-fan Poaching	51
Complications of a Co-Created Narrative	54
The Role of Identity in Narrative	58
Conclusion	60
Chapter 3	61

Fanfiction Archives	63
Microblogging and Community Involvement	67
Fandom Wikis	72
Summary	76
Conclusion	78
Further Research	80
Works Cited	82
Appendix A	87

Introduction

To engage with media fandom is to engage with a constant negotiation, interpretation, and reproduction of a text. While fanworks are often thought of as transformative, by which fans have the power to create their own unique interpretations or representations of a text, fans are not typically thought of as being true media producers. The original producers of a media text (writer, artist, or game developer) are often viewed in their fandom as a seat of authority and legitimacy, while fans are merely “filling in the gaps” (Jenkins, 1992) left behind by the producers. When creating their fanfiction or fan art, fans tend not to stray from the characters, settings, or themes of the original media-- though they may change characters’ personalities or the mood and tone. However, fans may often find themselves taking pastiche to a new height and using their fanworks to create a new sub-fandom where they are both fans and producers of the story.

Fandom is difficult to define, though most scholars agree that fandom is a collective of people who all appreciate or enjoy an object of pop culture (Jenkins, 1992; Baym, 2017; Booth, 2017) or is a combination of affective experiences and “material manifestations” (Lothian, 2018: pg. 373). Fandom is built up of individual thoughts, interpretations, and experiences surrounding a media object. However, as online fan communities become more prevalent, fandom is able to take new forms. It can also be a collection of non-commercial productions that examines the relationship between professional and amateur media (Ito, 2010). The definition of fandom in this research aligns with the aforementioned statement that fandom is a community or subculture of people who all enjoy a media object, be that a professional or grassroots production.

Fanworks encompass all written and visual works that are based on published and identifiable media in order to tell a new, recursive, or summative story. They are not professionally made and are created in a manner that substantially differs from the source material; and include fanfiction, fanart, fan videos (reenactments, anime music videos, multi-animator projects), and cosplay. Fanworks are a way of filling in gaps, expressing dissatisfaction, or seeking new perspective in the source material (Jenkins, 1992), and are shared with the hope that the audience will have a positive reception to the author's creation (Lipton, 2014). In *Textual Poachers* (1992), Henry Jenkins writes that "the expectations and conventions of the fan community also shape the meanings derived from the series and the forms taken by the fan's own artistic creations. Fans tend to see themselves in highly individualistic terms, emphasizing their refusal to conform to 'mundane' social norms and the range of different interpretations circulating within their community" (pg. 88). Fans tend to create fanworks that interest them and serve their own desires. There is no sense in creating a piece of work that you personally do not enjoy or contextually support as an interpretation of the source material. While anti-fans (Gray, 2003), or fans based around the hatred or dislike of a source material, can contribute to the production of fanworks, can derive pleasure from creating intentionally poor fanworks or pointing to flaws in the source material, this is rarely the case for most fans. Jenkins notes that fans remain "responsive to the somewhat more subtle demands placed upon them as members of fandom" (pg. 88). In this way, transformative works begin to reflect the role of fans and producers of media.

In contrast to this traditional view of fandom in which fans are poachers, some contemporary fans are now able to treat themselves as the producers of original texts. They extrapolate beyond the rules and confines of the original text, foregoing the use of canonical

characters or settings to create a new, mostly independent story that they control. Borrowing from Catherine Tosenberger (2014), I define these new communities as microfandoms – collaborative subcultures that are not limited to their original fandom. Microfandoms are independent sub-fandoms in which content is produced and enjoyed by fans, “thus blurring the distinctions between audience and producer as a means to create a distinct form of textual production that draws on both roles” (Meyers, 2012, pg. 1023). They represent an evolution of fandom from the investment and emotional connection from commercialized media to the investment and creation of fanworks.

My examination of microfandoms focuses on the cartoon *Gravity Falls* (2012) and its microfandom Transcendence Alternate Universe (AU) as a case study, examining the ways fans extrapolated from the source material and created their own narrative. *Gravity Falls* follows Dipper (Jason Ritter) and Mabel (Kristen Schaal) as they spend the summer at their Great Uncle Stan’s (Alex Hirsch) Mystery Shack, a tourist trap based around the supernatural. After finding a hidden book called Journal 3, the twins investigate their new surroundings, uncovering a variety of dangers, including the demon Bill Cipher (Alex Hirsch) who seeks to destroy their universe and tear their family apart. The creation of Transcendence AU began during the show’s second season, specifically starting from episode 24 “Sock Opera,” which aired on September 8, 2014. In the episode, Mabel decides to put on a sock puppet rock opera to impress a local puppeteer but her show goes astray when Dipper's drive to uncover journal secrets leads him to become possessed by Bill Cipher.

On September 17, 2014, Tumblr user zoey-chu made the initial post that sparked this microfandom:

Imagine in a canon-divergent AU, a huge, grand sort of finale where the Pines prevent an Armageddon-scale disaster. but some shit still goes wrong, and while they may have prevented the worst from happening, a huge event essentially unleashes a wave of supernatural phenomena... And during the Pines' "final battle" before all this happens, Bill pretty much dies... Dipper is also in pretty bad shape, vulnerable enough for Bill to attempt a last-ditch possession in order to save himself. But it doesn't work... not quite. A part of Bill ends up fusing with Dipper, but his mind isn't overtaken. It seems like Dipper lucked out and retains mind, but his body isn't so lucky. He becomes a spirit much like Bill was, only able to reside in mindscape/underworld/whatever you want to call it. The result is bittersweet. Dipper can no longer return to the life he once had... Another curious side-effect is that tiny bits of Bill's personality and habits are picked up by Dipper.

Within months, what started as the musing of an idea became a collaborative project involving the creation of original plot lines and characters by hundreds of contributors and thousands of readers. While Transcendence AU began its life as "traditional" fanfiction that explored the world and characters by diverging from the original story and exploring the characters in new situations or settings, it soon became unrecognizable as *Gravity Falls*, forging references or explorations of the cast and setting and instead focusing on fan made characters and places. Transcendence AU displays a clear divide between itself and the *Gravity Falls* fandom, with the fans having kept careful online records of their own history and narrative. The community sees themselves as having broken off from *Gravity Falls* and now existing as an entirely separate fandom.



(Figure 1.1, *Gravity Falls* promotional image, Disney Channel.) (Figure 1.2, Transcendence AU, Zillenoise.)

Transcendence AU engenders the same feelings of passion and pastiche that traditional fandoms do. The roles of production and consumption are not separated here but are symbiotic. In this thesis, I argue that the existence of microfandoms emphasize the roles of fans as producers through the use of hierarchical systems, interpretive practices, and record-keeping. The evolution of the Transcendence AU fandom reveals clear and salient details about the formation of a microfandom and provides a glimpse of the future for online fandom.

Literature Review

One of fandom's most notable forms of shared creation is "fanon," the fannish practice of theorizing, interpreting, and sharing ideas/preferences that become largely accepted within larger fandom or subcultures, even if these ideas directly negate or challenge the source media.

Fanon is an interpretation or addition to the original text as based on the needs or desires of an individual fan creator (Driscoll, 2006, pg. 88). In contrast, “canon” is the factual set of events, ideas, and interpretations provided by the source material (Tosenberger, 2008; Thomas, 2011). With the introduction of social media and fanfiction hosting archives such as Fanfiction.net (FF.net), Wattpad, and Archive of Our Own (AO3), many fans have turned to a new interconnected model of fan participation and creation due to their heightened ability for connection and co-creation with other fans. It is within these spaces that fans begin to co-create fanon (Galuszka, 2015; Jenkins, 2006).

Microfandoms expand on the concept of fanon. Highly specialized tropes, ideas, and narrative models convey “a wealth of meaning to those in the know, and are sometimes near-incomprehensible to [other fans of the source media]” (Tosenberger, 2014, pg. 18). These microfandoms tend to act as their own independent fandom in which participants hold dual roles as both supportive fans and producers of media (Chin & Hills, 2008; Meyers, 2012). They create these microfandoms through interactive dynamics that mimic producers and the media industry and the industrial strategies for creating and marketing their fanworks (Booth, 2015). Fans are responsible for all of the content within a microfandom, and work together using blogs or chat rooms to create an agreed upon new text to enjoy. They rely on the fanworks before theirs to act as context or narratives to fuel their own creative contributions.

Within their online organizations, fans are able to reify a non-real text of their own unanimous creation into one that is treated with the same legitimacy and intensity as the original source material (Booth, 2015). They rely on the participation of fans to not only care for blogs, construct archives, and to produce content, but also create the general culture and social norms of

the group. Acts of participation are not limited to a few fans who act as community leaders or authorities within the microfandom, but rather participation is an ongoing and collectivistic duty.

Henry Jenkins defines a Participatory Culture as one:

1. With relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. With strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others
3. With some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Where members believe that their contributions matter
5. Where members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

(2009, pg. 5)

Participation is the focal point of all microfandom behavior. While participation is partially reliant on Jenkins's five points and on the production of fanworks, members of a fan community are also influenced to participate based on their recognizability. For many fans, legitimacy, authority, and social status are gained through popularity or through methods of control over documentary and archival spaces (Jenkins, 1988: 99). Fans will symbolically "pay" each other for labor by giving tokens of popularity: consumption, comments, and credit (Pecoskie & Hill, 2014). Labor is valued through "fans' consumption of the gifts produced and distributed by fellow fans" (Turk, 2014) and can help provide a strong sense of support, acceptance, and to lower the barrier to engagement.

While participation of some kind, from artistic contributions to lurking, is required of all fans, not all fans contribute equally. Certain fans, such as initial creators, dedicated community leaders, or social media moderators, hold a specific function within microfandoms and hold high authority for this reason. Matt Hills writes in *Fan Cultures* that the Big Name Fan (BNF) is "one

of the fan-cultural or subcultural terms for fans who have attained a wide degree of recognition in the community, and so who are known to others via subcultural mediation without personally knowing all those other subcultural participants" (2002, pg. 9). Originally conceived as a descriptor for dedicated fans who participated in the productive and consumptive practices of both creating transformative works (fanfiction, fanart, cosplay) and purchasing endorsed merchandise (Kiriakou, 2019; Ito, 2010), the term BNF has evolved over time. In the case of microfandoms, BNFs are popular fanwork producers or archival/social networking moderators who have gained a subcultural celebrity status or recognizability among peers in their fandom. These BNFs are often seen as legitimate experts in the subculture, who hold the same social marker of "keepers of privileged knowledge" that corporate media producers do. But rather than further the divide between media producers and ordinary fans, BNFs have the power to divide fans into "insiders" and "outsiders" of their microfandom through symbolic tokens of documentation and recognition powers held within their dominion over blogs and other archival spaces (Bavlanika, 2013; Chin & Hills, 2007) and supportive recognition through commenting and discussion behaviors (Pecoskie & Hill, 2014). BNFs who have more authority, and therefore occupy the more dominant position in the fandom by controlling the textual interpretations, discursive powers, and culture held within the community (Williams, 2004). This status may often create a form of subcultural celebrity, in which these persons are only treated as famous within their niche community and through repeated personal contact or social knowledge (Hills, 2017, pg. 60).

While blogs and other social media, such as Tumblr, Twitter, and other independent websites are necessary for the ability to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate the co-created and cooperative knowledge of the group, hierarchies can manifest through the control

and administration of archives and social media platforms. Producers' blogs are "frequently deployed as one-way communication channels, performing 'authority' and 'industry-insider' status" while positioning its readers as outsiders rather than equals (Chin and Hills, 2008). The hierarchical management within fannish spaces helps maintain structures of discipline and internalization of the rules; but in turn, fans may experience low communicative exchange with BNFs/ members of power and other members with similar social standing.

Archival history is the primary form of large-scale communication through updating blogs or wikis to include story updates, character descriptions, or significant moments in the fandom's history. Focusing on the use of documentation and archives, Abigail De Kosnik (2016) argues in *Rogue Archives* that digital archiving is "deliberately opposed to the canonization of specific texts" (76), meaning that, in the case of microfandoms, by documenting and storing new fan-created texts, they seek to transform or recontextualize the source material. De Kosnik's definition of an archive is one that is free and open to the public, not restricted by copyright law, preserves cultural memory outside of traditional institutions, run by volunteers, and allows users to obtain and view the texts in full (76-77).

These archives include fan-sites such as Archive of Our Own or blogging platforms such as Tumblr. De Kosnik excludes wiki pages from her definition of archives, given that they are encyclopedic rather than preservative and do not contain the text in full. However, I argue that wiki pages aid archives by giving fans both a history and a reading guide by linking and citing fanwork hosting sites and blogging platforms, thereby serving a necessary function to the existence of microfandoms. These platforms employ non-normative criteria when assessing the value of fanworks and deciding which pieces of a collaborative cultural narrative and history will be preserved and legitimized.

Defining Microfandom

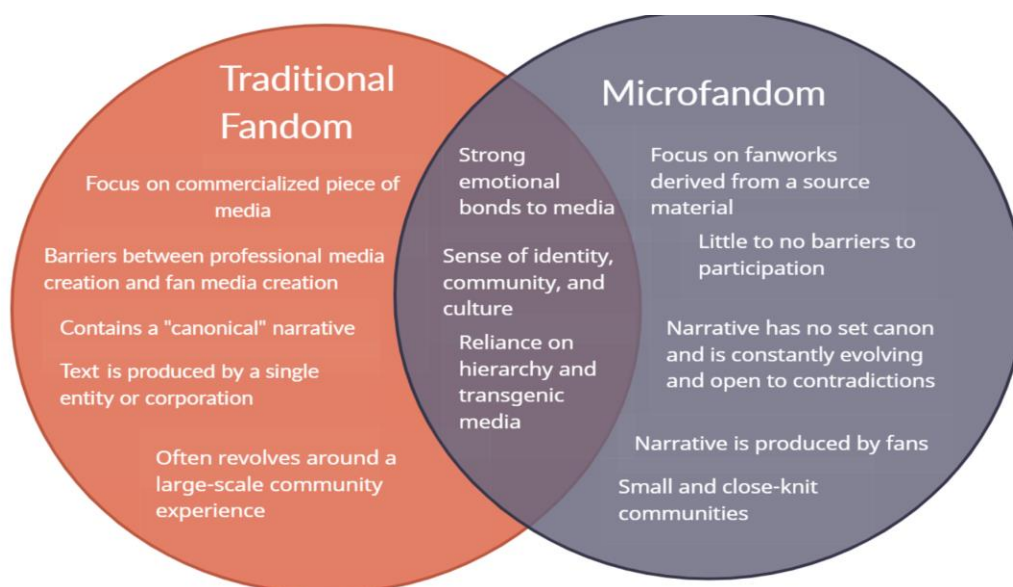
Just as defining a fandom can be difficult, defining a microfandom also presents challenges. Migration of fans to the internet pulled them free from the confines of conventions and fanzines as the primary meeting place and home of fandom, and allowed fans the opportunity to communicate on discussion boards, through private chats, and on personal blogs thus opening up fandom experiences to a wider audience (Sandvoss, Gray, & Harrington, 2018). The evolution of fandom has required fans to continually redefine what it means to be a fan and to reflect on how their experiences are shaped by personal and interpersonal dimensions. While fandom is still most commonly described as “an investment of affect and identity into an object” it is also defined by the relationship and community fans establish with each other (Lothian, 2018, pg. 373).

Through this lens, microfandoms have a lot in common with their traditional counterparts. Fans gather in online spaces to discuss their emotional investment in a media object and create fanworks as a sign of their attachment and to propose their own interpretations of a text. However, as fanfiction and fanart surge in popularity due to the availability of social media and posting platforms, fans find themselves at the crossroads of a new fandom experience. Traditional fandoms present a very clear divide between media producers and fans of media. Meanwhile, in a microfandom, fanworks are treated as if they are the source material, rather than an off-shoot of the source material.

I define microfandoms as small, close-knit communities where members know and communicate directly with the entire group as they transform the source material. While larger, traditional fandoms may contain pockets of fans who all know and interact with each other,

microfandoms are notable due to their size. Microfandoms are also distinct from fan projects, like zines, in that there are no barriers to participate nor will leaving the group break social obligations or cause the microfandom to collapse, such as if a participant left a zine they agreed to be a part of and their role needed to be replaced. Microfandoms rest between a space of being a completely original co-created work, and still retaining their fanwork origins. The stories created within microfandoms are often contradicting, meaning that the rules of the narrative are loosely defined or up for debate by its members.

Key Differences Between Traditional Fandoms and Microfandoms



(Figure 1.3)

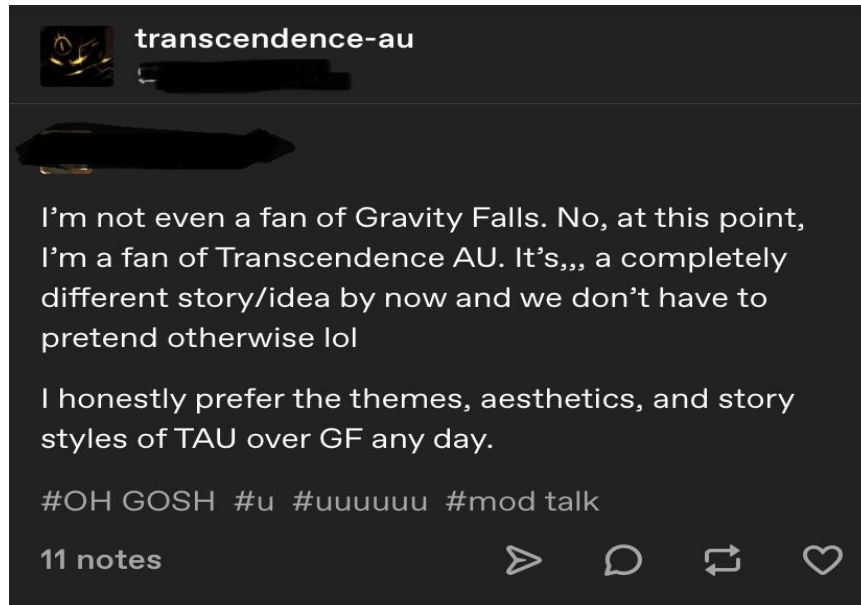
The driving force behind microfandoms is the community's investment in fan transformations of a media object. Headcanons, fanon, ships, crossovers, parodies, and alternate universes all provide the groundwork for microfandoms due to their divergence from the canonical media. These "what-if" scenarios expand upon Matt Hills's concept of hyperdiegesis,

or “a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic or extension” (2002, pg. 137) by which fans touch upon the unexplored narratives within a canon (see Chapter 2). While fans may contradict each others’ specific interpretations of a ship or alternate universe, they still identify as a community with similar interests much like any other fandom would.

Microfandoms exist in an unoccupied space between enjoying a media text and wanting to replace it entirely. The appeal of microfandoms “derives from unconstrained pleasure from the symbiotic relationship between fans and the media industry” (Booth, 2015, pg. 3-4). They maintain the same affections for the source material but now transplanted onto an object of their own creation, an object that they have transplanted their own identity onto (see Figure 1.4).

Many fans discussed feeling that Transcendence AU was a separate object from *Gravity Falls*, and that they preferred it to the source material. Fans enjoyed the freedom to create their own characters and plotlines, slowly taking *Gravity Falls* away from its origins and exploring the full capabilities of its world. Much like the creators of a film or television show, the fans are able to explore the content from the position of producer and fan. Transcendence AU creates a sense

of connection to media fandom, a place where grassroots production overtakes that of corporations.



(Figure 1.4)

Microfandoms have existed before Transcendence AU. Tosenberger (2014) uses the example of Fanon!Draco from the *Harry Potter* series, and the transformation of his obnoxious disposition into that of a charming character, in order to make him a more suitable romantic option for Harry. Using the multiple narrative works created by fans through both visual and written narratives, the idea of Fanon!Draco has become akin to a narrative separate from the original books and films. He is treated like an entirely new character within a new canonical text, rather than a rehash of Draco as he is seen within the books or movies. Paul Booth (2015) outlines a similar occurrence within the Inspector Spacetime community, in which fans created a *Doctor Who* parody (originally sourced from the TV show *Community*); and then worked together to create a new set of narratives, characters, and worlds that they treated like a piece of

popular mass media. It relied on the use of ‘reincarnations’ (a parody of the Doctor’s regenerations from *Doctor Who*) as a way for participants to create unique but interactive characters and narratives that spread across fanfictions, rather than trying to rely on a closed set of characters. Inspector Spacetime gained such a dense and unique following that Travis Richey, who played the Inspector on *Community*, worked with fans and their created narrative to produce a version of the fictional show. The majority of microfandoms represent an extrapolation from or expansion of the source material, not always mindful of the original texts’ limitations on characters, tone, or theme. In this way participants of microfandoms rest somewhere between devoted followers of a text and anti-fans, so in love with a media object that they seek to change it entirely and explore it on their own.

Though there are many avenues for microfandoms to form and early examples of their existence, I have chosen Transcendence AU due to my previous interest in and proximity to the fandom. In order to expand the amount of space new writers and artists could cover, Transcendence AU adopted an idea of reincarnation into the narrative, allowing for near infinite plot lines and characters to be created, similar to Inspector Spacetime. This allows fans to follow the adventures of main character Dipper Pines¹ (though he need not always be present in their fanworks) throughout time and space as he interacts with new sets of characters and a variety of scenarios from going to college to fighting monsters. In the six years that have passed, Transcendence AU has continued to expand into having thousands of followers. Shortly following the creation of the Tumblr blog in October 2014, a wiki that operated similar to

¹ Transcendence AU places Gravity Falls in an edgier, darker tone. Dipper’s character is given a more complex personality, where his usual quirky and nervous traits are paired with occasionally violent or chaotic actions. Dipper and Mabel also take aliases in the AU, Alcor and Mizar, to further separate them as different from Gravity Falls. When combined with the various original characters and plot lines, this can make Transcendence AU feel unrecognizable to fans of the show.

Wikipedia and curated by fans was created in November 2014 in order to keep an organized, searchable log of all fanfiction, original characters, plot lines, and specific terminology within the fandom. The emergence of streaming platform Disney+ in November 2019 allowed new fans to enjoy *Gravity Falls* and Transcendence AU in turn. This surge of newcomers aligned with the start of this research and provided opportunities to speak to fans both old and new about their experiences with and the evolution of the microfandom.

Research Methods

My case study on microfandoms explores *Gravity Falls* (2012) and its subsequent microfandom Transcendence AU: a series of interconnected fanfictions, art, and videos written by different fans, ongoing since 2014, that explores a semi-autonomous narrative that need not always rely on the characters, setting, or plot in *Gravity Falls*. As a member of the Transcendence AU (TAU) community, I have developed close relationships with other fans, some of whom have volunteered as participants for this research. I am aware of my identity as a fan, producer, and scholar within TAU and the challenges faced by my personal investment and relationships in the fandom.

My relationship to Transcendence AU served as the inspiration for this research. Particularly, I was interested in how my community negotiated the narrative within the AU. I often noticed, through Transcendence AU's Tumblr blog, that there were moments of negotiation between its members. That is to say, while creativity and freedom of expression are still highly valued in Transcendence AU, there was always an underlying contention over whose interpretations were more "correct". When new ideas or headcanons were sent into the blog, there was always a discussion of how they fit in or rejected the "canon" of the story, rather than

an outright celebration or acceptance. This was often juxtaposed to chat rooms, where members tended to be more celebratory and eager to hear each other's ideas and contributions to the narrative.

I was driven to think about the fan producer duality and the role of hierarchy within fandom, by reflecting on my own experiences within the fandom. My personal relationship with the microfandom lead me to question the structures that existed within it and want to determine where it rested on a spectrum of fandom behaviors. While Transcendence AU is a tight-knit and overall friendly community, there were moments where I felt like I was not performing fandom up to community standards, by challenging accepted ideas of "canon" and by being critical of how platforms were used. Much of my interrogation of Transcendence AU comes from these personal experiences, as well as my own relationships with the members of its community, already knowing many of the participants in my study on a personal level. Though I rely mostly on the statements I received from participants, my experiences still served as a backdrop to this research. This added challenges to my research by wanting to balance my critique of the community, as well as my affection for it— wanting to ensure that Transcendence AU was represented as a space where I felt simultaneously happy and estranged.

In order to demonstrate the creation of Transcendence AU, account for its history, and learn about the nature of participants as both fans and producers I employed a three-part analysis of microfandoms. The first part of my analysis came from online databases and archives such as Tumblr, Discord, and FandomWiki. I used these texts to create a timeline of the AU's history, including the introduction of significant participants, new ideas, and events. Using social media and the Transcendence AU wiki also provided me with samples of communication between

participants and how matters of the fanon are addressed as well as language unique to this microfandom as a form of observation and textual analysis.

I then pursued the case study through a two-step process of surveying and interviewing fans to determine if my assumptions about the community were correct. The participants were found using the Transcendence AU Tumblr blog as well as the Discord to share the announcement with the community. The criteria for participants were to be proficient in English and to be over 18 years old. No other restrictions were included in order to gauge interest and information from all participants of Transcendence AU, regardless of their activity levels at the given time. From there a pretest asked questions about how often they participated in Transcendence AU, when they discovered it, and what types of fanworks they created (if any). The purpose of this survey was to inform the questions I would ask in the survey based off of the sample of participants I had.

The secondary survey I used was hosted by Google Forms and divided into three parts based on three phenomena within fan studies and larger online cultures. The first part of the survey focused on Henry Jenkins' Participatory Culture, by asking members to rate their experiences with Transcendence AU on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Participants were also given the option to follow up on questions with specific details, anecdotes, or explanations for their initial answers if they felt they had more to say. The questions developed reflected Jenkins' five points of participatory culture, asking members repeatedly if they felt each point of participation was met and what their role was within the community (for more information see Appendix A).

The second part of the survey reflected Matt Hills's and Bertha Chin's discussions of BigName Fans and the role of bloggers as subcultural celebrities within fandoms. Again, this

portion of the survey relied on ranking responses on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly disagree), as well as the option for participants to expand on or explain their answers. These questions reflected the relationship between moderators and members of Transcendence AU, and how authority or control of a fanon narrative are controlled by individuals. Participants were asked about the role of authority in the community which was juxtaposed to their responses in part one which emphasized their ability to feel included or to make significant contributions. Days before I sent the survey, two new moderators for Transcendence AU were added to the roster. I elected to mention this in the form of a question so that participants could provide answers knowing I was aware of and including both past and current events as part of the data: “I believe that the introduction of 2 new moderators on April 24, 2020 has had or will have a positive influence on the community” (see Appendix A).

The final part of the survey focused on Abigail De Kosnick’s book *Rogue Archives* and the insight into how fans create and manage blogs, archives, and other online communication and documentation platforms. In this section of the survey, participants were asked to give brief written responses to questions (see Appendix A).

Following the survey, participants were given the option to volunteer for a follow up interview that could be conducted orally through voice chat or in a written format through email or social media in order to accommodate scheduling conflicts, time zones, and personal preferences. Participants completing a written interview were all given the similar sets of 10 questions based on if they contributed any fan works to Transcendence AU or if they no longer partook in the community. Any follow up questions were based primarily on a need for clarification or expanding on undeveloped ideas. Written response questions were kept shorter and more concise than oral responses in order to accommodate the amount of time a participant

would spend typing and potentially revising their statements (see Appendix A). Oral interview participants were given a similar set of questions, but were encouraged to speak freely and follow tangents throughout the interview (see Appendix A). Much of the oral interviews were driven by participants' own desires to discuss certain topics or to tell stories about their experiences and any follow up questions either asked for clarification or furthered the details of their statements.

Summary

The next three chapters of this research follow the frameworks of the survey questions. Chapter 1 discusses Matt Hill's theory of Big Name Fans and the concept of authority in microfandoms. Despite being built on the foundation of collaboration and shared authorial power, microfandoms still rely on leaders to regulate social norms for appropriate behavior and perform upkeep on social media and archives. Yet the presence of leaders also ensures the presence of hierarchies. This chapter will follow the question of authority and hierarchy to explore the relationships between fans and the power that everyone has to preserve and alter paratextual memory (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017). In this sense, fans mimic the hierarchical structures of mainstream media producers. Transcendence AU serves as a historical document and example of evolving fandom leadership and the roles fans perform within their communities.

Chapter 2 will pertain to methods of participation, creativity, and the creation of the narrative within Transcendence AU. Just as mainstream and corporate media is created through the efforts and skills of employees, microfandoms are created through the efforts of several fans at once. This chapter will explore how fanworks can sometimes contradict themselves and the phenomenon of "inter-fan poaching" by which fans share and borrow narrative elements from

one another in order to create a more unified story. They create an identity of unity and collaboration through their usage of social media and how they negotiate narrative differences and contributions with one another.

Finally, chapter 3 will analyze the use of platforms in microfandoms. The type of platform fans chose to use controls how and what kind of information is shared and preserved. Transcendence AU serves as the guide for how different types of social media such as curated blogs, open-source wikis, chat rooms, and fanfiction archives, all serve as individual parts in a functioning whole. It represents the necessity of transgenic media, how content can be displaced from one medium to another, when working in an online collaborative space. These tools serve as the written history and collectivistic knowledge that all fans bring with them into a microfandom. Platforms and archives are the summation of participatory digital grounds for democracy and collaboration.

To understand the future of fandom and the evolving status of fans as media producers, it is important to consider the current role of non-commercial media within subcultures. Fans that build upon and extrapolate from beyond their source material, into the point they form new fandoms, are demonstrative of the future of fans. They turn fanworks into power, transforming media into narratives that they control.

Chapter 1

Big Name Fans and the Role of Authority

Microfandoms, as exemplified by Transcendence AU, present forms of authority that allow fans the ability to control the dominant interpretations of the narrative (see Chapter 2) and make decisions regarding how the community should function through its online platforms (see Chapter 3). The fan/producer duality challenges the identity of fans and the ways they can contribute to their communities. This need for fans to identify themselves within the chain of production also raises discussions about what qualifies as participation and how to facilitate low barriers of participation. This hierarchy can be encouraging and provide a sense of being a close-knit organization built on reciprocity; everyone has a place where they belong. But authority can also foster a sense of being socially apart, in which members find themselves as being in or out of a social circle, rather part of the whole group.

In *The Forms of Capital*, Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1985, pg. 248). It is the measure by which resources, both tangible and symbolic, have an impact on relationships within communities. Bertha Chin states that fan capital is "gained from the cultural game played by fans in fandom" (2018, pg. 249). Her discussion of fan capital as a "game" suggests a meticulous and intentional strategy that goes into the performance of fandom. Fans will work to accumulate symbolic tokens of capital (likes, comments, recognition) or to earn status as a community leader or subcultural celebrity (Chin, 2018, pg. 251). The more popular a fanwork, the more popular its creator will be among fellow fans. This accumulation of capital is directed into the creation of

cultural hierarchies that divide fans into roles— their position reflective of their determined value within their community. While notions of social capital and hierarchy differ between fandoms, it is easier to identify hierarchies and the roles in which fans in small, close-knit microfandoms. However, it should be noted that the roles I have identified in Transcendence AU as my case study may not be applicable to other microfandoms or even traditional fandoms.

In this chapter I analyze the roles which fans can take within their microfandoms: Big Name Fans, lurkers, and alternative authorities. Each of these roles offer a service or fulfill a need for fandom and contribute to the sense of community. This authority is established by the means and limitations of fans, which can further contribute to inequality in fanspaces on the basis of race, class, and other demographic factors.

Big Name Fandom

Members of a fan community who hold a certain amount of authority and recognizability are defined by Matt Hills as Big Name Fans (BNFs). These fans are subcultural celebrities, “recognized simply by name or image (in a social media context, usually a combination of the two) and often reap the rewards that come with such fame,” though they hold little to no power or recognizability outside of their fandom (Kiriakou, 2019). These BNFs are often seen as legitimate experts in the subculture, regardless of the accuracy of their knowledge (Mittell, 2012), who hold the same social marker of “keepers of privileged knowledge” that media producers do. BNFs have the power to divide themselves from those they consider to be outsiders of their social group through symbolic tokens of capital (Chin & Hills, 2007; Bavlanka, 2013) and supportive recognition through commenting and discussion behaviors (Pecoskie & Hill, 2014). “Knowing the ‘right’ group of fans, associating with highly respected fan

communities adds to the fan social capital” (Chin, 2018, pg. 253). BNFs often gain their authority through their associations, rather than by merit; and these social groups are indicative of a person’s race, class, and gender (Pande, 2018; Scott, 2019). Fandom spaces, and therefore positions of authority within those spaces, are often gatekept to value predominately white, middle-class fans who have privileges in life that allow them the time, money, and social status to partake in fandom activities like collecting or writing fanfiction. The notion of fans creating social groups containing “insiders” and “outsiders” often leaves non-white fans as the outsiders in their community. Rukmini Pande writes that there has been little discussion of “the operations of racial/ethnic/cultural identity” that destabilize the binaries within fandom (2018, pg. 320), including the notion of “in groups” and “out groups”. By idealizing close-knit communities and subcultures, race is effectively obscured, often leading to problematic relations within the community and with the platforms fans use (Close & Wang, 2020).

While this research did not require participants to disclose their race, gender, or other demographic markers beyond age and pronouns, through other methods the majority demographics of Transcendence AU can be evaluated. Many members of the community may choose to share pictures of themselves on social media or through their icons, and it can be assumed the majority of Transcendence AU are white and identify as female or transgender/non binary. My closeness to the fandom also offered me knowledge of the general demographic makeup of its members. The fandom also communicates entirely in American English, suggesting that the majority of participants are American as well. This may be in part due to its source material *Gravity Falls* being primarily distributed in English speaking countries (though has been translated in 30 languages). The role of racial and gender identity expands into how the narrative is created in Transcendence AU, and which stories and original characters are valued

will be expanded upon in Chapter 2. It is also important to note that acquiring the demographic information of the participants would provide an incomplete picture of Transcendence AU, since many members could not participate due to age, or were unavailable. From my previous understanding, non-participants made up the majority of non-white members of Transcendence AU.

In relation to blogging and social media platforms (Tumblr, Twitter) where BNFs can answer questions or share public opinions, most of the content is created by fans rather than the moderator. Fans who run social media platforms that serve as a community meeting space or curative tool (see Chapter 3) are often referred to as moderators or “mods.” While free and open discourse is available to the public, moderators are required to set and enforce the rules of their platform (Massanari, 2015) and to regulate the content in a way that is appropriate to the individual group, such as staying within the topic or by removing hate speech. This need for regulation increases the role of moderators and creates “demand for gatekeepers who will advise listeners on what is worth listening to” (Galuszka, 2015: 29). However, as soon as responsibility or authority is disclosed to specific persons within an organization, they gain a sense of control over that organization (Schwartz, 2015: 88). By being tasked with the preservation of an online space, moderators gain authority over that space as well. This parasocial or quasi-interaction can create a power asymmetry in which high authority fans and moderators have a strong editorial control over fans’ sharing and discussion abilities (Chin & Hills, 2008: 268), thus limiting participatory habits within the group. In some cases, platforms will even allow for comments to be turned off, completely cutting fans off from a mode of communication with a BNF directly. The ability to curate, constrict, or otherwise limit the scope of conversations and knowledge between fans is a tool used to ensure the hierarchy of power (Jiang, 2014). The cost of increased

knowledge and communication between members of an organization can come at personal risk to leaders' sense of control and authority. The role of BNF as moderator is to control the influx of information, and that information can be tailored to the BNFs personal interests, rather than the interests of the community as a whole.

While fans consider the role of moderators to be necessary and non-negotiable for the well-being of fandom and its presence on social media, microfandoms make clear the functions of authority in fandom; primarily the ways in which moderators of a space have the potential for creative control. For example, in the Transcendence AU community moderators may have control over the construction of the narrative by responding to and putting new information on the blog. For fans, legitimacy, authority, and social status are gained through popularity: the number of likes you get on a fanwork, recognizability within a group, or methods of control over documentary and archival spaces. BNFs have more authority, and therefore occupy the more dominant position in the fandom, controlling the textual interpretations, discursive powers, and culture held within the community (Williams, 2004).

In Transcendence AU, new moderators are picked by already established moderators, continuing the prevalence of the "media insider" and "media outsider." During the process of this research, Transcendence AU added two new moderators (as new ones had not been added since 2017) at the requests of members over the course of several months. The selection was made based on who in the community would be a good fit within the moderator social group and "did not cause problems" (as was explained by one participant). How someone defines a "problem" is based on their own culture and ability level and can be exclusionary towards people who do not act like them. This provides further space for gatekeeping based on race, culture, or disability: assuming that the standard for proper behavior in the fandom is rooted in white, American, and

neurotypical/ableist standards. In this situation it can also be interpreted that “problem” refers to what the other moderators find controversial, rather than actions that are hurtful to the fandom at large.

These additions to the moderator lineup were not done through nomination or election, despite the requests of members to select their own moderators and to have more control over how platforms are run in the community. When asked for further clarification, current moderators responded that this was due to a previous moderator election in 2016, where the elected moderator was believed by the standing moderators to not be a good fit within their social group and was removed. No further detail was provided as to what the conflict was between the moderators. Former members noted that this behavior from moderators had some influence on their loss of interest in Transcendence AU (see Chapter 2).

While the increased popularity of new moderators may come as an unavoidable side effect of holding a level of responsibility in fandom, it also signals becoming a BNF. When BNFs gain more followers, more questions on their blogs, and more attention to their fanworks, it may also signal that their voices and opinions on fandom matters are considerably more important than the voices in the community they represent. They have more opportunities than other members do to make their voices prevalent both personally and on the Transcendence AU blog. When asked about the presence of authority in the Transcendence AU community, members primarily responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that moderators have more authority within the community.

I believe the moderators have more authority than other members.

26 responses

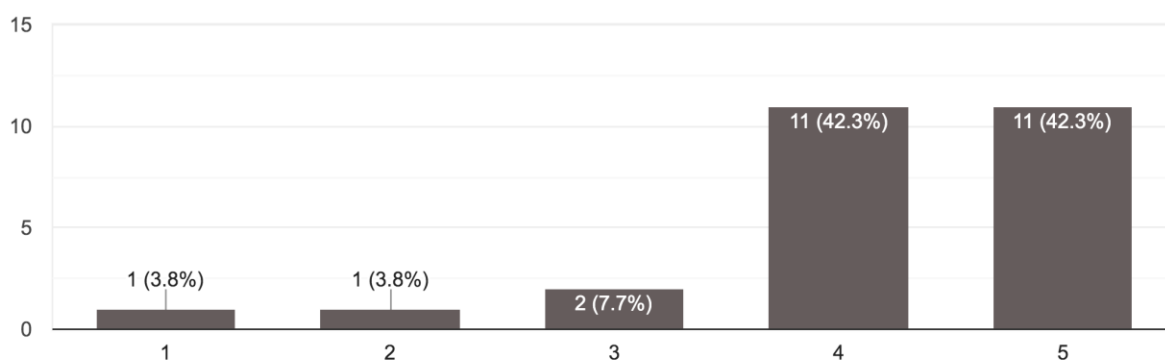


Figure 2.1

However, when asked for further clarification, the answers fell into one of two categories. The first category was that authority came only in the form of blog curation and chatroom regulation. As one response stated, “Apart from having more permissions on the blog and discord, their ideas definitely carry a certain weight.” Many members believe that the authority of moderators comes only in terms of blogging and that the authority is “not absolute.” The second category defines authority as being part of an “in group” that centers on popularity, both on themselves as personalities and within the fanwork (predominantly fanart and fanfiction). The moderators are described as being considered as an “in group” and being “more authoritative and above critique.” When asked for a follow up to why they strongly believed moderators had more authority, many mention a distance between the community and the moderators that prevents their role as curators and regulators from being truly functional.

While the Transcendence AU moderators do their job of upkeep on the blog and keeping online spaces physically organized, many of them do not regularly communicate or interact with

members of the community, placing the responsibility of fandom upkeep back onto those members. One participant said:

“When the mods became essentially unresponsive in public chat, we would just make our own groups/servers or otherwise host the thing we wanted to do ourselves. Don't blame them for that by the way- I imagine modding for a thing you're not all that active in anymore would be awfully boring.”

For many Transcendence AU members, making new blogs or servers to accommodate their own needs was not a big deal. They believe they hold equal responsibility for the care and development of the AU, both in terms of its narrative and its platform.

However, this response proposes further concerns. Why leave someone who no longer has interest in Transcendence AU in control of its platforms, especially when current members have stepped up to fulfill that role? Moderators who are predominately inactive in Transcendence AU still maintain authority within its fan spaces. Though no clear answer was given by participants as to why old moderators are not replaced, through my analysis and experience, I believe it is because current moderators are unwilling to give up their control of the fandom. Their moderatorship extends their popularity and follower-ship, even as they move on to explore new fandoms. Their hesitance to add new moderators and basing their decisions on who “causes problems” indicates that their role is far more social than it is practical. I do not want to imply this desire for control is intentional or meant to harm other fans, but that it is rather a learned behavior that stems from fandom’s need to control the narrative interpretations and habits of others (see Chapter 2).

In Transcendence AU, many moderators who participated in the interviews indirectly referred to themselves as BNFs or had experiences relevant to the BNF experience. They

described a rapid increase of Tumblr followers following their gained status as a moderator, sometimes into the thousands and typically more likes/comments on their fanworks. While Bertha Chin argues that “reputations earned by fans will not be transferable to another fandom” (2018, pg. 250), the Transcendence AU community demonstrates that reputations can be transferred between communities that already have an overlap between fans and that BNFs can influence their followers to enter into new fandoms. Transcendence AU creator Zillenoise was referenced as being a popular artist within the *Homestuck* fandom, which shared a significant portion of its fan base with *Gravity Falls*. This status from a previous fandom and the popularity gained from it is likely what allowed for Transcendence AU to gain popularity and recognizability over the several other similar AUs happening within the *Gravity Falls* fandom at the time.

When Zillenoise first shared the idea of Transcendence AU, it was likely their popularity in *Homestuck* that caught the attention of future members of the AU. Many Transcendence AU members who joined the community early on in 2014-2015 noted also being fans of *Homestuck* and became *Gravity Falls*/ Transcendence AU fans through Zillenoise or from other *Homestuck* BNFs. Chin’s argument disregards the multi-fandom experience, in which people blog about or create fanworks for more than one fandom at a time. The social capital gained in one fandom can be transferred to another if a BNF has a dedicated follower base. That is to say, loyal followers will continue to offer capital in the forms of likes or comments regardless of the BNFs fandom of interest at the time.

Though authority exists in fan communities, and can even be misused, the response to that authority varies between fans. Many fans stated in interviews that they were not concerned about the role of authority within their fandom, because they themselves were not interested in

having that authority. However, to insist that the role of assigning fannish value and curating content relies solely on BNFs is inaccurate. While BNFs hold a significant amount of authority within a fandom, that authority is also the product of other fans. When discussing the role of social capital in a production-focused community, it is necessary to consider fans who do not produce or create any new content for their fandom and how they fit into the collaborative process and social hierarchy.

Lurking on Fandom

Lurking refers to fans who may read fanfiction and chat logs (Costello & Moore, 2007) but overall do not participate in the everyday operations of their fandom (Merry & Simon, 2012). They are considered predominantly to be inactive or passive consumers within fan communities. Fan communities can have rates of lurking of 45% and up to 99% (Preece, et al, 2004), suggesting that the majority of engagement in fandom comes from lurkers. While lurkers are often defined as being quiet and rarely communicating with their community, many members of the Transcendence AU community believed that discussion and commenting was a predominant part of lurking. They saw lurking as a decision to not produce fanwork or by their fluctuating interest in the AU that prevented them from being constantly present. Lurkers consider themselves to be the ones who enjoy the labor of others and, though they may communicate with other fans, are not involved in the production of new fanworks. Every single fandom is composed of lurkers, just as they are composed of fan artists and writers. But this definition leaves little room for lurkers who participate in microfandoms: a place where fans are also supposed to assume the dual role of producer. What role do lurkers play in the production cycle and do they have equal authority to the rest of their fandom?

As previously discussed, one-way social capital is ascribed to fans is by the process of reading, liking, commenting, and sharing. These lurkers would then be the ones to determine the popularity of another fan or fanwork, enabling the process for BNFs to gain their status. In *Spreadable Media* Jenkins, Ford, and Green state:

[Lurkers] provide value to people sharing commentary or producing multimedia content by expanding the audience and potentially motivating their work, while critics and curators generate value for those who are creating material and perhaps for one another. Critics provide ideas about which content to value, and curators provide critics with easy access to the texts being examined. (2013, pg. 157-158)

Though not producers, lurkers are the driving force behind microfandoms, as the predominant consumers. They provide the much-needed encouragement to their peers and by ascribing value to fanworks, through liking, commenting on, and discussing them. Lurkers create a sense of legitimacy for microfandoms; they are an engaging audience that allow microfandoms to be treated like a new, independent fandom that is different from traditional multi-fan projects. Fans rely on “peer-based processes for distinguishing new and experienced participants and recognizing high quality work” (Ito, 2010). By commenting or discussing the fandom, lurkers also consider themselves as having an important role in their fandom, as they leave suggestions or ideas for creators to use on their behalf.

Lurking is also a tool for training new members in fandom. Rau, Gao, and Ding discuss a process during which “lurkers can benefit cognitively and socially from observing others’ learning” (2008, pg. 2760). In microfandoms, the vicarious learning process is especially significant, as it allows newcomers a chance to orient themselves within the culture of their fandom. This not only includes learning group behaviors, names, slang, and other habits unique

to a community, but it also provides a chance for newcomers to become familiar with a narrative while watching others discuss it. By watching, lurkers become aware of the various roles that present themselves in fandoms. Rather than hide the production process by which a microfandom's narrative is expanded, new fans are given opportunities to observe the process before practicing it themselves (Jenkins *et al.*, 2013, pg. 159). Lurking lowers the barrier to participation in fandom and increases the potential for future participation from new members. By choosing to simply observe and consume, the preferences of lurkers can actively shape a microfandom through their opinions and constant encouragement. They are not creators of content, but they shape the value ascribed to content and contribute to the creation of fandom hierarchies

Heterarchy and Alternative Authorities

Fans who exist outside of BNF and lurker spaces may also fall into distinct roles that are influenced by their social capital. These roles are “non-ranked” heterarchical systems of power in which fans move freely between positions of power (Schwarz, 2015). Hierarchical and heterarchical practices do not need to operate in opposition, but rather can reinforce the need for equal and checked authoritarian power in online cooperative spaces. Fans can take up multiple roles and interchange between these roles as their interests and the needs of the microfandom change. In many cases, these roles can be determined by what fans constitute as the ‘other’ fan—author and reader, writer or artist, supporter, or non-supporter, etc. (Chin, 2018, pg. 247). However, more specific roles can be found within microfandoms that are occupied by fans with less social capital. These types of activities are not limited to microfandoms and are found within all fan communities.

Beta readers are one of the most well-known roles in fandom. These are fans who offer services as pre-readers or content reviewers and ensure the formatting quality of the work such as spelling, grammar, or video editing (Kelley, 2016). In microfandoms, beta readers also serve as a resource and guide for the fanon narrative shared between fans. They are experts on maintaining a sense of thematic reasonability between pieces of a story (see Chapter 2). Beta readers and reviewers serve as mentor figures to newcomers as well, creating a bridge between lurking and content creation. These readers are guides to fans and provide a sense of encouragement and personal investment in a fandom. Some communities, such as video creators, take the role of beta reading and feedback giving and turn it into an event in which “people offer to post an opinion on somebody’s video in a reciprocal exchange” (Ito, 2010) as a way to further emphasize the necessity of beta reading.

Pathfinders are passionate and dedicated to their fandom, keeping track of developments in plot, character, and in platform usage (Pecoskie & Hill, 2016: 849). They have extensive and detailed memories of their fandom and have the knowledge and expertise commonly associated with BNFs. They assist newcomers in navigating fan-created works and work to identify lost or forgotten pieces of a microfandom’s narrative or history. The pathfinders play a significant role in the use of social media and documentation within a fandom, as it is their memory and know-how that drives the preservation of paratextual memory (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017). They are often providers of labor towards fan pages, wikis, or other social media (see Chapter 3). However, the fans are not unbiased.

A third role fans might consider taking is that of *event organizer*. For many fandoms these events may take the form of prompts given over a monthly period, weeks dedicated to shipping and pairs in which fans create art or writing, and even the creation and distribution of

zines. Event organizers will also head up creative endeavors like the creation of animatics or group bonding activities like online games or screenings of a show or movie. These organizers are responsible for technical preparations, social media announcements, and content distribution. They are a fandom's experts in collaboration and community bonding.

Transcendence AU relies heavily on community volunteers in these roles and methods of alternative authority. Within the tight-knit group of community members and friends, there are popular beta readers who consistently volunteer their services to new and older members. Pathfinders are constantly available on social media and often help other members remember the names of their favorite fanfiction, or details from both the source material and co-created narrative they share. These pathfinders also have an apt memory for the history of their fandom, and were of much assistance to me throughout this research. During my research Transcendence AU also experienced an increase of community projects and events such as an animated music video created by fans, a zine publication, bi-weekly "fic club" (similar to a book club), and recording podfics (fanfiction narrated like an audio book). In an interview a member mentioned two events that no longer happen in Transcendence AU, an Original Character Tournament (a bracket style voting activity featuring new OC fanart) and a holiday fanfiction give away. The interviewee described the events as being enjoyable and memorable because they were widespread in the fandom and highly organized, signaling the emotional significance of community events to fans.

A yearly event created to celebrate the microfandom's anniversary in October and encourage new membership takes place predominantly through the blog called TAUnton (previously ficathon). This event is announced in late August/ Early September in which members suggest prompts and create new fanworks. The event is asynchronous, allowing fans to

contribute on their own time demonstrating that a shared media text need not be produced or celebrated in live time for fans to commune around it. All fans are given the opportunity to suggest and take on prompts listed on a spreadsheet and do not rely on any hierarchy to function. There are no leaders in charge of the event; fans are allowed to do as they please. Hierarchies are minimal within these alternate authorities, with the exception of event planners who use their authority to give instructions and organize the activity through social media. These event planners don't have the same authority that BNFs do, because they do not control the dominant interpretation of the narrative nor do they create and enforce social norms. Rather their job is more secretarial involving schedules and answering questions.

During the process of this research, I was asked to lead a zine for Transcendence AU fans to submit artwork and short fanfictions to, as I had previous experience from other zines. This position, while granting me authority over how the project should be run, was limited to creating a timeline and for assigning roles to other participants, such as creating the final PDF file. This position in no way mimicked that of the Transcendence AU moderators, nor do I believe it gained me any social capital. The fanfiction I published did not become more popular, nor did I gain any new followers on my blogs during this time. Rather this was a group activity done for pleasure and to create a lasting memento of the AU.

It can be difficult to determine a fan's position within all the possible hierarchies that exist within fandom (Chin, 2018, pg. 249) and all the roles that are specific to certain fandoms. Fans do not "adhere to any one of these roles and often behave in different ways" (Jenkins et al. 157). The heterarchical model aids in this analysis, as it provides a model for fans of limited or less social capital than BNFs to move through the less distinct roles that are available to them.

Yet, much like lurkers, fans within these roles also have the ability to influence or support hierarchical structures and assign value to fans through their projects. Beta reading is most commonly done between friends, which emphasizes the role of trust between author and preliminary reader, but can also block off other fans from accessing advice or connections outside of their own immediate group. Just as BNFs tend to stick within close groups of friends, so do fans with less social capital, reinforcing those roles. Pathfinders may intentionally ignore less popular fanworks or creators within their fandom, reinforcing what it means to be considered valued within a fandom (Chin, 2018). Event planners also have the ability to bar fans they consider less desirable from their projects. While these other roles are imperfect and have the ability to further foster hierarchy and the need for social capital, they still allow fans with less capital a space for creative control or authority outside of the traditional models. Fans that exist within this middle ground between no and high authority can more freely choose how much authority they want to have in their microfandom, and can trade off power with each other depending on their own interests and skill.

Summary

Though moderators and leaders within online collaborative organizations serve the necessary role as communicators and distributors, they carry an authoritative power to determine the validity of other members. Microfandoms can be subject to occasional social tension caused by the presence of popularity as a form of social capital and authority. The role of authority reinforces the ideals that in order to have influence over one's fandom, you must first be regarded as producing valuable and desired work. While fans will seek methods of authority

outside of the traditional hierarchical model, they may still reinforce the idea that value of work is equal to authority or importance within a community.

These limitations placed on fannish value can have an impact on the ability for microfandoms to construct their narrative and decide on dominant interpretations of a text, as I will discuss in Chapter 2. However, many Transcendence AU fans noted that they were not interested in having authority within the community. The lack of authority provided many of them with the freedom to leave the community when they were ready, or to contribute at their own pace without the pressure of other fans. While it is important to reflect on fans' perceived value of their contributions and their desired role within a fan community, it is also necessary to discuss the ways the structure of fandom and role of authority influences fandom's ability to be an equalizing space, where everyone is equally valued as lovers or creators of media.

Chapter 2

Inter-Fan Poaching and the Hyperdiegetic Narrative

Contribution and collaboration are key components of every fandom. When fans contribute, they provide written feedback on new fansworks, bounce ideas off of each other on Tumblr, and display artwork. The idea of community is ingrained with the practices of sharing and discussing ideas (Schaffner, 2009). But despite fandom's community-oriented mindset, I believe that fan production is most often an individualized or small group experience.

When fans create artwork, comics, or cosplay, they do so mostly by themselves and for their own pleasure. They may take a beta reader for their fanfiction, take requests from fellow fans, or work as friends to finish a project. Microfandoms, however, are in a constant state of communication with the other members of their group. This ongoing communication within a tight-knit community is a distinctive trait in microfandoms that separates them from traditional fandoms. Focusing on fanfiction and fan-comics, the members of a microfandom tell small parts of a larger narrative. They rely on the stories that came before theirs to provide contextual details in the way traditional fandom relies on the source material. Microfandoms push the boundaries of creative collaboration and what it means to make a narrative.

Transcendence AU fans take this collaboration seriously. They pay close attention to details that other members have written as a guide for whatever they choose to write. For example, it would be confusing to write a Transcendence AU fanfiction set in California in the year 2039, because in the fan narrative the entire state was accidentally blown up in a supernatural apocalypse in 2038. Other fans latched on to this event as part of their stories, in which they discuss the consequences of such a cataclysmic event or explore the character's reactions to it, co-creating the AU's lore and character arcs. This act of treating a fanwork as

canon in order to further other transformative works is referred to as recursive fanfiction (Fanlore).

The fans treat each other as if they are in a writer's room of a popular television show. They must do their best to honor the previous 'episodes' written by other members and work together to create a sense of cohesion between stories. They do not get to choose what happened in the last episode (or given the non-linear timeline of the Transcendence AU, what will happen 25 episodes from now), but they accept it and work with it. In this manner, fans become simultaneous producers and consumers of a story. They rely on consumption to aid production. For this reason, microfandoms do not rely on a canon as traditional media fandoms will, but instead blend elements of canon and fanon interaction to create their narrative.

In this chapter, I argue that microfandoms create a new hyperdiegetic space in which contribution to the narrative is based on the possibility that "it could happen" in the narrative (Hills, 2002, pg. 137). It breaks the binary of typical canon/fanon thinking in fanworks and invites fans to enjoy the benefits of canonical structures alongside the personal freedom attributed with headcanon and individual desires. This hyperdiegesis gives fans a sense of "reasonability" to focus around, but also creates space for contradictory story-telling. Microfandoms use this hyperdiegetic thinking to encourage inter-fan textual poaching. Just like media producers, fans are free to play with the characters and narratives of a microfandom regardless of if they are responsible for their initial creation.

Hyperdiegetic Narratives

Canon, within traditional media fandom, is a source of structure that provides the set rules or ideals that fans accept or reject (Gonzales, 2016). Canon describes the preserved

memory and legitimacy of a culture, and in the case of fandom it refers to the source material: the original book, film, television show, comic, etc. on which fanworks are based. The term derives from the Biblical canon, which defines specific texts as authoritative within the religion. In this sense, canon is compared to the “word of God” or given a form of sanctity. Canon creates a contrast between what is “noncanonical,” or untrue in the source material (usually meaning fanworks), and what is considered “canonical,” or true (De Kosnick, 2016, pg. 104). The acceptance of a canon is considered respectful to media producers, and the ability to follow it is a demonstration of superior knowledge (Gonzales, 2016). As discussed in the Introduction, the contention of canon often results in fans deviating from the rules in order to pursue their own ships, alternate universes, or plot deviations.

However, this binaristic thinking of canon and non-canon does not translate to microfandoms. There is a canon as dictated by the source material, but no singularly defined set truths or interpretations that make up a microfandom’s narrative. Microfandoms cannot have a canon because they are built entirely of fanworks, which by nature cannot be canonical as they are already derived from another piece of media. To claim any fanwork is canonical is incompatible with the notion of fanworks as transformative. Nor is it always possible to identify true owners or authorities who create a canon when multiple people are all sharing and interacting with the same ideas.

Typically, a shared narrative that exists within a microfandom, such as Transcendence AU’s, would qualify as part of a fanon, in which information is reified by a group rather than presented in the source material. But in the case of microfandoms, fans treat their fan work as if it is the source material. Transcendence AU fans even refer to both their narrative and that of the source material as “the canon”. Yet, the word does not accurately define their experience as co-

producers or their relationship to *Gravity Falls*. The choice to refer to a fan-made narrative as a canon signals a truthfulness and “word of God” status that the source material wields (Fathallah, 2016), rather than the core belief that all fans are welcome to do as they please and are considered equals to each other. It marks the narrative as immovable and solid, rather than open to interpretation.

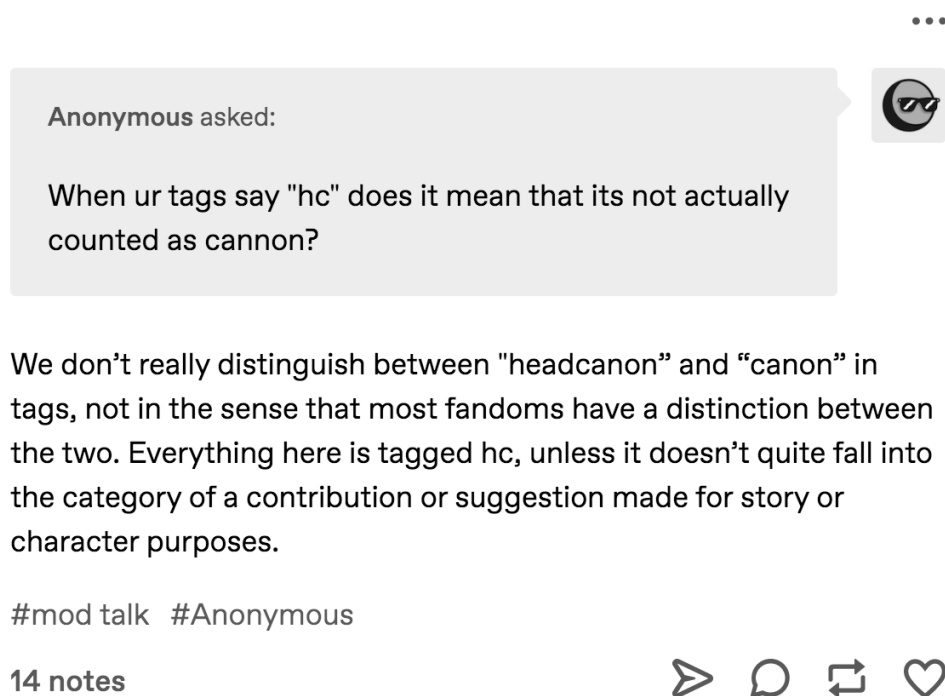


Figure 3.1.

Rather, microfandoms exist in a space beyond the boundaries of canon and fanon. Microfandoms are based on hyperdiegetic narratives. Hyperdiegesis, according to Matt Hills, “is the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text” (2002, pg. 137). It allows for productive practices such as discussion, speculation, and fanfiction within a media text’s universe (Johnson, 2017, pg. 370). This imaginary space exists within all fandom and is vital to interactive and exploratory thinking with a text (Jones, Cronin, & Piacentini, 2018).

While created by the shared interpretations of many fans, a hyperdiegetic narrative acts in place of a canon. It is unstable, often contradicting itself due to the contrasting writing of a large number of its participants. In the same sense that the source material can present opportunities for contradiction or confusion, as Matt Hills describes with *Doctor Who*, so too can fan-produced narratives. Transcendence AU fans embrace the idea of an ongoing story that is not cohesive in terms of timeline or characters. Original characters or events (the destruction of California) are the only ideas that become concrete in the AU, because of the emotional value they carry for their original creators— to deny their validity would be seen as hurtful or controlling. The contradictions within a microfandom’s narrative represent the member’s ability to have creative freedom and to experiment with the few rules and themes that are given to them. The term “rip-off” is often used, suggesting that the fans of Transcendence AU are stealing each other’s ideas and transforming them over and over to match their own interests or interpretations.

When asked how the narrative was made, Transcendence AU fans reported that new stories should rather match the “theme” or “sense of continuity” within the narrative.

“There isn’t some biblical canon of truth that you must, or even can, adhere to.... The fact we have this massive sprawling canon spanning past the end of the universe leaves so many holes to fill, and the fact that you cannot be wrong because there is no canon to contradict is so gentle and inviting to someone like me, who has to be ‘right’.”

“I’d define canon as an idea that either fits easily into the already semi-defined timeline or that has been accepted by more than one or two as either having happened or being able to happen. It seems less a question of ‘did this happen’ and more ‘could this happen.’ Usually the answer is yes.”

This description of “could this happen” is in line with Hills’s discussion of hyperdiegesis and the possibilities of that which is unseen in a narrative. Microfandoms allow a depth of exploration that allows fans to embrace a space of their own desires, fantasies, and world views (Knaggs, 2011, pg. 399) and cannot be challenged by any “singular, canonical iteration of the series” (Johnson, 2017, pg. 370). Because a text cannot please everyone, Transcendence AU attempts to create a space in which all fans have opportunities to embrace the possibility and sense of cohesion in the narrative. As one fan stated, “there is a very defined set of patterns, both in terms of characterization and plot beats... which characters are there, and world building.” A sense of story originality and personal choice is still supported in microfandoms, so long as some of these patterns are met. Another member aptly stated that it was important to remember that Transcendence AU is a “mythology and not a chronology”, implying its vastness and mutability. This connection to mythology does not reduce the emotional connection to the narrative or the legitimacy of its existence, but creates a space for contradictions and disagreements. A word was created within the Transcendence AU fans’ lexicon for this purpose – “squishy” – meaning that an event, character, or thing cannot be properly canonized within the cohesive narrative due to the number of overlapping ideas, such as specific dates within the narrative.

However, in order to be cohesive, there must be some indication of rules or themes. In Transcendence AU it is expected that fans follow a very basic set of rules (Dipper Pines is the demon of this narrative, not Bill Cipher as in the source material; or that reincarnation is part of the story), and the rest is all true to canon, regardless of contradictions to previous works. This puts Transcendence AU, and microfandoms like it, in a position of being a narrative with a contradicting and changing canon.

When fans create, regardless of whether or not they are part of a microfandom, there is an ongoing “struggle for discursive dominance... over interpretation and evaluation” (Johnson, 2017, pg. 370) through which fans attempt to codify their beliefs about a text as the most important or prevalent “truth” in their community. Jenkins writes that fans may engage in heated debates surrounding interpretations of texts that all exist within a shared frame of reference about “what questions are worth asking and what moments provide acceptable evidence for these questions” (1992, pg. 137). The most popular or approved of interpretations or evidence are what lead fans to create what is traditionally called a fanon. As discussed in Chapter 1, fans with the most social capital are the most predominant voices in determining which fanworks have the most value. It is through this struggle for social capital that fans create a dominant interpretation—the rules, ideologies, or “truths” about a narrative that fans believe. Derek Johnson refers to the process of competing through and comparing fanworks for the intention of creating the dominant narrative as “fantagonism” (2017). Transcendence AU is not exempt from the presence and consequences of fantagonism. In an interview, one member described a situation in 2016 involving a moderator attempting to control the dominant narrative:

“There was a schism amongst the Mods. It was, I believe, over... respective canonicity of characters. Mod [Redacted] had a sort of approach along the lines of ‘It is my AU. Everything is canon. But what I say is *canon* and anything else is debatable.’... There was a decent amount of drama and, as a result, a lot of folks just got really burned on the whole AU. So as a result, the folks in the Skype chat essentially quit the fandom, and since most of the people I enjoyed talking to in the fandom had left, I went with them.”

As Chapter 1 discussed, fans with more authority can exhibit control over a narrative or the members of their community. I do not mean to imply that all forms of fanfictionism are meant to engender rifts between fans or stir up intentional controversy, rather the dominant interpretation often provides balance and structure to a story. But when left unchecked, fans' desire for control can harm the entire microfandom.

Fanfiction and fancomics in particular need these dominant interpretations due to their emphasis on narrative structure, characterization, and plot that most closely mimic corporate media. When several fans are working together to create a dominant interpretation, they need to be aware of how the elements of a narrative (characters, events, world building, and general plot) must all remain recognizable and cohesive between fanfictions. The dominant interpretation is an important one, because it sets the rules and themes for other fans to follow. Transcendence AU is a prime example of fans who work to create a hyperdiegetic narrative that is built up of the collective contributions of multiple fans over the past six years. Microfandoms, being highly collaborative but with an inconsistent set of members and contributors, are not perfectly cohesive.

Inter-fan Poaching

Henry Jenkins defines fans as textual poachers who do not simply possess "borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but [rather] their own culture built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides" (2006, pg. 49). Taken from Micheal De Certeau's description of poaching as a raid on literary works to enjoy only pleasurable meanings and aspects, poaching is an ongoing struggle for ownership and control over the meaning of a text between fans and producers. There is no limitation that textual poaching can only be performed on a

commercialized text, but rather is an act that allows access to the means of cultural production: any and all culture is available for poaching.

It is typically considered plagiarism to borrow from another fan's works, such as plot details or original characters, without asking for direct permission (Fiesler, 2008). The term "poaching" itself refers to stealing from the elite, therefore fans should never steal from each other. However, microfandoms forgo this idea in favor of their collaborative ideas. They embrace a concept of inter-fan poaching; that fanworks can be poached in the same manner as with corporatized media.

Fans in Transcendence AU explore continuations of each other's works, rewrite previously written scenes, or create original additions as they would for any other fandom. Just as Jenkins proposes that the act of poaching as "an impertinent raid on the literary preserve where fans take away only those things that are useful or pleasurable" (1992, pg. 9), it is the same when writing within a microfandom. Fans do not have to poach every element of the narrative, just the parts they find interesting or think deserve to be further explored. No permission is needed to expand on any idea.

Some fan-made creations are even considered synonymous to Transcendence AU; they are just as much a part of the narrative as the canonical characters are. For example, many fans referred to Henry, an original character who marries Mabel Pines (a canonical character from *Gravity Falls*) as an example of true "open use" within the community. He is an expected part of the story, as so many fans have written about or included his character within their own stories.

The ability to poach from each other allows fans the opportunity to create independent works that contribute towards a collaborative goal. Inter-fan poaching in these communities acts as a sign of respect, demonstrating that the creators' opinions and contributions have been

appreciated and reified as part of the new text. Everything within the community is meant to be shared. It is a narrative that steals from itself. One fan is noted as saying she “ripped off” another popular Transcendence AU fanfiction “Reverse, Rewind, Rewrite” by MaryPSue (Archive of Our Own) by borrowing the general plot line, but flipping the tone from being charming and heartfelt to angsty and violent. But rather than be berated for her so-called “rip off,” this was celebrated within the fandom and even popularized the idea of reusable plot lines that anyone can use without permission.

When asked about needing permission to poach from another fan, 42.3% of fans strongly agreed or agreed with the need to ask permission to use a character or plot they did not create and another 42.3% were neutral on the statement. This is not because fans of Transcendence AU see ownership of ideas as important, but rather that letting someone know you are “ripping off” their idea is not only polite– but will make the other person feel good knowing that their fanfiction or fanart was well-received. Asking for permission is a compliment instead of an actual request.

One fan stated that, “I do not believe that I am being forced to ask for permission to use the ideas of those who made a character/plot line. Rather, I feel that, were I to set a story in that period of time with their characters, then I should ask the original creator if for no other reason than to be polite.” These social norms are a form of community respect and preservation. In general fandom, fans take it upon themselves to protect each other from creative infringements (Fiesler, 2008) and to provide content creators a sense of value or accomplishment when they inspire another member of their community. While shared ideas and “rip-offs” are praised in microfandoms, this fandom cultural norm remains the same.

The ability to poach encourages a new form of fannish intertextuality where fanfiction and fanart can interact with, reference, and borrow from each other. Just as Jenkins suggests fans can borrow “only what is pleasurable” from the media, so can they from each other. Texts do not exist in isolation from each other, especially in microfandoms. In the same way media references and responds to its predecessors, the members of microfandoms are constantly in dialogue. The depth of knowledge and the complexity of interweaving fanfictions creates an intertextual story in which fans must have some background knowledge about previous characters, plots, and creators in order to fully embrace the narrative. Creators define their contributions to Transcendence AU in relationship to other stories and creators. It is common to see fanworks in Transcendence AU that require background knowledge, or that other fanfictions be read first to gain context. They revel in the “rip off,” the act of interfandom poaching, as a sign of their shared creativity and mutual respect for each other.

Complications of a Co-Created Narrative

The ways in which fans create a hyperdiegetic world is by specifying what *does not* belong within a narrative. Microfandoms rely on this tactic to separate themselves from other similar microfandoms, or in Transcendence AU’s case, from other similar AUs. Transcendence AU has a different way of organizing what is and is not ‘canon’ within its universe. Headcanon, fanfiction, or fanart that intentionally negate the canon narrative (non-canon ships or crossovers) are called ‘sub AUs’. These sub AUs represent fully realized and fleshed out storylines or “what ifs” that cannot be considered part of the Transcendence AU canon. While this level of separation is done to preserve the AU’s sense of hyperdiegetic narrative and is encouraged by the community as a form of self-expression, creating for a sub AU may elicit a form of community

isolation as it “removes the opportunity for opinion” as described in an interview. Transcendence AU moderators do not allow for sub AUs or crossovers to be added to the Tumblr blog for the sake of keeping the narrative clear, potentially isolating writers who seek to express their individual desires or powers of textual transformation. As discussed in Chapter 1, certain fans not only have authority over what the dominant interpretation of a text is, but also which interpretations are not allowed. These sub AUs are also intertextual, sometimes relying on the ideas of multiple fanworks. The idea and usage of sub AUs is not specific to Transcendence AU, as the idea of AUs branching off from each other has been seen in other microfandoms for *Undertale* and *Homestuck*, but the term is specific to Transcendence AU.

Derek Johnson’s discussion of fantagonism and the struggle for dominant interpretive powers is prevalent in the way Transcendence AU fans create their narrative, and the sense of popularity and value ascribed to fans. When asked in the survey how the narrative is created, members of Transcendence AU replied with a variety of answers that highlighted different ways, though not all of these processes are compatible. Many members pointed to popularity represented through likes, comments, and discussion within the community.

“When a piece of fanart or fanfiction gains popularity in a tag, is referenced in other posts, and is used as key pieces of content to consume for TAU, then it's added to canon.”

“Mainly through fans simply presenting their ideas/fanworks on the blog or other forums. The concepts and ideas that are popular among the community subsequently get discussed and elaborated on more, and gradually adopted into the generally-accepted canon.”

In order to preserve the continuity to the narrative, the most popular fanworks and most popular creators are often the ones that provide inspiration or guidelines for new additions to the canon (see Figure 3.2).

When asked to rate if they believed their contributions to the canon provided inspiration for others, members replied that they were “*fairly new*” or a “*small writer*”. These remarks refer back to the ways by which fans pay and reward each other for work. Smaller writers attribute themselves to having less social capital associated with their fanfiction or other fanworks, and thereby do not have the same privileges to influence the larger narrative. While 76.9% of Transcendence AU members replied they agreed or strongly agreed with using other fanworks as inspiration for their own, only 30.7% believed that their fanworks (predominantly art and writing) had any influence on other members of the community (Figure 3.3), suggesting that only a few fanworks are considered dominant or valuable within the community’s narrative.

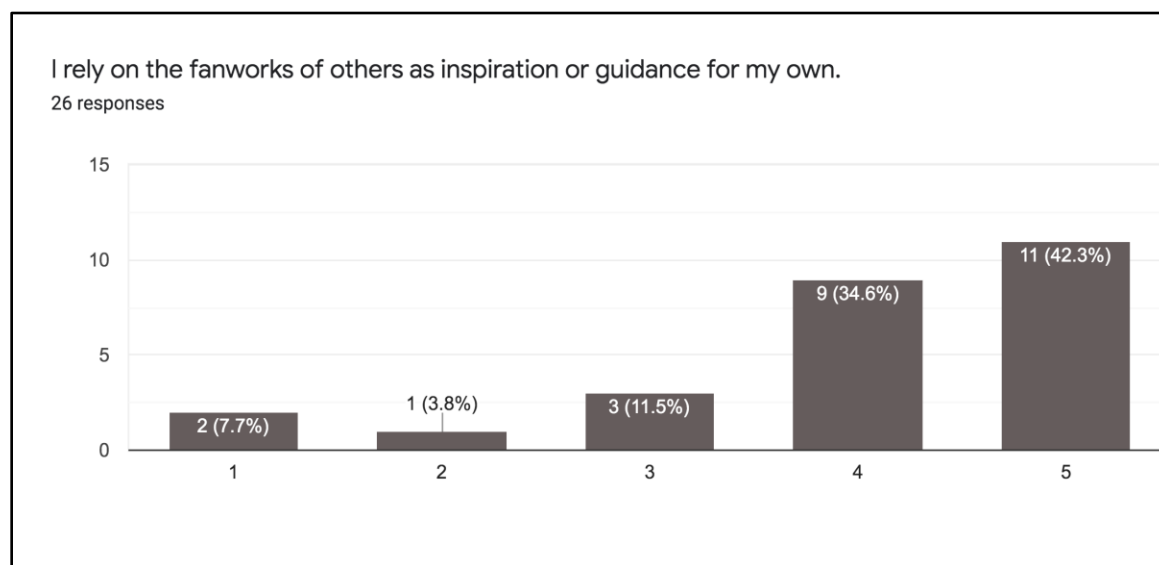


Figure 3.2

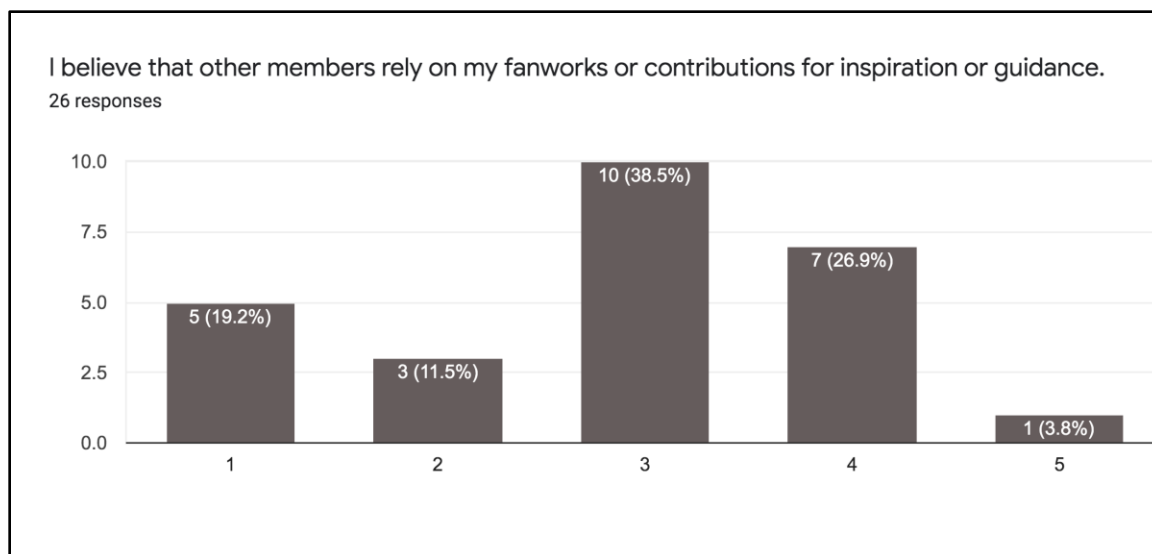


Figure 3.3

The focus on inspiration and that ideas must be referenced through word of mouth or other forms suggests that fanworks are in constant tension with each other. While not all fans desire to enter the competition for dominant meaning making, this method was the most commonly cited in the survey and interviews as being democratic—meaning making is determined by the members rather than a small group or sole individual.

However, there were fans who disagreed that the narrative is agreed upon in a democratic manner, and rather that it was the moderators who made the decisions of whether or not a new character, plot, or idea can be incorporated into the narrative. One member noted, “The Mods get to choose what, exactly, appears on the blog, and have veto power over what exactly gets shown and what becomes canonized.”

The moderators are considered to have more power over the narrative than any other member, even though Transcendence AU has marketed itself as a community where everyone is equal and is free to play with the hyperdiegetic structure of the narrative (see Chapter 1). Some

members noted that they believed all the moderators, regardless of when they entered the fandom or when they became moderators, were the ones who created the entirety of the AU and its story and therefore had the authority to control other fans and the narrative. This belief creates an imbalance with the aforementioned tokens of popularity and due credit. "Small writers" may believe themselves to be unimportant because they have no evidence to suggest they are influential in their community.

Yet, this belief in being un-influential is not a deterrent to most fans of Transcendence AU. Fans are predominantly focused on their own enjoyment, regardless of if they become popular within the community itself. They are still participating within the larger community by referencing former works and contributing to the narrative, regardless of whether or not the community accepts their contributions or follows up on them.

The Role of Identity in Narrative

Personal identity becomes prevalent in Transcendence AU when fanworks and social media posts are analyzed through the lens of personal interpretations. The AU relies predominantly on original characters who serve as reincarnations across time and space of *Gravity Falls*' cast. When creating their original characters for the AU, many fans rely on their own identities as inspiration, including their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability. The original characters in fanworks often have a spectrum of gender and sexual identities that reflect the members of the Transcendence AU community and their personal experiences.

Some attention is paid to the experiences lived outside of community member's experience, such as disability. Many fanfictions feature characters who are blind or partially

blind (a reference to *Gravity Falls*' recurring motif of the all-seeing eye and blindness) with research being done into current adaptive technologies, and the community agreeing on interpretations of how technologies would advance in science fiction and fantasy settings.

However, not all representation is portrayed equally within Transcendence AU. While original characters cover a large scope of racial and ethnic identities, due to the fanbase being predominantly white and American, these representations are often stereotypical or “whitewashed”, or non-distinct from white characters. For example, the character of Lucy Ann is shared and co-developed by the entire community, rather than belonging to a single creator. She is a vampire born in 2762 B.C. in Sumer. While she is often depicted in fanart as Black, this part of her identity is removed in fanfiction. She is constantly referred to by a white name, obviously not the one she would have been given at birth, and never discusses her experiences as a Black person in history. The wiki page that stores information about original characters (see Chapter 3) does not explicitly list her as being black or how she would style her hair, and instead refers to a single image. Non-American culture and values are also rarely explored within these stories, often defaulting to the creator's own identity and worldview. Almost no fanworks, regardless of when the story takes place, feature a location outside of America.

This analysis of characters in regard to race further emphasizes the complications of a co-created narrative. While a community's demographic can provide several nuanced and diverse interpretations of a narrative, there can still be open gaps in a community's understanding. When looked through the lens of a dominant interpretation, it makes sense that Transcendence AU's narrative would reflect the lives and values of the majority population. These representations of race and gender would also be reinforced by the BNFs, who may prioritize stories and character interpretations that match their own identities. Referring back to Chapter 1,

this need for increased diversity calls back to the need for alternative methods of authority in fandom. Separating from hierarchical status in fandom would create further opportunities for minorities in fandom to not only critique and improve upon the narrative, but also to make online spaces more accessible and accepting.

Summary

Microfandoms allow for a brief glimpse into the realities of online collaboration that are less visible in larger fandoms. De Kosnik describes the act of canonization as becoming “a constant, personal practice of searching, discovering, and consistently, actively preserving and reusing” (2016, 105). Just as Jenkins argues that fans are not passive but rather active consumers of content (1992), microfandoms are making active choices about their cultural memory and the legitimacy of other members in their community when they establish canons.

Fans working around the idea of “believability” in their fanworks rather than truthfulness of the canon is a familiar concept to fandom (Hills, 2002). It allows fans and producers a space for contradiction and to indulge themselves in pleasure. Microfandoms take hyperdiegetic spaces to the extreme by being both fans and producers in those spaces. The freedom to ask “what if” and “why not” allows fans the ability to poach from each other, without being weighed down by the concerns of creating accidental contradictions. The fans of Transcendence AU are collaborative and intertextual in ways that are not often witnessed in traditional media fandoms. Their hyperdiegetic narrative allows for exploration beyond the constraints of canon vs fanon thinking, and allows fans to borrow from each other as they would from the source material in order to maintain an ongoing sense of community and legitimacy.

Chapter 3

Social Media Platforms and the Preservation of Memory

The preservation of historical and fannish objects is vital to fandom's collective memory. Social media sites are memory preservation spaces that allow for a "a traceable history [for fans] to claim with pride and a future to look forward to" (Lothian, 2012, pg. 547). Fans create and update wikis that document details from within the story's canon, as well as information from creators and producers. Archiving platforms such as Archive of Our Own (AO3) and Fanfiction.net (FFN) tag and organize fanfiction in order to be easily located and curated by fans archives, and blogs are permanent records of their impact on their community and establish their place as part of a living legacy (Lothian, 2012, pg. 543).

As discussed in Chapter 1, when fans post to social media in regards to their microfandom, they actively participate in the creation of a narrative. In a space where the canonical events of a story are subject to revision, reinterpretation, or rejection, memory plays a specific role. They are digital reminders of who was involved and when and how their contributions affected their communities. In microfandoms, paratextual memory is not only a connection to identity, but a history of the fandom's created narrative. Paratextual memory is the way in which identity and experience are inscribed within texts. These texts maintain "an 'authentic' fan self-narrative in terms of having been there' at times of broadcast, and performs a 'good' fan identity premised on taking paratexts seriously" (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017, pg.159). Meanwhile, cultural memory defines a fan community's customs, traditions, and history that shape their identity (De Kosnick, 2016, pg. 29). To best explain the way memory is created in microfandoms I employ a combination of the terms, paratextual-cultural memory, to describe how identity, history, and narrative are all created through fanworks.

Blogs, wikis, and archives are technologies representing microfandoms' systems of participation, in which fans can document events or ideas that they found meaningful within their communities, and act as a form of permanent recognition to those who were involved. Abigail De Kosnik argues in *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* "fans who found and operate their communities' digital archives do not guarantee that they or their works will be remembered, but they create "the conditions of possibility for persistence and recollection" (2016, pg. 17). Memory is intrinsic to gaining new members of a microfandom and allowing them to establish their space within a narrative. Microfandoms unite technology and identity into paratextual memory, which can be read back by the community at later points in time.

De Kosnik argues that encyclopedic platforms such as wikis and blogs do not meet the requirements for archives (pg. 76), due to the fact that they may summarize texts (but not present them in full) or may not be easily searchable; but I argue that archives (such as Archive of our Own) work in unison with other platforms to create intertextual digital spaces where fans' paratextual-cultural memory can be preserved, re-contextualized, and connected. Microfandoms must rely on the combination of these spaces in order to communicate; archives alone would not be enough. Transgenic media (Booth, 2012, pg. 8-9) describes the way content can be displaced over time from one medium to another and integrates user information in that content. The information on blogs and wikis can be vital to dissecting and interpreting the information and objects that are stored in archives. All fandoms, but microfandoms in particular, rely on transgenic media to create and preserve memory as fans alter and migrate to different platforms.

Transcendence AU makes clear the transgenic nature of online platforms in the ways it structures and preserves the community's paratextual-cultural memory. When fans write

fanfiction or create other additions to the hyperdiegetic narrative, their online platforms process and store that new information on 3 different platforms. The fans work together to combine individual contributions to Transcendence AU's narrative into a collective and organized memory. All fandoms rely on platforms to preserve their memory, but microfandoms are contingent on these technologies in order to exist. Platforms provide the much-needed communication and background knowledge for new members to join microfandoms and for current members to keep track of their history. Unlike traditional fandoms that rely on a media text, which are often preserved on DVDs or streaming platforms, microfandoms must preserve their narrative as soon as it is made or else it will disappear.

Fanfiction Archives

Fanfiction archives are infrastructures that provide organized spaces for fandoms to store and interact with fanfiction and its writers. While in the past, fans have stored and distributed fanfiction through various means, such as zine publications, mailing lists, and individual websites, fanfiction archives have served as a place to permanently store, publish, and categorize fanfiction (De Kosnik, 2016; Pecoski & Hill, 2013). Among them, Archive of Our Own provides digital services to fan communities. "One intention of AO3 was to provide a stable, permanent archive" in response to fanfiction archives and publications of the past disappearing from the internet and a fandom's history and paratextual memory lost along with them (Fiesler, Morrison, & Bruckman, 2016).

One of AO3's most notable features is the user generated tagging system that is combined with moderation and volunteers who group like fanfictions together. This tagging system leaves specific places for fans to include the fandom, characters, relationships, and

archive tags/ warnings which detail to readers of any sensitive materials. Among these more generic tags are freeform tags in which the user can add more details or description to the tags of their story, providing readers with more context before reading and also allowing for the algorithm to sort the story into specific categories. Declarative tags assert the inclusion of specific elements in a story such as the genre, story elements, and fandom specific tags, including “Alternate Universe– Transcendence (Gravity Falls)” within fanfiction and other fanworks. These declarative tags delineate microfandoms from their larger fandoms and can keep their paratextual history separate. The tagging system within the archive is one that can be easily found and navigated, “facilitating the integration of new members” (De Kosnik, 2016, pg. 95). By categorizing fandoms and declarative tags, fans can easily access the exact stories they are looking for. AO3’s default display system is chronological, meaning it is based on a fanfiction’s most recent update, placing whatever is newest at the top. This allows for new or current fans to catch up with the fandom and to familiarize themselves with the “storytelling conventions, major authors, popular tropes, rituals, and argot” of their community (De Kosnik, 2016, pg. 96).

In this way, paratextual memory is passed down from older fans to new via the infrastructure of the archive. Platforms “capture, organize, and format fandom” to serve both commercial and economic ends, but also delegate the ways fans see and interact with content (Morris, 2018, pg, 358). The platform a group of fans chooses to use influences the work they can see and produce. “Platforms filter content that is considered historically, culturally, and politically significant” (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, pg, 4285) and thereby have an influence on what content fans see and interact with.

Transcendence AU's decision to rely on AO3/Tumblr as its primary websites for hosting fanfiction is also notable in the ways the platforms helped create a streamlined system for information. For example, AO3's competitors Fanfiction.net and Wattpad do not offer the same collaborative infrastructure that AO3 does, limiting fans' ability to communicate with each other through their fanfiction. Wattpad also automatically organizes fanfiction by popularity, rather than chronological order, limiting the fanworks that are immediately exposed to fans. In this way, archives are also responsible for the social value of fanfiction. If fanfiction is presented in a chronological order, it increases the chances of new authors gaining attention. However, all of the aforementioned archives provide the quantification of fanfiction by revealing to the reader how many views, likes, and comments it may have, directly influencing the social capital of its author (see Chapter 1).

The infrastructure of AO3 also creates spaces for collaboration and intertextuality that other fanfiction archives and platforms do not. First, AO3 allows writers to co-author, dedicate to, or publicly acknowledge that their work was inspired by another fanwork. The functions, found on the page for posting a new work, encourage the sense of community and inspiration that is vital to microfandoms. Second, AO3 encourages collaboration and intertextuality through the ability for writers and readers to create collections. Collections allow for fanfiction by different authors to all be stored in an archive separate from the tags. Writers collaborating on a multi-part story may choose to use a collection to group their fanfictions together. Transcendence AU uses a collection on AO3 to focus on fanfiction written specifically by members who use their Discord (a chat room) as both an encouragement to join in community bonding activities, as well as to reward current members for their efforts.

AO3s accessibility for collaboration can be most clearly seen when compared to Transcendence AU fans on Wattpad. When the AU was started in 2014, not everyone was aware that a larger community was forming around the idea. To many *Gravity Falls* fans, Transcendence was just another AU, and not an independent fandom with a close-knit community. So many fans continued to create independently, without the support or input from the larger Transcendence community. There was a lack of communication between Transcendence AU fans using AO3 and fans using Wattpad, meaning there was no one to invite Wattpad users to the larger community. Much of the fanfiction on Wattpad divorces itself from the hyperdiegetic narrative seen on AO3 and Tumblr and also tends to stay closer to the canonical rules and story of *Gravity Falls*. For this reason, members of the Transcendence AU community would often refer to their Wattpad counterparts as outsiders or as misinterpreting the point of the AU.

Much of this separation is also due to the tagging functions on each website. Anyone who published their fanfiction on AO3 or Tumblr could follow the tags to find a close-knit community that was supported by blogs and its own AO3 tag— thus separating it from other AUs from different fandoms that went by the same name. However, Wattpad does not offer the same streamlined organization. AO3 offers fandom specific tags and categories, while Wattpad does not differentiate between fandoms. Wattpad was designed for original fiction, and it focuses more on descriptive tags like genre options to tailor stories to its readers. The platform was not designed with fans' needs for communication and unification.

Fans who started writing for Transcendence AU on Wattpad became completely unaware of the fandom's paratextual-cultural identity, and wrote fanfictions that deviated from Transcendence AU's norms. Though the separation happened by accident, it created long-lasting

cultural effects on the microfandom. As one fan posted in the Transcendence AU Discord server, Transcendence AU fanfictions on Wattpad “are so amazingly disconnected from the rest of TAU that they probably won’t be fun to read”. These Wattpad fanfictions break the basic rules of Transcendence AU, which was described as Dipper becoming a demon like Bill Cipher– and likely interpreted it to be that Dipper was already secretly a demon. This difference in interpretation was likely a misunderstanding between groups of fans. Many fans within the close-knit community often describe their Wattpad counterparts as being inferior or not being “real” fans of Transcendence AU. Regardless of whether Wattpad and AO3 are completely separate fan communities, Wattpad’s divergence from the microfandom is in part due to the way the platform operates.

Microblogging and Community Involvement

A common practice among fandoms is the presence of one or more microblogging or social media platforms that act as an archive and virtual gathering space for fans. The most notable of these websites is Tumblr, a microblogging service on which users can upload a variety of multimedia, and then reblog that content to another blog. This reblog function is vital to Tumblr’s nature of creating viral posts, allowing amateurs the opportunity to publicize and communicate to larger audiences (Shifman, 2014; Neill Hoch, 2018). There are no barriers that prevent access to a create or view a Tumblr blog even fans who are not registered users with the site can view and submit content to a blog (Meyers, 2012). Tumblr, however, lacks the formalized community structures present on Facebook, LiveJournal, or Reddit, in which pages are created specifically for members to communicate in an enclosed space (Neill Hoch, 2018), though fans still choose to use it due to its aforementioned accessibility.

All Tumblr blogs are functionally the same but may have two distinct purposes: the first is a personal blog, the function of the space being to represent the interests of an individual. Personal blogs might draw from several different fandoms or topics, and will host that user's fanworks, as well as personal thoughts or opinions. Personal blogs are tailored to the individual who owns them. They may use Tumblr's tag function to group their posts with related content, or for easy searching through their blog if they want to find a post again. The second form is a community blog. Community blogs, however, are meant to serve as tools or archives for a group. Many fandom blogs focus on one specific fandom (or group of related fandoms, i.e., western cartoons, anime), and curate their content from tags in order to serve as a central hub for like-minded fans. Fans use these spaces to ask questions related to the source material, to gain publicity for their work, or to share their thoughts with a larger audience. These public blogs may also serve as places where content producers such as directors, actors, and writers can communicate with their fan base directly, or through a "media insider" representative (Chin & Hills, 2014). *Gravity Falls* continues to rely on community Tumblr blogs such as *fuckyeahgravityfalls* to host cast and crew member tweets about the production of the show and updates on merchandise. *Fuckyeahgravityfalls* also serves as a place for fans to ask questions and share fanart and fanvids.

The accessibility of blogs "positions bloggers outside of traditional conceptions of the 'professional' media industry producer" (Meyers, 2012, pg. 1026) and establishes a new space where fans simultaneously exist as active producers and consumers of content. The work performed by community Tumblr blogs allow fans a control over the interpretations and marketing of the source material. But the labor provided by blogs, as well as wikis, can be seen as free advertising for corporations—producers are no longer responsible for communicating with

fans or documenting information (Chin, 2014). Transcendence AU specifically relies on its Tumblr blog to create the dominant interpretation of its narrative, as discussed in Chapter 2. Many members stated that the blog is where the “canon” is held and created, meaning that anything outside of it is not made official. This directly ties to how much authority its moderators have over the narrative and the fans themselves (see Chapter 1). However, the blog has been very accepting of what it will share or publish, with the exception of the previously mentioned sub-AUs.

Microfandoms use blogs in the same way. Blogs can act as a central hub for microfandoms as a place where the narrative is documented and discussed (see Chapter 1), as well as a place for all members to come and ask questions or share their personal thoughts. But because the fans are also the producers of a narrative, their personal blogs also play a role in the production cycle. While in a traditional fandom, a producer’s words may have to be linked or copied from another source, BNF fans’ personal blogs act as primary sources. Questions or comments about fanfiction or fanart may go to a specific fan directly, and then be shared on the blog as a form of documentation or as advertisement (Figure 4.1). While not all microfandoms have a blog dedicated to the narrative content they create, most fans use their personal blogs and choose to follow each other directly on Tumblr or other social media. Fans will use their blogs to

interact directly by posting and reblogging from each other as well as asking questions.

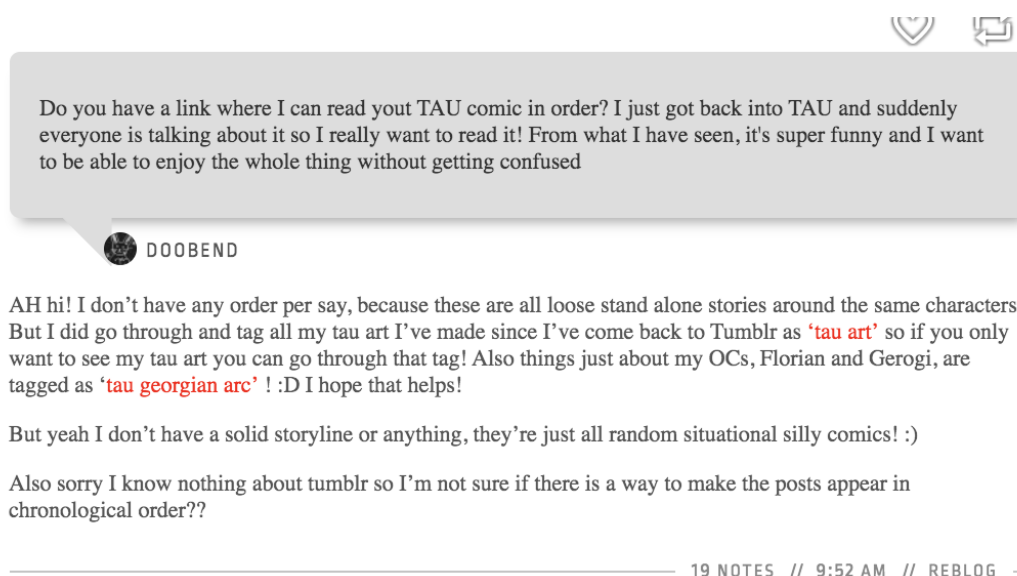


Figure 4.1, avespecora.tumblr.com

In 2015, one year after Transcendence AU's inception, Tumblr staff deleted the primary blog, alongside several (now absent) side-blogs. While the blog was returned the following day, the community banded together by using their personal blogs to rebuild a history of over 700 posts. As skia-oura wrote in a Tumblr post, the fandom "created petitions, we have reblogged the issue, and have spent hours trying to salvage what we could from the imprints TAU has left on the internet". While the problem was resolved, this event demonstrates the dedication of microfandoms to their paratextual memory. Personal blogs serve as a backup to community-based blogs, a place where fans get to record and save the digital objects of fandom that mattered to them. The preservation of memory is reliant on both individuals and their community. This notion of fandom preservation in relation to corporate blogging platforms is also prevalent within the creation of the AO3; which was made by fans in response to the sudden deletion, or 'purging', of fanfiction from other websites, predominantly LiveJournal. Just as Transcendence AU fans save their history from the deletion of their blog, fans before them had saved their

fanfiction from deletion through the AO3, demonstrating the value fans place upon the proper storage of their texts.

The choice to have a central blog demonstrates fans' conscious efforts to document their history and preserve paratextual memory that can be easily accessed by anyone. Using a single blog as a “hub” for all communication also allows fans easy access to find older posts and to introduce new members to their co-created narrative.

In Transcendence AU, the blog is a way of staying involved with the community and to engage with new content of its ever-expanding narrative. Having a presence on the blog, either through being reblogged or submitting headcanons is a form of legitimacy as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Many fans discuss the blog as a tool for keeping updated with their community.

“The blog is my main source for updates and art/writing. I use the blog to occasionally ask questions and/or submit headcanons and fanfics of my own.”

“I look at it practically every day as a way of seeing what people are doing and keep up to date with any fanworks I’m reading, as well as looking at the content for specific characters or stories I feel like focusing on at the moment.”

The focus on “the moment,” as described by fans, is a statement to the constant development of fandom and paratextual memory. The Transcendence AU blog provides a backlog of the story’s ongoing narrative and the members who were involved, but also the relationships between those members. Blogs keep a permanent record of how members interacted with each other, and who maintained close friendships. When Transcendence AU members share ideas through their community blog, they will often tag each other to show who they were talking to in the moments or who might find a particular blog post interesting. This function is also used to give credit to each other when citing fanfictions or fanart. The permanent display of relationship not only

demonstrates the community's close-knit relationship, but can also provide key clues for determining the "ingroup" and "outgroup" status of its members (see Chapter 1). Transcendence AU members who are tagged/referenced more often in blog posts by moderators are more likely to have a higher social capital and authority within the fan space.

Fandom Wikis

Wikis play a significant role in fandom as sources of stored knowledge about a narrative's canon as well as the paratextual information surrounding a fandom, such as popular theories about the story or details from public appearances by the cast and crew. As the plots of film and television become increasingly more detailed and intertextual, fans have used wikis as a resource to keep details straight (Jones, Nelson, & Van de Somple, 2018, pg.77); and microfandoms are no exception. Through these spaces, users can look for past details about a popular piece of media and contribute to an expanding, and sometimes contradictory, knowledge base (Booth, 2009; Dunlap & Wolf, 2010; Mittell, 2009). Wikis represent "the mutable and meaningful nature of history" (Booth, 2009); as episodes of a show or a new film in a series are released, the wiki must update to accommodate a constant influx of information.

Wikis are updated on a volunteer basis, meaning that participation is not always stable (Hunter, 2011); the number of users involved in updating a wiki may change and the voices represented on a wiki vary as well. By updating wikis, fans enact their part within a story, as active consumers or even creators (Mittell, 2012). As with blogs, there are no barriers to interacting with a wiki; anyone can view or update a wiki for free. However, there may be a technological barrier for some users. Anyone who wishes to update a wiki must be familiar with how to use fandom.com (the most popular host for fandom wikis) or be familiar with basic

coding. For less experienced users, not knowing how to use the website can be a barrier to participation. The lack of barriers to participation is opposed to community blogs, which can only be curated by certain individuals who hold permissions or the password.

These wiki users often debate and negotiate on what will appear on their wiki, and the writing/style choices that will be used on the wiki. Jason Mittell (2009) describes this debate within the parameters of the *Lost* wiki (Lostpedia), in which fans debated if non-canonical romantic pairings and theories should be listed on the wiki as a form of paratextual preservation. He describes a process by which, until proven untrue by the authorized canon, theory and fan production have a space on the wiki to explore the possibilities of the show. Once proven untrue, the wiki is updated and noncanonical theories are saved to a discussion tab where users can access the ideas and thought processes of previous fans. However, the role wikis serve in microfandoms are different due to the contradictory and hyperdiegetic nature of these fandoms. Paul Booth (2009) describes this issue in his discussion of the Doctor Who wiki. He argues that wikis do not attempt to show ‘The Truth’ but rather multiple truths that “compliments or contradict each other to create a knowledge base” (pg. 333).

As with AO3 and the blog, Transcendence AU fans created their wiki as an aid to paratextual memory as well as a tool to assist new members with understanding the narrative. When asked to describe how they used the wiki, many fans replied that it was a tool to help them remember details from previous fanfictions or blog posts without having to go back and read the original. One fan even replied that the wiki helped them remember what they wrote in their own fanfiction several years prior, as it was documented by another fan. The wiki preserves the memory of the members, not only creators of original characters or plotlines, but of those who

helped by documenting these things. One fan noted looking back on the wiki “with fondness” for those who helped organize and update it.

When creating a new article, one of Transcendence AU’s requirements is that citations and references be included. These references must come in a formalized fashion, meaning that the fact or opinion dictated on the wiki come from AO3 or a Tumblr post. These footnotes also include hypertext links to these outside sources, so that fanfictions and blog posts can be easily accessed by anyone who is curious to learn more. Using citations can also be problematic, as they imply a sense of true authority as discussed in Chapter 1 (Booth, 2009, pg.345)– going against Transcendence AU’s reputation as being hypertext and contradictory. However, I argue that in the case of microfandoms, the need for citation further encourages exploration and documentation within the community. Wiki pages link to other internal pages, allowing fans to deep dive into their fandom’s narrative and history. One page inevitably leads to another one. It is also a form of validation and appreciation that exists outside likes, comments, and reblogs that AO3 and Tumblr rely on. I was asked to create the citation format for the Transcendence AU wiki, providing a system that mimicked academic citation style but was still user friendly. I believe this was done to create a standard for all fans to easily reference. I included the author’s name, the title of the work (or opening words of a blog post), date of initial publication, platform, and link; though some alterations (including the indication if an author was a moderator) were added without my involvement.

However, the wiki operates on a “first come first serve basis” and struggles to represent a space where all ideas are documented in a clear, narrative format. Fans often cite that the timeline is contradictory and inaccurate: for example, a character's birthday could be documented as two different dates by a single author. The Transcendence AU wiki does not yet have an

agreed upon way to document contradictions, instead agreeing that whatever is included on the wiki first will be treated as fact. I do not believe that the Transcendence AU community is against a new structure in their wiki style that allows for contradictions, but rather that the amount of labor it would take to create and trial new systems would be a large undertaking for the fans.

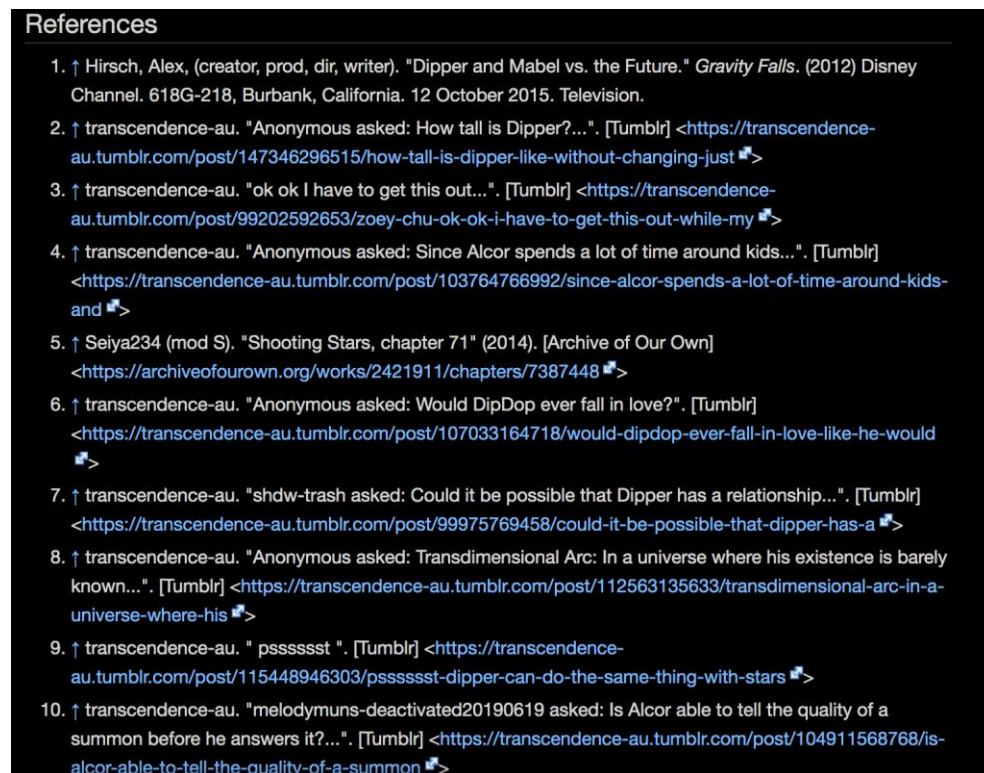


Figure 4.2, https://transcendence-au.fandom.com/wiki/Transcendence_AU_Wiki

Wikis play a notable role in many microfandoms as a way of legitimizing the narrative and giving it the same treatment as the source material. Transcendence AU takes more care with their wiki by using citations and hyperlinks. Other wikis for microfandoms such as Inspector Spacetime, Hogwarts TikTok Professors, and various *Undertale* AUs do not include citations, making it difficult to track down exact fanfictions or blog posts. Though citations are not common of all wikis, they represent Transcendence AU's dedication to their narrative as well as their goal to preserve paratextual memory. By documenting their narrative in one cohesive

location, with easy search functions, they allow a space for fans to embrace the cyclical intertextuality of their hard work. Their wiki not only legitimizes them, but creates a sense of collaborative wholeness between their platforms.

Summary

Each of these platforms serves a unique function on their own to Transcendence AU and other microfandoms. They are sources to both create and document the history and memory of microfandoms, an extension of the fans' dual role and producers of a narrative. Fans use platforms to reveal themselves as fans of each other's work and celebrate their collective achievements.

The platforms are also cyclical, in that they inform and feed into each other. The microfandom's paratextual memory is created when fans cite and reference each other and hold discussions in a communal digital space. With a vast, ever evolving narrative that extrapolates so far from the source material these platforms become transgenic (Booth, 2012). Archives, blogs, wikis, and other social media spread across each other, hosting "a combination of individual contributions coupled with professionally produced templates" (De Kosnick, 2016, pg. 8). What one person can post on AO3, can be shared on the community blog, and later documented on the wiki. Platforms in fandom are an ouroboros that feed into themselves. The platforms are merely templates for information to be shared and discussed through different lenses and voices.

Transgenic media combines the old and the new, not just when discussing technology and social media, but when discussing the memory of fans. By acting as storehouses for information and hubs for communication, platforms allow old ideas and conversations to continually resurface. Memory is no longer private, but public. Memory is the basis for how microfandoms

create themselves. Fans remember the source material, fanworks, and conversations they have with each other and continually re-encounter these memories on social media platforms. De Kosnik writes that memory “has come loose from its fixed place in the production cycle” and instead it “can be found anywhere, or everywhere in the chain of making” (2016, pg. 4). For fans who control the production cycle, memory is not only a part of their enjoyment as fans, the most vital tool for their empowerment as collaborative creators. While paratextual-cultural memory is still valuable for traditional fandoms, the story would not be lost if fans ceased to share and record their ideas with each other. Microfandoms build new stories and characters from the source material, and without archives, blogs, and wikis in place: their entire identity as a fandom would be lost.

Conclusion

Microfandoms offer insight into often elusive fan behaviors and the joined role of fan and producer. Due to their close-knit nature and small size, it's easy to trace communication between fans and discover hierarchical systems and how a narrative is built. Using Transcendence AU as my case study provided one lens through which to view the existence of microfandoms and both the functional and problematic outcomes of the fan/producer duality.

Firstly, we can identify the ways microfandoms act as microcosms of traditional fandom, but where social structures and norms are more intensified. We can conclude that all fandom is influenced by the perception of authority from media producers and Big Name Fans alike. This authority, which offers a sense of legitimacy or 'word of God' status, is based on a creator's quantified popularity based on their likes, comments, and followers on a social media platform (Chin & Hills, 2008). Authority is then turned into community leadership through the moderation of blogs and wikis as well as the construction of a dominant narrative.

Transcendence AU demonstrated the ways in which authority can be limited to fans, creating a divide between the "insiders" with the power to control the fandom and the "outsiders" who follow the rules and regulations set for them. While authority can be necessary to establish and regulate social norms for how fans should behave online, it can also have adverse effects on fans' ability to feel included or like their contributions are appreciated.

This authority impacts how fans create the dominant interpretation for a text, by using their social status to compete with one another to create the most popular transformation or interpretation of a story. This interpretation can be regulated by BNFs and by the media producers themselves, creating divisions between what is and isn't an acceptable way to interact with the text. These interpretations along with documentations of the fandoms' interaction with

each other and with producers are stored on different social media platforms, preserving a fandom's paratextual-cultural memory. By making connections between media platforms and the use of transgenic media (Booth, 2012), fans are better able to create pathways between the locations where knowledge is stored and better preserve their social norms and history for future fans to use.

However, microfandoms do not only tell us about how fandom currently exists, but might provide clues to how fandom will continue to evolve in the future.

Fandom recognizes no clear divide between fans and producers. Paul Booth writes that "as media fandom becomes more common-place, both media fans and media producers co-opt each other's methods, inherently problematizing an either/or in fan/industry relations" (2015, pg. 1-2). As fandom continues to evolve, fans may replace media and media producers entirely. Fans possess a hierarchical system that closely mimics the roles of media producers; Big Name Fans holding positions similar to directors, producers, and CEOs, while other members act as writers or storyboard artists— often contradicting each other between scripts and episodes to create a hyperdiegetic narrative. Fans also provide most of the marketing and contextual labor that media producers used to provide. They now run the blogs, wikis, and social media pages that once alerted fans to new updates and changes, making the need for a professional role near obsolete. Microfandoms are the next step in how fans are creating their own media industry, one that is based on their own desires and community connections.

It is also likely that producers will further expand on their roles as fans and just as fans will lean into their roles as producers. Chandler Harris outlines the methods by which producers also act as fans by devoting themselves to exploring content they find inspiration in much the same way as their fans. They then like their fans, add depth and breadth to the content that seized

their interest” (2017, pg. 371). Producers rely on the same methods of pastiche and transformation when responding to previous media texts and to real world events. They mimic fandom creation by referencing and furthering their favorite media texts. Media and fandom are in a cyclical state, constantly informing one another.

Microfandoms represent a convergence between consumers and creators, as power shifts between the two roles (Booth, 2015, pg. 5). As media fandom continues to grow and new technologies make themselves available to fans, the identity of fan and producer will no longer be a duality, but a unified state of being. The media industry may never be fully replaced by fans, but they have collaboratively extrapolated from and created new media texts through microfandoms. And while these texts may not be considered real or legitimate, the fans love them with the same passion and intensity as they do traditional fandom.

Further Research

Several areas for further study still remain. For my case study I only focused on one microfandom, Transcendence AU. This was due to my inability to make contact with other microfandoms to find participants and my unfamiliarity with many of these fandoms. Further study and analysis of other microfandoms to confirm or complicate my findings would lead to a more perceptive stance on fandom as a whole and the ways that microfandoms are different from their traditional counterparts. While microfandoms would still meet similar requirements of being a fan-made narrative with no barriers to participation, microfandoms may display nuance in how they attribute authority or use platforms as a mode of communication. I would also encourage overlapping research with other examples of the fan/producer duality to determine if microfandoms rest on a spectrum for fan behaviors. Microfandoms share much in common with

individual creators whose fanworks can have subcultural popularity, and begin to act as fandoms of their own. On the opposite end of the spectrum, entire fan communities will often “abandon” the canon if they find it to be inadequate or if they reject the original creator’s authority. These fans will often co-opt and rewrite the narrative, much like a microfandom but on a much larger scale.

Secondly, I see it as vital to expand research on fandom authority and dominant interpretations in relation to race, gender, sexuality, disability and class. International fandom, whether traditional or microfandom, is often obscured by white, middle-class, heteronormativity (Pande, 2018). With microfandoms being creations by the fans with limited barriers to participation, they should be spaces where fans are valued as equals and hierarchical systems do not impede modes of creativity. Much of fandom is based on the idea of a “good” vs “bad” fan, behaviors that are often rooted in having the time, money, and education to perform fan labor. Much like corporations and media producers, microfandoms are still built on prejudice and racism. Further investigation on how media platforms value the voices white male creators and the effect on microfandoms.

And finally, most of this research was conducted during COVID-19 quarantine, an event that allowed more fans the opportunity to spend time engaging in online fandom. Further research that looks at the effects of quarantine on fandom and the barriers it both presented and removed for fans in terms of race, gender, disability, and class would expand upon the topic of authority.

Works Cited

- Bavlnka, T. (2013). /co/operation and /co/mmunity in /co/mics: 4chan's hypercrisis. *Transformative Works and Cultures*. doi:10.3983/twc.2013.0442
- Baym, N. K. (2007). The new shape of online community: The example of swedish independent music fandom. *First Monday*, 12(8).
- Booth, P. (2009). Time and relative dimensions online: Doctor Who, wikis and the production of narrative/history. *Interactions: Studies in Communication and Culture*, 1(3), pp. 331-349. https://nls.ldls.org.uk/welcome.html?ark:/81055/vdc_100057495945.0x000009.
- (2012). *Time on tv: Temporal displacement and mashup television*. Peter Lang.
- (2013). Reifying the fan: Inspector spacetime as fan practice. *Popular Communication*, 11(2), 146-159.
- (2015). *Playing Fans: Negotiating Fandom and Media in the Digital Age*. Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital. In: Richardson, J. (ed) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York, Greenwood. 241-258.
- Chin, B. (2013). The fan-media producer collaboration: How fan relationships are managed in a post-series x-files fandom. *Science Fiction Film & Television*, 6(1), 87-99. doi:10.3828/sfftv.2013.8
- (2018). "It's about who you know: Social capital, hierarchies and fandom". In: Booth, P (ed) *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*. John Wiley and Sons Inc., pp. 243-255.
- Chin, B., & Hills, M. (2008). Restricted confessions? Blogging, subcultural celebrity and the management of producer-fan proximity. *Social Semiotics*, 18(2), 253-272. doi:10.1080/10350330802002424
- Close, S., Wang, C. (2020). International platforms, international prejudice in the platformization of crafting. *Social Media Society*, 6(3).
- Costello, V., & Moore, B. (2007). Cultural outlaws: An examination of audience activity and online television fandom. *Television & New Media*, 8(2).
- De Kosnik, A. (2016). *Rogue archives: Digital cultural memory and media fandom*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Dunlap, K., & Wolf, C. (2010). Fans behaving badly: Anime meta fandom, brutal criticism, and the intellectual fan. *Mechademia*, 5(1), 267-283.
- Driscoll C. (2001) One true pairing: The romance of pornography and the pornography of romance. In: Hellekson, K and Busse, K (eds) *Fan fiction and fan communities in the age of the internet*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 79-96.

- Fanlore, "Alternate Universe". https://fanlore.org/wiki/Alternate_Universe
 "Recursive Fanfiction". https://fanlore.org/wiki/Recursive_Fanfiction
- Fathallah, J. (2016). 'Except that Joss Whedon is god': Fannish attitudes to statements of author/ity. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 19(4), 459-476. doi:10.1177/1367877914537589
- Fiesler, C. (2008). Everything I need to know I learned from fandom: How existing social norms can help shape the next generation of user-generated content. *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*, 10(3), 729-762.
- Fiesler, C., Morrison, S., Bruckman, A. S.. (2016). An archive of their own: A case study of feminist hci and values in design. *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - Proceedings*, 2574-2585, 2574–2585. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858409>
- Galuszka, P. (2015). New economy of fandom. *Popular Music and Society*, 38(1), 25-43.
- Gray, J. (2003). New audiences, new textualities: Anti-fans and non-fans. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 64–81
- Gray, J., Sandvoss, C., & Harrington, C. L. (Eds.). (2017). *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* (Second). New York University Press.
- Gray, Melissa. 2010. "From canon to fanon and back again: The epic journey of Supernatural and its fans." In: "Saving People, Hunting Things," Tosenberger, C. (ed) special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2010.0146>.
- Gonzalez, V. M. (2016.) "Swan Queen, Shipping, and Boundary Regulation in Fandom." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2016.0669>.
- Harriss, C. (2017). The producer as fan: Forensic fandom and *The Good Wife*. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 41(4), 368–381. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859917712233>
- Hill, H. (2017). Information activities as serious leisure within the fanfiction community. *Journal of Documentation*, 73(5), 843-857. doi:10.1108/JD-04-2016-0045
- Hills, M. (2002). *Fan cultures*. London: Routledge.
- (2014). "When doctor who enters its own timeline: The database aesthetics and hyperdiegesis of multi-doctor stories." *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, 9(1), 95–113. <https://doi.org/10.7227/CST.9.1.7>
- Hills, M. & Garde-Hansen, J. (2017) Fandom's paratextual memory: remembering, reconstructing, and repatriating "lost" DoctorWho, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34:2, 158-167, DOI: 10.1080/15295036.2017.1293276

- Hunter, R. (2011). Erasing “property lines”: a collaborative notion of authorship and textual ownership on a fan wiki. *Computers and Composition*, 28(1), 40–56.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2010.12.004>
- Ito, M. (2010). "The rewards of non–commercial production: Distinctions and status in the anime music video scene." *First Monday*, 15(5).
<https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/2968/2528>
- Jenkins, H. (1988). Star trek rerun, reread, rewritten: Fan writing as textual poaching. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 5(2), 85-107.
-- (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. Routledge.
-- (2006). *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. New York: New York University Press.
-- (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York University Press
- Jiang, Z. (2019). Why withholding information won't give you an advantage. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Johnsom, D. (2017). "Antagonism: Factions, institutions, and constitutive hegemonies of fandom". In: Gray, J., Sandvoss, C., & Harrington, C. L. (Eds.). *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* (Second). New York University Press, pp.
- Jones, S., Cronin, J., & Piacentini, M. G. (2018). Mapping the extended frontiers of escapism: Binge-watching and hyperdiegetic exploration. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34(5-6), 497–508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2018.1477818>
- Jones, S. M., Nelson, M. L., & Van de Sompel, H. (2018). Avoiding spoilers: wiki time travel with Sheldon Cooper. *International Journal on Digital Libraries*, 19(1), 77–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00799-016-0200-8>
- Kelley, B. (2016). Chocolate frogs for my betas!: Practicing literacy at one online fanfiction website. *Computers and Composition*, 40, 48–59.
- Kiriakou, Olympia. (2019). Big Name Fandom and the (Inevitable) Failure of Disflix. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 30.
- Knaggs, A. (2011). Prison Break general gabberly: Extra-hyperdiegetic spaces, power, and identity in Prison Break. *Television and New Media*, 12(5), 395–411.
- Lothian, A. (2012). Archival anarchies: Online fandom, subcultural conservation, and the transformative work of digital ephemera. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(6).

- Lipton, J. D. (2014). Copyright and the commercialization of fanfiction. *Houston Law Review*, 52(2), 425-466.
- Massanari, A. (2017). #Gamergate and the fapping: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture supports toxic technocultures. *New Media and Society*, 19(3), 329-346.
- Merry, S. K., & Simon, A. (2012). Living and lurking on livejournal. *Aslib Proceedings*, 64(3), 241–261. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00012531211244527>
- Meyers, E. (2012). 'Blogs give regular people the chance to talk back': Rethinking 'professional' media hierarchies in new media. *New Media and Society*, 14(6), 1022-1038.
- Morris, J. W. (2018). "Platform Fandom". In: *The Routledge companion to media fandom*. Click, M. A., & Scott, S. (eds.). Routledge, pp. 356–364.
- Mittell, J. (2009). "Sites of participation: Wiki fandom and the case of lostpedia." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 3.
(2012). "Wikis and Participatory Fandom". In: Delwiche, A., & Henderson, J. J. (eds.). *The participatory cultures handbook*. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Neill Hoch, I. (2018). Content, Conduct, and Apologies in Tumblr Fandom Tags. In "Tumblr and Fandom" edited by Lori Morimoto and Louisa Ellen Stein, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1198>.
- Nieborg, D. B., & Poell, T. (2018). The platformization of cultural production: theorizing the contingent cultural commodity. *New Media & Society*, 20(11), 4275–4292.
- Pande, R. (2018). "Who Do You Mean by “Fan?” Decolonizing Media Fandom Identity". In: *A companion to media fandom and fan studies*. Booth, P. (ed.). John Wiley and Sons. pgs: 319-332
- Pecoskie, J., & Hill, H. (2015). Beyond traditional publishing models: An examination of the relationships between authors, readers, and publishers. *Journal of Documentation*, 71(3), 609-626.
- Preece, J., Nonnecke, B. and Andrews, D. (2004), The top five reasons for lurking: Improving community experience for everyone. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 20(2), pp. 201-23
- Rau, P.-L. P., Gao, Q., & Ding, Y. (2008). Relationship between the level of intimacy and lurking in online social network services. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(6), 2757–2770. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2008.04.001>
- Schwarz, J., & Baumgärtel, T. (2015). A reader in international media piracy: Pirate essays. In :

- Honorability and the pirate ethic* (p. 81). Amsterdam :Amsterdam University Press.
- Scott, S. (2019). *Fake geek girls*. New York University Press.
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Thomas, B. (2011). What is fanfiction and why are people saying such nice things about it? *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 3(1), 1–24.
- Tosenberger, C. (2008). Homosexuality at the online hogwarts: harry potter slash fanfiction. *Children's Literature*, 36(1), 185–207.
 -- (2014). Mature poets steal: Children’s literature and the unpublishability of fanfiction. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 39(1), 4-27.
- Turk, T. (2015). "Fan Work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom's Gift Economy." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 15.
- Williams, Rebecca. (2004) “It’s About Power”: Spoilers and Fan Hierarchy in On-Line Buffy Fandom.” *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*. 2018.
 -- (2018) Tumblr's GIF Culture and the Infinite Image: Lone Fandom, Ruptures, and Working Through on a Microblogging Platform. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 27.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1153>.

Appendix A

Pre-Test

Short answer:

What year did you join the Gravity Falls: Transcendence AU community?

How did you hear about it? (Social media, friends, etc.)

Do you or have you created any fanworks for Transcendence AU? If so, what?

How often do you partake in the online community by posting content, checking blog updates, interacting with other members etc.? (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Yearly, No Longer Participating)

Questions on a Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, N/A):

I feel that I am welcomed by the Transcendence AU community.

I believe there are relatively low barriers to civic engagement and creation in my community.

I believe the members of my community passed on important information about Transcendence AU's canon and culture to me.

I feel that my contributions of fanart, fanfiction, and public opinions matter to and are accepted by the community.

I feel that my contributions are treated with equal enthusiasm to those of others.

Other members recognize my platform (AO3, Wattpad, Tumblr, Discord)username.

Other members have cited me by name or my contributions (fanart, fanfiction) when I am not present in an online space.

I feel I have the power to make changes or suggest alternatives to the dominant canon shared by the community.

I feel I have the power to change how platforms (Tumblr, FandomWikia) are used by my community.

I believe I must contribute fanworks (fanart, fanfiction, fanvids) in order to matter to my community.

Other members are excited to discuss my ideas with me.

I have been discouraged from sharing, writing, drawing about my ideas by other members.

I do not share certain ideas, writing, or art with the community because I am afraid of being rejected.

I believe I have little to no authority in my community.

I believe all of the moderators have the community's best interests in mind.

I believe that the moderators have personal biases.

I believe that the introduction of 2 new moderators on April 24, 2020 has had or will have a positive influence on the community.

I believe that new moderators should continue to be added.

The majority of the moderators have addressed me or my contributions (fanart, fiction) by name when I am not present online.

The majority of the moderators are excited to discuss my ideas with me.

I believe the moderators have more authority than other members.

Paragraph Answer:

Can you describe Transcendence AU as simply as possible?

How are new ideas or contributions to the canon shared within the community?

How are new ideas or contributions to the canon added to or accepted by the public knowledge?

What is the purpose of the community wiki page?

What is the process by which content (art, fanfiction, public discourse) is added to the wiki?

Do you feel you need permission from a moderator to update the wiki?

What is the purpose of the community Tumblr blog?

What is the process by which content (art, fanfiction, public discourse) is added to the Tumblr blog?

What role do the moderators serve in the community?

Oral Interview

The questions are as follows:

Can you tell me about a time that you felt your contributions or opinions did not matter to or were rejected by the community?

Can you tell me about a time you collaborated with another member?

Can you tell me about a time you influenced or changed the community through the usage of online platforms (Discord, Tumblr)?

Can you tell me about a time you made a change to the dominant canon or shared ideas within the community? Were your ideas initially rejected or easily accepted?

How has your experience in Transcendence AU differed from other fan communities?

Can you tell me about the significance of authority (the power to make decisions, enforce rules or ideas, and to act as a leader) in the Transcendence AU community? Do you think authority exists in this community?

Tell me about why you responded (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) to feeling welcomed by the community?

Tell me why you responded (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) I feel that my contributions of art, fanfiction, and public opinions matter to the community?

Tell me why you responded (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) to 'I believe I have little to no authority in my community'?

Tell me about why you responded (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) I believe all of the moderators have the community's best interests in mind.

Tell me about why you (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) believe that the moderators have personal biases.

Written Interview

Can you tell me about your experience of finding, joining, creating Transcendence AU? How did other members receive you?

How did you learn about and come to understand the Transcendence AU canon? Did you read fanfiction? Use the blog or wiki? Did other members help explain it to you?

In your own words, tell me how the canon is made and by whom?

How does the canon handle contradictions between works or ideas? (Ex. How does Wendy die?)

Is having a canon beneficial to Transcendence AU? In what ways?

If you create(d) fanworks of any kind, how did you use the fanworks that came before yours as inspiration?

If you haven't created any fan works, what have you learned from watching TAU members create?

How would you describe the relationship between members and moderators? Would you like to see that relationship changed?

How would you define authority in Transcendence AU? Does it exist in this community?

How has your experience in Transcendence AU differed from other fan communities?