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The fan fiction reading guide: the use of multimedia and comments as close reading tools

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THE FAN FICTION READING GUIDE:
THE USE OF MULTIMEDIA AND COMMENTS AS CLOSE READING TOOLS

A Thesis
Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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Abstract

This paper considers the benefits of including multimedia in fan fiction multimedia and its effects on the close-reading and critical analysis skills of readers. By completing an illustrative and cumulative case study with three fan fiction authors who are currently writing and publishing a new fiction (fic), the author was able to view the production and promotion of fan fiction and its accompanying multimedia. Additionally, this research analyzed the comments from these works through topic modeling and term frequency as well as other data analysis methods. Through both the data analysis and the interviews, several conclusions were discovered, including the conclusion that readers are able to build their skills through fan fiction and multimedia.

Keywords: fan fiction, close reading, comments, multimedia, data analysis

For Susan, Robin, Jane, and Haley

I am your biggest fan.

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Introduction

In the early 1990s, the world of fan fiction exploded into academia. The Internet was expanding rapidly and fan fiction archives for media like *Star Trek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* became staples for fans of the medium. Because of this great movement to the Internet, academic scholars became very interested in what happened between fans and their communities.

Pioneering studies like *Textual Poachers* (Henry Jenkins), and *Enterprising Women* (Camille Bacon Smith), and work done by John Fiske in the late 1980s, soon became the groundwork for many media scholars looking to study the intricacies of fan communities. With the rise of Web 2.0 and the popularity of fandoms such as *Harry Potter* and *Star Trek* in the early 2000's, media scholars had a wealth of information to support their theses and constitute an archive, and found a new way to participate in the things that they (academic/fans or aca/fans) loved. As academics became more immersed in fandom, fandoms continued to grow and become more dedicated to their crafts: they coded websites and archives for fan fiction; drew fanart; attended and cosplayed at conventions; and wrote hundred-thousand-word epics about the things that they loved.

Francesca Coppa, editor of *The Fan Fiction Reader: Folk Tales from the Digital Age*, argues that because of the intense involvement in fandom, “fan fiction has become an increasingly mainstream art form, and fandom itself is moving fast from subculture to culture.”¹

Fan fiction is fiction about a popular original work, created by fans of the original work instead of the creator. Typically, fan fiction is categorized as a transformative work, meaning that the original work has been transformed into something else.² Fan fiction has many subgenres, which are often found in the participant-generated tags for the work on fanfiction websites. The most popular genres are AU [alternate universe], crossovers, smut, and shipping. Crossovers occur when one fandom and its characters find their way into another fandom. Common crossovers are Marvel Comics and DC Comic crossovers, or the SuperWhoLock (the CW's *Supernatural*, BBC's *Dr. Who*, BBC's *Sherlock*) crossover. Smut is sexually explicit or pornographic writing. Smut and shipping go hand and hand. Shipping (a nickname for "relationshiping") is when the author or creator of the work wants two characters to be together romantically, often times diverging from the original work. Common ships in fanfiction are Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter from the *Harry Potter* series, Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or a real-life celebrity and a reader, which is known as self-fics. Self-fics (often called "Mary Sue" fics in the fandom) have become increasingly popular in the genre, and are typically written in the first person, with fans interacting on a personal level with the celebrity. Authors or creators may take requests for these from fans or may only write this genre of fanfic. In addition to the above-mentioned genres, many authors write slash fiction. Slash fiction refers to fanfiction where two characters identify their sexuality as anything other than heterosexual or their gender as anything other than cis-gender. The inclusion of slash fiction in so many canon works has allowed for LGBTQ+ authors and readers to find homes in fanfiction and the majority of authors who write, produce, or read fan fiction identify as females, minorities, or as members of the LGBTQ+ community.³

The popularity of fan fiction on the Internet accurately demonstrates Adrian Johns's reminder that, "the story of a book . . . does not end with its creation."⁴ With the rise of tumblr in 2010, fan fiction was able to reach more people than it ever had before. Additionally, Archive Of Our Own (AO3), an open source fan fiction archive, became increasingly popular because of its lax rules (writers were able to post NC 17+ fiction and write fiction about celebrities, which they were not allowed to do on Fanfiction.net, or ff.net) and easy to use interface. With this leap in popularity, fans began producing more and different types of work. Various supplemental pieces of art were readily available for writers to utilize, causing a growth of multimedia in fan fiction. With the inclusion of multimedia, fan fiction studies have reached a critical moment because the story of fan fiction has not ended with the product of fan fiction text alone. Multimedia helps the fan fiction continue on long after the story has finished.

This paper considers the benefits of fan fiction multimedia by completing an illustrative and cumulative case study with three fan fiction authors who are currently writing and publishing a new fiction (fic). These case studies will reach the conclusion that multimedia and comments change the ways that texts are read and helps readers develop critical analysis and close-reading skills. Furthermore, the relationship between multimedia, comments, and fan fiction can be beneficial for academics and teachers to understand and allow for creative implementation into classrooms. This study is pertinent to research on fan fiction because there is a lack of research regarding the inclusion of multimedia in fan fiction. Researchers like Gunther Kress emphasize the benefits of communicative practices, multimodality, and interactivity in the classroom; and fan studies scholars like Rebecca Black and Katherine Anderson Howell note the benefits of fan fiction in the classroom; however, the interdisciplinary study between these two is nascent. Additionally, as pointed out in the introduction of *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, "an

increasing number of scholars are turning to fan studies to engage their students as a result of the overlap between fan studies and other disciplines related to popular and cultural studies, including social, digital, and transmedia studies.”⁵ However, without the full study of multimedia and its effects on fan fiction, as well as an interdisciplinary look into this subject, students, writers, and fans are at a disservice.

Vocabulary

In this introduction and thesis, several vocabulary words will be used to describe the research work and fan fiction in general. These terms are defined below:

Multimedia

In the context of this research, multimedia is defined as anything that supplements fan fiction that is outside of the written text. Examples of multimedia include songfics (fan fiction that has a Spotify playlist that can be played along with or a fic that is based on one song), manips (manipulations of photos or image stills through Photoshop or other editing software), reading guides (guides that further explain the fandom, literary devices, or figurative language in the story), fan art, Pinterest boards and mood boards (collections of photos or inspirational information that coincides with the story), and videos or other digital media that supplement the text.

Close Reading

Close reading, as defined by Beth Burke, “is a thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's form, craft, meanings, etc.”⁶ Close reading emerged in literary studies in Britain in the late 1920s before migrating to the group of the American New Critics in the 1930s and 40s. The New

Critics stressed the text over its context instead of reading it in the light of outside sources (like historical events or authorial intent or ideology) to inform a work of literature.

Webscraping

Webscraping is a technique that is used to extract large amounts of data from websites. After the data is extracted, it is often put into a spreadsheet format. In this thesis, webscraping techniques were used to pull the comments from AO3 and place them into a .csv document without the usernames of the commenters.

Literature Review

This research is derived from literature that separates itself into four themes: intertextuality, transmedia, platform studies, and learning theory. For the theme of intertextuality, I analyzed the literary theories of Julia Kristeva, as well as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and the multimodality theory from Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen. Kristeva drew from Mikhail Bakhtin's work on heteroglossia (the presence of two or more voices or viewpoints in a text) which argues that "authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities [that] can enter the novel; [and] each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships."⁷ Like heteroglossia, Kristeva's work on intertextuality places readers in the structure of the reading, and "also within an on-going process of signifying that goes all its way back to the semiotic plurality," allowing readers to connect symbolic forces and themes in singular stories.⁸ Intertextuality's codes that are imparted to readers from other texts help form the foundation of fan fiction—readers are able to view works by different authors from the same codes and symbols as another work. For example, readers can

see *Bridget Jones's Diary* as a reimagination of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, or Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a transformed work from the Book of Genesis. These common codes make connections across media and texts.

The work of Kress and van Leeuwen on multimodal discourse takes a critical analysis of the way that communication is utilized through multimodal efforts and helps dissect the intertextuality of media. In their book, Kress and Van Leeuwen identify four domains of multimodal communication practice “in which meanings are dominantly made,”⁹ and which are overarchingly called “strata.” The four levels of strata are discourse, design, production, and distribution, each of which can be looked at from the point of both producers of multimodal communication and interpreters of the practices. Each of these levels of strata can be applied to both the production and reading of fan fiction. Discourses are “socially constructed knowledges of reality,” which have “been developed in specific social contexts,”¹⁰ and is independent of genre, mode, and design. These discourses form the foundations of what fan fiction is.

A helpful way to look at discourse in fan fiction is to look at it through the lens of Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and famous post-structuralist because, as Judith Fathallah argues, “the New Media context of fan fiction online requires a theory and method that can account for the active properties of language in a process of transformation.”¹¹ Foucault believed that language is actively shaped in fields of discourse and is not neutrally, “naively,” a conduit of meaning. Rather, as statements embedded in and generated by changing socio-political discourses, language is an empirical intervention of the world. This means that as things change in the world, language also changes.¹² Similarly, Foucault explained that the unity of a discursive formation (the formation of discourse) is not in its inherent, fundamental meaning but the regulations by which it operates, thus allowing for discursive formations to be made up of

statements that are able to be changed.¹³ In fan fiction, the discourse which makes up a character is constantly challenged by transformative works. In the case of Draco Malfoy from the *Harry Potter* books and movies, fans of the Drarry ship¹⁴ are often not satisfied with how the character is portrayed in the media (as mean, dark, and often homicidal); therefore, they develop new discourse for the character to participate in. Discourses then influence the ways that designs are produced.

Designs, as described by Kress and Leeuwen “are means to realize discourse in the context of a given communication situation.”¹⁵ Saussure’s work on semiotics as well as his definitions of signifier and signified is helpful to look at here. The sign that fans create is the multimedia and gives context to the signified, which is the intertextual discourse from within the work. Fan fiction writers develop multimedia and their own stories as a way of fulfilling a discourse. The most obvious example of this is a manip (Figure 1). Photos are specifically grouped together or manipulated to show characters in suggestive positions or thought-provoking poses. Some manips also contain pictures of objects that are vital to understanding the piece of fic. Below is a manip of actors Chris Evans and Sebastian Stan who play Captain America and Bucky Barnes respectively in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. While the original author of this manip is

unknown,
anyone can
clearly tell that
the photo has
been
manipulated by



Figure 1: A manip of actors Sebastian Stan (L) and Chris Evans (R) kissing.

the strange black and white smudges in the middle of the photograph. To fit a discourse where Captain America and Bucky Barnes are in love (or even Chris Evans and Sebastian Stan are in love), fans must utilize design to suit their needs.

After designing, fans must produce and distribute their designs. Production and distribution (the two final strata) as Kress and van Leeuwen describe them, refer to “the organization of the expression, to the actual material of the semiotic even or the actual material production of the semiotic artefact.”¹⁶ Kress and van Leeuwen use the term medium to describe what is produced, but acknowledge that design, production, mode, and medium are hard to separate. In relation to fan fiction, what is produced by fans is the actual text or the actual media, which can be difficult to separate from what is designed. In a similar vein, the distribution strata as proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen is difficult to separate from the production and design of fan fiction overall; yet, identifying these strata allows for the principles of multimodality to come forth into language discourse.

Barthes’s “Death of the Author” is important for thinking about intertextuality. Barthes argues that traditional critics tend to judge works through authorial intent because it would appear to give them a determinate “answer;” however, this answer is not the complete story. Or the reading Barthes opposes, it might seem that if a critic can look at an author’s life and work and discover what the author meant to imply when they included a certain aspect of a work, or figure out why they wrote the work, then the critic can “figure out” the text. However, Barthes argues that language is a public system that precedes and engulfs any author’s meanings beyond their local control; the “absence” of the author – his or her disappearance into the greater state of textuality -- provides the reader the ability to analyze the text as an element in a “galaxy of signifiers” such that an author is conceived as the past of his own book, which should render the

author as a nonexistent character when considering a work. “Modern writers,” Barthes argues, “are born simultaneously with [their] text.”¹⁷ This is very much true to fan fiction and its writers, who can seemingly rise through the ranks of fandom as they write and produce a text.

Particularly relevant to fan fiction, Barthes writes that “to give an Author to a text is to impose upon the text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing.”¹⁸ In creating fan fiction, there is an inherent anonymity with publishing fic—writers and authors are protected by a screenname and there is not publicity on the majority of individual writers, which echoes Barthes conversation on authorial intent. Similarly, writers and readers bypass the original author/creator, making their own meaning within the work. Through this bypassing, fans are able to discard the restraints that the original content creator placed on the work, thus allowing the ability to create new transformational works with new codes in intertextuality.

In response to Barthes’s “Death of the Author,” Foucault, writes that “[t]he Author is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses: [...] The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.”¹⁹ Foucault views the author as a function of a discourse: they can be objects of economics (e.g. in copyright), or appropriation, and are not universal or constant. Foucault writes that before modernity in the West, authors were not regarded in the literary tradition and that texts, “were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity.”²⁰ When viewing an author in a discourse, a text is limited; therefore, Foucault asks that theorists adopt the idea of a “author-function,” where something functions under the name of an author but does not need to be the author, which relates back to Barthes’s argument. The author should serve as a reference for a point in history

to set the work but should not serve as the ultimate meaning on the text. Both of these works show that fan fiction is steeped in the paratexts of the literary theory tradition and provides a rich background to the debate of intertextuality and the function of an author.

In summation, fan fiction is the culmination of several literary theories and intertextuality binds fan fiction to original content in literary canon. Through intertextuality, meanings are linked, allowing for fan fiction readers to connect their literature to the codes and signs of classic literature. Intertextuality expands the world of fan fiction and allows for readers to play with new and old themes and ideas, transforming them into well-developed and thought out stories. Additionally, intertextuality's themes and codes can be transferred into the media associated with a text.

To examine transmedia, I combined the work of fan theorists as well as media scholars to better understand the usage of transmedia in the fandom community. Transmedia is the technique of telling a single story or story experience across multiple platforms and formats using current digital technologies. First, the work done by Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo attempts to understand "reading beyond the book" by analyzing contemporary leisure reading cultures in both print and other media. They discuss reading as a social practice "because the action of reading always take place somewhere, whether in what we discern to be a domestic and private space such as the home or in a public space like a library or a bus."²¹ The internet, in both public and private spheres, allows for the reading of texts in a purely social environment, allowing for users to respond via comments and other forms of media. Such practices of reading, writing, and responding can be seen as a mass reading event (MRE) as defined by Fuller and Sedo, where a community collectively enjoys a work all at the same time. At any given time, someone else on the opposite side of the world can be reading the same media or text as another person, then

turning to transmedia avenues to discuss the work, thus loving the book in a public sphere.²²

While this example may not be an exact example of transmedia, it echoes the theme of transmedia throughout the work.

A second influential theory associated with the analysis of transmedia is Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's idea of remediation, which discusses culture's desire to simultaneously and paradoxically to multiply its media and to erase all traces of the mediation (or the media theory where the central mediating factor of a given culture is the medium of communication itself). Bolter and Grusin focus on how computer graphics, art, media, and the World Wide Web define themselves by borrowing from other forms of media, hence, remediation effects.²³ In a way, fan fiction has remediated print culture and tangible books, as it has remediated zines and other aspects of fandom culture. Additionally, as Bolter and Grusin point out, the immediacy of the internet allows for users to create all the media that they want; yet, the Internet also constantly reminds the user of the medium that they are viewing (or hypermediacy), thus allowing for users to distance themselves from the "thing." This constant push/pull of immediacy versus hypermediacy plays into transmedia, where fans express their fascination with the media itself and feel that they are a part of the media. This is actually a huge factor in ship wars (fights between fans of different ships), which arguably can start from transmedia. While many fans consciously realize that these are characters within the art, they feel as though the characters are the actors/actress who play them (even though many fans know that the actors are not their characters), thus resulting in a parasocial attachment²⁴ to the actor/actress. When seeing the actor/actress in public then, many fans will blur the line between immediacy and hypermediacy, causing them (the fans) to believe that the actors/actress are the characters that they play.

Bolter and Grusin also discuss the influence of convergence culture, which Henry Jenkins has extensively studied, and its impact on transmedia. Convergence culture or the “technological process bringing together multiple media functions within the same devices,” is seen very much in transmedia, the merging of media and text.²⁵ Convergence forces media companies to rethink the ways that media is consumed, and how new media consumers have taken on a more active role in their consumption.²⁶ In this study, convergence was seen in the merging of television and movie with the internet, traditional print media with online publishing culture, game with music media—and many other ways in between. The use of transmedia itself is a convergence between art and digital media, communication and the Internet. This convergence changes the ways that transmedia is accepted in works: without convergence culture, the expansion of fandom may not be what it is today.

Furthermore, Jenkins and Camille Bacon Smith’s foundational fan studies research on fan fiction also informed my research. Jenkins was the first to brand fans as “textual poachers,” stating “Fan publishing has represented an important training ground for professional writers and editors, a nurturing space in which to develop skills, styles, themes, and perhaps most importantly, self-confidence before entering the commercial workplace.”²⁷ Jenkins also argues that fanfiction reshapes and is shaped through “social norms, aesthetic conventions, interpretive protocols, technological resources, and technical competence.”²⁸ Bacon Smith echoes similar sentiments in her work, stating that fan fiction helps users explore parts of their personal lives. Bacon Smith describes the “Mary-Sue” character as a way for women to analyze their identities in fan communities and discusses how women develop sexual identities from fandom. Both of these works cover transmedia, looking first at the art associated with texts and then analyzing the interactions that fans have with one another.

I also draw from Paul Booth's work on digital fandom. Booth argues that "Media, like fans, are continually evolving, and it is only through a constant and vigilant observation of these changes that scholars, students, and practitioners of media can hope to stay current," which shows the need for the inclusion of fan studies in new media studies.²⁹ Booth further argues this inclusion through research which stresses the influence of fans on Alternate Reality Games (ARG), wikis, roleplaying, and social media. All of these digital aspects influence the transmedia that surrounds fandom on the Internet. Booth's work was influential particularly in Chapter 3, where I discuss the use of wikis as reading guides for understanding in-depth knowledge about canon in a fandom. The use of wikis as transmedia helps develop a paratext around a work.

Finally, Joseph Reagle's research on comments was influential in the understanding of commenting as a form of transmedia. Reagle specifically looks at the ways that comments influence the revision and editing process of writing, especially in fan fiction. He also notes the manipulations that comments pose as well as their use as critique. In regard to beta writing as a form of revision, Reagle argues that the "scope and scale of the comment have changed," and have changed from general commentary about a work to concrit, or constructive criticism.³⁰ This form of transmedia acts as a place of learning for writers, where they can learn and adapt their trade in the fan fiction.

As shown above, these readings have been prominent in understanding the use of transmedia in modern convergence culture and in this study. Each of the pieces of multimedia used in the fics helps add to the conversation on transmedia and its role in the new media landscape. Additionally, the multimedia in the works acts as both pieces of transmedia, but also helps a reader better understand intertextual connections.

Another theme in this research is platform studies. Originally, when planning this thesis, I did not think that I would need to consider this theme, as I assumed most fan users on the Internet used tumblr for all of their needs. However, in December 2018 all this changed when the website decided to remove all adult content from their website, prompting fans and users to leave the website, either deleting or abandoning their accounts. Yet, the decision to ban all adult content did not happen overnight. In its conception, tumblr was a website where users could post not-safe-for-work (NSFW) and adult content. While that was not the website's explicit purpose, it was not uncommon for many users to be following, be followed by, or have their own porn blogs. In 2013, Yahoo! acquired tumblr for \$1.1 billion with the promise to add advertisements to the website, but tumblr creator David Karp doubled down on the lack of NSFW regulations on the website stating that "When you have [...] any number of very talented photographers posting tasteful photography [...] I don't want to have to go in there to draw the line between this photo and the behind the scenes photo of Lady Gaga and like, her nip."³¹ Adult content continued to occur on the website and many sex workers "found a home" on tumblr, calling it a unique, safe space. However, in 2017, tumblr began a new program that allowed users to use a feature called "safe mode," which automatically blocked users from seeing any NSFW content. Users had to manually go through their settings and uncheck the box for safe mode before finding NSFW content.³² This discouraged some users from continuing their usage of the website, but in general, many users stayed.

In March 2018, the United States Congress passed the "Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act" and the "Stop Online Sex Trafficking Act" (FOSTA-SESTA), which was hailed as a way to curb sex-trafficking and child pornography on the Internet. However, the laws also had adverse effects. These effects included the murder of 13 sex workers a month after the law's induction,

independent sex workers facing unsolicited demands to traffic them, and numerous sex workers being left without homes, being raped, or being assaulted, according to Lura Chamberlain.³³ Many sex workers who used Tumblr and other social media sites (like Craigslist's personals, subreddits, and Facebook) found themselves choosing between jail time (because they posted NSFW content) and homelessness (because they did not post). Tumblr initially did not act upon these laws because they felt that their "safe mode" function would prevent their website from being tagged as a primarily NSFW website; at the same time, Tumblr saw an increase in porn and NSFW blogs from those looking for a safe space from FOSTA-SESTA regulations. Then, child pornography was found on the website. The Apple App Store delisted the Tumblr app, causing the tumblr staff to scramble to get the app relisted. They deleted many safe-for-work (SFW) and NSFW blogs and accounts (unrelated to child abuse or pornography), pushed out a new update for Android users that forced them to put their blog into "safe-mode," and restricted access to NSFW content. Then, they banned all porn and adult content on the website.³⁴ tumblr's new regulations for NSFW content are as follows:

Don't upload images, videos, or GIFs that show real-life human genitals or female-presenting nipples — this includes content that is so photorealistic that it could be mistaken for featuring real-life humans (nice try, though). Certain types of artistic, educational, newsworthy, or political content featuring nudity are fine. Don't upload any content, including images, videos, GIFs, or illustrations, that depicts sex acts.³⁵

The way that tumblr moderates this content was through a flagging system, which as the website describes, is a "mix of machine learning and human moderation." Nevertheless, many blogs and accounts were banned for NSFW content—even if it did fall under the protected content as put forth by the website. While this porn ban affects sex workers the most, it also affects fans who write NSFW content or post NSFW media. Many fans left tumblr after the porn ban, bringing up issues of archiving fanworks and new platforms for fans to go.

Fans, as Abigail DeKosnik points out, have a great interest in digital archiving and have wholly embraced the idea of a readily available (24/7), zero barrier to entry, zero copyright and payment restrictive, fully downloadable Internet.³⁶ As DeKosnik points out, fan fiction archives strive to archive all fan materials, and “fill gaps in written records.”³⁷ The biggest archive that many fans use is the Archive of Our Own, which is an archive for fan fiction and text-based fan works. While AO3 is great for text-based works, the deletion of many blogs from tumblr can cause fans to lose their archived media like fan art, mood boards, and playlists. For example, one participant in this study stated that they had loved a piece of fanart and wanted to tweet about it and spent almost thirty minutes looking for it on tumblr, only to find that the original artist had taken the work down. Likewise, some fans are turning to private servers, which prevents from the public archiving the works, causing fans to rely on one another to save and archive material. This decentralization of fandom has largely been driven by the “fall of tumblr.”³⁸

After the mass exodus from tumblr, many fans have been looking for their “community” once again. Many fans have argued for the decentralization of fandom and the movement over to websites like fediverse, which hosts other websites (including hubzilla and friendfeed). Some fans are looking to archive their own work within a community and find archives that may have been lost, thus using websites like mastodon, dreamwidth, or pillowfort, which allow unlimited storage and tumblr-like experiences. Others are looking for secluded fandom spaces, thus adopting roles on servers like slack or discord where they can gatekeep fandom. Some have turned to other social media like reddit or Twitter or Instagram and some have stayed on tumblr because of the familiarity. Finally, some have turned to websites like Porn Hub and YouPorn, where they know they will not be persecuted for their NSFW content, their sexuality, or their lifestyles. Consequently, the new platforms have broken apart fandom into many pieces, driving

an imaginary wedge between the Internet. Each participant in this study has had a similar experience: they had found a home in their fandom on tumblr, but now feel as though they have been pushed out. This diaspora also affects the content being produced: less NSFW or explicit content is available across the web, and it is increasingly hard to find.

The final theme of this research study is learning theory. Here, I combined the works of the educational theories of connectivism and Learning as a Network (LaaN) with the fan studies educational theories of Rebecca Black and Katherine Anderson Howell. Connectivism is derived from the work done by Lev Vygotsky on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In the ZPD theory (illustrated in Figure 2), students are situated at the center of three circles. Their circle establishes what they can do unaided. The furthest circle is what they cannot do. The ZPD lies between these two and shows how to scaffold the learning so that the students may eventually be able to do the work they currently cannot. Vygotsky took into account traditional learning classrooms where students received face-to-face instruction; however, in the modern era, learning takes place online, thus the theory of connectivism.

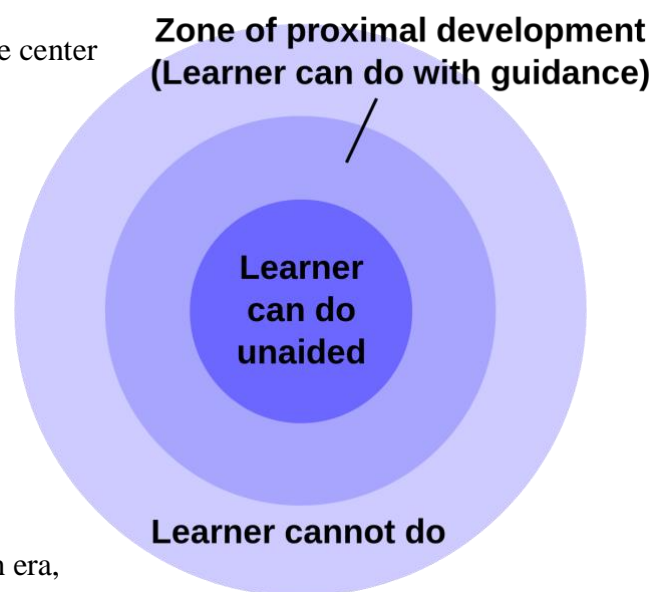


Figure 2: An illustration of Vygotsky's ZPD.

Connectivism “is a theory of learning in a digital age that emphasizes the role of social and cultural context in how and where learning occurs. Learning does not simply happen within an individual, but within and across the networks.”³⁹ Connectivism and the LaaN theory stress that learning can reside outside of our current understanding and that connecting to specialized information sets will enable us to learn more than our current state of knowing.⁴⁰ In fan fiction, students are able to learn skills about plots, characterizations, world building, and interaction and

communication skills, all of which may have been unreachable in their current social and education settings. The idea that students can use fan fiction to help support their creative and personal development is not a new idea, yet, it is an idea that needs to be stressed.

In addition to connecting education theory to fan fiction, this research largely offers an update to Black's *Adolescents in Online Fan Fiction*. Black argues that writing fan fiction inside and outside of the classroom gives students creative writing skills, communicative practices, and social support that they might not have gotten in traditional classrooms. Additionally, writers are able to "make comparisons with other literary works or draw connections with philosophical and theological traditions," thus connecting readers and writers in a web of intertextuality. Furthermore, Black focuses on the use of fan fiction as a way to develop identities in online and real spheres and notes the use of fan fiction in teaching English Language Learners (ELL). In her work, I looked specifically at her notes on self-directed learning, as this is what I experienced with fanfiction in my introduction to the genre, and what my participants also experienced. This self-directed learning on the internet, Black argues, is tied to the choices of resources, tools, and can provide an authentic use of technology in the classroom if a teacher chooses to incorporate it. Black notes that fans choose the most "effective media, tools, language, and resources to accomplish specific communicative purposes"⁴¹ and that these purposes can help readers and writers learn to better analyze and understand the material that they are reading.

Like Black's work, Howell looks at various ways to involve and incorporate fandom and fan fiction into the classroom. Howell, citing Kyle Stedman, argues that remix classrooms "offers students literacy and value in the class work, as well as citizenship."⁴² Stedman's work on remix classrooms shows that remix classrooms take "text-center approaches, focus on analysis, practice centered and composer-centered approaches"⁴³ which ultimately allow students

to make choices about how they blend their materials. These classrooms (especially reading and writing classrooms) already are focused on the texts and already are close-reading them and by incorporating the skills learned from fan fiction, these classrooms can better support their students. Furthermore, the classrooms can provide opportunities for digital citizenship. Finally, while my research does not focus on the incorporation of fan fiction into a classroom, many of my participants and writers of fan fiction around the world see the benefits of their writing and reading play out into non-classroom situations.

Throughout this research, I have realized that these themes are cyclically linked through my own interactions of the author's works and through my observations of other reader's interactions. Through intertextuality, I am able to better understand the text that I am reading, which then leads me to better understand the transmedia associated with the text. Through this understanding, I am then able to learn from the network that I associate myself with, thus, then, relaying this information back through forms of transmedia to complement the text. This cyclical analysis compounds throughout fandoms and influences the way that fans read and analyze texts outside of the fan world, all without even realizing the change. Therefore, fans are able to learn from the material that they read online.

Creating Fan Fiction

The creation of the fics in the study incorporate intertextuality and transmedia as they are created. Each writer has their own individual writing process, as there is no universal writing process that all writers should or can use. Many fan fiction authors begin like all writers, with an idea. The idea may have stemmed from a tumblr or twitter post that discusses a few ideas, or from an inbox ask where another fan may have asked the author to write on a theme. Sometimes a line of dialogue may start a fic. After developing the idea, some writers will plan out the story

via outline while others may begin to write the story straight away. If the story is an AU, or alternative universe, the writer may need to decide on world information for the AU (what the world looks like, what the characters' jobs, lives, homes, etc. are like). Some writers will begin publishing as soon as they begin writing, while others may take some time to start publishing. Additionally, some writers may choose to have a beta (a reader who gives feedback before publishing) give them feedback (content and grammar or just grammar) on their work, while others may choose to forego a beta. Furthermore, some writers may look for an artist for their work to create fanart or may begin creating multimedia to go along with the fic. When ready to publish, writers typically draft a short summary (under 100 words) of their piece that they can use to advertise their work. Additionally, they create tags (i.e. keywords) for their works. As Ayse GURSOY, Karen WICKETT, and Melanie FEINBERG argue, "fan fiction accommodates a variety of tagging practices, with the caveat that user-generated tags are highly variable and often range in their descriptive utility. [AO3's] tagging system combines author-generated tags with moderation by a team of volunteers (the 'tag wranglers')." ⁴⁴ These tags can link together codes and themes within a fandom or a ship, creating an interwoven network of themes. After creating tags, writers can disclose any trigger warnings associated with their texts. On AO3, most users choose the options, "No Archive Warnings Apply," or "Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings"; however, if there are elements that fall under any of the warnings (like "Graphic Depictions Of Violence," "Major Character Death," "Rape/Non-Con," or "Underage"), writers should use these warnings. ⁴⁵ After finishing their tags, writers publish their works and wait for the responses.

Research Plan

After analyzing the current literature and its contributions on my study, I began to develop my research plan. I combined qualitative research (interviews and observations) with quantitative research data from the comments on works. I first knew that I needed to develop some type of case study to prove my thesis, resulting in my reaching out to fan fiction authors. Initially I found these authors through the subreddit /r/fan fiction and sent out a general “call for authors.” In this call, I briefly specified what my research was about in addition to exactly the type of participant I was looking for. I received about 150 responses from the thread (100 comments on the thread and roughly 50 direct messages from new participants in my inbox). In the end, the pool was narrowed to three authors from three separate fandoms: the Supernatural fandom, the Marvel Cinematic Universe fandom, and the Star Wars fandom.

The following chapters will discuss each of these authors at length, including their involvement in their own fandom, their writing process and use of multimedia, and a critical analysis of their texts. Additionally, in the chapters, there will be information on general parts of fandom including an analysis of the platforms being used by authors, as well as discussions regarding the fandom each author participates in. Chapter One will cover Ruby* from the Supernatural fandom and her involvement in a discord community as a place for editing, revising, and general help. Chapter Two will cover Carol* and her involvement in the Marvel Cinematic Universe fandom and her usage of Twitter as a way to connect with her readers. The third chapter will cover Jessika* and her role in the Star Wars fandom, specifically taking a look at her use of reader guides and tumblr (* the names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities). In the critical analysis portion of each chapter, there will be an in-depth look at the comments and multimedia associated with their texts from my perspective as a reader,

as well as a data analysis method called topic modeling, which looks to see how topics connect across comments and in different pieces of the media associated with the text.

¹ Francesca Coppa, *The Fan fiction Reader: Folk Tales from the Digital Age*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2017), 1.

² Lauren Rouse, "Fan Fiction: Modern Day Story Telling," (master's coursework, DePaul University, 2018), 15-16.

³ Lauren Rouse, "Fan Fiction: Modern Day Story Telling."

⁴ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

⁵ Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson, *The Fan fiction Studies Reader*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 1.

⁶ Beth Burke "A Close Look at Close Reading: Scaffolding Students with Complex Texts." NIE Online, accessed on October 10, 2018, https://nieonline.com/tbtimes/downloads/CCSS_reading.pdf

⁷ Bakhtin, 263

⁸ Julia Kristeva, "Nous Deux' or a (Hi)Story of Intertextuality," *The Romanic Review* 93, no. 1-2, 9

⁹ Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes of Media and Contemporary Communication*, 4

¹⁰ Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse*, 4

¹¹ Judith Fathallah, "Foucault and Fandom: How Fanfic Changes the Discourse of Popular Texts," YouTube, 2 minutes 40 seconds, 13 July 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrP4ACFvc9Q>

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012).

¹³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

¹⁴ Drarry ship is the relationship of Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter from *Harry Potter*

¹⁵ Kress and Van Leeuwen, 5

¹⁶ Kress and Van Leeuwen, 6

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," In *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang), 1977.

¹⁸ Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 5

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, (Cornell University Press), 1977

²⁰ Foucault, "What is an Author."

²¹ Joseph Reagle, *Reading the Comments: Likers, Haters, and Manipulators at the Bottom of the Web*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 27

²² Reagle, *Reading the Comments*, 199

²³ David Bolter and Richard Grusin, editors, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 1.

²⁴ Parasocial attachment

²⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3

²⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 18

²⁷ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 40

²⁸ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 43

²⁹ Paul Booth, *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 8

³⁰ Reagle, 79

³¹ Martineau, Paris, "tumblr's Porn Ban Reveals Who Controls What We See Online," *Wired*, (2018), <https://www.wired.com/story/tumblrs-porn-ban-reveals-controls-we-see-online/>.

³² Martineau, "tumblr's Porn Ban"

³³ Lura Chamberlain, "FOSTA: A Hostile Law with a Human Cost." *Fordham Law Review* 87 (2019), 2174.

³⁴ Martineau, "tumblr's Porn Ban"

³⁵ "Community Guidelines," Tumblr, last modified December 17, 2018, <https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/community>

³⁶ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rouge Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016) 2

³⁷ De Kosnik, *Rouge Archives*, 90

³⁸ Participants called the mass exodus of tumblr as "the fall of tumblr."

³⁹ George Siemens “Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age.”

http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Jan_05/article01.htm

⁴⁰ Siemens, “Connectivism.”

⁴¹ Rebecca W. Black, *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2008), 127

⁴² Katherine Anderson Howell, *Fandom As Classroom Practice* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 10.

⁴³ Kyle D. Stedman, “Remix Literacy and Fan Compositions,” *Computers and Composition* 29, (2012): 120. (Howell 2018)

⁴⁴ Ayse Gursoy, Karen Wickett, and Melanie Feinberg, “Understanding Tag Functions in a Moderated, User-generated Metadata Ecosystem,” *Journal of Documentation* 74, no. 3 (2018): 490-508.

⁴⁵ *ArchiveofOurOwn*, accessed on 26 February 2019, <https://www.archiveofourown.org>.

Methods

This research plan took a three-pronged approach. The first was to research intersections between multimedia theory, fan studies theory, literary theory, and text analysis research (see Introduction). The second and third parts involved interviewing authors and analyzing data from comments on fan fiction. These two parts will be discussed in this section. I used documentary analysis through interviews, criterion sampling to gather my participants, and qualitative research methods to develop data analysis for this project. I completed IRB review by the university.

Participants

In order to show the process of close reading multimedia texts, as well as determining ways to introduce these texts into classrooms, I pursued case studies via interviews. This qualitative research involved three participants who are fan fiction authors, and whose usernames

have been changed

as a way to protect

their online

identities. The

participants were

found via the

subreddit, /r/fan

fiction by a post

detailing the

research in this

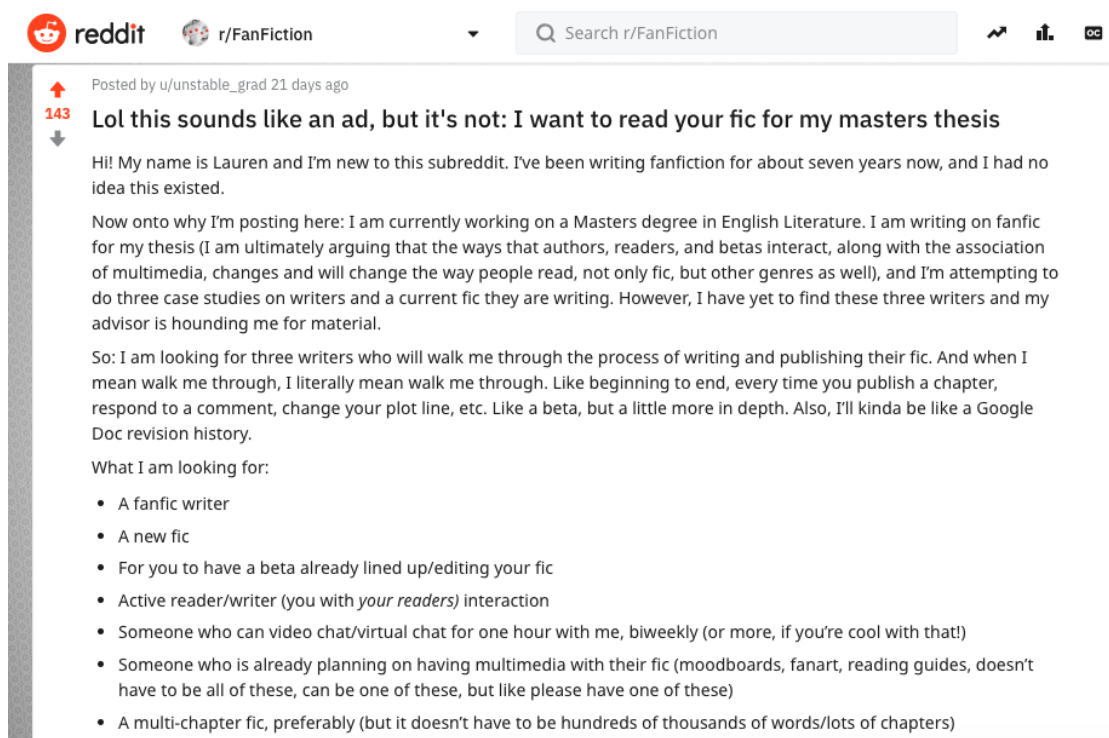


Figure 3: A screenshot of the reddit post that I used for participant selection.

study (the original post is Figure 3). Restrictions for the writers included: a fan fiction writer, a new fic, a beta, active reader and writer interaction, virtual or video chat once a week for one hour, multimedia already being planned for the fic, a multi-chaptered fic, and for the fic to be published on AO3 or ff.net. This criterion-based sampling was established so that I would have parameters for myself and for my study. As Cheryl Giesler states, “with criterion-based sampling, you specify a certain relevant criteria and choose all cases that meet that criteria.”¹ After 150 comments in twenty-four hours, I reached out to the responders with a consent survey and a request for each responder’s tumblr URL and fan fiction URL (a copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A).

As I combed through the URLs, I began to segment the data. I looked for metadiscourse on the tumblrs or in the fics. Giesler defines metadiscourse as the “part of the discourse that talks about the discourse.”² There are two parts to metadiscourse: textual and interpersonal, both of which fics should have and mostly occurred through the comments on fics. In the comments, I was also able to see reader/author interaction. I looked for fics that had multiple comments and author responses, thus creating a conversation between the two about the work. I additionally looked for the same people replying to posts on the tumblr and noted any correlation or variation between the responding rates and type from the author. Finally, I looked to see if the author was easily accessible via their tumblr. What I mean by this is if the author replied to asks in their inbox, would be on the website at least once a day, and posted their works on their blog. This process allowed me to narrow the pool of roughly 150 participants to 25 participants.

From there, I created some criteria that were not originally a part of my reddit post. I knew that the work’s language should be in English, as these authors typically have the most reach in a fandom and I would have the ability to read and understand the works. This narrowed

the sample that I had further, but it still was too broad with about 10 authors left. For this particular study because I was taking such an in depth look at authors and their works, I wanted to limit myself to three authors. From there, I restarted with the steps I initially followed, comparing author to author before I finally ended up with the three authors that I ultimately chose. Because of the limited time frame that I had for this study, I felt that three authors could represent the larger sample that I looked at.

After I completed the criterion sampling, I reached back out to the authors to have them sign consent forms for the study and to have them fill out a demographics study. All of my authors are above the age of twenty-five. Two authors currently reside in North America (and identify their race as white), while one lives in Southeast Asia and identifies her race as of Southeast Asian descent. Two authors did not speak English as their native language: one speaks French, and the other speaks Filipino as their first language. All three authors identify as cisgender females with she/her pronouns. Finally, all three authors wrote with white ships as their focus with the ships (one heterosexual and two slash): Castiel/Dean from the CW television show *Supernatural*; Steve/Bucky from the Marvel Cinematic Universe; and Rey/Kylo Ren | Ben Solo from the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy.

Procedure

The Interviewing Process

The subreddit process and selection process took about two weeks to finish completely. After the authors were chosen, they were alerted to the next step of the process, which was the interviewing process. Initially, the interviews were set up to occur over a four-month period with an online meeting once every four weeks. Due to some scheduling conflicts, the interviews may

not have been exactly four weeks apart, particularly between rounds three and four where there were about three weeks due to time constraints. The interviews were conducted over either Zoom or Discord and the authors were sent the interview script before each interview. The first two interviews stuck to the original script, but as I began drafting this thesis, some of the questions changed to fill in the blanks that I was missing.

The four-month interview process was intended to show how a fic may change over time. For example, one participant, Ruby, who is currently working on her untitled work-in-progress (WIP), writes very slowly, so there needed to be a longer time between each of her interviews while substantial work was done to her WIP. Additionally, the four-month process allowed for me to complete the needed analysis of the tumblr profiles, previous works, and other social media feeds. I worked on analyzing each of these profiles as I was interviewing so that I was able to ask questions as they came up while I was researching.

When writing the interviews, I adopted an ethnography process that is similar to Sherry Turkle's ethnography in her novel *Alone Together*. Turkle's work focuses on the use of the Internet and technology as an interaction tool and she interviews users who have used various pieces of technology. At one point, Turkle analyzes the relationships that her interviewees had with their Tamagotchi—small handheld videogames that contained virtual pets that users took care of—and the visceral reaction to taking care of that pet. Through interviewing these users, Turkle was able to capture the many facets of the technology and the experience of using a Tamagotchi. Turkle's analysis, interviewing, and explanation, are very similar to what I complete in the following chapters of this thesis.³

Documentary Analysis

As I was interviewing, I began a documentary analysis of the works from the authors. According to Glenn Bowen, documentary analysis is, “a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic.”⁴ I analyzed physical evidence for this analysis, including AO3 comments and social media posts. I first began by looking at all of the texts that my participants had produced, noting the target audience of the document and any unintentional or intentional biases related to the documents. There were issues of bias with the documents as these had been produced by fans of a certain ship over another ship and were not factually-based research materials; however, because of the nature of the fan fiction, I was able to ignore some of the biases. I explored the background information of each work: the tone that the author used, the purpose for the story, and the style in which it was presented. After I had asked these questions of the texts, I began to close read the texts, developing a kind of map which helped me better understand the text. I looked for instances of figurative language, narratology, and ethnography within the text and the multimedia associated with it. I did, as Bowen argues, “[determine] what is being searched for, then document and organize the frequency and number of occurrences within the document. [I] then organized [the information] into what is ‘related to central questions of the research.’” In my documentary analysis of the comments for instance, I was able to see reader comments like, “this helped me visualize (blank) better” or “I understand this better because of (blank).” These comments lead me to creating my research question that focuses on how readers learn via fan fiction. I also noted themes (which Bowen calls a “thematic analysis”) and codes that came up in all of the works that I read (regardless of fandom). These themes, like the themes of support,

love, and understanding, helped me link my research and questions across fandom. These themes helped me integrate the data that I was able to gather from webscraping.

Quantitative Analysis

After completing the qualitative portion of this project, I turned to the quantitative portion. I turned for assistance to DePaul's Digital Scholarship Librarian, Dr. Ana Lucic, who helped with writing a webscraping script to gather AO3 comments for one work of each of the authors. The works chosen were either current works or past works that the author had mentioned in their interviews. To scrape comments, we used R programming language and its rvest library, which allows HTML and XML page manipulation, as well as the RSelenium library, which provided bindings for the Selenium 2.0 WebDriver.⁵ A python library for scraping fan fiction content and metadata exists on the GitHub repository, but this script needed changes to allow scraping of the comments.⁶ I reached out to AO3 via email to let the website know about my research, and they responded with interest in my survey and data.

The crucial step was to identify under which html node the comments appear on the html pages. We established that the following node provided access to the comments: `html_nodes (“#feedback blockquote.userstuff p”)`. However, we were not able to differentiate between author- and user-provided comments using this method (the script that was used to download comments is included as Appendix B of this file).⁷ To get only the text of the comments, the “`get_text`” function in the rvest library was used. This was limiting, as it deleted many comments with only emojis in them; yet, it placed all of the comments into one document for easier viewing and understanding. Comments were saved to a matrix format and downloaded to a csv file. Rows represented pages of comments and columns represented individual

comments on the pages. The next step was to convert from this wide to long format for which (reshape2) library in R was used and its melt function. Instead of having multiple columns and cells to look at in wide format, I only had one column to look through with the long format. After this process, the text analysis portion of the project started.

Text analysis

The following R libraries were used for text analysis and to visualize the results of the analysis: (reshape2), (ggplot2), (wordcloud), (tm), (topicmodels), and (RColorBrewer) (the program that was used for analysis is included as Appendix B of this document). Having familiarized myself with the comments, I proceeded to create a customized stopwords list that would be used in addition to the default (tm) library stopwords list. Stopwords removal is a useful tool as their commonness can prevent certain texts from being analyzed at scale. These were the words that I thought would not contribute to the analysis and included references to character names and certain abbreviations. The following words were treated as stopwords: “thank,” “thanks,” “use,” “see,” “used,” “via,” “amp,” “kylo,” “ben,” “solo,” “rey,” “leia,” “luke,” skywalker,” “han,” “solo,” “chewie,” “dean,” “winchester,” “sam,” “casitle,” “love,” “heart,” “yay,” “omg,” “captain,” “america,” “steve,” rogers,” “bucky,” “winter,” “soldier,” “sam,” “Wilson,” “tony,” “stark,” “ironman,” “falcon,” “black,” “widow,” “natasha,” “clint,” “I’m,” “like,” “much,” “really,” “balthazar,” “reylo,” and “can’t.” Other preprocessing tasks that I completed included removing punctuation and whitespace. We did not lemmatize (sort words by grouping inflected or variant forms of the same word) words or reduced them to stems due to time constraints; however, this will be left for future work. We also did not eliminate URLs as we thought that they can be useful pointers to other platforms, resources, or links.

Associated terms

The next step involved creating a term document two-dimensional matrix which included individual terms in rows and documents in columns. The two-dimensional matrix will help the program visualize the data. The tm library includes a function `findAssocs()` that allows identifying terms that are associated with our terms of interest and searches for terms that frequently appear together in the document. In order to find these associated words, we needed to set a parameter with `corlimit`. The parameter `corlimit` allows specifying the level of association between the terms, meaning the higher the association the more likely the two are going to appear together. For example, the correlation level of 0.9 or 0.95 would imply that the words appear frequently together in a document where a low correlation (like 0.3 or 0.2) implies that the words seldom appear together in the same document (the `corlimit` can vary between 0 and 1). We set the level of correlation at 0.3 as other correlation settings did not produce many results. One of the words I was interested in examining more closely through this matrix was “looking.” Inputting this word into the matrix searched the comments for other words that occurred along with “looking.” In one fic, some other words that were associated with looking were “glass,” “ending,” “delighted,” and “sugar.” This gave me an idea for other possible words that would be associated with the word I was looking for, which could show relationships between the text and possible analysis skills.

I was also interested in establishing frequent terms within each body of comments.

We looked more closely at a subset of words that appeared equal to and or more than 20 times. This subset was then visualized through a bar chart (Figure 4). It is additionally

visualized through a word cloud

(Figure 5). Because of the time frame of this project, I did not analyze the frequent terms for each of the authors; however, in the conclusions portion of this thesis, I discuss opportunities for further study based on these visual representations.

Topic modeling

Another type of analysis that was conducted was topic modeling, or Latent Dirichlet Allocation analysis (LDA). Topic modeling is a form of unsupervised classification of documents and this analysis was conducted through the (topicmodels) R library. Latent Dirichlet Allocation is a generative probabilistic model through which each document is treated as a mixture of topics and the documents get clustered based on their level of association with particular topics.⁸ We established that eight topics represented a reasonable number for this body of

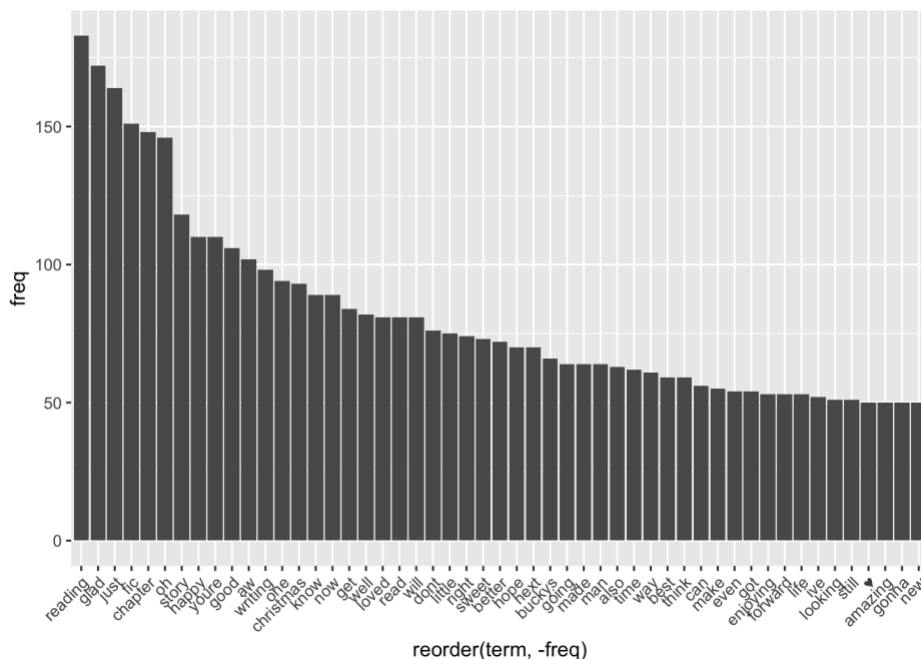


Figure 4: A bar graph showing term frequency in the comments of one story.



Figure 5: A word cloud showing term frequency in one story's comments.

comments and we specified that each topic would be represented through ten individual terms. The number of topics (sets of words) and words to represent the topics are customizable. The results of topic modeling and word frequency analysis will be discussed in the next section/chapter.

Discussions

Delimitations for this study occur because of the restrictions on writers. After going through the responses to the initial /r/fanfiction post, I eliminated fan fiction that did not meet the original restrictions. Often, many writers had multimedia with their fan fiction; however, they had little to no author interaction due to a low views or reader count on their stories. Furthermore, because of the low population of betas, many authors did not make it past the first round because they did not have betas. I did consider authors who used Grammarly (a grammar editing software) instead of having a beta because the nature of the software shows that authors considered a revision process of some kind. I wanted to exclude writers who did not have betas for two reasons: one, I did not want the writers to assume that because I was looking at their fic, I would be editing it; and second, I wanted the writers to have engaged in some sort of revision process that I could “see.” Finally, I eliminated fan fiction that had archive warnings on AO3 (like rape/non con, underaged, graphic depictions of violence, and major character death) because these warnings generally drive people away from the fic. This could lower possible reader/writer interaction in the comments of the fic. Additionally, I wanted to avoid triggers for myself.

Additionally, while many authors have tumblrs, I did not attempt to contact authors via tumblr, which narrowed the author pool. I felt that they would get the best results through the

medium of the subreddit because it presents an outside source to gather information from. tumblr is intrinsically linked to the actual lives of authors, and in previous attempts to reach multiple authors through the platform, I was unsuccessful. Likewise, my pool of authors was only comprised of female authors who were in the same age range and wrote the analyzed texts in white (Caucasian) ships. While other participants who had initially applied to be a part of the study were of different races, genders, and wrote in all ships (heterosexual, homosexual, etc.), the three authors I chose had the best representations of multimedia and fit all of the requirements for the study. I believe that further studies need to be done to determine the uses of and effects of multimedia on writers of color, writers of different genders, and ships of different colors and genders. Finally, in order to create an unbiased survey, I did not involve my own current fandom (*Kingsman*) in the study. This could present problems in my objectivity of the study, making it hard for me to take a stance on topics within the fandom and fan fiction. And while the idea of this study was drawn from the multimedia inclusion in *Kingsman* fan fiction, many other fandoms replicate this same process, if not to a greater extent.

Finally, there were limitations that occurred with the data analysis of this project. The first limitation was time. Because of the time frame for this project, I was unable to look at all of the data and determine its use for this project. For example, while I completed term frequency for all of the works, I was unable to utilize the data drawn from all of those in the chapters. Similarly, some of the data collected did not reflect information that would be relevant to this study. Another limitation was the corruption of some files. Because of the nature of webscraping, some of the comments from the original story were not copied into the file, thus resulting in data loss. Therefore, I was unable to analyze that data. A final limitation was the transference of the

data. Some files did not accurately copy the original comment, resulting in some comments being unreadable. This mostly happened with files where there were emojis or used characters like “, ”, [,], or __. These symbols often were blank spaces in the excel file or transferred as asterisks. Despite these limitations, the data was still thoroughly analyzed.

¹ Cheryl Geisler, *Analyzing Stream of Language: Twelve Step to the Systematic Coding of Text, Talk, and Other Verbal Data*, (New York: Pearson Education, 2004), 18

² Geisler, *Analyzing Stream of Language*, 41

³ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Basic Books, 2011.

⁴ Glenn Bowen, “Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method,” *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009) 27-40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

⁵ Hadley Wickham, “Package ‘rvest,’” R Project, 2015, <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/rvest/rvest.pdf>; John Harrison and Ju Yeong Kim, “RSelenium: R Bindings for ‘Selenium WebDriver,’” R Project, 2019, <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/RSelenium/index.html>.

⁶ Radiolarian, “AO3Scraper,” Github, last modified February 14, 2018. <https://github.com/radiolarian/AO3Scraper>

⁷ After completing the webscraping, the language and tone used by the different users on AO3 made it easier for me to determine who was writing each comment (for example, authors, it turned out, were are more likely to use “thank you” than a reader).

⁸ David M. Blei, Andrew Y. Ng, and Michael I. Jordan, “Latent Dirichlet Allocation,” *Journal of Machine Learning Research* 3 (2003), 993-1022.

Chapter 1

Ruby* is thirteen when she finds fandom—it is specifically *Sailor Moon* anime (not her ship any longer), but it flips a switch inside of her. She has recently started reading and writing in English (she grew up in Canada speaking French at home and in school), and anime opens up doors for her previously not imagined. “I was pretending to be way older than I actually was, and was printing out English fanfiction for my friends and editing out the not safe for work (NSFW) content,” she laughs, “I was the oldest out of the group and so I got to read all the fun stuff while they had to get my censored version.”¹ Ruby started on fandom when Internet fandom was in its infancy stages—she remembers Web 1.0, misses the simplicity of chatrooms, and feels more at home on a chat server than a website like tumblr. Upon her entry into fandom, she interacted with other fans through play by post, which is a combination between online roleplaying and creative writing.² She moved through fandom in this way throughout her teenage years, investing time into roleplaying games and collaborative writing in chat rooms. However, continuing with fandom in technical school proved unfruitful and time consuming so she took a break from writing.

At the age of thirty-one, Ruby picked up her computer again and started writing her stories down. She describes herself as pretty flighty when it comes to a “home”³ fandom—she

bounces around from fandom to fandom, originally restarting in the Harry Potter fandom before moving onto the Marvel fandom (specifically shipping Steve/Bucky), then onto the *Lucifer* comics, short fix-it fics⁴ for *Daredevil*, and finally onto *Supernatural*. She typically writes short stories, or drabbles, ranging from 1,000 words to 5,000 words. When she does write longer fics, the stories reach about 30,000 words, all of which have been edited by the same beta reader for the past two years.

Because of her start in fandom, Ruby found a home on discord and the /r/fanfiction subreddit: she says it brings her back to the collaborative fandom state. Discord is organized into channels, each with its own purpose and theme, allowing for fans of all different fandoms to come together to share works, art, daily life, and personal stories. There are channels for fanart, writing help with works in progress (WIPs), NSFW content, fluff pieces, and other multimedia. On the particular discord channel where Ruby is a moderator (or mod), there used to be channels where people could play Pokémon Go together and livestream themselves playing video games. Ruby likes being a moderator on this channel for many reasons, but mostly because it provides her the ability to “tell [myself] what [I] want out of a space, and then create exactly that.” Ruby is also involved in pillowfort communities as well as the Supernatural twitter community. She also has a WordPress for archiving her own work and contracting commissions for publishing fanworks.⁵ She minimally uses her tumblr: after the fall of tumblr, the Supernatural fandom found it easy to transition over to discord and pillowfort, and while Ruby still uses her tumblr, she will probably “nuke it” when a current bang⁶ is over.

The Supernatural Fandom

Supernatural is a dark fantasy television show that first premiered in 2005, and in 2020 will finish its final season. It is currently the longest running U.S. fantasy show and has a large

cult fanbase.⁷ The show centers on the stories of two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, and their adventures with the fallen angel Castiel, among others. In the show, Sam and Dean hunt demons and other supernatural entities with the guidance of many other characters. The main ships for this fandom are Castiel/Dean (with over 79,000 fics on AO3), and the incestuous ship of Sam/Dean (with over 26,000 fics on AO3).⁸ The sheer amount of fans, coupled with the amount of fanworks and fanart on the Internet is enough to convince the producers and writers to reconsider decisions that they make about the show.

For example, the show saw a resurgence of fans in between 2013 and 2015, despite the show having considerably lower numbers during the previous seasons. This change in ratings came after writers of the show began including their fans and fanfiction in one episode, literally entitled “Fan Fiction” (Episode 200). In the episode, Sam and Dean encounter an all-female production of their lives, the episode ultimately commenting on the ships present in the fanfiction fandom. As Anissa Graham points out, “Episodes like ‘The Monster at the End of this Book’ (4:18), ‘Sympathy for the Devil’ (5:1), and ‘The Real Ghostbusters’ (5:9) offer a layered look at fandom... These episodes place in the foreground slash fiction as a means to explore one type of fanfiction writer [...]”⁹ By including their fans in the show, fans feel validated and want to watch a show where their opinions matter, which then continually brings them back to the show. This effect (called the Grateful Dead Effect by Aaron Barlow), relies on fans’ increased interest as a simple transaction which becomes part of a greater economic model. According to Barlow and other critics, “by giving away some content, a group can build [a more loyal] fanbase that is committed to the group’s long-term success.”¹⁰

As a Canadian resident, Ruby originally became involved in this fandom because of Netflix. She stated:

The show plays a lot on repeat television [in Canada] and I used to catch reruns of it. They're good standalone episodes sometimes, but after a point, the characterization gets all messed up. Then I found out ten seasons were on Netflix and I immediately binged it. I used to come home from work, eat dinner, watch two or three episodes and fall asleep. [I did this] so often than if I didn't watch the show, my roommate would immediately be like 'What's wrong?!'¹¹

After she had binged watched about half of the series that was available on Netflix, she began looking for the fandom online. She stated that she knew that LiveJournal was “dead,” so she turned to tumblr and began following the BNFs in the fandom, who are very good writers she says.¹² Producers eventually took the show off of Netflix in Canada, meaning that she could not access it, but then Ruby found the Superwiki. Similar to a Wikipedia for a fandom, fandom wikis (like Superwiki or Wookieepedia) provide spaces where fans can review information from their fandoms or learn new things. The Superwiki, Ruby says, has a very useful table of death that helps her determine which characters have died or which ones the characters have not fought in a while, thus making them more likely to be used in her fanfiction.

As for the Supernatural fandom, Ruby says that it is very large and that because of the studio's acknowledgement of fandom and fanfiction as a thing, tends to be very active and very vocal. Ruby states that there are toxic parts to this fandom: fans who, “are convinced that the actors are actually in love with one another and that their real life wives are beards,” or ones who “are angry that there's more in the show that's not just Sam and Dean's relationship and think that Castiel has to go because he brings the whole show down.”¹³ Ruby notes that these are fans across age ranges (because *Supernatural* has a diverse range of fans), but that the younger fans are more likely to engage in “anti” or toxic practices. “Some people believe that you can't ship something because stories written about it may condone abuse. I say, there is a separation between fiction and reality, and you need to determine what that is.”¹⁴ Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen point out this shame in their introduction to *Fandom at the Crossroads*:

There is shame about being a fan at all, shame over the extremity of “some” fans, shame over “certain” fan practices, over having those practices revealed to the rest of the world, or to the fannish objects themselves, as the fan at the convention discovered. There is also shame about studying something as “frivolous” as fandom—or worse yet, taking frivolous pleasure ourselves, “sitting too close” instead of remaining suitably detached observers.¹⁵

Zubernis and Larsen point out that these strong emotional reactions (anger and shame but also love and excitement) intermingle and help fans negotiate their identities in the fandom space.

Yet not all of the Supernatural fandom is toxic, according to Ruby. Ruby advises any new fans to find the multishipper spaces within the fandom. “There you can ship whoever you want. You don’t have to be in shipper wars or anything like that.”¹⁶ This is where Ruby resides, a place where she can geek out over whatever she wants without fear of toxicity or retaliation. She also says that for anyone trying to get into fandom should find what they want to talk about: whether that is the meta discussions of color choice in an episode or an obsession over Castiel’s coat, there is “a place for everyone in this fandom.”¹⁷

Writing Process

In her writing process, Ruby uses several different tools. First, she outlines her work, chapter by chapter, in a Google document that is shared with her beta reader (Figure 6). The first few chapter outlines are very sparse, Ruby points out, but the outlines get more detailed as the story goes on. Ruby works on her current fics often times at her day-job and will think of lines that dialogue that ultimately end up in the outline. Ruby said, “I throw the dialogue in there when I think of it and then build the scene around just a few sentences.”¹⁸ After that, she determines where the scenes that she has written fits into the overall chapter, arranging and rearranging as she goes. Sometimes, if she knows how the fic will end, she writes the end and then works backward through the story.

Other times, she let themselves skip short scenes if the details of the scenes do not matter. Ruby states, “[Sometimes], I have to determine if my characters are missing vital characterization—if they are fully-fleshed out or not. Sometimes they aren’t, so I have to go through and rewrite them, even if I don’t want to.”¹⁹

Act 1 -The Party

- Dean at Party, close target, subtle hit
- Event double booked
 - Ketch gets other target
- Dean uses distraction to get his own target
- Sam bitching about schedule conflict with Johnson

Act 2 - The Meet

- Meet with Ellen
 - At Club owned by Crowley (White Pheonix)
- Photo of missing kid and basic intel
- Paying 3x regular fee

Act 3 - Legwork

- Figure out Sinless kids have been disappearing.
 - Targeting runners/Shadow Community kids
- Get in contact with others, not a one person job
 - Bitching about splitting fees, removing chance of meds bills for Bobby

Act 4 - Kids rescue

- Kids Brainwashed/Dreamscape with Djinn venom
- Ben amongst kids
 - Dean pissed he didn't know he was missing
- Krissy amongst kids

Figure 6: An example of Ruby's outline

In order to track herself, Ruby uses a word tracker on a Google spreadsheet. She has coded the document, using HTML code, to track all of the words that she types in a day. She sets her limit at 500 words a day, and when she hits that minimum, the box in the spreadsheet will

turn green. Even if the words are not a part of the story or fic she is currently writing, the tracker compiles all of her words, which often helps Ruby trick herself into writing more, especially if she has not written for her fic. Even if she does not hit the word minimum for the day, she will often make up the word limit on another day. Her writing process takes a while, as she typically has the entire fic completely written and beta'd before publishing it, meaning that a 30,000-word piece she is working on in March typically will not be published until November or December of that same year.

Current Projects

At the time of writing, Ruby is working on a sequel to a previous work which had 30,000 words with over 100 comments and a Mature rating²⁰ and which she says is taking her forever to write. She has switched the point of view in the story from Dean to Sam Winchester (who are brothers in the television show, and sometimes lovers in fanworks), a point of view she does not typically write in. Her characterizations of these characters, she said, are canon characterizations within the fandom, but she stated that she tends to highlight their flaws more than other writers in the fandom. She states:

Parts of this fandom are really young—some *Supernatural* fans are so hesitant to work with dark! fics²¹ because some sixteen, seventeen, eighteen-year-old might jump into your comments and start yelling at you about how you're "mischaracterizing" their character. I don't get the whole, 'this character is my absolute favorite, they are perfect and can do no wrong' or tying so much of your identity to a character. *Supernatural* is full of dark themes anyways, and to act like these characters are perfect and wholesome all the time when they're actually pretty problematic is not the way to go. That's not how I deal with life and I don't need people to be nice to the character because I love them.²²

Ruby discusses exploring the psychological tensions of the characters; for instance, Dean, the older of the two siblings, is the de-facto leader in canon; yet, Ruby likes to play with his anxieties about protecting the people he loves, his attachment issues, and his co-dependency on his brother. For Sam, Ruby likes to play around with his avoidance issues and dismissive

tendencies. In some fandoms, characterizations are pulled from certain seasons for fanon (fan-made canon that is generally accepted by most of the fandom), and for a series that has been on



Figure 7: Fanart by jasric, found at jasric.tumblr.com. This picture features (from L to R) Sam Winchester, Castiel, and Dean Winchester.

as long as *Supernatural*, it means that characterizations can come from different seasons. For example (with more well-known characters), some *Harry Potter* fanfic might take the characterizations of Harry Potter from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (where he is angsty and angry) and the characterization of Draco Malfoy from say, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (where he is scared and upset) when making a ship between the two. Ruby typically uses the characterizations of Dean from seasons 9 and 10, Sam from seasons 3 and 4, and Castiel from season 6. By using different seasons for the characterizations, Ruby is able to play around with the tensions that the characterizations create.

Multimedia

Fanart

Ruby has only recently begun using fanart along with her stories. She states that the fanart is typically a reward for writing longer, chaptered, fics. She has noticed that fanart has helped her stories get more hits, especially when she was regularly posting on tumblr. Ruby states, “tumblr was a very visual website, and if you only post text, you don’t get as much traction—images attract people.”²³ She said that if you have an image attached to a fic, people are more likely to click on the image, which will naturally lead them to the story. She believes that more people consume fanart than they do fic because people tend to react more to visual images than to auditory ones. Additionally, the fanart helps someone visualize what is going on in the story. For example, Ruby once wrote a story where she was attempting to describe the image of a wet salt flat, something that readers may not be able to picture. Ruby’s current fan artist reached out to her with the offer to draw the picture after Ruby had published the story, bringing her vision to life in a digitally rendered drawing. Ruby says that fanart can also bring visual learners and viewers into fanfiction as it gives them something to guide their reading. In a study by The Institute for the Advancement of Research in Education (IARE), researchers found that using visual objects could improve learning in the following areas: retention, reading comprehension, students’ achievement, and critical thinking.²⁴ When information is represented visually and learned verbally, the material is more accessible to fans as well, including fans with disabilities, which in turn can make the fandom more accessible online.

Mood Boards

Ruby has recently discovered how to make mood boards for her stories, starting with a story outside of the Supernatural fandom. In fandom, mood boards are also called aesthetic posts, and are defined, by Fanlore, as:

a type of image set. It is visually unified, often by being desaturated or having a specific color tint added.

[...] it is common to see

aesthetic posts about individual

fandoms, pairings, or characters. They might include shots of the character from canon or a fancasting of the character, images of locations associated with that character, images of props associated with that character [...]²⁵

These mood boards (like the one in Figure 8) are very popular on tumblr, due to the ease with which images can be posted.

Mood boards also exist on Pinterest, as some fans create whole boards just based on their story. These aesthetics of other mood boards is what drew Ruby to the art. She says that laying images out in a mood board also helps her readers visualize what is going on in the story. For example, when writing a story, Ruby may look up the outfits that she wants her characters to



Figure 8: Mood board for Ravenclaw house from Harry Potter by @LeafyAkiko

wear from fashion designer catwalks or online shopping websites. A simple screengrab or saved file of the outfit can help her create a mood board, especially if the article of clothing is hard to describe. By posting the mood board at the beginning of the story, in her author's notes²⁶, or on her social media, she is able to show the readers her inspiration behind the story.

Interactions with Readers

Discord

Ruby's involvement with her fandom and other fandoms on discord also help guide a reader's reading of her story. She likes the chatroom function of discord—it takes her back to the old days of fandom, when fans joined in secret on AOL chatrooms and on the early days of LiveJournal (Figure 9).²⁷ LiveJournal was very popular at the start of fandom, bringing fans from all across the Internet to converge on the chatrooms. In the mid 2000s, LiveJournal lost much of their reader usage as the servers transitioned over to a Russian company and, in the late 2010s, over to a Russian server to become compliant with Russian social media law. LiveJournal, for those who have not used it, was very similar to a Web 1.0 version of tumblr—every post developed would create its own URL (like tumblr does with its posts), each user had their own friends list, and users are able to communicate via posts in a chat like way. Dreamwidth (Figure 10), an increasingly popular website for many fandoms, uses a heavily modded LiveJournal

code; yet, Ruby has not tried out the website yet for her own fandom because of a lack of popularity in her previous Supernatural tumblr fandom.

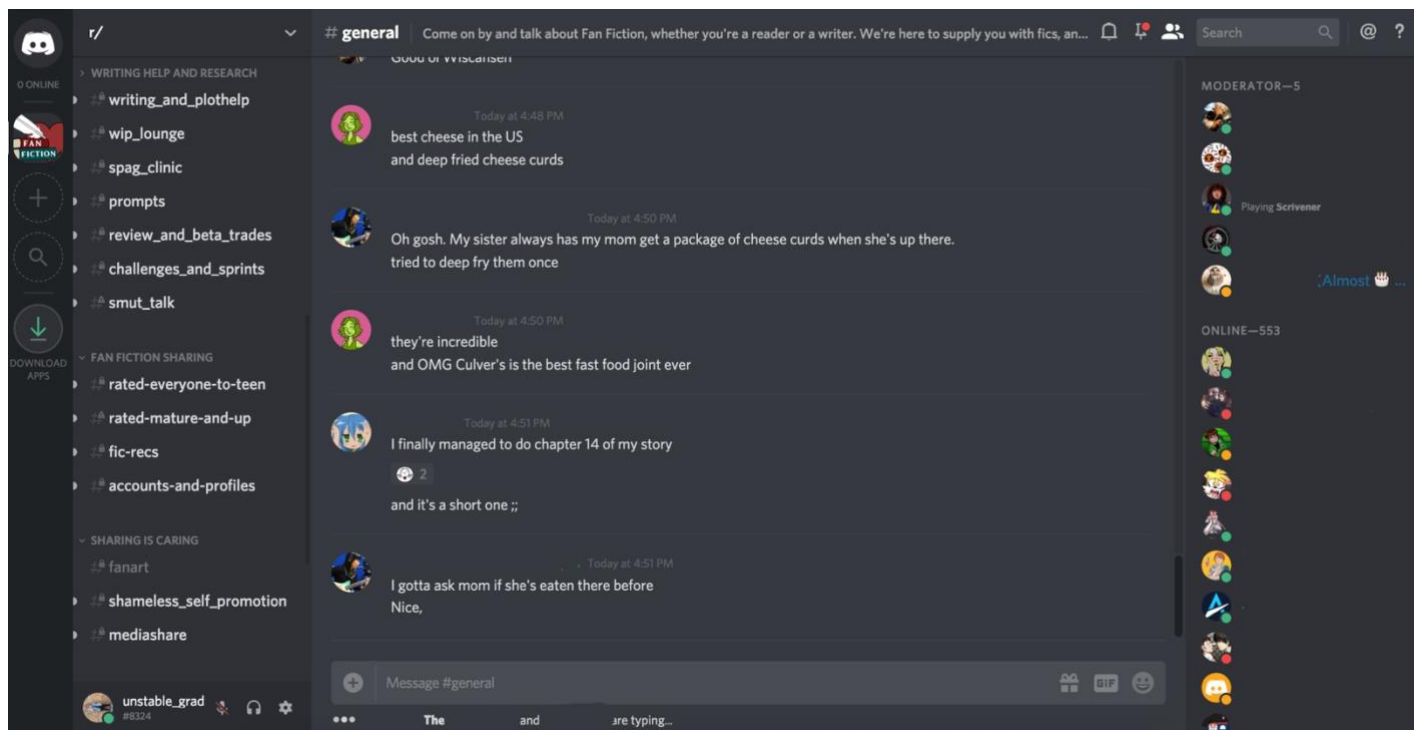


Figure 9: A screenshot of a discord server. Note the channels on the left-hand side, which allows for users to interact on different subjects.

Discord has other similar features to LiveJournal other than the chatroom feature. It also uses mods, who control the content that is posted on the website. Ruby can normally be found on the general subchannels, asking questions about her plot, hashing out fandom drama, or showing people pictures of her puppy. She also frequents the WIPs channel to help out others who may be stuck in their WIPs. Because of her status as moderator, she makes sure that everyone is following the established rules of the channels, and generally keeping an eye out for those who, “shame others for content. Guess what? You don’t have to look at it—there’s a back button on the internet, and with one click, you don’t have to look at it anymore.”²⁸

Comments

Another way that Ruby interacts with her readers is through the comments on her AO3 stories. She states, “I answer every single comment; I am a literal human puppy when I get them—so very excited and eager to comment back.”²⁹ She

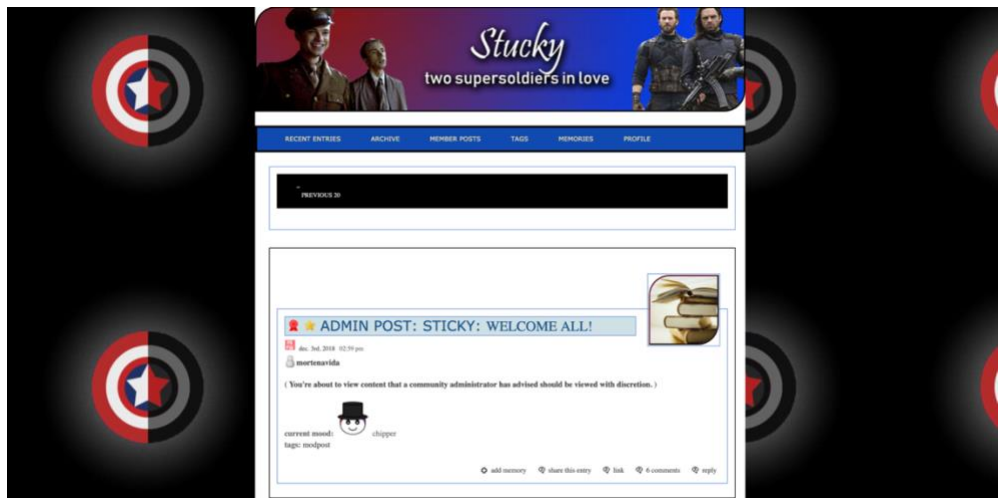


Figure 10: A screengrab of a dreamwidth homepage.

says that her comment back depends on the relationship that she has with that person. If she does not recognize the username from previous comments or a discord server, she generally leaves something along the lines of “thank you for reading,” which is similar to many other fanfiction authors. If the commenter is someone who she interacts with a lot, the answer will tend to be more personalized. She says, overall, about seventy percent of the comments that she receives on the AO3 stories receive detailed comments back, which makes her very lucky, she says. She says that discord draws out a lot of these more detailed comments, as it helps fans from multiple fandoms interact with one another. “The communities created within the servers: it gets a lot of people to read outside of their fandoms. People are like, ‘Maybe I’ll go read this because someone posted it and it seems interesting.’”³⁰ According to Ruby, this is what fandom should be all about—generous sharing and cooperative flailing³¹ over things that everyone loves. These comments act as multimedia, and form a paratext around the work where readers are able to interact.

The Future of Fandom, According to Ruby

Because of the turn from tumblr, the *Supernatural* fandom has largely dispersed all over the Internet. Some have stayed with tumblr, but because of the prominence of a slash ship in the fandom, many have left for discord or other websites. Ruby has an account on pillowfort (figure 11), a new unbeta'd website that currently requires a small payment for an account after a waiting period and selection process by the website. The advantages of pillowfort are that the website has a feed like the dashboard of tumblr, making it scrollable. It also has the advantages of communities where people are allowed to have conversations in chatroom structures, a clear advantage over the reblogging to comment function of tumblr. Additionally, pillowfort has a closed-off community

aspect with the ability to moderate the discussion, which is something that Ruby desires and is similar to discord. Yet, the guidelines of these communities are not very strict, meaning there are no set moderators so discussions would rely on

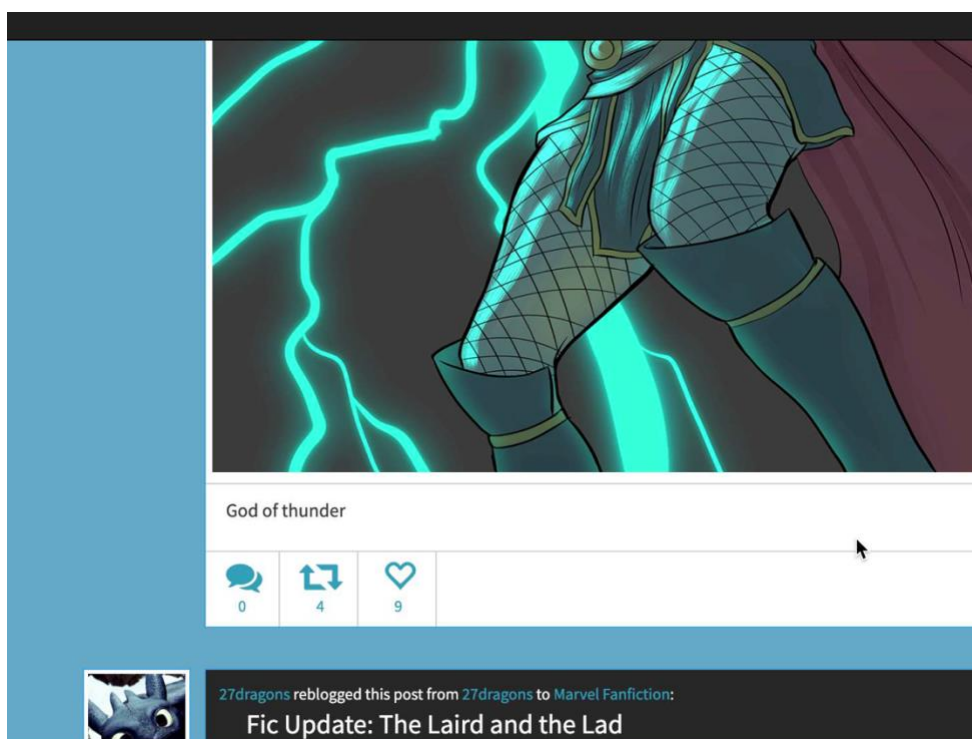


Figure 11: A video scrolling through a pillowfort dashboard; <https://tinyurl.com/v3bq8m3w>

users to create their own rules, which some may not care for. Finally, because the website is a .io (a country code which means different Internet usage rules), NSFW content is not allowed on the website—and the website reserves the right to kick anyone off for inappropriate content. Ruby

said that they would need to change their domain completely before allowing NSFW work onto the website.

A website that does allow NSFW is Pornhub (Figures 12 and 13), which reached out to many of the users of tumblr before the Fall.

Pornhub wanted many of the users of tumblr who used the website for sex work to transfer over; yet, when asked about fandom, Pornhub said they would gladly take some of the NSFW content these fans generated. Ruby points out

“They said they would give us unlimited storage and a platform that wouldn’t shame us—there was some discussion in the Supernatural fandom about switching over, but my needs were already met, so I didn’t see much of a point.”³² However, Ruby said if Pornhub wanted to build a section for gifs

and erotica, then she would consider switching over, stating, “More power to them, it will give them a shit ton of users. tumblr lost like 100 million-page views between December and January and all those people need somewhere to go.”³³

From a Reader’s Perspective

Ruby was selected to be a participant in this study because of her detailed reply comments, use of fanart and relationship with her artist, and her genuine consideration in using

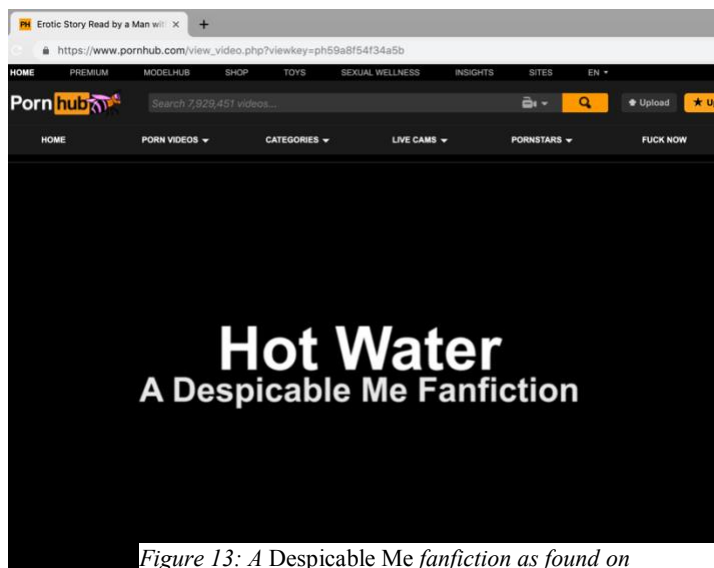


Figure 13: A Despicable Me fanfiction as found on Pornhub.

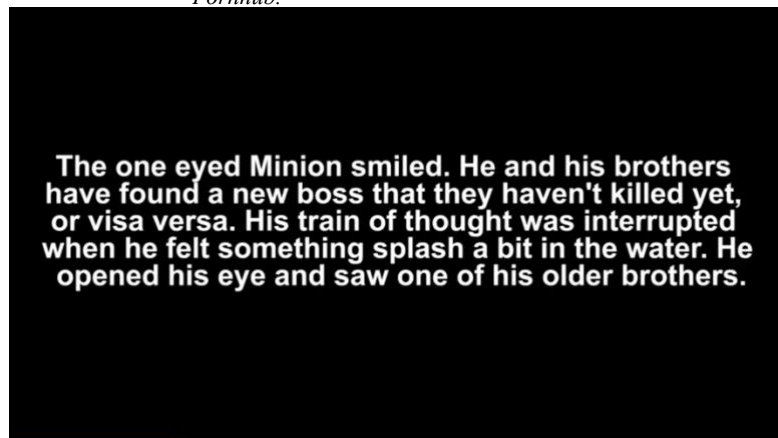


Figure 12: Because of Pornhub's video platform, the fanfiction may have to have a "read-aloud" component to it.

more multimedia in her future fics (which is seen through her inclusion of mood boards). As a reader, each of these options helped me better understand her writing and her way of communicating with readers. The translation of imagery in the writing process is always a game of chance, especially in fanfiction, where readers understand what the characters and sets of a movie or television show look like, but may not understand the other, added material. For example, if an AU takes place in an American city, readers from any other country may have a hard time picturing the set-up of the scene. This is where multimedia can benefit the readers. These designs, as Kress and Leeuwen would call them, better help a reader understand the discourse of the fic. Furthermore, analyzing the fic through these designs helped me better understand Ruby's understanding of the source text, as well as her involvement in her own fandom.

As stated before, Ruby typically uses fanart as her multimedia, either embedding it in the middle of the text or placing it at the beginning. In one chapter, she embedded the art following a paragraph of description.

Dean could feel the rise of Castiel's magic before he saw it [...] It had been night outside, but now light streamed through the kitchen window, the stark white of burning magnesium or lighting strikes. It cast strange shadows across the room, fractioned by the coloured glass baubles, making Dean's eyes water as he turned away, focusing on the large shadow wings that unfurled from Cas' back.³⁴

There are many sensory pieces to this snippet of Ruby's work—she is a writer who uses a lot of imagery, and this is no exception. In the comments on this chapter, several people had commented on how beautiful the art was in this section and how it played off of Ruby's use of imagery. One reader goes through the chapter, removing about 15 lines of source text and discussing it at length in their comment. The commenter mentions the imagery that Ruby uses three times, synthesizing their discussion of the comments with a note to Ruby's worldbuilding.

The commenter writes, “You are really good at throwing in tiny details that show a LOT. And then the exchange between Sam and Cas. I don't have to guess, and I don't have to read a lot to understand how much history is there.”³⁵ This commentary on the chapter is a “reflection of the reader’s response that is intended for the author, but does not necessarily include specific suggestions for improvement.”³⁶ It shows that the reader took the time to close read and understand the chapter, recognized the literary techniques and figurative language that Ruby was successfully using, and in a way, provide feedback to the author that they learned and understand the subtexts within this chapter.

Comments in fanfiction can serve as reader guides: they act as places where authors further connect with their readers. The Author Notes also act similarly to comments, and, as Maria Lindgren Leavenworth argues, “is one of the strongest indications of how the function of the paratext has changed with new publication forms and in a cultural climate where texts are produced in close temporal proximity to their readers.”³⁷ Ruby uses Author Notes sparingly in her works, typically starting with a longer A/N at the beginning of the work and then small additional notes throughout the chapter with warnings. One chapter’s A/N states, “this chapter earns the smut rating.”³⁸ This paratext, or additional material supplied by authors, editors, publishers, etc. that surrounds the main text, gives a warning to the reader: if you proceed, there will be NSFW content that may not be appropriate for readers under a certain age. Authors Notes, coupled with the tags, ratings, and warnings, create a dense paratext around the work that supplies information to the reader beyond their reading. In the tags and warnings, authors can discuss any trigger warnings, “dark” material, or create their own tags that may link their other stories together. Additional tags may appear with the updating of the story: many authors will tell readers to “watch the tags” in their summary if the story will have a change. There is a debate

among many fan communities with the warnings, specifically the “Major Character Death” warning as many think it will spoil a twist in their story, which is where the tags could possibly help out.

Comment Analysis

In the visualization of term frequency in Ruby’s work, I noted several things (Figure 14). The first was the frequency of the word “like.” It is the biggest word in the world cloud and is used over 60 times in the comments. This made me wonder what the usage of the word was: was it used for a comparison or was it used in more colloquial terms? After looking

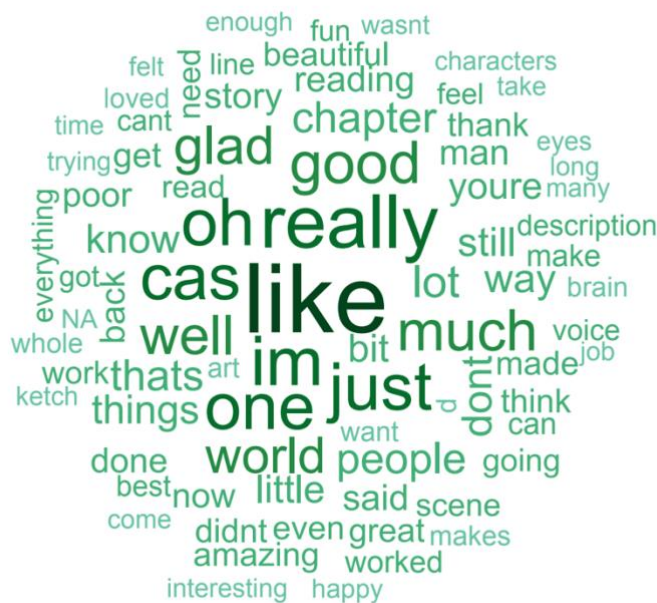


Figure 14: A word cloud representation of Ruby’s comments.

through the data, I found that “like” was used 24 times as a verb, 21 times in citing the content of the story, 14 times as a comparison tool, and 4 times as colloquial language. I was interested in the use of “like” as a comparison word: readers compared characters to other characters, to their own actions, and to the television show and the world at large. These connections (often referred to as “text-to-text,” “text-to-self,” and “text-to-world”) are commonly used by teachers and professors when teaching analytical and close reading.³⁹ For example, one reader makes a text-to-text connection between the work and the world of *Supernatural*, as well as connections between the work and other AUs:

Okay so I don't know Shadowrun and I don't read a lot of AUs *like* this, but they sound in-character enough and the world interesting enough that I think I'll *like* it. I despise All-Human/No-Powers (or Modern AU for LotR, Game of Thrones medieval stuff) Basically stripping everything interesting about the world and the characters. HOWEVER, this world feels very SPN-*like* if that makes any sense? Dean sounds very Dean and all the little things you've added to make it recognizably SPN *like* Sinclair being the old art guy really makes. Also, glad he still has Baby! Anyway, it was riveting, and I was actually annoyed when my brother came home and wanted to talk so I had to take a break from reading. Can't wait to see more. Also, that cover art is AMAZING.⁴⁰

The use of “like” in this comment acts as a form of mixture description, or “descriptions of target documents defined by their likeness to mixtures of other documents,” according to Peter Organisciak and Michel Twidale.⁴¹ These descriptions often act as more informative understandings and relations of a text, as it helps readers make the connections between the original text and the transformed text. For Ruby's work, these mixture descriptions happen frequently in the comments, showing the expanded frame of reference from fans in this fandom.

Another reader stated:

OH. MY. GODS. WTF JUST HAPPENED??! THAT WAS FASNIATING!! Okay girl calm down for a minute breathe for sec. The imagery of the caretaker walking into pool of blood and leaving red footprints everywhere was very unnerving. Poor lady! Glad they rescued the people that were snatched. Are they all *like* assassinations or is it more a programmable thing *like* on Dollhouse? I can't wait to find out
aa!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!⁴²

Here, the reader makes a connection to *Dollhouse*, another sci-fi show. These connections through the text, whether the readers realize them or not, help develop their own intertextuality for a work. These conclusions drawn on the word “like” were completed in the first round of data analysis. Ana and I then made “like” a



Figure 15: Updated word cloud for Ruby's work.

stopword, which changed the analysis in the term frequency. However, words that connote mixture descriptions and textual connections still occurred (Figure 15). For example, “world” was a frequent term, acknowledging Ruby’s world building skills, which relate to the comments regarding mixture descriptions.

The second thing that I noted when analyzing the data was the topics from the topic modeling (Figure 16). The words from Topics 2 and 8 specifically stuck out to me. In Topic 2, the writing skills of Ruby are again commented on. Readers have commented on her ability to world build, which appeared in the topic modeling. One reader said, “The description of the city sets the scene and the area up so well. You world-build like it is an original and I can see your love in it.”⁴³ However, as I

have noted above, these

writing skills and

descriptions helped the

readers develop a paratext

and intertextuality. In

Topic 7, the words “made,”

“felt,” and “looking,” were

intriguing. When I went

back and searched through

the comments to find the

specific locations of these words, I discovered that the readers were physically placing

themselves into the scenes where the characters were. One reader said, “Suddenly brain matter ...

that was unexpected! I like all the details Dean is taking in even in this chaos ... as a good runner

	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6
[1,]	"still"	"good"	"made"	"glad"	"know"	"said"
[2,]	"lot"	"well"	"things"	"people"	"read"	"wanted"
[3,]	"little"	"beautiful"	"enough"	"worked"	"didn't"	"work"
[4,]	"even"	"thats"	"think"	"bit"	"interesting"	"kids"
[5,]	"just"	"worldbuilding"	"felt"	"many"	"world"	"bad"
[6,]	"story"	"looked"	"looking"	"write"	"deans"	"writing"
[7,]	"one"	"descriptions"	"scene"	"thing"	"voice"	"course"
[8,]	"youre"	"chapter"	"need"	"nurse"	"brain"	"around"
[9,]	"banter"	"whole"	"line"	"creepy"	"djinn"	"eyes"
[10,]	"wasnt"	"just"	"go"	"tension"	"yes"	"loved"
	Topic 7	Topic 8				
[1,]	"oh"	"one"				
[2,]	"reading"	"amazing"				
[3,]	"now"	"art"				
[4,]	"great"	"back"				
[5,]	"got"	"imagery"				
[6,]	"man"	"come"				
[7,]	"chapter"	"fun"				
[8,]	"yeah"	"cool"				
[9,]	"okay"	"poor"				
[10,]	"feels"	"take"				

Figure 16: Topic modeling for Ruby’s comments.

should! This reads really smoothly. Everything is happening all at once, but I never felt lost or confused.”⁴⁴ Fans are described as “self-insertish,” but instead of occurring in the original media, this insertion was in a transformative work. This shows that fans are continually reading beyond the book and creating beyond what their perceived boundaries are, which in turn shows the use of fandom spaces as a space for learning and connecting.

Conclusion

In summation, Ruby’s works show her dedication to her readers and her fandom. Her use of discord as a workshopping space, as well as her inclusion of fanart in her stories provides a rich multimodal experience for her readers. Additionally, Ruby’s world building and usage of literary techniques draws many readers to her stories, where they comment on her use of techniques and offer in-depth speculation and discussions. Ruby’s comments provided the best view of close-reading skills, as readers analyzed the text and then through their comments, showed their learning and understanding skills. Finally, Ruby’s use of platforms helps supplement her works as it allows for her to converse with readers in new and developmental ways.

¹ Ruby (fan fiction author), in an interview with the author, spring 2019.

² Mizuko Ito, Judd Antin, Megan Finn, Arthur Law, Annie Manion, Sarai Mitnick, David Schlossberg, Sarita Yardi, Heather A. Hortst, *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009) 93.

³ Your home fandom is the fandom that you always come back to.

⁴ Fix it fics are defined as “fanfiction that changes something about canon that the fan writing the fic wasn’t happy with. This can be anything from explaining plot holes or inconsistent characterization to bringing a favorite character back from the dead.”; “Fix It,” *Fanlore*, last modified December 21, 2018, <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Fix-it>.

⁵ Ruby takes commissions to print and bind fan fiction. She typically charges for this but says its often nice for people to hold their works in their own hands.

⁶ Bangs (or big bang) are defined as, “specific types of challenge usually involving long fics and accompanying artwork. This type of challenge is a reprise of the old zine tradition of collaboration between artists and writers for internet fandoms.”; “Big Bang,” *Fanlore*, last modified December 21, 2018, https://fanlore.org/wiki/Big_Bang.

⁷ Michael Rocha “Supernatural’ Now Longest Running Sci-Fi Show in U.S.,” *WebArchive*, last modified July 12, 2015, <http://www.discoverd.com/news/2015/jul/12/comic-con-2015-supernatural-panel/#&panel1-1>.

⁸ ArchiveofOurOwn, accessed on 26 February 2019, <https://www.archiveofourown.org>.

⁹ Rouse, “Modern Day Storytelling.”

¹⁰ Aaron Barlow, “If It Sucks, It’s Your Fault’: Joss Whedon and the Empowerment of Fans,” *Cult Pop Culture: How the Fringe Became Mainstream (Vol. 1. Film and Television)* ed. by Bob Batchelor, (Praeger 2012) 168.

¹¹ Ruby, 2019.

¹² Ruby, 2019.

¹³ Ruby, 2019.

¹⁴ Ruby, 2019.

¹⁵ Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen, *Fandom At the Crossroads: Celebration, Shame, and Fan/Producer Relationships*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 2.

¹⁶ Ruby, 2019.

¹⁷ Ruby, 2019.

¹⁸ Ruby, 2019.

¹⁹ Ruby, 2019.

²⁰ Ruby typically writes in the Teen or Mature rating for the *Supernatural* fandom, with only one of the almost thirty fics being in explicit. She says this happens because she does not write a lot of smut, or sexually explicit content, for her ship.

²¹ Dark! fics contain “Dark” material and in many fandoms is often defined as material or fics that includes violence, blood and gore, rape/non-consensual content, death, abuse, or pedophilia.

²² Ruby, 2019.

²³ Ruby, 2019.

²⁴ “Graphic Organizers: A Review of Scientifically Based Research,” *The Institute for the Advancement of Research in Education*, 2003, 1-10.

²⁵ “Aesthetic Edit,” *Fanlore*, last modified December 21, 2018, https://fanlore.org/wiki/Aesthetic_Edit.

²⁶ Author’s note is commonly abbreviated as A/N.

²⁷ LiveJournal, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://www.livejournal.com/>.

²⁸ Ruby, 2019.

²⁹ Ruby, 2019.

³⁰ Ruby, 2019.

³¹ Flailing does not have a negative connotation in fandom—it generally refers to being very excited about something.

³² Ruby, 2019.

³³ According to the website Similarweb, in December 2019, tumblr had 521,000,000 views and had 437,000,000 views in January 2019. In March 2019, the page had dropped 15.4% from the February count, and continued to decline; Ruby, 2019.

³⁴ Comment on Ruby’s work.

³⁵ Comment on Ruby’s work.

³⁶ Reagle, 45.

³⁷ Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, “Paratextual Navigation as a Research Method: Fan Fiction Archives and Read Instructions,” in *Research Methods for Reading Digital Data in the Digital Humanities*, (ed. by Gabriele Griffin and Matt Hayler, 51-71, Edinburg: Edinburg University Press Ltd., 2016) 54.

³⁸ Ruby, 2019.

³⁹ Diane Kardash, “Making Connections: Text to Self, Text to Text, Text to World,” *Google Sites* (blog), 2004, <https://sites.google.com/a/alaska.edu/diane-kardash/Home/making-connections>.

⁴⁰ Comment on Ruby’s work.

⁴¹ Peter Organisciak and Michel Twidale, “When the elevator pitch meets the subject heading: How mixtures of other documents can describe what a document is about,” *American Society for Information Science and Technology* 41, no. 1 (2014), 1-9.

⁴² Comment on Ruby’s work.

⁴³ Comment on Ruby’s work.

⁴⁴ Comment on Ruby’s work.

Chapter 2

Carol* started off her fandom journey in the *Twilight* fandom, a place where she was able to practice her craft and receive feedback on all of her works. Her introduction into a very active fandom allowed for her to build an audience and a following that saw Big Name Fans rise through the ranks almost weekly.¹ *Twilight* was immensely popular for the years that the books were being published, and were breeding grounds for constructive criticism (concrit), according to Carol. “When I was writing for *Twilight*, the community put up a discussion every time I added a chapter, and I learned a lot from those discussions.”² Carol’s creative writing background began in school where she took workshops, something which rarely continues after undergraduate or graduate classes finish. These discussions in the *Twilight* fandom helped Carol develop her style and helped her better understand her readers. “If your reader is confused with your writing, you have failed them,” she said, “So that’s why feedback in comments is so crucial for new writers.”³

Carol had always wanted to be a writer growing up, and began self-publishing some non-fan pieces and posted them on the internet. These stories were the “earnest of her heart,” yet she found that after she began earnestly publishing works, writing was not as fun or as interesting for her. Additionally, her more kink-niche based stories made more money, but these were not what

she always wanted to be writing. “I turned to fandom a few years later and it’s been a great time—and the [Marvel Cinematic Universe] MCU has become kind of a second home for me.”⁴ She has been writing in the MCU fandom for two years now, and also dabbled a little bit in the Drarry ship for a few years after *Twilight*.

Along with posting on AO3, Carol interacts with other fans and her readership on Twitter and occasionally tumblr; however, she feels that the fandom is really young on tumblr and that “it’s [not] always appropriate to discuss some of the themes in my writing with people [under 18].”⁵ Most of the MCU fandom has

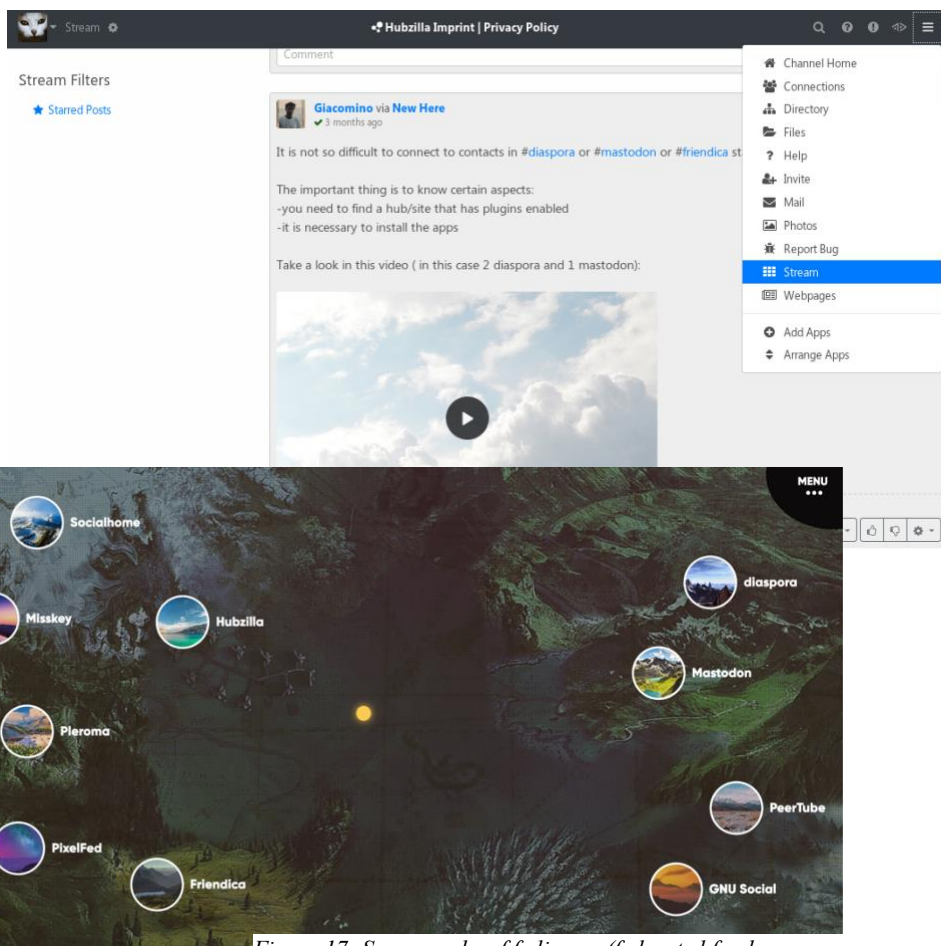


Figure 17: Screenshot of fediverse (federated fandom websites) and hubzilla (top). These websites function similar to tumblr but can arguably do a lot more than one interface.

moved over to dreamwidth, federated fandom spaces (like hubzilla), as well as pillowfort and discord.⁶⁷ After the new NSFW guidelines on tumblr, fan writer Impertinence wrote a meta-analysis essay on platforms called “Federation and Fandom,” arguing for the move of fandom over to fediverse. She stated:

Federation would solve a lot of fandom’s current problems. For starters, there is a huge variety of roll-your-own federated services out there. There’s Peertube, which is focused on video hosting; Pixelfed, focused on image hosting; Mastadon and other microblogging frameworks; Friendica and Osana, which are focused on social networking; Hubzilla,

which is focused on all-purpose social networking, file storage, and wiki management; and Nextcloud, which is focused on file storage. This network of frameworks is incredibly powerful, and some of them are very easy to set up.⁸

Impertinence argued that a decentralized space would give members the ability to stay together and stay out of the capitalistic spaces of the internet (i.e. those who look to capitalize off of fandom). And while the decentralized movement is a good idea to some, it has not taken off just

yet (Figure 17). Some members of Carol's fandom have moved over to Slack (which is similar in function to Discord);⁹ yet, Carol has not really gotten on board with the instant messaging fandom just yet (Figure 18). "To me," she said,

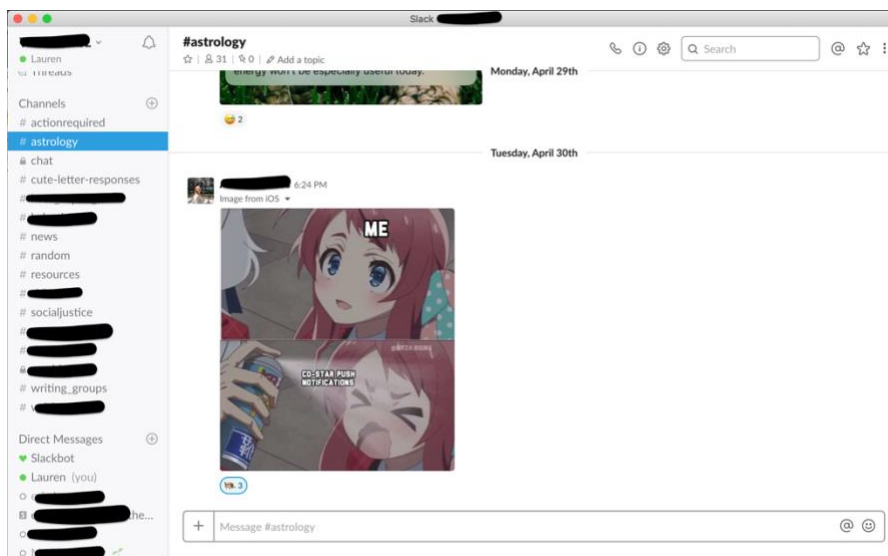


Figure 18: A screengrab of a channel on Slack.

"Discord [and Slack] just feels like you have to make a commitment to be in a conversation [all the time], and if you're not in the conversation, you're interrupting when you try to jump in."¹⁰ Yet, the fractioning of the MCU fandom has not stopped Carol's love for the Steve/Bucky ship, nor has it stopped her from writing and interacting with other fans in the fandom.

The Marvel Cinematic Universe Fandom

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is a media franchise developed from the original Marvel comic books. The film franchise began in 2008 with *Iron Man* (starring Robert Downey Jr. as Tony Stark | Ironman) and recently culminated with *Avengers: Endgame* in April 2019. This grouping of films (from 2008 to 2019) is called the "Infinity Saga" and was split into three

“phases,” each phase ending with an *Avengers* movie. There are twenty-two films in this saga. The Marvel Cinematic Universe has also had television shows on multiple platforms, including *Marvel: Agents of Shield* on primetime television, and *Daredevil*, *Luke Cage*, *Jessica Jones*, *Iron Fist*, and *The Defenders* on Netflix.¹¹ The franchise additionally has attractions at theme parks, spin-off videogames, commercials, and guidebooks for each film.

The MCU has some of the highest grossing films in history and has a massive fan following online and in person. On AO3, there are 281,747 works in the MCU. The two most popular ships are Bucky Barnes/Steve Rogers (Carol’s ship) with over 40,000 fics and Steve Rogers/ Tony Stark with 25,000 fics. Slash fics are extremely popular in the MCU, as many fans note the homoerotic subtexts between the characters in the movies (for instance, Steve going out of his way to protect Bucky from harm, rescue him, and stay devoted to him despite his wrongdoings, feels to many fans as the beginnings of a homosexual relationship). However, these films have been largely criticized for their lack of racial and gender diversity, especially in the early films. The MCU produced sixteen films before casting an African American actor in a lead role in *Black Panther* (Zoe Saldana, a Latinx actress was cast in *Guardians of the Galaxy* in 2014, but did not play a lead role) and twenty films before producing a film where a female character was in a lead role in *Captain Marvel*. Despite these setbacks, the fandom is home to fans of all different backgrounds who still love and support the original content.

Writing Process

In Carol’s writing process, she finds inspiration in many different places. Her current work (at the publishing of this thesis) is reaching towards 90,000 words and was developed out of her political science undergraduate minor, love for Greek mythology, practice in and readings of comic and multiverses, and studies of religion. She begins with a very complex outline, which

she arranges and rearranges as she goes through the story time and time again. She writes on her lunch hour at work, and often as she is sitting at her desk during her work day she jots down ideas onto a Google document. She states, “Most of what I want to write is already up in my head, so it doesn’t take long at all to write it down after I think of it.”¹² Carol also uses her weekends to write, as her husband works, meaning she can be undistracted for longer periods of time. She does not use a set time for her writing each week, as she feels that setting a time might limit her, but instead writes as much as she can one week without worrying about restraints.

Carol switches between using a beta and using the grammar checking service Grammarly. She had used a beta for about a year and a half in the past; however, she felt that the beta could be “self-insert-ish,” meaning that they often disagreed over characterizations, mild kink scenes, or other plot points. Additionally, past betas had conflicting schedules with Carol’s writing time, meaning that they had a hard time making time to go over the work together. Carol often overrode the concerns of the beta and published the story how she had written it anyways, but agrees that to some, having the feedback of a beta can be helpful. Reagle points out that in a beta relationship, “both writers and beta commenter come to know each other’s idiosyncrasies and may become friends [...] however a balance of honesty and support must be struck.”¹³ Losing this honesty could cause Carol to mistrust betas when they tried to lend feedback. However, for her current work, Carol has taken on a beta again, who she found on a discord server. Carol says that she really values the feedback that this beta gives and that their relationship has been founded on respect, which in turn has caused some much-needed writing motivation and for her word count output to increase.

When posting, Carol has to have at least sixty percent of the story already written, because sometimes comments that recommend plotlines or changes in the characterizations of a character can be derailing. Carol states:

When I first started in fandom, I was in a community where the fans within the community would talk about the different chapters and didn't ban authors from seeing the content. As an author, it gave me the opportunity to make those tiny corrections. What I saw from these comments was that the readers thought of a character one way, which is not what I wanted that character to do, so I ended up introducing another character in the story to guide the main character to what I wanted them to do. It really helped me grow the story and make it better, which is great for longer fics, but at the end of the day, I'm not workshopping these pieces, and some of the feedback that I've gotten in those communities has been really hurtful.¹⁴

Carol also states that the current MCU fandom has an unwritten standard that people do not give constructive criticism on stories. "It's pretty much, absolutely forbidden," she says. "Most people are like, 'If you're trying to critique my piece, just fuck off and die.'"¹⁵ Yet, some authors may take time to analyze comments if their readers state that something in their story does not make sense. There is a line between criticizing a work with "bad" concrit (i.e. critiquing the author's writing style) versus "good" concrit (i.e. showing the author where their character may not be in line with fanon). This line of thought is similar to the thought process of many other fan fiction writers and can build a community of anti-bad-concrit in fandoms.

After posting, Carol tries to interact as much as she possibly can with her readers. She has spent years building up an audience in fandom and uses the same username consistently. "Sometimes, I'll have some ask if I'm the same [Carol] who published in *Twilight*, and so it's cool to see those people who I knew years ago come back to my works."¹⁶ Carol says that all her time spent cultivating her fandom audience has helped her create three rules for herself in fandom:

1. Always be nice about everything.

2. Be really supportive: of new writers, of people who feel insecure, of all writers.
3. Promote works from your audience and try to link your readers to other stories in the author notes section on AO3.

Carol says that she always tries to focus on the positives of her audience and the fandom in general, stating, “I’m really happy with this fandom because there’s a lot of really awesome and supportive people.”¹⁷ She tries to answer every comment that she receives, and says that responding to or acknowledging every comment will help authors build a fandom within a fandom.

Current Projects

Carol is currently working on a fully-illustrated, multi-chaptered work. There will be over forty illustrations, some which are classic portraits, and others that are comic book style illustrations. This work

A	B	C	D
	Chapter	Progress	
Prologue	Prologue	complete	betad
evening at the bar/steve sketching/making B late dinner/lovey dovey bullshit		1	
old man bucky		2 complete	betad
rumlow takes steve/lashes out at fury		3 complete	betad
morning after- picnic		4 complete	betad
first wrong bucky//many wrong buckys		5	
b explains that he thinks he has the gift		6 complete	
teen bucky		7 complete	
goes to Fury for help, finds Sam/Nat (WS-esque plot point)		8	
b gives his backstory at some point		9	
siberia soldier		10	
s explains his job, his backstory, howard		11	
nat takes him to wanda, who sends him to Tony		12 complete	
hobo bucky		13 complete	
s/b bang/discover marks		14 complete	
soldier bucky		15 complete	
tony back to wanda		16 partial- 3/4	
s/b meet in bar		17 complete	
wanda resets him to Bucky		18 complete	
Nat recons the location and finds out the plot; Steve et al ready for attack		19	
B shows up just as they're about to attack.		20	
S takes B away		21	
They go to wanda, who's vision is blocked. They're attacked		22	
They have to destroy hydra. Enlist gang for help		23	
Wanda takes them to the fates, who explain all		23	

Figure 19: Carol's outline for her current story. This outline updates as she writes, completes, and gets her work beta'd.

is a blend of several non-canon AUs, with expanded fanon universe lore, such as “the Howling Commandos that fans deserve.”¹⁸ Carol wrote this piece as a five-act play, taking background information from “basically every mythology,” as well as her political science coursework. Carol has also done extensive research on five-act play formats, watching films and reading plays,

studying the ways that the plot develops and changes. One of the non-canon AUs she is using is

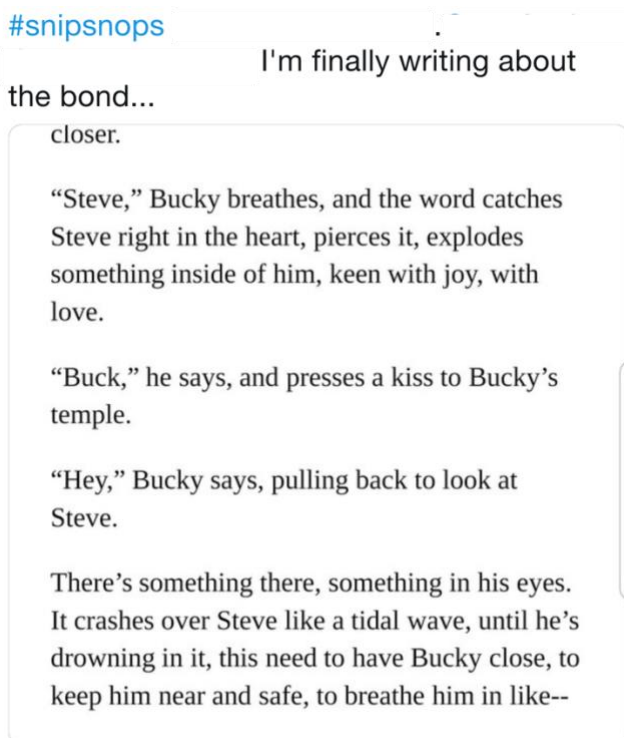


Figure 20: Carol's original tweet with snip snops.



Figure 21: A thread of replies to the original tweet from Carol.

the idea of multiverse travel, which meddles with time travel. She watched the film *Memento*, starring Guy Pearce and directed by Christopher Nolan, because the film follows an unconventional plot line that deals with time in a nonlinear fashion. After watching this film and talking with her beta, Carol ended up reworking the entire story into a new format, following the nonlinear plotline like *Memento* does. In an outline for the story, Carol color-coded each different story line, showing how the story bounces between each throughout the first quarter of the fic. Then, the story lines converge, as seen with the color green (Figure 19). Carol's beta, who had read both the linear and non-linear versions says that the non-linear story line seems to draw the reader in more and keep them focused. This formative feedback, as Reagle points out, focuses on

the task and not Carol herself, which in turn can create a more collaborative environment for writing and producing.¹⁹

She has worked on this fic with her artist and says that is an absolutely true collaboration. She often spends hours debating with her artist over scenes in a 30,000-word outline on Google docs, or by sending pictures via Twitter direct messages about possible plot points. Initially, this work was developed out of a piece of fanart: Carol's artist posted a sketch of Chris Evans, the actor who plays Captain America, on Twitter, where Captain America was donned in cyberpunk gear with a large clock behind him. Carol wrote a 500-word response to the piece of fanart, drawing on some of the themes from her current work. The artist then contacted her to create the large work as a whole.

Throughout the writing of the fic, Carol posted tweets with "snipsnops"²⁰ of the story, thus allowing for her to promote the story before its publishing (Figures 20 and 22). Her artist also posted photos of her sketchbook for the story, creating a conversation about the work as well. Additionally, the two have played around with the idea of creating a soundtrack for the fic, but say that if that does happen, it will happen after the fic has been published. Additionally, the two have been thinking about creating a trailer for the fic; however, there is a huge time commitment associated with cutting together a movie, which Carol does not think will happen in time for initial publishing. They are; however, animating small sketches and using gifs from the MCU to also promote the story on Twitter.

Multimedia

Fanart

Carol typically interacts with fanart the most. She states that her favorite part of fandom is most likely the memes and the fanart which is why she was upset when tumblr shutdown. The visuality of tumblr allowed for fanart and memes to be posted throughout the website, which meant that many dashboards were scrolling feeds of pictures, gifs, and memes

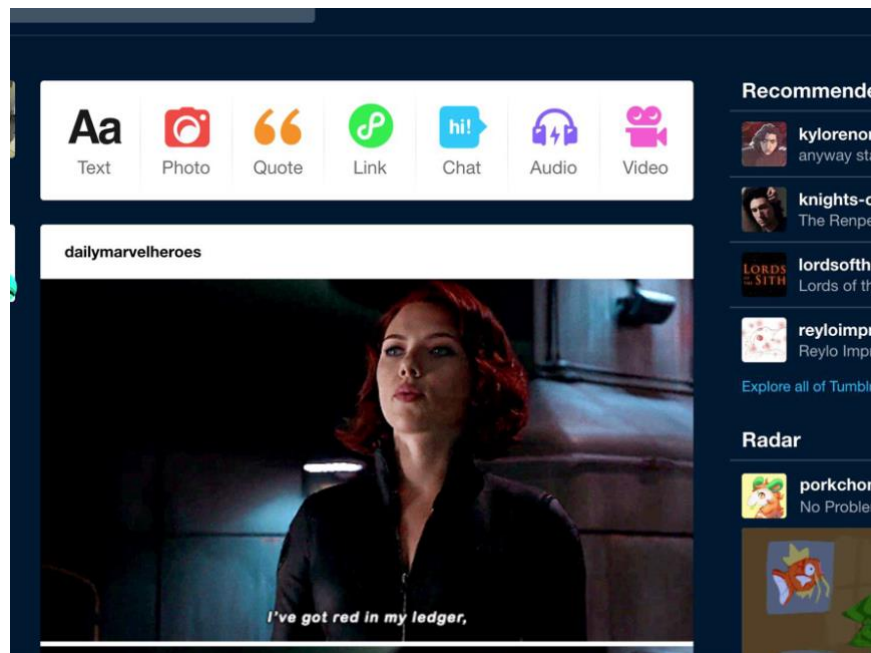


Figure 22: A video scrolling through a tumblr dashboard;
<https://tinyurl.com/v3bq8m3w>

(Figure 22). Carol states that having fanart for a fic can change the way that the fic is viewed by the fandom. “Say for instance, that you’re a new writer. One way to get your fic on the map is to get an established artist to make art for it. It goes the same way for artists. If you’re an A plus author, you can put an artist on the map.”²¹ She says that the art associated with her fic has driven traffic to her stories, especially the art done by artists within the fandom. For her first Steve/Bucky fic, Carol worked with a professional comics artist to create the art, but did not see enough of a bump in the popularity of the fic. “You need someone who engages with the fandom for an artist. Otherwise, the point of having art as a marketing tool can be pointless.”²² Majorie Cohee Manifold points out that the educational benefits to artmaking influence the way that an artist interacts with art play and narrative; thus expanding upon an artist’s “repertoire of

artmaking skills and contributes toward an ultimate goal of gaining recognition among fellow fans, not only as an excellent portrayal of the source works, but as re-interpreter of the work.”²³

For her current fic, because of the importance of the fanart in the physical story and plot line, Carol has had to have a lot of input from the artist. While they speak on twitter, both Carol and her artist are creating as they interact: Carol will approach with storylines and possible snippets of scenes or the artist will approach with a fully worked out image. When they bring either of these to the table, one must adapt: whether that is the artist creating a new image or Carol creating a new scene. Carol says, “I keep notes, but I don’t feel compelled to do exactly what we talked about. I don’t have to do “X-Y-Z” if “A-B-C” makes more sense to what I am writing and where the plot is going.”²⁴ These interactions between both Carol and her artist can also be seen on Carol’s twitter, where they fangirl over one another. Carol says that the fangirling acts as a way to also promote the artist who was original not as well-known in the fandom, but now has gained many followers in the fandom.

Interaction with Readers

Twitter

Carol is very active on twitter. After the fall of tumblr (where she had roughly 1,500 followers), most of the MCU fandom transplanted over to twitter, dreamwidth, and pillowfort; however, Carol was already established on twitter, which lead to her deciding not to go onto dreamwidth or pillowfort. On her twitter (where she has about 1,200 followers), she posts both personal and fandom information as well as her political viewpoints. For her tweets about her current work, she tags the tweets with the name of the story (in abbreviated form). The artist who she is working with does the same on any art sneak peaks that she does. In an analysis of the comments on these tweets, many fans replied with reactionary gifs gauging their excitement and

need for the story. Carol states that twitter, “is definitely much more interpersonal and interactive,” where tumblr was like “yelling into the void and once in a while the void would yell back.”²⁵ On twitter, she’s able to do polls and was able to receive feedback on her update schedule for fics. She updates weekly based on these polls, which can prevent people from being rude in the comments on AO3.²⁶

Comments

Carol says that she “tries to reply to every review,” but that she has about “300 comments in her inbox on AO3 that she may never get to.”²⁷ Out of the thousands of comments on her work, she says that she will respond to every one that substantially engages with decisions in her story, meaning that she responds to about 10 percent. The comments that she responds to that substantially expand on the work often ask about characterization and plot lines. For example, a reader left the following comment on one of Carol’s stories:

**wipes tear away* So lovely *sniffs* Steve restoring the Advent Box is the most heartfelt and romantic gesture! And an apology and being vulnerable...gah. Steve that’s how you win someone back! I love that as much as Bucky was falling for Steve [...] he was ready to look out for himself and his own well-being if Steve was going to try to draw it out and make it harder for Bucky to move on. And that they’re communicating!! So wonderful. I love this so much and am going to be sad to see it finish up.*²⁸

Carol responded with a lengthy comment thanking the reader, responding to their plot summaries, and lamenting the ending of the WIP. Carol says that when she responds to these comments, it makes her want to go out and read new fics and respond with lengthy comments. She typically responds with lengthy comments and often if an author responds with a short answer, she will “get a little butt hurt,” she said, “But that’s fandom, I guess.”²⁹

The Future of Fandom, According to Carol

Carol has stated that most of the fandom has moved over to twitter, following the fall of tumblr. Some have transferred over to dreamwidth and pillowfort; however, both of the websites have very few fans on them (Figure 23). Carol said that she has not been on either of the websites, except to claim her screenname so that she can be consistent throughout the websites.

Dreamwidth, which functions

in similar ways to tumblr and to LiveJournal, relies on users posting and reposting material, adding their own descriptions to the multimedia, as well as having chat-like discussions in the replies section of the post. However, the dreamwidth for the Stucky and MCU fandom has very few followers and is not popular.

From a Reader's Perspective

Carol's work with multimedia has contributed partially to her popularity within the fandom and this contributed to her selection for this study. As she has stated, the act of including fanart or some type of multimedia provides a fic with an increased population to access, as well



Figure 23: This screengrab of a post in the stuckyfandom dreamwidth is a fic recommendation.

as a better understanding of the fic at hand. As seen with Ruby and her inclusion of fanart, Carol may possibly experience the same understanding that readers go through when she includes fanart in her fics. Additionally, with her new fic having fanart as such a central part to the plot of the story, Carol has created a fic that helps readers create beneficial analyzing skills, as well as close reading skills. The art will help readers connect certain parts of the story and will stay in their minds longer than the words may. Additionally, it creates a more accessible piece, one where English Language Learners or lower level readers can still connect with the piece, despite its more difficult to understand themes. For example, the theme of time travel is often difficult to follow, as are the themes of multiverses, and providing art for this will allow for readers to review the plot in a visual way for better understanding. Fanart additionally creates a visual culture learning community (VCLC), which is group self-organized around a visual culture interest and production, according to Andrea Karpati, et al. Karpati argues that, “VCLCs offer means, methods and media to support the development of young people’s identity formation through creative practice and engage them in active citizenship,” and that, “Communities of visual culture [...] can significantly contribute to an emerging new pedagogical paradigm of the twenty-first century involving sociocritical approaches to art and design education outside of school.”³⁰ These sociocritical approaches to art and design involve readers analyzing works to better understand the material that they are viewing.

Comment Analysis

In her previous fan fiction, Carol’s inclusion of multimedia created a similar effect. For example, in a story that she wrote during the holiday season, she included recipes along with each chapter that she published.³¹ In a term frequency analysis of the comments, as well as in a visualization (via word cloud), words and comments regarding the recipes came up. Other words that were originally part of the comments like “appreciate,” “made,” or “making,” also appeared in the frequency analysis, showing that readers took note of the recipes and began to analyze them as a part of the story (Figure 24). For example, one comment on the last chapter stated, “P.s. I’m still thinking about those maple scones :)” which were only mentioned once in the first chapter. Scones were mentioned fifteen times in the comments and each comment developed a paratext about recipes and recipe sharing around the work.

When creating a topic modeling of the comments in Carol’s works, two topics and their associated words stuck out to me. The

first topic was “chapter, don’t, know, next,

time, even, think, every, wait” (Topic 4). These words to me signaled feedback for the work or some form of commentary as Regale calls it. Commentary is feedback on the work, but it does not provide any specific suggestions. Comments from this specific work like, “OH goodness.

```
(freq.terms <- findFreqTerms(tdm, lowfreq = 20))
[1] "excited" "loved" "thank" "now" "oh"
[6] "thats" "theres" "wonderful" "cant" "everything"
[11] "hard" "okay" "work" "kudos" "leave"
[16] "let" "chapter" "first" "good" "read"
[21] "advent" "great" "man" "sweet" "just"
[26] "well" "words" "aw" "aww" "better"
[31] "glad" "youre" "back" "already" "fic"
[36] "best" "ever" "fluff" "lol" "really"
[41] "im" "like" "steves" "whole" "one"
[46] "baking" "calendar" "happy" "makes" "many"
[51] "ah" "right" "sad" "ending" "christmas"
[56] "hope" "much" "new" "perfect" "story"
[61] "year" "buckys" "amazing" "day" "end"
[66] "needed" "sharing" "writing" "d" "lovely"
[71] "every" "way" "alisa" "appreciate" "forward"
[76] "looking" "mwah" "nice" "thanks" "food"
[81] "thing" "boys" "will" "cute" "little"
[86] "talk" "didnt" "make" "thought" "go"
[91] "get" "life" "nat" "take" "come"
[96] "us" "enjoyed" "loving" "reading" "also"
[101] "dont" "even" "look" "something" "comment"
[106] "enjoying" "comments" "adorable" "damn" "beautiful"
[111] "stella" "awesome" "gonna" "sure" "yes"
[116] "going" "though" "help" "people" "next"
[121] "say" "wait" "time" "kind" "know"
[126] "hes" "gosh" "can" "things" "want"
[131] "chapters" "hugs" "two" "youve" "poor"
[136] "got" "update" "think" "getting" "totally"
[141] "feel" "cookies" "last" "liked" "made"
[146] "lot" "may" "god" "soon" "please"
[151] "write" "making" "done" "theyre" "fun"
[156] "die" "ive" "file" "always" "idiot"
[161] "still" "ill" "favorite" "said" "together"]
```

Figure 24: Frequent terms in Carol’s work. The yellow highlights show the words that I focused on for this analysis.

Bucky is so gone on Steve. I hope [they] overcome the awkwardness soon!”³² or “I really got caught up in the action. I guess they’re about to talk about the background check. Hopefully Nat is around to explain. Great update!”³³ do not specifically say that these are scenes Carol should include but offer feedback and slight suggestions based on what has happened. The other topic that I analyzed included the words, “fic, read, will, better, also, amazing, perfect, feel, cute, nice” (Topic 7). These words seem to connote future projects, either from the reader or from the writer, specifically with the inclusion of the word “will.” For example, one reader wrote, “[This

has] been one of the	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6
	[1,] "buckys"	"just"	"story"	"chapter"	"oh"	"glad"
highlights of my holiday	[2,] "make"	"loved"	"aw"	"know"	"happy"	"youre"
	[3,] "ive"	"made"	"now"	"dont"	"christmas"	"writing"
season this year!! I’ve	[4,] "yes"	"can"	"right"	"next"	"well"	"little"
	[5,] "thing"	"hes"	"man"	"time"	"sweet"	"forward"
fallen in love with your	[6,] "back"	"say"	"going"	"even"	"hope"	"enjoying"
	[7,] "go"	"two"	"♥"	"think"	"best"	"looking"
style and will read	[8,] "god"	"chapters"	"life"	"every"	"new"	"still"
	[9,] "ever"	"getting"	"great"	"wait"	"hard"	"gonna"
anything you write in the	[10,] "kudos"	"makes"	"theyre"	"stella"	"wonderful"	"appreciate"
	Topic 7	Topic 8				
future!” ³⁴ Additionally,	[1,] "fic"	"reading"				
	[2,] "read"	"one"				
these words may also	[3,] "will"	"good"				
	[4,] "better"	"get"				
mean that a reader	[5,] "also"	"enjoyed"				
	[6,] "amazing"	"got"				
“reads” a concept	[7,] "perfect"	"things"				
	[8,] "feel"	"boys"				
	[9,] "cute"	"write"				
	[10,] "nice"	"advent"				

Figure 25: Topic modeling for Carol’s work.

presented in the work or that they may “read” some information in the future.

Other topics showed a variety of tones to analyze (Figure 25). For example, Topic 1 (beginning with “buckys”) seems to comment on the content of the story, as does Topic 5 (beginning with “oh”). These comments could either represent commentary or constructive criticism in the physical text. For example, one reader wrote:

I love this Bucky. I love all Bucky's but this one is so tenacious and strong even while being "normal." There's so much going for him and you keep him way down to earth. It's refreshing. :) Now that Clint is aware of what happened I'm hoping there will be a moment of him/the Avengers giving Steve shit for his decision. That self-sacrificing idiot is too much sometimes God love 'im.³⁵

This reader is commenting on both the story ("Now that Clint is aware") and the characterizations of Bucky and Steve ("but this one is so tenacious" and "that self-sacrificing idiot..."), which shows a developed interest in the background dynamics of the story. This is then reflected in the topic modeling. Topic 3 (beginning with "story") and Topic 8 (beginning with "reading") carry the tone of the author, as these words are commonly associated with words that authors use in fanfiction. For example, one comment from Carol reads, "lol @ woodworking his way. :) Thank you so much for reading. I'm really glad you're enjoying it still. :)"³⁶

Comments from the author also help develop a paratext around the fiction as they help develop a community of inclusivity and gratitude.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the interactions that Carol has with her readers has helped her build an involved and knowledgeable community within her fandom. As a reader of her works, her inclusion of multimedia made me want to read more. As I read through a draft of her newest work, as well as published parts of her old works, I felt welcomed into the community that she had created. I was also able to carry over some of the knowledge that I learned from her inclusion of multimedia, specifically the recipes, which I crafted in my own kitchen after reading. And as I read her newest work, I was better able to learn through the artwork about the world that she was crafting and about the characters that she used. Some characters had different

backgrounds than I was unfamiliar with—for example, Scarlet Witch (Wanda Maximoff) was cast as a prophet or ‘seer’ character (who could see the future) and Falcon (Sam Wilson) was a fallen angel with the Sword of Archangel Michael. The art of each of these characters helped me “see” the characterizations of these two and the comic book style panels allowed for me to visualize one of Wanda’s future casts. The multimedia allowed for me to not only see each of these things, but further develop understandings of the plots and different story lines that the characters inhabited. And while this is specialized knowledge, these designs were developed to help me better understand the discourse within this text. Hence, these skills can be carried over into any analysis that I may make in the future when considering pieces of multimedia.

¹ BNFs in the Twilight fandom includes E.L. James, writer of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy.

² Carol (fan fiction author), in an interview with the author, spring 2019.

³ Carol, 2019.

⁴ Carol, 2019.

⁵ Carol, 2019.

⁶ Fediverse, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://fediverse.party/>.

⁷ Hubzilla. *Fediverse*, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://fediverse.party/en/hubzilla/>.

⁸ “Federation and Fandom,” *Fanlore*, last modified December 21, 2018,

https://fanlore.org/wiki/Federation_and_Fandom

⁹ Slack, Accessed March 1, 2019, <https://slack.com/>.

¹⁰ Carol, 2019.

¹¹ There are also shows on Hulu and primetime television.

¹² Carol, 2019.

¹³ Reagle, 79-80

¹⁴ Carol, 2019.

¹⁵ Carol, 2019.

¹⁶ Carol, 2019.

¹⁷ Carol, 2019.; Carol said that in the past, she had worked with artists or other fandom authors who were extremely negative about her works and often derailed her reason to write and that the exposure they brought through bangs was not worth it for her to continue working with them.

¹⁸ “The Howling Commandos that fans deserve” is a common thread in the MCU Steve/Bucky ship. Many fans feel that the characterizations of the Howling Commandos in *Captain America: The First Avenger* does not accurately represent the full characters in the comics; therefore, causing fandoms to develop canon lore in fandom based off of the comic books and a few select fanish texts.

¹⁹ Reagle, 82

²⁰ Snipsnops are defined as small pieces of a story shared with readers.

²¹ Carol, 2019.

²² Carol, 2019.

²³ Marjorie Cohee Manifold, “Fanart as Craft and the Creation of Culture,” *International Journal of Education Through Art* 5, no. 1 (2009) 16

²⁴ Carol, 2019.

²⁵ Carol, 2019.

²⁶ Every fandom writer has received the dreaded “update pls” comment on at least one of their works. By having a set schedule, writers can keep these comments to a minimum.

²⁷ Carol, 2019.

²⁸ Comment on Carol’s work.

²⁹ Carol, 2019.

³⁰ Andrea Kaparti, Kerry Freedman, Juan Carlos Castro, Mira Kallio-Tavin, and Emiel Heijnen, “Collaboration in Visual Culture Learning Communities: Towards a Synergy of Individual and Collective Creative Practice,” *The International Journal of Art & Design Education* 36, no. 2 (2017): 164-175.

³¹ Some of the recipes were made by the character and other recipes went along with the theme of the chapter.

³² Comment on Carol’s work.

³³ Comment on Carol’s work.

³⁴ Comment on Carol’s work.

³⁵ Comment on Carol’s work.

³⁶ Comment on Carol’s work.

Chapter 3

Jessika* entered into fandom at the age fourteen. Her high school classmate printed out a Draco/Ginny fanfic and passed it around at school. Jessika said, “I got curious and went online to read more fanfic, and from there I discovered fandom messaging boards and LiveJournal communities.”¹ Like Ruby and Carol, Jessika is more familiar with fandom at its earlier stages on the internet than the current fandom. At her entry to fandom, Jessika first started by reading fics on websites and then lurking on message boards and LiveJournal before moving onto publishing her own works in the Draco/Hermione ship. She said that writing has always been a hobby of hers, stating:

I’ve always written as a hobby for as long as I can remember. I was writing poems and short stories in grade school. I can’t remember how I started, but it was probably because I was an avid reader and I wanted to give writing my own stuff a shot.²

Jessika is a nomadic fan too, moving from fandom to fandom in her life like many other fans do. She said, “After the Harry Potter fandom, I had a brief *Lord of the Rings* phase, followed by *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Les Misérables*, *The 100*, and *Game of Thrones*. I wrote fanfic in all of these fandoms.”³

Jessika has always been a fan of *Star Wars*, but it was not until after the 2015 movie *Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens* came out that she began poking around in the online fandom. She was immediately invested in the Kylo Ren/Rey ship after this movie, publishing her first work in the fandom only eleven days after the release of the film in the Philippines. She was intuitive too, predicting the death of Snoke at the hands of Kylo Ren and Rey two years before *The Last Jedi* even came out. She published mostly teen and mature ratings (for violence content) before publishing her first explicit fic after being in the ship for a year. Jessika has always been immensely popular in the Kylo Ren/Rey ship—which could be due to the length of her fics or the amount of detail that she puts into each work.

Jessika spends most of her time in fandom on tumblr as she finds it is an easy platform to share links to her works and to answer questions about her work. She also utilizes Twitter frequently because “it’s the most convenient way to be updated on *Star Wars* news and also the memes are hilarious.”⁴ She recently has started an account on discord where she is able to chat with fellow Reylo shippers, get to know them more, and share ideas. She has found that quite a lot of people migrated to twitter and pillowfort as new platforms and that her tumblr dashboard is less busy but that has not stopped her from using the website.

The Star Wars Fandom

Star Wars, as produced by George Lucas, originally began as a trilogy of movies in the late 1970s but has since morphed into a multibillion-dollar franchise. The movies in the franchise follow the Skywalker family, a group of Force-sensitive individuals who are entrenched in a fight of good versus evil across an unnamed galaxy. However, this media franchise is not only limited to the films and includes various spin-off movies (*Rogue One* and *Solo*, respectively), live action and cartoon television shows, novels, comic books, radio stations, videogames, and

theme park rides. Each of these pieces of media has expanded the Star Wars canon (now called *Star Wars Legends*) which provides fan fiction writers with a multitude of story lines to play with.⁵

The wealth of information provided by Star Wars requires an in-depth look for all new members of fandom, especially a fan fiction writer. If a writer is to produce a canon work, they would need to comb through pages and pages on Wookieepedia (148,000 to be exact)⁶ to figure out what sort of food their characters should eat; how they would dress; what their home may look like; how their culture celebrates traditions. Jessika said that the rich lore of the *Star Wars* universe is one of the reasons why she was drawn to the fandom. She stated, “I love the rich lore of the Star Wars universe and I want to share it with my readers without overloading them with information within the narrative of the story itself.”⁷ Additionally, Jessika was drawn to the fandom because of its sense of humor, welcoming atmosphere, and the support shown towards content makers.

However, this welcoming atmosphere does not always last, as the Star Wars fandom can be one of the most toxic fandoms on the internet. Toxic fandom can fall into multiple categories and can be defined in multiple ways. Some people believe that toxic fans are the ones who are possessive over the work and obsessive over the characters in the work. These fans may feel that the content belongs to them and only to them. Sarah Ford, a MFA candidate at Youngstown University, pointed out in a presentation on the toxic Star Wars fandom that many fans felt that they had spent more time in the world than the creators did, thus giving them ownership over the text.⁸ Between the release of the original trilogy and the prequel trilogy, there was almost twenty years, which allowed for fans to play with the backgrounds and futures of characters like Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, and Princess Leia Organa. After the release of the prequels came a

barrage of expanded universe texts which played with story lines like a new Jedi Academy, the marriage and life of Obi Wan Kenobi, and battles between the sides of the Force. Fans were able to play with all of these texts, creating and analyzing canons from all forms of media. However, this would all end when, in 2012, Disney purchased Lucasfilm, who then formed the “Star Wars Story Group,” which planned for a sequel to the original movies. Yet, the sequel trilogy would be bound by these previous canon works, allowing for a limited story line. Thus in 2014, Lucasfilm said that anything prior to 2014 in the Expanded Universe was noncanonical and rebranded the expanded universe as *Star Wars Legends*. This outraged many fans—especially those who had become attached to characters like Mara Jade (Luke Skywalker’s wife) or Kyle Katarn (a Jedi instructor and master). Therefore, many fans were naturally hostile to the sequel trilogy and the characters in it.

The main driving forces behind current and past toxic fandom in the Star Wars fandom are racism and sexism. *Star Wars*, up until recently, has had few actors and actresses of color in the films (most notably Lando Calrissian in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*); however, this all

changed with the sequel trilogy where the main cast was comprised of actresses and actors of color. Oscar Isaac, a



Figure 26: An example of the sexism that Kelly Marie Tran faced online.



Figure 27: Replies to the tweet in Figure 26 that also show sexist and racist language against the actress.

Latinx actor, became the risky
 “fly-boy” character with a
 loveable droid; John Boyega, a
 black actor, became a Resistance
 hero; and Daisy Ridley, a female



Figure 28: Further replies to the tweet in Figure 26.

actress, became the unknown savior in the films. However, many in the fandom were not happy with this: some decreed that black actors could not be Storm Troopers or even in the films; while others found that the budding relationship between Finn (Boyega’s character) and Rey (Ridley’s character) was disgusting and unwarranted.⁹ Dubbed videos were made that removed all women from the first sequel film, and the second as well. And then, the second sequel film came out with Kelly Marie Tran, a Vietnamese American actress, playing a leading role in the film. Many fans were outraged about her role in the film (they found her plot point to be useless) as well as her relationship with Finn (Boyega’s character)—and she received the brunt of racist and sexist language (Tran received so much hatred online that she was forced to delete her social media accounts) (Figures 26, 27, 28). It is easy for many to say that this is a small portion of the fandom, that, as William Proctor argues, those who have issues with the film may fit “into traditional stereotypes of the basement dwelling, lonely fanboy who has nothing better to do than spoil others’ enjoyment with weaponized nostalgia”; but this would be inaccurate.¹⁰ Jessika said that she has noticed that the “white members of the fandom have a more difficult time examining their racial privilege as opposed to the other fandoms [she’s] been in,”¹¹ which includes female fans as well. The toxicity of the *Star Wars* fandom has driven many fans away and caused others to create their own secluded safe spaces where there is little hate—which is similar to where Jessika resides.

Writing Process

In her writing process, Jessika typically begins with main plot points in her head. She states that she does not make outlines and needs to have most of the ideas formed before she starts writing. When she physically begins writing, she cannot get started on the story until she has a title. "I sometimes do 'sprints' with my writer friends meaning we try to write as much as we can in a short period of time."¹² Jessika needs to write in total silence as it helps her focus better on the work. She also does not write out the scenes in the order that they appear as that tends to make her lose interest. She edits as she writes and rarely goes back to comb through her work for edits. She also does not use a beta for her process but has consulted other users for this work and past works.

Jessika updates as she writes a chapter, so all of her works are works in progress until they are finished. She said that she struggles the most with keeping a consistent update schedule as she works and travels pretty often for her job. However, because she does not have the whole work done before she publishes, it gives her time to interact with her readers on each chapter, which can influence certain aspects of her works. She stated, "The comments don't make me change the plot or anything, but they provide insights into the character dynamics that I hadn't considered before and so I try to expand on that."¹³ The readers notice these changes too. One reader pointed out in a comment:

It's always so much fun to read through your asks, messages, and answers on tumblr and see how you incorporate questions and feedback into your stories. Obviously, you accomplish all this masterfully with an assist from some of the most perceptive readers (not me I'm just here to cheer) around. But for the rest of us it's almost a little game tracking the writing process conducted through asks to [the] fully realized aspects of characters.¹⁴

Along with the inspiration from some of her readers, Jessika also finds inspiration in songs, poetry, and her own travels.

Current Projects

Jessika's current work is longest work in this fandom—it is currently over 200,000 words and only 80 percent done. It is canon compliant—meaning the world is set in the *Star Wars* universe and has expanded universe lore in it. Jessika calls it “the trashy romance novel I’ve always wanted to write but with lightsabers.” The work has been in progress since mid 2017. The work has changed over time, especially with the newest movie release, *The Last Jedi*. In the film, director, Rian Johnson, hinted heavily at a romance between Rey and Kylo Ren and the possible redemption of Kylo after his murder of the First Order Supreme Leader, Snoke. Jessika had originally planned the story based on the relationship between Rey and Kylo in the first movie; however, with Episode VIII being so centered on the romantic aspects of their relationship, she changed her plot:

I had planned for Kylo and Rey to be more hateful towards each other for much longer than they actually ended up being in the fic. *The Last Jedi* came out after I had begun publishing, and I realized that a purely antagonist dynamic would no longer ring true for their characters.¹⁵

There is a shift in the characterization and the relationship between these two characters that is perceptible to readers. And while that shift might be attributed to the slow burn and angst tags, the change into tone between the characters and their dialogue shows the plot adaptations.



Figure 29: A mood board for Jessika's work.

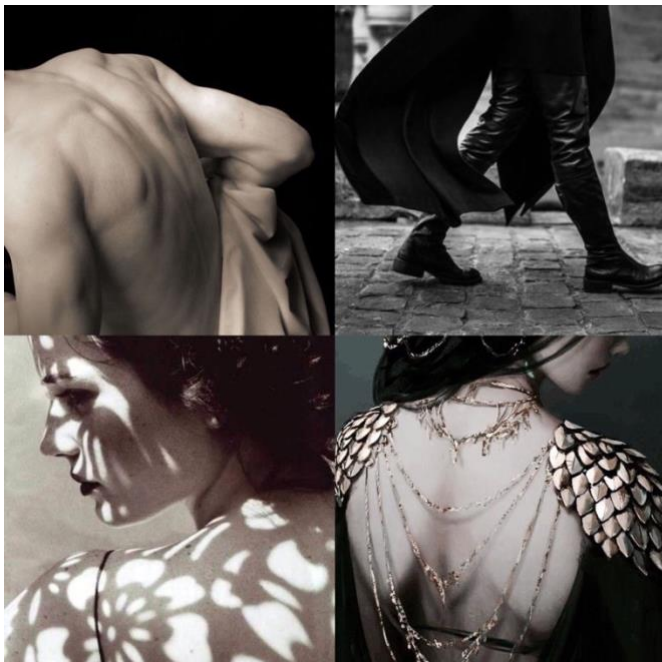


Figure 30: A mood board for Jessica's work.

This work is one of the most popular Reylo pieces in the fandom, even though Jessica never thought that the work would be so thoroughly read. The work has over 13,000 comments on it, 2500 bookmarks, and almost 370,000 hits. Every chapter receives mood boards, fanart, and multiple asks on tumblr about plot points and characterizations, all from and created by the readers. Jessica says that art and mood boards, “inspire [her] to

write and, thus, update faster.”¹⁶ Jessica publishes exclusively on AO3 because it allows her to add the end notes where she can provide links to the items that she references in the fic. For example, if she discusses at length the makeup that a character is wearing, she can easily link the picture that she drew inspiration from, giving the reader a visual representation. Jessica stated that things like art and mood boards, plus other multimedia, “does help [her] readers visualize things and get a feel for the mood that [she’s] trying to set.”¹⁷

Multimedia

Fanart

While Jessica does not draw or create fanart herself, she does receive a lot from her readers. Additionally, unlike both Ruby and Carol, Jessica does not commission fanart from an artist and has art for nearly every chapter of her work. She also utilizes a title cover, which can be seen on her twitter in a pinned tweet. The tweet is unpinned and a new one is created with the same cover art every time the chapter updates. The cover art has been in circulation since the

early chapters, but readers still respond to the tweet telling Jessika about how much they love the cover art. Most of the fanart is interpretation of scenes from the chapters: for instance, one scene where Jessika described a garden scene was then digitally rendered by a reader and sent back to her. Jessika then linked the art in her next A/N. Tisha Turk calls this transaction between writer and reader a “gift economy.” Turk argues that gift economy is much more complicated than simply giving fic or art from one person to another. Turk states:

While some gifts are made for and presented to specific fans [...] they are typically made available not only to that individual but to the community as a whole, to be taken up by whatever subsets of the community are interested. [...] Put another way, gifts within fandom are not simply given but distributed—and potentially, via links and reblogs, redistributed, sometimes well beyond the corner of fandom in which they first appeared. Fandom gifting is not just one-to-one but one-to-many.¹⁸

Jessika and many of her readers participate in this gift economy, and Jessika is generally very good at honoring the fan labor she receives. She consistently is reblogging and tagging fanart and mood boards she is gifted on tumblr, as well as twitter, and as I stated, has mentioned the gifts in chapters that she produces.

Mood Boards

Jessika likes to make mood boards in her spare time, as it is a creative outlet that she can use to destress or entertain herself. She said

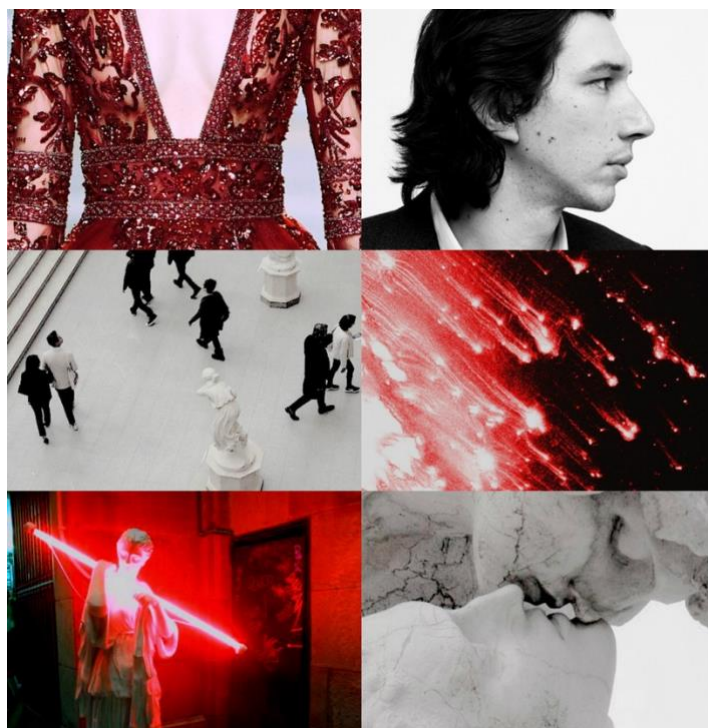


Figure 31: A mood board for Jessika's work.

that the mood boards she uses tend to draw more readers to her stories, and that “tumblr and Twitter users tend to reblog and retweet posts more when there is a mood board or art attached.” There are some common themes across mood boards for her current work and other works: the

mood boards often use the same color palettes for the story, which then is copied by other fans. For example, in Figures 29 and 30, a fan developed these mood boards for Jessika's first chapter in a work. The muted palettes with hints of red throughout (for example, behind Rey in Figure 29, or the slight red tint to the hair of the female subject on the bottom left in Figure 30) show a cohesion between the art and the story. These muted palettes could directly correlate with the action and exposition in that chapter, reflecting back on the plot in the first chapter of her work, where she set up her work as a blank canvas. Now, compare this to the mood board from Figure 31: a much more garish palette to behold. This palette draws directly from the reds of the First Order and is associated with a chapter where there is violence and blood. There are correlations between the mood boards: Kylo Ren is an imposing figure in both mood boards, and he is associated with strength and darkness. On the opposite hand, Rey is seen in lighter clothing, her skin color a stark contrast against the background she is placed against or the clothes that she wears. Additionally, the inclusion of marble-like figures in both mood boards project the themes of wealth and strength that Jessika has crafted into her works. The mood boards are a direct representation of the themes, motifs, and symbols that come up in Jessika's work.

Reading Guides

Reading guides are defined as guides that “help students navigate reading material, especially difficult chapters or nonfiction reading. [...] Reading Guides help students to comprehend the main points of the reading and understand the organizational structure of a text.”¹⁹ Jessika uses reading guides in a unique way to help her readers understand the Star Wars universe better (Figure 32). As stated, the Star Wars universe encompasses many different story

lines, planets, and characters. Jessika, when coming across a term from the lore that she feels a reader may not understand, links the Wookieepedia article in the A/N at the bottom of the chapter. Paul Booth discusses the benefits of fandom “wiki”-pedias, stating that:

Wikis externalize a sense of the whole community being more than the sum of its individual parts and illustrate an interactivity that depends not just on the ability to change something onscreen, but also on the ability of users to communicate with each other. Many fan-created wikis use this interactive, encyclopedic character of wikis to explore the various unexplained narrative possibilities of the extant media object.²⁰

These interactive spaces act as archives, according to Booth, and the archive in turn represents the way that communities of fans come together to inscribe “the extant media object itself,” thus allowing for the rewritten narrative parameters of the text and the determining of what is and is not canon.²¹ In the Star Wars fandom, these narrative parameters are especially visible when considering the rebranding of *Star Wars Legends*. Users were forced to recreate the canon narrative of Star Wars, resulting in the adaption of the wiki page.

“Because she’s not here!” the other girl burst out, wringing her hands. “Her bed hasn’t been slept in and I’ve searched for her all over the palace— she’s gone!”

Notes:

Jerba.

Miriskin.

Crusader-class corvette.

Artorias.

Myto sector.

Darius Onneir.

Caled Galfridian.

Tol Getelles.

Antemeridian sector.

Dun Möch.

Everilly.

FYI on Luke’s characterization: I conceptualized this version of him and his dynamic with Rey before the trailer and all the new info about TLJ came out. As we don’t know the whole story yet, I’ve decided to stick with my original plan for now. Once the movie drops, I will do my best to reconcile this Luke to what will be his canon characterization— there’s a year’s gap between the end of TFA and the start of this fic, so I believe I will have sufficient leeway in that regard.

Figure 32: A video that shows Jessika’s links in action and the correlating Wookieepedia pages; <https://tinyurl.com/y3bq8m3w>

Interaction with Readers

tumblr

Jessika is very active on her tumblr, posting throughout the day. She states that the platform has a very easy way for her to share links to her works and answer questions. While

many fans did leave tumblr after December 2018, the Reylo fandom still has a presence on the website. This also means that there are significant clashes between Reylo shippers and anti-Reylos. Like the other ships in this thesis, there are general disagreements over which of the characters should be in relationships with the others; however, this reaches a much different level in the *Star Wars* sequel fandoms. In the sequel movies, Kylo Ren tortures Rey and Poe, cuts Finn with a lightsaber, murders innocent people, obliterates an entire planet, and kills his own father. He also is at the head of a Neo Nazi organization whose main goal is taking over the galaxy in violent ways. However, the crimes of the character are not the only reason why many fans dislike Reylo: many antis argue that the ship is steeped in racism as well as sexism and misogyny. This is partly due to the erasure of the Finn/Rey ship in *Star Wars* fandom. In some Reylo fiction, Finn is portrayed as the jealous ex-boyfriend or the angry, over-protective best friend. Stitch, a fandom blogger and scholar, writes, “This reframing of Finn’s reciprocated adoration of Rey as a harmful or abusive relationship on his end – primarily by white fans – is like peak fandom racism. It’s the Black Brute all over again where of course, Finn is a liar, an abuser, a creepy obsessive to people who think Kylo Ren is Mr. Darcy reborn.”²² If he is not portrayed like this, Finn is often placed in a relationship with Poe, and then only brought into the story for some kind of comic relief, which doubly acts as a form of gay erasure. Furthermore, antis are angry at the pedophilic undertones in a relationship between Kylo and Rey and the large amount of abuse and rape/non-con based fics in the ship. This makes tumblr and the internet at large a tumultuous place for any Reylo shipper. Yet, Jessika has found her niche on the website and rarely, if ever, deals with anti-shippers. Jessika said that one of the things that drew her to the ship and fandom on tumblr was, “the light/dark aesthetic, the clash of strong personalities, [and] the endless possibilities to play around with the enemies-to-lovers trope.”

Twitter

Jessika is also very active on her fandom Twitter. She states that the *Star Wars* fandom is pretty active on Twitter, especially when posting memes and updated information. She posts a lot of fic recs on her profile, and retweets art or other related fan works. She also posts for her stories as she publishes. She also posts a lot of Adam Driver content (Driver plays Kylo Ren in the films), and has lengthy discussion about his other films and works (Driver has a movie coming out in 2019 called *Dead Don't Die* and is currently on Broadway in a Tony nominated play *Burn This*), his outfits, and his life in general. Jessika's twitter allows for observations of the parasocial attachment to an actor or actress. For example, Jessika retweeted several videos of Driver being interviewed where other response tweets said things like "I want Adam Driver to murder my family," and "He could force choke me or choke me, I don't care."

Curious Cat

Jessika recently got a Curious Cat, which is a social networking site where users are only able ask questions or answer them. Curious Cat is owned by a Korean company and acts as a "ask me anything" website. They have a zero-tolerance platform for bullying and proactively monitor their content for anything that would fall under bullying in the guidelines. Additionally, the website acts like a social networking spring board where users can share their questions and answers automatically to other social networking websites.²³ On her twitter, Jessika had written that she was taking a day to do some writing, and linked her followers to her Curious Cat account, encouraging them to follow her and ask questions or confess something to her (which she cannot reply to). And while the major draw for this website is the ability to ask questions, many of the questions can be asked anonymously by the users which could create issues for the answerer (in this case Jessika) especially when considering the toxicity of the fandom. Jessika

could ignore the antis but they (the antis) could end up being overwhelming if they decide to bombard her account with questions.

The Future of Fandom, According to Jessika

For Jessika's fandom, she feels that the platforms in use by her fandom provide a space where the community can thrive. Jessika states, "At the moment, I can't think of any gaps that have yet to be bridged by existing platforms."²⁴ This fandom, like the other fandoms in this thesis, has migrated over to other platforms to supplement tumblr or has moved over to new platforms all together. However, Jessika feels that her three platforms are working out well for her in the time being. She interacts with other authors via Twitter, where they share memes, make fun polls, brainstorm together, and promote their works. She is also part of several writing groups on Discord. As for the Star Wars fandom, Jessika does not see herself leaving anytime soon. She states, "I see myself writing for the Star Wars fandom for a long time, considering that we have many more movies and television shows to look forward to. And writing fic still remains the best way for me to destress and exercise my creative muscle."²⁵

From a Reader's Perspective

Jessika was chosen for this study because of her work with reading guides, her large tumblr and twitter following, and the small community that she has created with her work. Unlike the other participants, Jessika and I only had one interview due to scheduling conflicts, and it was over email. This in a way was limiting; however, I felt that her work was important to include because of its use of multimedia and her interactions with fans. In a way, the popularity of her work and her status in the Star Wars fandom has allowed for her to create a brand for herself, just like Carol and like Ruby. Jessika also shares a lot of personal information on both her tumblr and her twitter, documenting her travels, her time with her cat, her job and her every

day musings. This, in a way, helps readers relate a little bit more to her—they ask her about her cat’s health and wellbeing, her travels, and comment on her selfies and videos. Both Carol and Ruby also share about their personal lives on the Internet, but rarely share photos of themselves or their own world, keeping them at a distance. The breach of the veil of privacy that Jessika has willingly allowed lets readers develop a parasocial relationship with her. The fact that she feels comfortable to share private information with her readers in her home fandom shows the benefits of community building and interpersonal relationships in fandom. And because of her sharing, Jessika is able to interact at a personal level on the comments on her AO3 works.

Comment Analysis

Because of the sheer amount of comments on Jessika’s works, the webscraping program that Dr. Lucic and I used had to be modified so that we could get a better representation of the data. This mostly occurred when establishing frequent terms, where we had to create a subset of the words that occurred more than 1,000 times. If we had not increased the subset to this, we would have had a larger set of frequent words, instead of a smaller, more concentrated set. In the end, there were 28 words that occurred more than 1,000 times and they were: "one," "also," "oh," "reading," "wait," "always," "chapter," "can," "don't," "reys," "even," "know," "next," "will," "just," "well," "think," "going," "now," "time," "good," "way," "read," "story," "update," "get," "please," and "fic" (see Figure 33). Many of these words are associated with reading the text: "read" and "reading" are repeated twice. Additionally, words like "think," "know," and "going" could imply that the reader is reacting to how they interpreted the text. In one comment using the word "going," a reader stated, "I get it ... now I know why we're waiting so long to see them finally get together ... because it's *going* to finally happen at/after the masquerade, right ;)." ²⁶ This reader is using the skills of foreshadowing that Jessika developed to

determine where the story might go next. The word “know” implies similar foreshadowing and nods to literary techniques. One reader said:

Now THIS chapter was an absolute gift!!! It was so sensual and intimate I'm so proud of them for FINALLY getting this far! He was so sweet with her so attentive and patient and loving and then he had to open his mouth and admit his feelings and then she tried she tried so hard to just tell him. It's killing me inside *knowing* that there is this eternal chasm between them that will never get fixed until we get Snoke killed and Kylo turned. And even then, it's going to hang between them because they're both so convinced that they are doing the right thing and that the other is so wrong. Ugh. Or none of that can happen because Prince Isolder is going to KILL his son-in-law in cold blood.²⁷

Jessika has set up a situation of dramatic irony in her current work: Rey is secretly working with

the Resistance and

hiding them from the

First Order, but Kylo

has no idea, and now is

in love with Rey (and

vice versa). Only the

readers and few choice

characters know of

Rey's internal battle—

which is pointed out in

this comment.

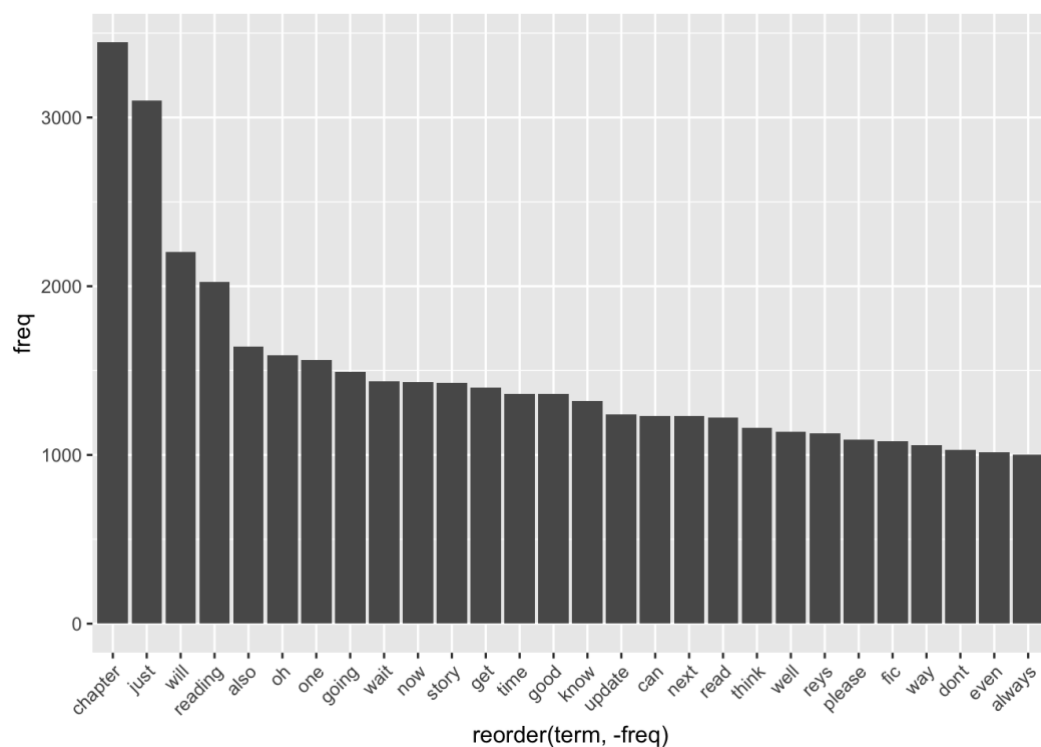


Figure 33: A bar graph showing the term frequency for Jessika's comments.

In the topic modeling for this chapter, I noticed that there was more connection between the topics than other topic modeling showed previously. This could be for several reasons; however, I believe that it shows links between thoughts and comments. Additionally, similar connotations can be found in these topics to other topics from the other participants' comments. For example, in Topic 8 (see figure 34), one could determine that a reader is asking for an update on the story. As Jessika stated, she often times takes a while to update because she publishes as she writes, meaning that some comments are asking for her to update or to write faster. This is similar to the comments on Carol's work, where readers often ask her to update, despite having an update schedule. In a way, this shows that some readers may not actively be aware of the fan labor that goes into producing a story. Most of the comments using update are telling Jessika "great update" or "yay, you updated!" but some are not-so subtly hinting at her to update. For

example, one reader says, "So I'm maybe checking your AO3 page for updates multiple times a day," to which Jessika responded with "Will update as soon as I can!"²⁸ Comments like the one that Jessika replied to can make authors feel invalidated and like they are nothing but a word

	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6
[1,]	"will"	"just"	"chapter"	"chapter"	"will"	"one"
[2,]	"just"	"fic"	"just"	"snoke"	"reading"	"two"
[3,]	"also"	"chapter"	"also"	"reading"	"chapter"	"fic"
[4,]	"oh"	"will"	"oh"	"will"	"next"	"way"
[5,]	"going"	"back"	"think"	"going"	"one"	"just"
[6,]	"next"	"writing"	"youre"	"wait"	"need"	"will"
[7,]	"writing"	"also"	"wait"	"time"	"dont"	"read"
[8,]	"things"	"now"	"well"	"well"	"oh"	"reys"
[9,]	"reys"	"dont"	"story"	"youre"	"end"	"hope"
[10,]	"time"	"know"	"next"	"happy"	"get"	"still"
	Topic 7	Topic 8				
[1,]	"chapter"	"please"				
[2,]	"reading"	"just"				
[3,]	"right"	"now"				
[4,]	"oh"	"story"				
[5,]	"think"	"time"				
[6,]	"well"	"hope"				
[7,]	"time"	"going"				
[8,]	"just"	"one"				
[9,]	"commenting"	"update"				
[10,]	"soon"	"take"				

Figure 34: Topic modeling for Jessika's comments.

processing machine. This can often take away from all the great experiences of fandom.

Other topics that stuck out to me were Topic 1, Topic 4, and Topic 6. In each of these topics, names of characters were mentioned, showing what words often correlate with discussions and comments that are content based. In both Topic 1 and Topic 4, a character's name is mentioned, along with the word "time." When I was looking through the comments to find the association between the character's names and times, I stumbled across a comment that read, "There's a part of Rey that still hasn't left Jakku it seems. Is Ben aware of that? Has she shared memories with him about that time?"²⁹ This shows that the words in Topic 1 and 4 may not have to be directly in the same comment, but typically have a common link between the two that allows for readers to make connections. In this case, the link between "Rey" and "time" is "Jakku," and this comment shows the reader critically thinking and making connections between the three. Another comment used the same technique to discuss the link between time and Snoke, which was the characterization of Ben/Kylo Ren:

[...] It was because of how it will be taken when this blows up in her face. He's totally going to think she was manipulating him and using him the whole time. It's playing into Snoke's hands more than if he were doing it himself. That's the sad part. He's already paranoid enough but then to find out the one time he goes against his instincts and got played... this will not be good. I'm hoping she can come clean or fix this before it comes out in a way she can't control or repair.³⁰

This close reading takes a look at the background character of Kylo and the secret that Rey has been hiding. The reader, based on past readings of this character, future casts what their reaction would be like, through a close reading.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jessika's in depth looks at characters, coupled with her inclusion of multimedia and constant reader interaction has allowed for her to create a community within a community. As I read Jessika's fic, I felt that her multimedia, especially the reading guides,

allowed for me to develop a deeper understanding of her work and the Star Wars universe at large. Additionally, her inclusion of links to dresses and makeup (the multimedia) helped me visualize her writing, which in turn, helped me analyze the codes and paratext around her works better. Finally, her reader interactions allowed for me to view the often-painstaking work that goes into building a community and fan labor. And, like the other participants in this study, Jessika's work made me wonder new things in a new fandom, and showed me that all of these stories, may they be coming to a close (*Supernatural's* final season and the canon ending of Steve Rogers) or continuing on (*Star Wars Episode IX*), their conclusions do not end with a black screen—but proceed on in fan works and in fan communities.

¹ Jessika (fan fiction author), in an interview with the author, spring 2019.

² Jessika, 2019.

³ Jessika, 2019.

⁴ Jessika, 2019.

⁵ "Movie Franchises," *The Numbers*, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.the-numbers.com/movies/franchises/sort/World>.

⁶ Wookieepedia, accessed May 10, 2019, https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Main_Page.

⁷ Jessika, 2019.

⁸ Sarah Ford, "No One Hates Star Wars More than Star Wars Fans: Exploring the Wreckage of a Broken Fandom," Paper presented at the PCA/ACA Conference, Washington D.C., April 2019.

⁹ "I've Got Some Complicated Feelings About Rose Tico's Characterization." Stich Media Mix (blog), June 30, 2018. <https://stitchmediamix.com/2018/06/30/ive-got-some-complicated-feelings-about-rose-ticos-characterization/>.

¹⁰ Henry Jenkins, "The Last Jedi: An Online Roundtable Part 3," *Confessions of an AcaFan* (blog), February 14, 2018, <https://henryjenkins.org/?offset=1518691426319>.

¹¹ Jessika, 2019.

¹² Jessika, 2019.

¹³ Jessika, 2019.

¹⁴ Comment on Jessika's work.

¹⁵ Jessika, 2019.

¹⁶ Jessika, 2019.

¹⁷ Jessika, 2019.

¹⁸ Tisha Turk, "Fan work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom's Gift Economy," *Transformative Works and Culture* 15 (2014), <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/518>.

¹⁹ "Reading Guide," *Reading Rockets*, accessed May 10, 2019,

http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/reading_guide.

²⁰ Paul Booth, *Digital Fandom*, 106.

²¹ Booth, 109

²² "I've Got Some Complicated Feelings..." Stich Media Mix, <https://stitchmediamix.com/2018/06/30/ive-got-some-complicated-feelings-about-rose-ticos-characterization/>.

²³ <https://curiouscat.me/about>

²⁴ Jessika, 2019.

²⁵ Jessika, 2019.

²⁶ Comment on Jessika's work.

²⁷ Comment on Jessika's work.

²⁸ Comment on Jessika's work.

²⁹ Comment on Jessika's work.

³⁰ Comment on Jessika's work.

Conclusions

In this study, I came to several conclusions intended and unintended. The first conclusion that came about from this research was the conclusion that multimedia influences the way that a reader interacts with a text. As seen from the comments, readers consistently go out of their way to make connections and discuss fan fiction via literary terms. Similarly, multimedia associated with a text can help readers better understand the story that they are being told (as seen with Ruby and Carol's fics) or learn new information (as seen with Jessika's fic). The designs that fans produce allow for them to develop a paratext around a work, furthering their understanding of intertextuality and its associations with fan fiction. Finally, the interactions that authors have with their readers also furthers understanding of the text and of the fandom in general. These interactions, coupled with the almost instantaneous conversations and relationships on the Internet changes what it means to be a reader, and author, and a learner in the social media era.

The second conclusion is that fan fiction authors complete an immense amount of fan labor to create a community around themselves and their works. This conclusion was mainly developed from Jessika's work with her fandom; however, this is true for all of the participants in the research. Carol mentioned taking time to make sure that her usernames were the same across all of the platforms to ensure that her readers could find her easily. Ruby used discord as a

workshopping space, interacting with potential readers and taking time to read their fics in the hope that they would read hers as well. And Jessika took time to respond to as many comments that she could, reposted art from fans, and developed a following across multiple platforms where she could interact with fans. Yet, my participants do not see these acts as pieces of labor; rather, they are acts of enjoyment and participation. As Mel Stanfill argues in an editorial for the *Journal of Transformative Works and Culture*, “‘free labor is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleurably embraced and at the same time shamelessly exploited.’ We find that simultaneity of pleasure and exploitation to be key.”¹ Stanfill ultimately argues that fan labor should be valued and the recognition of fan labor is vital to fan cultures. For my participants, this recognition comes through donations on ko-fi pages, kudos, and comments—and, most importantly, their interactions with their readers, whether it be a tweet, a reply, or an ask.

A third conclusion for this study was that with the “fall of tumblr” online communities have fractioned, which brings up questions regarding toxic fandom, privacy, and gate keeping. As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, toxic fandom can come in many forms, but almost always results in fighting between parts of fandom who are united behind the original content. Reylo shippers and antis both love Star Wars despite not getting along, as do the shippers in the *Supernatural* fandom. But their hate for the thing that the other loves, often results in a fractured fandom. As Ford points out, “fractured fandoms come from tensions that exist within or between fandoms and fan communities and rise primarily through communication problems.”² Ford quotes CarrieLynne Reinhard, who states:

Fracture results from differences in perception, when fans prefer their own beliefs and feelings rather than an objective reality. If a fan holds their interpretation of a character, media text or sports team in higher regard than any factual aspect of the that thing, that perception can potentially alter how they respond to other fans ... such problems could

contribute to the perpetuation of the sexism, racism and other –isms that fracture fandoms when only certain people appear to have the power to determine the boundaries of proper or improper behavior.³

Fractured fandom is perpetuated through many different platforms on the internet, causing people to want safe spaces again where they can ship what they want to ship without any repercussions. This often leads to private spaces, where fans can “gatekeep” and prevent others from participating.

Gatekeeping, when often described on the internet, is the process of analyzing someone else’s experience in fandom to see if they will meet the “standards” of a true fan. In many stories of gatekeeping, male (often white) fans quiz female or nonbinary fans on their knowledge, demanding answers to questions of minute details. However, I think that this definition is limiting. In this example, fans gatekeep because they do not feel that the other fan has enough knowledge about the fandom; yet, gatekeeping extends far beyond that. Gatekeeping prevents other fans from accessing all parts of fandom in an attempt to create a “safe-space” free from triggers, but this action often disguises gatekeeping under the thin veil of classism and racism. Fandoms have always functioned as safe spaces and some fans do need additional warnings for triggers or content; however, the deliberate exclusion of fans of color from fan narratives via gatekeeping causes further fractioning in fandom. And because of the call to decentralize fandom, gatekeeping will only become worse for fans of color. Jessika, as a woman of color, pointed out the need for white fans to recognize their privilege in fan spaces, and I agree. White fans have always dominated fan spaces, forcing their preconceived notions of who is and is not a “good” fan onto fans of color, causing undue burden, and perpetuating cycles of abuse. White fans, including females (and those who identify as females), and LGBTQ+ fans need to

recognize their privilege in themselves and in their ships, which brings me to one of points of further study.

In addition to the conclusion, several topics for further study remain. First, this study focused mainly on Western media and largely Caucasian characters and ships. However, these ships and this media is not all-encompassing. There are several avenues of research that stem from here. First, I think it is important to look at multimedia in fandoms of color and online communities of color, especially in regard to fan art and mood boards. Racebending, or taking characters and creating a storyline around them where they are a different race, is a technique that some artists use, but often are criticized for. Another avenue of research is the use of multimedia in non-Western culture fandoms. In other fandoms, for example manga or dōjinshi (self-published works) are popular fandom texts that incorporate multimedia at their very core. Dōjinshi can often be developed out of manga styles or fandom, making it a form of multimedia analyzed in this study. A final avenue of research that stems from this point of study would be analyzing the popularity of white ships, specifically white slash ships and their futures. At a Fan Studies Network panel in February 2019 at the University of Southern California, fan scholars debated the future of slash, stating that “slash” may be dead because fans may not identify with it anymore. However, in a recent survey by Fansplaining to determine what it means to be a shipper, questions were brought up regarding race. Rukmini Pande, author of *Squee from the Margins*, argued that, “you can already see the pushback in the responses from fandom once whiteness is being foregrounded... Because it is uncomfortable, it disrupts the notion that queer fandom is liberatory. But it is very necessary work.”⁴ Analyzing shipping and slash culture for race is an important step in fan studies that needs to be taken.

Second, while this study looked into fandom communities, it did not look into the inherent classism that occurs in fandom, both between the different classes of users (beta versus author versus reader) and what constitutes as a “good” and “bad” fan. This point of further studies builds off of needs for comprehensive studies of race in fandom, as often times, fans of color are labeled as “bad” fans by white fans. In my doctoral research, I plan to follow the understandings and development of class in fandoms, looking specifically at the impacts that classism has on race and gender, as well as fan labor. I believe that understanding how classism plays into fandom can help readers and researchers understand the Internet’s role in classism, as well as its role in perpetuating racism and white supremacist viewpoints.

Finally, due to the limited amount of time for the study, all of the data could not be analyzed, nor could all of the conclusions be drawn from the data. I was unable to look at the term frequency on the comments; however, I had begun to see some promising avenues of research in the term frequency. For example, a possible avenue could be looking at the word “thank.” Thank is used by both author and reader in the comments but means two very different things. The usage of the word in regard to fan labor could also be an interesting correlation. Additionally, as I pointed out in Ruby’s work, the word “like,” is used in many different ways in the comments. Linguistically, this shows the development and history of the word, and it also provides fruitful insights in the way that a reader is using it and developing their own understanding of something. Lastly, I was unable to analyze some of the interactions on websites like tumblr or discord because of the sheer number of messages and asks; however, I think that these places could also provide insight into the future of multimedia in fan fiction. Clearly, as is seen in this study, fan fiction and its multimedia will continue to live on, long after the story has finished.

¹ Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, “Fandom and/as Labor,” *The Journal for Transformative Works and Culture* 15 (2014), <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/593/421>.

² Ford, “No One Hates Star Wars...” presentation.

³ Ford, “No One Hates Star Wars...” presentation.

⁴ Rukmini tweet.

Appendix A

Survey for Prescreening (given via Survey Monkey)

Question Number	Question	Participant Answer Choice
1.	<p>Please read the document below: ADULT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PRESCREENING The Fan fiction Reading Guide: The Role of Multimedia in Producing Fic and Its Use as a Close Reading Tool</p> <p>Principal Investigator: Lauren Rouse, MAE Candidate, graduate student Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA Department (School, College): College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, English Department Faculty Advisor: John Shanahan, PhD, English Department</p> <p>I am conducting research to better understand the impact of multimedia on fan fiction and on the readers, who read it. I am looking for people who meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 18 or older • A fanfic writer • Writing a new fic • Have a beta • Have active reader/writer (you with your readers) interaction • Able to virtual or video chat for one hour • Planning to have multimedia with your fic (moodboards, fanart, reading guides, etc.) • Have a multi-chapter fic • Publish on AO3 or ff.net <p>I want to get your permission to prescreen you to be sure you are eligible to be in the research and meet the above criteria. To do that, please complete the Survey Monkey survey. I am also asking you for your tumblr and fanfiction URLs so that I can ensure you are eligible.</p> <p>Who should be contacted for more information about the research?</p> <p>Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the pre-screening, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study or you want to get additional</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>No answer choice</i></p>

	<p>information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher, Lauren Rouse at lrouse3@depaul.edu, or John Shanahan at jshanah1@depaul.edu.</p> <p>This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University's Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.</p> <p>You may also contact DePaul's Office of Research Services if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team. • You cannot reach the research team. • You want to talk to someone besides the research team. <p>You can keep a copy of this information to keep for your records.</p> <p>Statement of Consent from the Subject: If you agree to be screened, please answer yes to the next question on the Survey Monkey.</p>	
2.	Do you consent to being a part of the prescreening?	<i>Yes or No</i>
3.	What is your reddit username that you responded to the post with?	<i>Fill in the blank</i>
4.	What is your tumblr URL (if you do not have one, please write N/A)	<i>Fill in the blank</i>
5.	What is your fanfiction URL (for example AO3 or ff.net)	<i>Fill in the blank</i>

Demographic Survey for Participants (given via Google Survey)

5/18/2019

Thesis Questionnaire

Thesis Questionnaire

Hi! Please fill out this questionnaire. Thank you so much!

1. How do you identify your gender?

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary/ Third gender
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say

2. If you selected "prefer to self-describe" above, please explain below.

3. Preferred Pronouns

4. How do you identify your race?

Mark only one oval.

- African American
- White
- Latinx
- Hispanic
- East Asian
- South Asian
- Middle Eastern
- Carribean
- African
- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Prefer to self describe

5/18/2019

Thesis Questionnaire

5. If you selected "prefer to self-describe" above, please explain below.

6. Age*Mark only one oval.*

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- Other: _____

7. Current Time Zone

8. Native Language

9. Education Level*Mark only one oval.*

- Some high school
- High school diploma/GED equivalent
- Bachelors
- Masters
- Doctoral
- Technical school

10. Current Fandom

11. Email to be contacted at:

Appendix B

Webscrape Script (created by Ana Lucic)

```

1 library(rvest)
2 library("RSelenium")
3 library("MASS")
4
5 output.filename <- "/Users/analucic/Documents/comments_NeedleInABug.csv"
6
7 remDr <- RSelenium::remoteDriver(remoteServerAddr = "localhost",
8                                 port = 4445L,
9                                 browserName = "chrome")
10
11 pages <- 1:3
12 urls <- paste0("https://archiveofourown.org/works/1308881?page=", pages,
13              "&show_comments=true&view_adult=true&view_full_work=true")
14
15 get_text <- function(url) {
16   url %>%
17     read_html(options = "HUGE") %>%
18     html_nodes("#feedback blockquote.userstuff p") %>%
19     html_text()
20 }
21
22 results <- sapply(urls, get_text)
23
24 #comments_df <- as.data.frame(do.call(rbind, results), check.rows=FALSE)
25
26 write.matrix(results, file=output.filename)

```

Code for Data Analysis: Inputting Libraries (created by Ana Lucic)

```

library(reshape2)
library(ggplot2)
library(tm)

```

Loading required package: NLP

Attaching package: 'NLP'

The following object is masked from 'package:ggplot2':

annotate

Hide

```

library(topicmodels)
library(RColorBrewer)
library(wordcloud)

```

Reading the file that contains scraped comments from the web site and converting the file from wide to long format

Code

	id	key
	<int>	<ctr>
1	1	V1
2	2	V1
3	3	V1
4	4	V1
5	5	V1
6	1	V2

6 rows | 1-3 of 4 columns

Code for Data Analysis (created by Ana Lucic)

```
text <- d$value
text<- text[!is.na(text)]
text <- gsub("'", "", text)
text <- gsub('"', "", text)
text <- gsub("#", "", text)
text <- gsub("&", "", text)
text <- gsub("'re", "", text)
text <- gsub(" ", "", text)
m <- Corpus(VectorSource(text))
m <- tm_map(m, tolower)
```

Warning in tm_map.SimpleCorpus(m, tolower): transformation drops documents

Hide

```
m <- tm_map(m, removePunctuation)
```

Warning in tm_map.SimpleCorpus(m, removePunctuation): transformation drops documents

Hide

```
m <- tm_map(m, stripWhitespace)
```

Warning in tm_map.SimpleCorpus(m, stripWhitespace): transformation drops documents

Removing certain words that we don't want in the data set, in addition to the default text mining library stopwords list

Hide

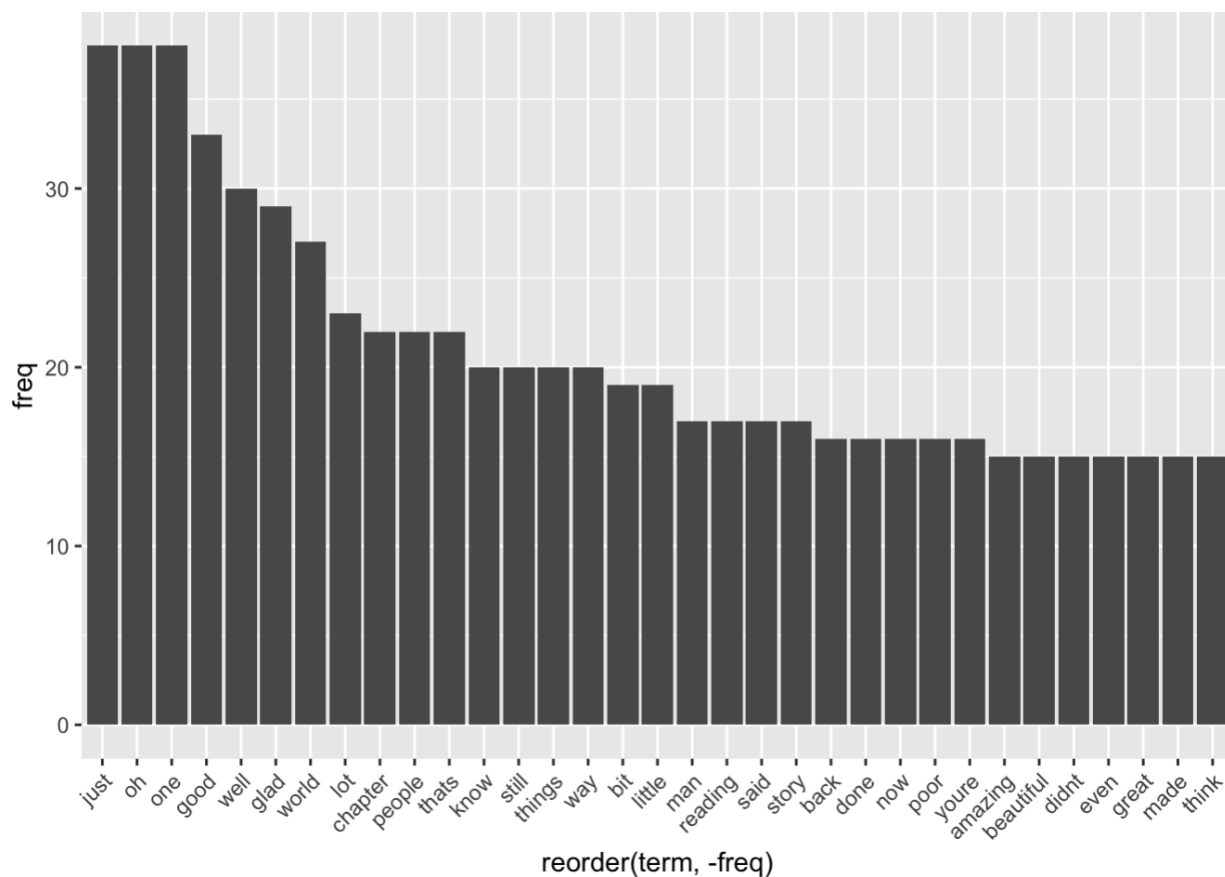
```
myStopWords <- c("thank", "thanks", "use", "see", "used", "via", "amp", "kylo", "ben", "solo", "rey", "leia", "luke", "skywalker", "han", "solo", "chewie", "dean", "winchester", "sam", "castiel", "love", "heart", "yay", "omg", "captain", "america", "steve", "rogers", "bucky", "barnes", "winter", "soldier", "sam", "wilson", "tony", "stark", "ironman", "falcon", "black", "widow", "natasha", "clint", "s", "m", "3", "cas", "cant", "dont", "like", "much", "really", "cas", "reypo", "balthazar", "im", "d", "make", "makes", "get")
m <- tm_map(m, removeWords, c(stopwords("english"), myStopWords))
```

Full Code Notebooks (created by Ana Lucic)

Ruby's Work	http://rpubs.com/alucic/work1
Carol's Work	http://rpubs.com/alucic/work2
Jessika's Work	http://rpubs.com/alucic/work3

Appendix C

Comments on Ruby's Work (Graph)



Comment's on Ruby's Work (Frequent Terms)

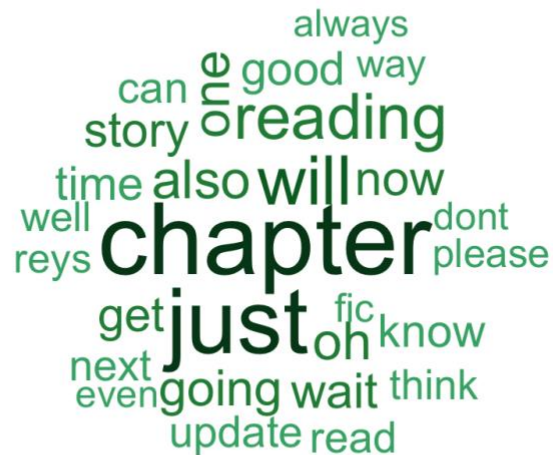
```
findMostFreqTerms(dtm, n = 50, INDEX = rep(1, dtm$nrow))[[1]]
```

just	one	oh	good	well	glad
38	38	38	33	30	29
world	lot	people	chapter	thats	way
27	23	22	22	22	20
know	still	things	bit	little	said
20	20	20	19	19	17
reading	story	man	youre	back	poor
17	17	17	16	16	16
done	now	didnt	amazing	made	even
16	16	15	15	15	15
beautiful	think	great	scene	need	going
15	15	15	14	14	14
read	work	can	worked	description	everything
14	14	13	13	12	12
feel	line	best	got	voice	fun
12	12	12	12	12	12
whole	loved				
11	11				

Comments on Carol's Work (Word Cloud)



Comments on Jessika's Work (Word Cloud)



Comments on Jessika's Work (Frequent Terms)

```
findMostFreqTerms(dtm, n = 50, INDEX = rep(1, dtm$nrow))[[1]]
```

chapter	just	will	reading	also	oh
3444	3101	2203	2026	1640	1590
one	going	wait	now	story	get
1564	1491	1438	1431	1426	1399
time	good	know	update	can	next
1361	1360	1321	1238	1231	1231
read	think	well	reys	please	fic
1221	1161	1136	1130	1089	1079
way	dont	even	always	amazing	hope
1057	1031	1018	1003	990	986
happy	loved	youre	writing	great	want
928	896	882	878	849	841
kind	snoke	feel	first	two	glad
832	829	815	806	804	782
words	still	commenting	make	right	back
769	759	758	741	734	716
kylos	beautiful				
700	695				

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