Kean University

Dichotomy of Fan:

A Snapshot of Interaction, Participation, and Belonging

in Modern Fandom Culture

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Abstract

Welcome to the summary of my M.A. thesis website, DichotomyofFan.com, whose full title is, as you saw on the previous page, *Dichotomy of Fan: A Snapshot of Interaction, Participation, and Belonging in Modern Fandom Culture.* As I believe it would be a bit much to dump everything on the site—there are 15 interviews and that's only one section—into this summary, I'll be including a preview of each main section of the project. Speaking of, there are a lot of ways I can (and have) introduced this project to people. Instead of the default Surprised-Pikachu-meme-How-Do-I-Even-Explain-This awkward pause, allow me to use past mini-projects requiring me to explain it in succinct terms that make sense... in order to make it make sense.

Everyone is a fan of something. Everyone has their *thing*—music, shows, books—that influences them, drives them, or simply puts a smile on their face throughout the day. My thesis project started as a result of fan experience—a creative piece after years of influence, interaction, and participation—but soon moved to an exploration of fandom itself. It has become a snapshot of fan communities today as both my peers—through interviews—and I—through autoethnographic accounts—have experienced them, analyzed through the theoretical discussions of researchers like Henry Jenkins and compiled in a series of vignettes (read: rants) on fandom trends, ethics, memes, and lingo.

Introduction

This project is the result of a steady buildup of interest in fan(dom) studies—including the actual realization that such a thing exists. That interest was essentially cultivated over the last few years of my college career, specifically in classes that allowed for academic exploration of my creative interests. Funnily enough, those particular classes required regular blog posts, several of which I mention throughout this website. As such, a good portion of the project is written in an informal, almost spoken, way. Here are links to those blogs, by the way, for your pleasurable perusal:

Networked Narratives (Spring 2017) — https://owlsarepeopletoo.wordpress.com/

Electronic Literature (Fall 2018) — https://masoochwrites.wordpress.com/

Networked Narratives (Spring 2019) — https://owlsarepeopletwo.home.blog/

Thesis (Fall 2019 + Spring 2020) — https://cmthesisblog.wordpress.com/

Interviews

Everyone has their own story when it comes to their interests and their fandoms. What do they like? When did they start? How deep into the fan community (if at all) are they? What purpose does fandom serve in their life? This aspect of my project looks into the fan(dom) experiences of fifteen friends of mine (because I have no impulse control). Each interview was recorded on two devices and later transcribed, which is a hellish task that I do not wish on anyone. Anyway, here are just a few little things of note before you can check out two of the interviews:

1. All participants were asked if they would like to use a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

2. Each participant was asked 13 base questions along with any other questions that formed from natural conversation progression or curiosity.

And with that, we move on to the interviews themselves! I've decided to add two to this summary just to showcase a bit of variety in fans' relationships with their respective content in regards to level of involvement, personal and emotional importance, mental, social—and even political—stressors, etc.

Interview with Kris

Me: **What does it mean to be a fan of something?**

Kris: So I think there's a difference between being a fan of something and being in a fandom. So I think "fan" is purely just enjoying something—I think it could be anything—[but] being in a fandom, I feel like it's some kind of popular culture or something that you find interesting that you then seek out more about, whether it's reading fan fiction, or creating something about it, or interacting with it outside of just the original piece of whatever it is.

Have you been part of a fan community? How so? Please describe.

Yes. I feel like there's… a ton of them, and there are some that I still am a part of and some that I'm not anymore. For a very long time, I've been a fan of Marvel movies, pretty much anything sci-fi, movie-wise. I'm obviously a *Harry Potter* fan, and you know that (laughs). I used to be—ashamed to say this—a Twilight fan. And SuperWhoLock… [which] is *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, and *Sherlock*, the three shows. Although I don't watch *Doctor Who* anymore and I haven't finished the most recent *Supernatural* season, but mostly that's because I don't have time to anymore (laughs). And then, mostly how I interact with them is, mostly I don't really go

back to the original sources anymore. With *Harry Potter*, I actually like the fanfiction more than I like *Harry Potter*, especially because of how I'm now able to address… So like, I read the original books and watched the original movies when I was a child, so I just took it for what it was, and it was entertaining and I enjoyed it, but now looking at it and being like, "Wow, that theme is really a problem," like, it's really problematic. I enjoy less that and more the nostalgia, and then enjoying fanfiction, just the general themes… I made my parents take the Pottermore quiz (laughs), y'know, so stuff like that.

In terms of fan fiction v. original content, what are you seeking in the former that you're not getting in the latter?

So, I think the number 1 thing is usually the fact that something happened in the original—whatever it is, book, movie—that I didn't feel was written well, so a lot of the times I go for the "fix it" kind of fanfictions. So like, fanfictions that start before whatever that thing is—that is usually something that a large majority of the fandom doesn't like—and tries to figure out, "What if this had happened instead, and how would it have continued?" And then, also, queer representation, because that just never happens. So, I think seeking that out… Also, a lot of fandoms that I'm a part of are not very "female main character"-heavy, so a lot of times I'll go for fanfictions that focus more on female characters. And in general representation like… a lot of times, I like reading fanfiction that has—because *Harry Potter* is basically whitewashed—so when there's more people of color in the story, and just more variety of people instead of… very cookie cutter, just placed where they needed to be to make the story work… and see how people would react in that situation and how it makes the story more rich. And then also, part of it is, to me at least—I mean I'm sure [the authors] have no idea and it doesn't really help them, but the only thing that I do on fan fiction sites is [give] kudos when I like something, because I do like

that it's writers. A lot of them are usually young people who write, and they're aspiring to write, and whether it's just that they want to stick with fan fiction for the rest of their life or if they want to write in some other way in the future, and I like that it's helping them and giving them an outlet, and so I like being able to take in what they've created and see them grow as writers.

How often and how long do you participate in these fan communities/fandom spaces?

So I think that, since I've been a child I've always felt connected to things that are "geeky," I guess (laughs). I remember as a child going to see the *Lord of the Rings* movies with my dad, and even now I'm still interested in *Lord of the Rings*, same with *Harry Potter*.

In the fandom spaces online, how often do you interact with those spaces?

So, with other people in the fandom, pretty much never. Even not within a fandom, I'm more of a lurker online. I'll read other people's stuff but won't talk back. But only because I've been so busy with school and everything, only once or twice a week. In the past, maybe once or twice a day (laughs).

Please describe a typical interaction or experience within these spaces.

Like I said, mostly reading. Reading a fanfiction and reading the comments on it. Reading threads or articles about [fandom]. I have two books that are about the psychology and the philosophy of different fandoms, so I like trying to find articles about that online, like analyzing it.

Describe your 'history' with a fandom. What made you join? What made you stay?

So I think my longest running is *Harry Potter*. I was in… I wanna say the summer between first and second grade. The library near me had a book reading, and we were supposed to read a

certain number of books for the summer, and if we got enough stamps then we would get a prize. They would hand out a free book. And so I read, like… triple what they expected, and I brought in my list and they were all about the same length, but one of the books was the first *Harry Potter* book. And it's distinct in my memory because they told me that they didn't believe that I had actually read it, because they didn't think it was my age group's ability level. And so, I guess that would be when I first started with it. And then, my second grade year, my class had a writing contest and we could pick whatever book we wanted to, and we had to write about the characters in the book and us interacting with them. I ended up winning my school's contest, and then the same piece got sent on to a regional contest, and I won the regional contest, and then I got sent on, and I got runner-up for the state. My first fanfiction! (laughs)

I was just gonna say that, "Your first fan fiction!" (laughs)

And it's funny because, thinking back now, I don't think I still have the actual paper I wrote, but I remember in it that I was writing about dorming with the characters in *Harry Potter*, and totally missed the fact that in the dorms they were separated [by gender], and so we had bunk beds and I was the top bunk and Harry Potter was the bottom bunk (laughs).

Just jumping back to the question, you mentioned what made you join, but what made you stay?

I think… support from my family. My family would always buy me things that had to do with it or ask me questions about it… And then, just the fact that it was something that was unique to me, because my friends at that time were not into that kind of stuff, and so it was something that was "just for me."

If you knew then—when you joined the fandom—what you know now as a fan in this community, would your fan experience be different? Would you join it again?

So, like I said, I feel like I'm more connected to the other pieces of it than the original source, so… I love what I have with the fandom, and so I don't think I would ever not want to be a part of it, but I do think that I would've approached it differently. And, with *Twilight*, I don't think I would have ever been a part of it. I mean I enjoyed—I did go to a release party for one of the movies… I think it was *New Moon*? At that point… (laughs) I was too old for *Twilight* and didn't want to admit it. I was at a BlockBuster for a movie release, and it was after the BlockBuster had closed, and they had set TVs up in the aisles and we had brought sleeping bags. Me and two of my friends were there watching it, and we're chilling out, enjoying it, but then we looked around and realized that we were surrounded by 12 year olds.

How old were you at the time?

Like… I was in high school.

That's not too big of a difference.

Ehhh, I think I was… a junior maybe? (laughs)

… Not too big of a difference… (laughs) I'm trying to help you out here!

(laughs) And that was when I was like, "Okay, this needs to stop." Yeah, I mean, I still watched all the movies and finished all the books. But, yeah, I didn't go to the spaces as much as that anymore. But I still went to other fandoms' release parties. I went to a *Harry Potter* one. I was in Washington state visiting my uncle, and my cousin was there, as well, and we went to… It was this big party… I think it was for the fourth book, and it was behind a library… or maybe a

bookstore? And they had just set up tents everywhere, and everyone was in costume, and there [were] just people at each tent doing craft things that had to do with *Harry Potter*, there was a woman doing tarot… It was really cool, yeah, and it's something that sticks distinctly in my mind for that fandom.

How important are your fandoms to you? Why are they important?

I think they're incredibly important to me, especially… so partially the nostalgia, but also they've been a part of my life for so long that they're a part of my identity now. They have helped me to become who I am and I have no idea where I would be now if I didn't have them, like I don't know what kind of person I would be because they've been with me so long.

Kind of goes into the next question. Has fandom experience played a part in your identity/how you identify yourself today? How so? Do you wanna expand on that a little more?

Yes! (laughs) Um… I don't know, I think just the fact that it's been with me so long, and so the things that I enjoy affected my experiences, my choices in life, like choosing to stay home and hang out with friends at home rather than go out to parties in high school. That made me a different kind of person than the people who might be going out to parties. Just the things that I enjoy and choose to do, and the friends that I've made, and the connections I've made with other people… Not necessarily that I seek out people who enjoy the same things as me, but I feel like a lot of times, I just naturally end up drawn to people who enjoy the same things as me, or similar things. And so, my friends have helped me to shape my identity and I don't know if I would've found those same friends, and therefore, shaped my identity the same way that I have.

Do you create content as a fan? Please describe.

I have. So I have written fanfiction before. I have crafted things. I remember I made… I crocheted gloves, but they were, like, the fingerless gloves that were like the Iron Man—(holds out hand)... I've made plenty of things that are *Harry Potter*… Just in general, crafting things. I've written analysis papers on different fandoms…

That's fair! I'm doing a whole thesis, so (laughs).

Yeah (laughs). In high school, I convinced my theatre teacher to add a—so we were doing something called Broadway Nights, and so it was scenes from different plays, mostly musicals—and I convinced her that we should also include *Rocky Horror [Picture Show]*, so we did "The Time Warp."

Nice! Are you a fan of *Rocky Horror?*

I am. I have gone to many midnight showings. My first midnight showing, I went with my dad, actually, because… He had told me that he loved it. He went with my mom when they were first dating … They almost didn't continue dating after that (laughs). My mom is not a fan of that kind of stuff, she thought it was really weird.

Ooohh, was it the first date?

No, the first date they went to an AC/DC concert. My dad was a metalhead in high school (laughs). And so he pulled up to the house and he had, like, shoulder-length hair, and my grandfather yelled at him to cut his fucking hair (laughs). Yeah, but the *Rocky Horror* date did not help. But, yeah. I've introduced other people to it. Some people enjoy it, some don't. Like I said with how it helps me to connect with friends—so [FRIEND] and I would not have been friends if it had not been for *Rocky Horror*. So at work, we were allowed to wear whatever we

wanted for a while, and so I happened to be wearing a T-shirt with *Rocky Horror* on it—it was the one with Tim Curry sitting on the lips—and so we're both super socially awkward, and… I don't know why we decided to forget about social awkwardness for a few minutes, but we both started talking about it.

I feel that… the lapse of judgment (laughs).

I'm glad I did, because it ended up working out, but this is not something I would normally do. I was just like "Do you wanna go one time?" and she agreed, and so we went, and we became really close friends.

Have you ever had career or professional opportunities open up for you as a result of your experiences as a fan?

No…? … (pauses for thought) No.

Fair enough. Have you ever discovered new interests because of your fandom experiences?

Yeah, absolutely. I think part of my fandom experience has been connecting with people in real life who are also fans of that or something else that's similar. I don't find that I share with people online who are within fandoms, but in real life I do, and they often will suggest, "Oh, you should try this," or "You should look at that," and I'll end up finding things that I like from that.

Do you tell people outside of the fan community that you're in that fan community? Why or why not?

Yeah, absolutely. I mean it's not like I introduce myself, "Hi, I'm [NAME], part of this fandom," y'know? But I'm not trying to hide it or anything, either. I just don't see why there is a reason to hide it.

Do you tell people inside of the fan community that you're in that fan community? Why or why not?

It depends (laughs). There are certain people in fandoms who are gatekeepers, and so they will determine if they think you qualify as an actual fan of whatever that thing is. Sometimes it's, "Oh, well, you've read the books but not done this," or "Oh, you've watched the movies but haven't read the comic books," y'know, so, "You don't know enough." I will avoid people that give off the vibe that they're gonna be [like] that. Not to judge ahead of time, but a lot of times, it's guys in the community who end up that way (laughs).

Why do you think it's like that?

The fact that there's gatekeeping? I think for a long time—recently, being "nerdy," being "a fan of something," is a popular thing, it's "cool" to like that. But it hasn't always been. And the people who, for the whole time, were fans of things, experienced a lot of, like… being separated, [and] isolation from it, I guess? And so I think there's kind of like a "You didn't earn your place here" kind of thing. Part of that, and then I think also just… people sometimes feel like they're "special" because they know a lot about something and aren't willing to allow others to share, and forget that they were once also new to something, and it should be a fantastic thing that you're finding someone who doesn't know something about something, because instead of making fun of them and being nasty to them, why not share and teach them, y'know?

I feel that… That's all the main questions that I have. Is there anything you want to circle back to or that you want to Defiantly Rant About For The Public To Know?

(laughs) … The only thing I can think of is the whole thing I was talking about with gatekeepers. When I was younger, my brother was a very big gatekeeper in my life. So, my brother, as a

young person, liked a lot of the things that I like now, and sometimes he delved more deeply in them, and he [had] a habit of being like, "If you know something, he's louder and more right than you" (laughs). And so there were many times that I didn't share with him what I knew and avoided talking to other people about it because of how he reacted and how he was almost putting down what I knew about it, but he's a lot better about it now. Yeah, he's gotten better at accepting that you can have a different opinion about something.

Is that where gatekeeping in general is heading?

No (laughs). There's a lot of gatekeeping, and not just… I don't know if it's not always been in other places, not just fandoms, or if it's the fact that I'm a more well-rounded person and see more things a bit, but gatekeeping is everywhere. And I don't think it's something that's ever going to completely go away. I do think that it's something that, if there's enough people in there, it can become that there's this small group of people who are annoying—"they exist, but we ignore them and let them sit over there" kind of thing, rather than making it so much harder to enjoy whatever your fandom is.

Interview with Brian

Me: **What does it mean to be a fan of something?**

Brian: To be a fan is to have more than the average amount of excitement about a given thing. That's it in general, I would guess. Or I guess both excitement and I guess knowledge of that thing. So like a sports fan knows about that sport and all the names of the rules and stuff.

Have you been part of a fan community? How so? Please describe.

I would say loosely yes, in a couple different fan communities. Probably the most recent one would be *Overwatch*, as you know a bit. To the extent of… first of all, played the game a bunch, so then that was the interest field of it, and then the above average portion—that, I would say, like, more than the average player base—would be like I'd go online to communities like Reddit and r/overwatch, and then communicate both with other people who share an interest in it, or to learn more about it, or to keep up-to-date with news and updates and things. And then additionally on the side would be like separate communities for memes, and like fan communities where people would just talk about the content in a more casual, fun kind of way.

How often and how long do you participate in these fan communities/fandom spaces?

Not in the *Overwatch* fandom anymore, since the whole "Blizzard hates Hong Kong" thing. Since, or more specifically, or I guess less specifically, corporate overlords care more about profits than they do about human rights issues. So that's… (laughs).

Sounds about right.

Not specifically Hong Kong, it could've been anywhere, but yeah they showed— I guess if there were any question about leaving fandoms, that's what it takes… They were a big community that had a lot of people, but did something that was kind of universally agreed to be pretty bad, and then handled it terribly like over and over again. They kept making new statements, being like, "Yeah, so, we stand by our original decision, because we can't lose China as a partner," so then just… kept messing it up. But I was in that community for like 2 to 3 years, pretty regularly.

Please describe a typical interaction or experience within these spaces.

Surprisingly friendly. For the perspective of video game [fans] being like… really nasty, condescending people, because a lot of the times when you play games, that's what a lot of people are, but I think there's a certain threshold where like, if you're in the fandom, you usually care more about it and the other people that are into it and less about your own selfish experience of it. So say, for example, in a game of *Overwatch*, people would be jerks, as you do in video games, but when you go on to *Overwatch* Reddit, it's people [being] super friendly, [like] "Oh, here's how you could improve." People will upload clips of their play style and are like "How can I improve on my techniques?" and they have feedback and criticism for them instead of "lol u suck." So in fandom communities, my experience is generally more friendly than outside of it.

I know you kind of already went into this but: Describe your 'history' with a fandom. What made you join? What made you stay?

(laughs) Yeah… I stayed with it for a long time with it because… I don't know, it was just fun? I guess it could go to [that] I had a group of friends that would also play, so it was a good way to keep in touch with these same friends. And what made me start it was… I guess just… interest in the original core product that was being sold—it was a good game (laughs). So then, because me and a group of people all enjoyed it enough, it pushed us into wanting to follow it more closely into a fandom.

Just curiosity—do you still play?

No, I haven't played for a couple months. Still get dreams about it, actually, (laughs) I don't know if that's important for the interview.

Really? (laughs) Interesting, though!

I think I mentioned it in the group chat, but that I used to regularly get *Overwatch* dreams about, like, a really good play.

I think I remember these…

And I had a dream a couple days ago where I was playing *Overwatch*, and I was just like "No! That chapter of my life is gone!" (laughs) But, yeah…

Does anyone in the group chat still play? I forget.

I don't think so.

Nah, everyone jumped ship… Yikes. I mean, valid. Okay, if you knew then, when you started being a fan, what you know now as a fan, would your fan experience be different? Would you join it again?

In terms of the community, yeah, probably, I would join the community again. But if, when I first started playing *Overwatch*, if they had done a similar human rights blunder, I probably wouldn't have joined the fandom because I probably would have put down the game. But the community wasn't the issue that made me leave the fandom, so yeah, I definitely would. I'd probably be more involved right from the get-go. Probably get on the Reddit super early and associate with other people who are there to try and learn from people who are more skilled than me, try and help people who are a lower level than me, make friends that can also play.

How important is your fandom to you? Why is it important?

I feel like "important" is a weird word to use for it, because I feel like the second saying "Oh, yeah, it's important" makes it feel like it's too important (laughs). It's nice… I wouldn't say it's super important to me, though, like… I guess, again, it only takes like one big mess-up and I'm

just like "eh," and I'll just leave it. There's communities of nice people all over the place. It doesn't have to be this one game. It doesn't have to be a game in general. So, fandoms are nice, but I would say that they're not so important that they're not either worth leaving or that they're worth sticking to at the expense of pretty much anything else. [Fandoms are] interchangeable.

Has fandom experience played a part in your identity/how you identify yourself today? How so?

Hmm… Not really. I would say, if anything, I guess a fandom in general of gaming, maybe? Because it got me to appreciate a lot of things I wouldn't have appreciated otherwise, like different ways of telling stories, nuances of level design, things like that. So, as kind of like a problem-solving-oriented kind of thinking person. Things like that I find really interesting to think about, so like, I wouldn't have been able to do that with, say, a movie, because it's more like a set script. But, with things like level design, it's fluid and you have to account for different things. And that same kind of mindset goes into other kinds of gaming like D&D or board games and meeting up with other people that have a similar in it. So a lot of these facets kind of work together for different… problem-solving skills, I dunno.

Do you create content as a fan? Please describe.

I didn't… Unless you would describe text posts [as] content. Like, I didn't create anything artistically. There was one point where I tried to help out on a subreddit for *Overwatch* that was about update news, to get that posted regularly because it was like a game mode cycle and you weren't able to check from [outside] the game. So it would be like you'd have to log on to check. So somebody made a subreddit post that was just the new game modes that were in every day so you could just check it on your phone instead of having to go home to check [in-game]. There.

So like, little things for update news and trying to… I think I posted a couple memes… (laughs) maybe a couple bits of visual content, but yeah, sparsely.

Have you ever had career or professional opportunities open up for you as a result of your fandom experiences?

I wouldn't say so, but it was interesting that for a time—it wasn't like a career path, but it was a short running job at Wild Pig [Comics], I don't know if you knew that I ran D&D games. So like, through gaming fandoms, I did have a weekly part time game-running session until the store closed… which has, genuinely—and again this is like, personal news with me and [significant other]—has factored into future plans where we're both super psyched, like… It would be so cool to own a comic book store, or a gaming store, and do that regularly. But not real plans, but they have factored into considerations for future careers and stuff, I guess. I would love to have a Wild Pig comic book store, that place was amazing.

Specifically Wild Pig, or…?

I mean it's not a branch so I guess we could (laughs) literally just steal the name and call it Wild Pig III.

See if it's copyrighted or anything (laughs).

Yeah, but just to have a gaming store/comic book store would be so cool.

Have you ever discovered new interests because of your fandom experiences? You did kind of touch on that earlier but if you wanted to expand on it.

I guess not really, not that I hadn't mentioned already, not that I can think of [worth expanding on].

Do you tell people outside of the fan community that you're in that fan community? Why or why not?

Oh yeah, yeah, I talk about *Overwatch* all the time. I can't shut up about it. Well, when I was playing *Overwatch* I couldn't shut up about it, but also like games in general—I bond with people over games pretty frequently. One of the students where I student teach was telling me about how he loves *Fallout*, and we talked about *Fallout: New Vegas*, and he was like "Dude," and he went up to shake my hand, because he was like "Ah, you're Cool Adult, because you play video games." So yeah, it's cool when you can reach out to some people that enjoy games, or maybe enjoy specific kinds of games, and connect to people like that.

I know I've experienced that kind of thing in theatre camp with all my kids. God, I think the biggest was *Steven Universe*. Everyone loved *Steven Universe*.

Yeah, you just talk about it, and usually—I guess this goes back to experiences in fandoms, I guess this is the experience outside of them—most people are pretty fair in the mindset of "let people enjoy the thing that they enjoy" (laughs). If someone doesn't like *Steven Universe*, and you tell them about Steven Universe, they're not gonna be like "Ugh, that show sucks," they'll be like "Eh, alright," and then either they're like "Oh, I'm really excited about it!" and then you bond over that, or they're just like "Okay, cool," and listen to you talk about it.

That's been your experiences?

Yeah, generally.

Do you tell people inside of the fan community that you're in that fan community? Why or why not? ... You look confused (laughs).

So like (laughs), in this case… telling people while I'm playing *Overwatch* that I'm excited about playing *Overwatch?* (laughs)

Maybe more like in online spaces, I suppose. Or if you randomly meet someone and they're like "Oh, yeah, I play *Overwatch*," would you engage?

Oh, yeah, absolutely. So if it's the reciprocal of the last question, absolutely, if someone were talking about it, I would try to talk to them about it, as well, because I know from the positive experiences that I've had reaching out to people, that it's nice when somebody's also interested in the same thing.

Okay! So that's all the questions that I have. Do you have anything that you want to circle back to or rant about?

I was surprised that there weren't any questions about negative perceptions of fandom, though. Questions about, like, "Are there any things that you would be in a fandom of, save the fandom?" So like, "Are there any things that you're interested in but refuse to join the fandom of, because [of] the fandom?"

Oh, wow. I didn't think of that.

So like, *Rick & Morty*.

(laughs) Alright, yeah. Please, feel free to go off.

I love the show, the show is fine, I follow… Like, there's all the requirements for being a fan, because I liked the show itself, which led me to dig deeper and look at Dan Harmon, the guy who made it, and try to look at some of his other stuff… Searched for the pilot, like I did all the extra following things to stop someone from being just a passive viewer of to a fan of

something… But… (laughs) the fandom has such a negative perception [for] itself, like people who don't get the point of the whole show in the first place, or have a perception as just people who are really obnoxious… So that, it stops me from wanting to identify in some fandoms. So say… *Rick & Morty*… *Fight Club* is another one. The book's fine. Movie's fine. Don't tell people I like that movie, though (laughs), because…

So would that be one case where, if you found someone who also loved *Fight Club*, would you not tell them that you loved it?

I would be *skeptical*. I would have to listen to them talk about it first.

See, that's the thing! That's why I asked earlier (laughs).

Yeah, so just like— Okay. Yeah, but that's because I'm not in that fandom, though. I wouldn't tell them that I'm in the fandom because I'm not in the fandom (laughs).

That's fair.

And then there are certain things like *Steven Universe* that like, I think that the show is fine, but I've seen a lot of things about the fandom that's like… kinda toxic. And I'm just like, "Well, I'll just watch the show" (laughs). I won't really try and engage because I don't want the negative associations that come with it, which I guess circles back to the question of "How important are the fandoms?" They're important enough to not want to engage with some of them, but not so important that engaging with others is completely necessary. Like, it factors into your decision of talking about a certain thing, but it's not integral. I think that's about it, that I got.

Self-Documentaries

In academic terms, I'm documenting here my own fandom experiences via autoethnographic accounts: what fandoms I was a part of, how and when I interacted and participated, what I gained through these experiences, etc. All that fun stuff packed into five darling little episodes.

Don't be fooled. I'm in a lot more fandoms than just those depicted here. Considering that I have a limited timeframe, that I am a single human, and that I have systematically jumped around to about 15+ fandoms over the years, I will not be able to cover every aspect of my experiences right here right now. The ones I go into more thoroughly for this project are Nancy Drew, YouTube, Anime (aka Japanese animation), and K-Pop (aka Korean pop music)—all staples of my growth as a fan, a person, and a scholar. I'd like, in the future, to talk about the influence and impact of more of those fandoms. And I will. Someday. For the purpose of this summary, though, I will just include the introductory Episode 0 and Episode 1: Nancy Drew.

Episode 0: Intro

For this little introductory episode, I'll be going through a few of the questions I had my interviewees answer for me.

What does it mean to be a fan of something?

I believe that a fan is someone who likes something. That's really the plainest definition to me. Surface level, that's really all you need, and really all that should count. Look a little deeper, though, and there's almost a spectrum of where you lie as a fan in relation to That Something. (My one interviewee, Sam, described it as a bullseye, and it's a good way to look at it, I think, as I talk about in my Fan & Content vignette.) There's a range of how you engage as a fan, if you engage at all, and that doesn't take away from the fact that *you are a fan*.

Have you been part of a fan community?

As you, dear reader, will see later, I have been a part of many fan communities. Some in more depths than others—from a cursory "I like that" to "I have 5+ posters of that on my wall and interact with the fandom daily." It's funny, actually, that being part of a fan community/fandom and being a fan can be considered the same thing or different. As far as I know, the definitions are subjective. Even I interchange them sometimes, but I do believe that the two are separate. You can be a fan and not be active in the community, for example.

How important are your fandoms to you?

My fandoms are certainly important to me. For some, the content is more important, and for others, the communities have become what most strongly keeps me engaged. I think I've always been a fan of something, though. You could argue that I was a *Blues Clues* fan—did I watch it because I loved it or because it was there? Hmm. But anyway, being an artsy kid, I'd say anything with a story would hook me. Anything that pulls you away for the briefest moments from reality was something I'd give a chance (not really for an "escape" per se, but for fun, or that *what if* curiosity). Plus, when I became more active in fan communities, there was this distinct, comforting feeling of being a part of something.

Overall, I think my fan experiences started out as pure enjoyment, became influence and inspiration when I started trying to produce my own content, and now is all of that plus sharp-eyed critique. I think I'd attribute my observation, empathy, and editing skills to these experiences, now that I think about it. The more differences you expose yourself to in the world, the more you're able to be open-minded, accepting, and understanding. (Those are my thoughts,

at least.) As such, as you'll see in the other entries, being a fan of the content I chose really shaped me and my ideals, interests, wants, and habits.

Has fandom experience played a part in your identity?

Thus leads me to identity. The past few years, I think all my work has somehow related to the concept of "identity." A writer's voice (which I did look into ad nauseum in the [final project](#) for my Writing Theory class with my entry "[Voice & Identity in Writing](#)"), what influences someone, where is a person's place in a community and does that differ from how they would describe their place, etc. As for myself, it's like I said, all my experiences and the content I chose to consume have led me to this point, for better or worse. I think, no matter what way I spin it, I have to admit that fandom has indeed made me who I am today.

Do you create content as a fan?

And lastly, indeed I have created fan content, but I will not be linking any to this project. I made some fan art during my high school and college years, but most were doodles that will probably never see the light of day, regardless of how much I personally like them. Fan*fiction*, though? I consume that shit daily. What's a published work? I don't know her. Anyway, I have written a few, planned a lot more, and in my efforts to One Day Maybe Please Hopefully I'm Begging get published, most of them have or will be developed into original stories, instead. Most of them do not exist anywhere online, but [ODDNights](#) is going to be the vehicle with which I get to try them out, hopefully. And that should about cover it for an introduction! Let's move on to specific fandom experiences.

Episode 1: Nancy Drew

Nancy Drew and I… have a very deep history.

Maybe not like Marianas Trench deep but like... 5 AM existential talks with your significant other while the sun comes up deep.

That comparison took me way too long to come up with and it doesn't even make sense so let's just move on.

This is the first self-doc I'm trying out, and I think it's pretty fitting, since ND—including books, games, movies, etc.—was pretty influential to me around middle and high school. And shE'S MAKIN' A COMEBACK, TOO.

But let me start at the beginning.

I got into Nancy Drew by way of the original Nancy Drew book series by Carolyn Keene (a name which I later found out to be a pseudonym and that many authors ghostwrote the series) and PC games by HerInteractive, and I got into the Nancy Drew book series by Carolyn Keene and PC games by HerInteractive by way of my cousin. The latter came first, though. At least, that's how it stands out in my mind. Like, I *distinctly* remember the day, sitting in my cousin's lap at her computer, playing this little point-and-click game. Whenever I visited my cousin's, we'd play the cool computer games she had—most notably this wild American Girls game called *The American Girls Premiere*.

One particular day, she brought out a couple games of the Nancy Drew series and said, "Pick one." It was really as simple as that. I don't remember any convincing or swaying that she did, but there was probably a "Do ya like mysteries, cuz? Puzzles? How 'bout these? Promise they're not scary." (I think that was a thing with me. Couldn't do Scary Things. HA, give it like 8-10 years, kid. You'll get the appeal.)

Lemme take a minute to describe these games, though. They're essentially point-and-click adventure games where *you*, the player, are Nancy Drew (meaning you never see her face, which is kind of a gag at this point) solving a mystery you somehow got roped into (be it ludicrously coincidental circumstance and she just Happens to be there or a character legit asking her for help—but that's usually how ND goes).

Anyway, you meander around, finding clues and playing mini games and choosing dialogue options, and you learn a lot of stuff on the way. Like whether something is locked or stuck. (I tried finding a compilation on YouTube of how many times Nancy says "It's locked" or "It's stuck" and I am grossly disappointed to find none.) Here's a screencap of what the game UI (User Interface) generally looks like:

This one's an oldie, though. *The Haunted Carousel*. The interface has changed up in recent years. Like this:

From *Warnings at Waverly Academy*. This is a more recent depiction of what the games look like. In both, you got your inventory, your journal, your checklist (only available in the easier mode of the game, Junior Detective, while Senior Detective mode offers less help), your phone (where you can call your friends Bess and George, your boyfriend Ned, the Hardy Boys, etc. for help), and your dialogue box.

So, we have a story-based game with minor choices that, from what I recall, don't necessarily affect the story itself too drastically, though you can get kicked out (or die—there are many ways to die, i.e., crushed by elevator, eaten by carnivorous plant, lava, impaled by carousel poles).

We have fun in this fandom.

The particular game I played with my cousin, though, was *Danger on Deception Island,* picked by 12-ish-year-old me because "orcas are cool" and "you said this one was the least scary of the 3 so—" I think we got through most if not all of DDI—(Jeez, the forum's game title acronyms are all coming back to me. But more on that in a bit.)—that day and I immediately

sought out more. My parents bought me a few games, I got more for holidays, ended up buying ones myself once I had relative financial autonomy…

Bruh. It went from 0 to 100 real quick.

Long story short, I fell in love. I'd already been into PC games—both educational (LET'S GO JUMPSTART) and not so much (HARRY POTTER PC GAMERS RISE)—and these were just… *it*. There was just so much to them. Each game had a different setting, looked into different histories and cultures—appreciatively, as far as I can remember, fingers crossed—and I ate 'em up, man. They were so fun, and it was like a secondary form of education for me, too. Problem solving was a given, considering they were puzzle/mystery games, but the amount of alternate things I looked into as a result of ND…

Do you *know* how obsessed I got with Marie Antoinette because of *Treasure in the Royal Tower?* And how much more I got into the history of alchemy (as well as what not to feed a parrot) because of *Curse of Blackmoor Manor?* And don't get me started over how hyped I was about the ones that took place in Italy *(The Phantom of Venice)*, Ireland *(The Haunting of Castle Malloy)*, Japan *(Shadow at the Water's Edge)*, and New Jersey *(The Haunted Carousel)*.

And *Secret of Shadow Ranch* needs no point of interest for me to promote. It's just Good. And I could say the same for others, as well. There's just so much stuff in them that sticks with you, makes you want to know more about things—not just in the game, either, but in real life.

(Let's be real, though, most if not all games do that. You get some skill out of whatever you play. Hell, a mobile anime I'm playing has me working on my resource management skills.)

If you play enough as Nancy Drew—this analytical, intelligent, open-minded, resourceful woman—you end up taking her with you, incorporating those tactics of hers into your own

thought processes and logic. You get her thirst for knowledge, her instinct to know *more* and maybe meddle just a bit *more*, even for the smallest things, and they become yours.

That's how I think it happened for me, at least. These games got me thinking more, got me to learn more about an array of cultures to the point that some concepts have stuck with me all these years later, even with a hiatus in playing.

One big thing I remember is a code used in *Secret of Shadow Ranch*—it was simple for a 7th grade mind, so I taught it to my friends. One day we were messing around and decided to use the code on our names. Thus was born my nickname that has lasted me over a decade.

So… yeah! Fascinating games.

And frustrating. God, could they be frustrating.

Come to think of it, Henry Jenkins says something about this fascination/frustration relationship in *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*. In a discussion of participation and resistance, he claims that "[f]andom is born out of fascination and some frustration. If you weren't fascinated, you wouldn't continue to engage as a fan. If you weren't frustrated, you often wouldn't continue to rewrite and reinvent" (14). He ain't wrong, but there has to be a balance, y'know? Too much fascination and little frustration could lead to obsession and blind belief in perfection of the content, while too much frustration and little fascination could just lead to loss of interest and abandoning the content.

Anyway, it took a bit of fumbling and upset and many a call to my cousin for puzzle help for me to eventually stumble upon the HerInteractive community forums. I'd never been on anything like them before. The transition is a little fuzzy, but after a while of being on the receiving end of game advice and How-To's and hints, I wanted to be the one *giving* that information. So I spent hours on a profile and signature, detailing what games I'd played, what I

knew most about, and what *other* things I was into (pretty sure it was my *House, M.D.* and *Poptropica* era). Doing so, wanting to have a nice looking signature—with different colored text and fancy fonts—led me to learn HTML. I'm no savant, but I learned the logic behind it, some of the general coding language, and it's progressed (somewhat) from there.

I *mean* somewhat. I went to an IT high school but I learned more from googling for gradient text. What does that tell you?

Was that too mean?

Actually, I don't think so.

School today is… I don't want to say garbage, but… Let me specify: The American Public Education System is garbage. There we go.

It's all a means to an end, with public schooling. College, too, while we're at it. Get the high scores on testing, get the highest grades, achieve this, achieve that, get that degree. We're achieving, but what are we gaining? What are we learning?

Tablo, leader of Korean hip hop group Epik High, talked about this on the college level in several episodes of *The Tablo Podcast* (Episode 22 and Episode 25 specifically). Basically, you can learn (mostly) anything outside of school, what with the internet these days. There are benefits of going through a college program, and there are benefits of *not* going through a college program. It really depends on your desired career path, though, as Tablo points out. If you want to be a brain surgeon you better heckin' go to medical school ("Ep. #25 | Romantic Comedy Turned Murder Mystery"). But I digress. With enough drive, you can learn practically anything on the internet, y'know? Just… use your best judgment.

Also, subscribe to *The Tablo Podcast.* He's a rad dude and the show's insightful as heck. (But he's 100% wrong about the way to hang toilet paper.)

Let's get back on track here. Regardless, tech prowess aside, the ND forums opened up

that particular world for me, one of interaction with other fans in a constructive manner for

support and collaboration.

For a while I thought that the forums were down, even mentioned it in one of my

interviews, but with the revamp of the HerInteractive site in recent years, there are new message

boards up in a similar format of the old community forums. One thing I don't like is that the

color scheme completely changed, from a dark teal texture to your basic white with these

magenta-red accents. It's jarring.

Aesthetics aside, I'm excited to have found it again. Maybe I'll jump back into that fray

at some point.

That reminds me, actually—Nancy Drew got me into Let's Plays (or videogame

walkthroughs or playthroughs) before I even knew what Let's Plays were. Striking out on the

forums—for one conundrum or another—led me to seek out more visual walkthroughs via

YouTube. I'll probably (definitely) go into Let's Plays more in my YouTube Self-Doc, but

discovering arglefumph was 100% for Nancy Drew. He is, after all, The Nancy Drew Dude.

What started as a means to an end—find the puzzle answer—led to me watching his entire

playthroughs just for his humor and accent attempts (bless him). He's not how I got into

YouTube, but he was one of the big channels I used to follow back in the day. Apparently he's

still posting stuff. Good on him.

Fast forward through years of playing these games (19 out of 33 to date), and reading

those classic, brightass yellow, hardcover books (25 on my shelf out of ??? who even knows?),

and sitting through attempted film and show adaptations of the girl detective… It was an interest

that died out around the time my anime era hit, but their impact was never lost on me. So much

so that, when I reconnected with old friends and made new friends that shared my interest in the game series, I realized I wanted to revisit this aspect of my life.

That sounds so serious, *this aspect of my life*.

Long story short, I want to do Nancy Drew Let's Plays of my own for all the games, especially the newer ones I haven't played yet. (One actually just came out a few months back! Shoutout to *Midnight in Salem*.) I'd love to bring on friends to play them with me and talk about random stuff, ND or fandom or otherwise. I know it's been done before, and I know there's a whole podcast (*Unlocked: The Nancy Drew Podcast*) for the games that I only just found and haven't checked out yet, but… not to be cocky, but it's never been done by *me* before. That sounds cocky. Bear with me. Every story's been told, but change up who tells it and you get a whole different experience, know what I'm sayin'?

There's so much more I could say about this series, about Nancy Drew in general, about how her character got "fridged"—aka killed for the progression of another, usually male (the Hardy Boys, in this case) character's storyline, which I can and hopefully will go off about some day—for her 90th anniversary. (Seriously, who does that?) But that could be a whole other project. And it will be. Hopefully one day I'll be able to come back and link that Let's Play series for y'all. *Stay tuned (for Danger).*

Vignettes

Welcome to the apex of this project, in a sense. What you'll find here is a series of thematic vignettes drawing together my experiences, my friends' experiences, and theoretical components regarding fandom that I'd consulted before and throughout the project.

While transcribing my interviews and documenting my own stories, I noted down particular themes that kept coming up. With a list of 10+ themes, I noticed that they fell almost on their own into a triangular relationship. I am very sure that there is a better term for that, but I'll leave that for now.

Overall, there are three main elements I've been working with. The Fan, the Content, and the Community. (A fourth is Society, but we'll get to that.) With those three elements comes three relationships. And so, here's what we have:
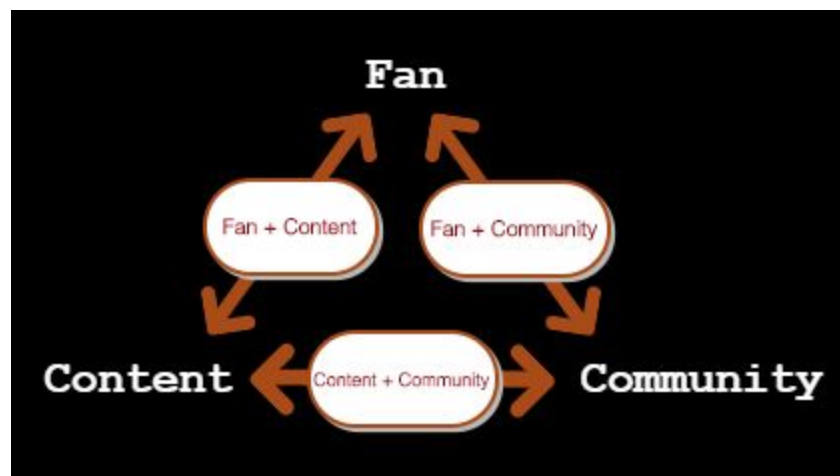
The fourth relationship I feel is worth discussing, then, is that between Fandom—the combination of fan, content, and community—and Society. Imagine a big circle around the Fan - Content - Community trifecta up there. *That's* the Fandom & Society relationship. Sorta. Listen, it's an in-process concept. These themes could and probably will change over time, even after this project is "done". The more that I think about it, the more that certain themes overlap, or contradict each other, or deserve better terms, etc.

One final note: due to the short nature of these vignettes, I have included all of them in this summary.

Fan & Content

The relationship between an individual *fan* and the *content* they enjoy (movies, macrame, motorcycles, music, etc.) is the one whose narrative is the simplest, most known, and most portrayed in media. Basically, we're looking inside a fan's head. Why do they (singular) like the thing? How do they express how they like the thing? Each person's story is going to be different, of course. That can be shown through the interviews alone.

Attraction

Content draws a fan in by some means. Regardless of the method of discovery (of which there are many, according to several of my interviewees), why and how long and to what intensity they stay interested in the content depends on innumerous factors, really. Jenkins describes in *Participatory Culture* (as I mentioned in my Nancy Drew Self-Doc) that a balance of fascination and frustration keeps a person engaged in content and fandom, and that's really it (14). That "fascination" can take several forms, but the most prevalent that I've seen in my experiences and interviews is *relatability*: finding representation in a story, in a song, in a content creator's life experiences, etc. Not to just let this point be a throwaway, but, it really could be anything, and it could be inexplicable to the fan themself. "Why do you like ____?" Don't be surprised to get an "I don't know, I just do," because sometimes, you as a fan really just *do*.

Bullseye Model

Sam's interview will cover this model more completely, so head on there for that explanation, but the image of the bullseye was poignant enough to warrant a discussion on the topic of fan intensity. With *the thing* or *the content* in the center of a bullseye, where does a fan fall in relation to it regarding emotional "closeness" or intensity of "connection"? The topic

could go down two paths, I think. 1) At what point on the bullseye does a fan "cross the line" from fan adoration to unhealthy obsession? (A topic discussed in my K-Pop Self-Doc and, more explicitly, in an old final project of mine on fandom and obsession.) 2) Anywhere a fan is on that board, whether they're a casual fan or diehard, whether they like one song or follow a tour, well, in Arya's words from our interview, "if you are a fan, you are a fan. There's no ifs, ands, or buts about it." And that is something some (particularly gatekeeper) fans often forget.

Accessibility

With the boom of social media, fandom has thrived on a global scale. My interviewee Jei points out the ease of "finding stuff" and how security has kind of tightened over the years due to the increase of minors online, which is a *whole other deal*. Before you pass judgment, though, peep Tim's interview, and know that mature content creators in fandom *do* go to lengths to set barriers for their art/writing/etc. But that's fan content, and that is not what we're talking about right now. Measures to bar minors from mainstream mature content (movies, video games, etc.) is more on the parents. Something I lowkey went off about for a second in my YouTube Self-Doc. Long story short, the internet makes it easy to access content from around the world (i.e., anime, K-Pop) and participate in the content's online fan community, which also spans the world.

Fictional Content vs. IRL Content

This. I think this might be one of the more interesting aspects of this project. To me, at least. Because I'm a *nerd.* Just to clarify, *fictional content* = made up stories and characters in books, movies, shows, etc., while *IRL (in real life) content* = real-life people, events, things, stories, etc., like celebrities or musicians. Since joining a fandom of IRL content (K-Pop), the dynamics of its fans compared to my fiction-based fandoms past have been pretty similar, but

with added perks and higher stakes. *Perks* being that you could have the chance to see the artist or celebrity in real life. *Higher stakes* being that, on the celebrity/artist's side, the threat of negative aspects of fandom are very very real. I go in-depth (ish) about this back in that fandom and obsession project I mentioned earlier. Main point: there are distinct differences between being a fan of fictional content and IRL content. Several interviewees touched on these distinctions, but feel free to check out Abbie's and Jei's, specifically.

Fan & Community

This particular section is where this whole project got its name. *Inclusion* and *exclusion*—two opposing concepts that exist in fandom spaces in a messy blend of moral dilemmas, bonding through trauma and fascination, social ineptitudes, and true tests (and failures) of common sense. Been there, done all that. "But golly, Christina, it can't be all bad. Ain't it just a buncha people liking stuff?" Ye shall see, my friend. No community exists without its problems.

Inclusion (aka the best of times)

Belonging

When a *fan* initially engages in a fan *community*, they find a designated place for people of a similar interest. In that way, they find a sense of belonging. Through interacting via social media and real-life circumstances like conventions, friendships are (most likely) formed. You're on the same wavelength as the people you've surrounded yourself with, and it's pretty fulfilling. Daniel, Risa, and Tim (and more interviewees, I am sure) could attest to that. Plus, it's not just a found friends/found family trope. We're not stopping there. You start learning stuff about yourself, as well. Exploring fiction, communication with new people, and all that good

self-reflection stuff leads to self-discovery, growth, and openmindedness. (See my [Intro](#), [Anime](#),

and [K-Pop](#) Self-Docs for more on that.) And I think those are pretty pivotal in gaining that sense

of belonging, even just in general.

Support Groups

Not that self-actualization isn't a practicality, but in this little subsection I'll be touching

on the more practicalities of inclusion in fandom. Fans find places for themselves to belong in a

community, and they also find designated spaces for aspects of fandom to take place. Just go

through *Affinity Online: How Connection and Shared Interest Fuel Learning*, which I mention in

the [Content & Community vignette](#) and my [YouTube Self-Doc](#). People thrive in these spaces,

sharing their crafts and *bonding* (Ito et al.). I mean, [Mandark](#)'s in a Facebook group for sculptor

and YouTuber Ace of Clay, [Craig](#) LARPs on the weekends, [Brian](#) frequented the subreddit

r/overwatch (pre-Blitzchung controversy) for gaming support. Most (if not all) interviewees

mentioned interacting with and/or participating in fan communities in some way, either online or

in person. These communities that serve a purpose while acting as safe spaces are just… lovely.

Comforting, even. But, then there's—

Exclusion (aka the worst of times)

Gatekeeping & Toxicity

Hoo boy. Here we go, friends. There is a lot to say here. As much as the whole "we all share an interest and support each other!" is heartwarming and wholesome, fandom ain't all sunshine and roses. We all know social media is a double-edged sword, and it doesn't just stop where fandom is involved. Each fan community has its own sect(s) of bullies and stalker fans, among others with a "holier than thou" mentality, and oftentimes, that toxicity gets attributed to the entire fandom (but that's more Fandom vs. The World). Most claims aren't without reason, of course, considering the sorts of infighting you see that make you worry for the sake of humanity a bit. Regarding general toxicity amongst fans, see … well, most of the interviews. Regarding gatekeeping specifically, see my interviews with Kris, Craig, and Arya. One way or another, every fan has had negative interactions in fandom spaces.

Aversion

It sucks when a negative reputation precedes you. It's the case for many a fandom. People gaining interest in a thing but steering clear of its fandom based on that reputation is… very common. Brian brought this up in our interview, citing popular adult cartoon *Rick & Morty* along with *Fight Club*, while Christine mentioned similar aversion in the case of K-Pop group BTS. In such cases, a fan will just engage in the content and avoid the community completely. Are they still a fan? Of course. Are they a member of the fandom? Perhaps not. It really depends on that fan's perception of the distinction between "fan" and "member of fandom." But that's getting into semantics. Something else worthy of note before I wrap up here is the answers by interviewees to the "Would you join the fandom again?" question. It shows a difference similar

to that "better to have loved and lost" quote. Even with negative aspects of fandom, most found that they would join the community again.

Content & Community

This section has all 'C' headings for the sole purpose that it was almost entirely coincidental but then I ran with it because it made me giggle.

The relationship between a *content* (be it book series, boy groups, BDSM, Beanie Babies, whatever) and its *community* as a whole is often one of reverence, as I've seen. Makes sense that a fan community for a thing would hold the thing in high regard, huh? I'd make an analogy to religion and followers, but let's save that precarious argument that could get me in trouble for my interview with Arya and a future, well-versed discussion, maybe. In the meantime, let's look at some different elements that can exist in the space between the two.

Canon vs. Fanon

This theme encapsulates the creation and distinction between the actual aspects of the content (canon) and expansions of the content (fanon: fan works, theories, "head canons," etc.). A fan community could have multiple sects (depending on size, complexity of the content, etc.) that focus on or believe different fanmade concepts regarding that original content. Sometimes, the line between the two can be blurred, as is discussed in Mandark's interview, while other times, discussions of canon vs. fanon content, as well as different elements of fanon content, can spark disagreements and animosity amongst fans. Or it could be a pretty benign time where people speculate who in a fanon based relationship (or ship) would be the one to kill the spider. ((Useless Note: wouldn't be me.))

Curation

The age of social media (in its many [plat]forms) has allowed for fandom to exist in a massive, amalgamative… mess… with everyone feeling the need to shoot their own opinion into the void of the internet. Which is fine, but as was discussed in Joanne's interview, all those opinions readily available, as well as the functionality of Twitter, Tumblr, etc., leads to fans curating the content they view. (And that's with anything, really, not just fandom.) Doing so, while being well within a person's right to filter out content deemed triggering or problematic or just unwanted, creates this *filter bubble* of only the content that person wants to see. It's an echo chamber. You got your pros and your cons for this theme. A… dichotomy, if you will.

Criticism

I'm going to put this in big capital letters. *YOU CAN BE A FAN OF SOMETHING AND WANT IT TO BE BETTER*. It is a common misconception in fandom that a person critiquing or criticizing an aspect of a content is a "hater" and therefore deemed "not a fan." If a content has elements or themes that seem like they could be improved upon, constructive criticism is certainly a thing. That's how content grows with time, becomes more inclusive, has less terrible tropes, doesn't adhere to society's heteronormative misogynistic gender conforming trends of—you see where I'm going with this? Creative works—hell, and even fandoms of stuff like shoes, for instance—benefit from the type of criticism and feedback that their fans or consumers bring to the table. That's economics, baby. Fan communities' relationship with their revered content can take a "lemme put my fave thing on a pedestal because it can do no wrong and anyone who thinks it's less than perfect can die" turn or a "I think my fave thing can be approved upon because I love it and want it to be the best it can be" turn. And several interviewees absolutely vented about that. Understandably.

Content Creation

Let's talk about those fan works I mentioned earlier. They're more concretized byproducts of the community's interaction with the content. It's a simple formula of inspiration, influence, and production, done for as many different reasons as there are different fans. Several interviews ([Tim](#) and [Christine](#), to name a few) discussed fanart and fanfiction, and Ito et al. describe in *Affinity Online* how spaces specifically for creative subcommunities exist and grow (*Hogwarts at Ravelry*, Animemusicvideos.org, etc.). And if all that weren't rad enough, many of those creatives take their fan works and either make bank or utilize that experience to get a job and make bank. Or they do it for fun, which is also valid.

Fandom vs. The World

Aka *Fandom & Society*, but the *Scott Pilgrim* reference was too good to pass up. As I said earlier, we're defining *fandom* as the combo of *fan + content + community*. This'll be a short one, by the by. I don't even have much to say by means of an intro, so we'll just move on to—

External Stigma

Society hates people who like things. "Nerds," specifically (though that term is as subjective as "fan" is), whose whole shtick is to like a thing with *great enthusiasm*. Well... hmm, okay. The portrayal of The Nerd stereotype has… gotten better, I guess, in mainstream media. "Nerd culture" is being normalized, portrayed as cool, and that's all well and good, but there are still issues regarding the kind of fandoms a person is in. *Star Wars? Avengers? Sports?* Mainstream. Acceptable. *Cartoons? Anime? K-Pop?* That's where you get the "Are you a child?" "Do you want to be Japanese/Korean?" "Why do you watch those Chinese boys dance?" questions. The infantilization, the racism—it jumps out. Then you get into the realm of misogyny

and… *Sigh*. Y'know, just check out the interviews ([Miss A](#), [Anna](#), [Sam](#), [Arya](#), [Jei](#), [Christine](#), [Abbie](#)…), specifically the interviewees' responses to *"Do you tell people outside of the fan community that you're in that fan community? Why or why not?"* as well as my [K-Pop Self-Doc](#), especially the "Why are Fangirls scary?" TED Talk by Yve Blake. It's unfortunate, how the interests of a person can pigeonhole them in the eye of society. I did mention in my [Anime Self-Doc](#), though, that more nerd fandom aspects are gaining traction in media. I had a positive view in the self-doc, but let's spin it around. It's lovely to feel "seen" in shows like *King of the Nerds...* but at what commodified, dramatized price?

Is it fandom?

I had an enlightening discussion with [Arya](#) on the topic of religion. Hot-button topic, I know, but think about the base conditions for being a fan of something. With a broad view of the word *fan,* and the understanding that you can indeed be a fan of *anything*, is a religious group a fandom? The two share similar characteristics, as Arya brought up. I'm sure people have made the connection before, and it's certainly something interesting to think about. Philosophical, even. But then you can get kind of bummed out when you realize that politics follow the same structure, too. American politics, at least. And with that, I am *swerving* away from this topic! Thank you and have a good day/night!

Extras

Every project has those little fun extra bits that are, like, *part* of the project *I guess* but don't *need* to be in the final project because they're just supplemental stuff. They're just kind of *brushed over.*

Well, no! Not here, friends! Here, we *showcase* our extras. You wrote this bit because a song inspired it? Honey, link the song. Do it. Show off those inspirations. Y'all get to see every step of my process. (Especially since I linked my thesis process blog earlier.)

Maybe that's why I have issues with academic writing. Too clean-cut, complex wording, high strung— Man, I'll read a dissertation on the most mundane shit if there's an actual *voice* to it. Make me chuckle and give me a cool jam to play in the background and I'm set. Make academia fun, y'all.

That got off track, though, I think. Enjoy the fun stuff that went into the creation of this monster project. Everything will be on the website, but I'll give you a sneak peek in the meantime:

ODDNights Radio (& More!) — You want jams, we got jams. Music has always been a core part of my life, both in fandom and IRL. It influences my own creative processes and acts as a form of connection between myself and others. As such, I've linked playlists that I've curated over the years for past projects, future projects, or just for shits and giggles. Happy Listening!

Interview Extras & Bloopers — Because my friends are insightful and funny. Here will be a slew of extra bits and wild moments of the interviews that were trimmed for time, but nonetheless golden.

Glossary — because millennial fandom linguistics are (is?) cool and confusing (and

mostly, if not always, stolen). I'm an expert of neither memetics nor linguistics (though I

do like linguistics), so I'll just skip to the part where I tell you that this is a glossary of the

random fandom/social media/millennial terms used throughout this project. The terms'

respective links on their respective pages take them to their respective definitions, and

that's what they do here, too. They're just all gathered in a nice alphabetical list, linked to

possibly several versions of their definition and where on my website the term is used.

Field Findings (YouTube and Twitter) — things I've found on the internet with the same

vibe as elements of this project (i.e., fandom ethics, social media, community, mental

health in relation to fiction/fandom, content/fan interactions). The YouTube Findings

include timestamps and "sketchy lil notes" I initially wrote up for each one. The Twitter

Feed Findings are essentially retweets from this project's "official" Twitter,

@DichotomyofFan.

Future Prospects

   I mention in a lot of areas on here that I don't want this project or this interest to end here. I want the passions that I've displayed on here to carry on because I think they're important. Inspiration, influence, and creation in regards to fandom interests are powerful. This stuff can get you a job or just give you a smile during the day. The pros are great, y'know? (We're just going to ignore the cons for a second; those can stay in the interviews and self-docs and vignettes, okay, this is the Optimism Corner.)

   So, here we have little explanatory pages for future projects I want to do! Heck, if the website is still up in a few years and I've actually gotten around to making such-and-such channel or such-and-such podcast, I'll have links to the actual *things* for you.

Electronic Literature Piece (On Dark, Dark Nights)

   Or *ODDN*. Or *ODDNights*. Y'know, in the full title, I've always wondered if a comma should go between the two "Dark"s. Hmm. *On Dark Dark Nights*. Does that look better? I'll figure it out at some point. For now, the comma stays.

   "But what is it?" you may ask. "What is this odd (heh.) acronym mentioned sporadically throughout your master's thesis project, Christina?" Well. In 2018, I wrote a children's book for my Writing for Children & Young Adults class, titled *On Dark, Dark Nights*. (Shoutout to my interviewee [Mandark](#) for suggesting the title to me. MVP.) Later on in the same semester, in my E-Lit class, I took that story and started turning it into an electronic literature piece, but with some bigger aspirations. Story-wise, I wanted to take other original stories (including fanfic plots) of mine and fit them together into one massive interwoven narrative to act almost as a portfolio of sorts. Like, "Here are all my ideas and characters. Here are my children."

Mechanic-wise, I wanted the piece to have choice-based games vibes. (I wrote my undergraduate senior paper on that. Heh. It's linked on the website, if you're curious.) So there would be different choices and endings. But also, with the amount of characters I wanted to add to this piece, I thought it'd be cool to give the reader the option to change perspectives. The point of view was already second person (i.e., "you walk down the hall"), but who that "you" was... I wanted the reader to have that control.

Well, "control." That's another thing. Reader/player agency in a narrative/game is *also* what that undergrad paper was about. It's rad stuff to think about.

Anyway, here's the work-in-progress version of that e-lit piece.

If and when you check out the website, take note of the homepage. The big tree with the owl at the top, several other silhouettes... Surprise! They're just a few of the characters of *ODDNights*. Here, I'll add it for you.

I wanted this piece (and this tree, where the story starts) to be a focal point of this project, even in its unfinished state, because it was going to *be* the project at first. Things obviously

shifted, but I think it's important to point out that the inspiration for *Dichotomy of Fan* was an original piece almost 100% influenced by my experiences in fandom. So, we've come full circle.

So if there's one passion project to come out of all this, it's working on *ODDNights*. I'm always brainstorming for it, honestly: taking notes, researching, and adding songs to that ODDNights Radio playlist. Fingers crossed I get to work on it in the future.

YouTube Channel

You heard it in the [Nancy Drew Self-Doc](#). You heard it in the [YouTube Self-Doc](#). You probably heard it in like three other places because I'm a serial story repeater. I would like to start a YouTube channel. And I would like to start it with Nancy Drew PC game Let's Plays. And I would like to have friends join me in the playthroughs.

I could wax poetic about how we could talk about learning through games and fandoms, go off (again) about how I don't expect anything to come from starting a channel, but I think I'll just be repeating things that I've said in those self-docs. So, see this page on the website as a placeholder. If and when I get this whole channel thing started, I'll add an update and a link there.

Podcast

Take a peek at my interviews. And the bloopers/extras if I put those up yet. See, now... Those were *fun*. I love talking about fandom ethics/politics/drama/etc. with my friends. I love hearing people's stories. I want people's stories to be heard. Also, I think my friends are hilarious. Truthfully, I haven't thought *too much* about this yet, but I do really like the podcast format (especially Tablo's). There are fandom-centered podcasts out there, and I do want to venture out

and check those out before I do anything. So, this is the most far-off project in relation to this project. I'll update the website when I get that going. See you then.

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