This study looked at how young adults feel that their lives have been influenced by their experiences participating in fandom, both in their reading and creative habits as well as in their own personal development. A survey of 215 people showed that most people, after joining fandom, read, write and create art more than they did before. It also revealed that young people in fandom believe their lives to have been significantly shaped by the support, feedback and inspiration that the friends they make in fandom communities give them.

Headings:

Fandom

Young adults -- Books and reading

Young adult literature

Adolescent development

Fan fiction

Identity formation
FANDOM AND THE DEVELOPMENT AND LITERARY LIVES OF YOUNG ADULTS

by
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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina
April 2013

Approved by

_______________________________________
Brian Sturm
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Introduction

Not every teenager reads fiction for fun. Almost every young child enjoys being read to, and through elementary and even middle school, many children are voracious readers. By the time children get to high school, many are either too weighed down by their school work, extracurricular activities, jobs and social lives to have time for reading, or else they don’t view it as valuable (either on their own or in their peer groups).

For educators, there is an ever-present struggle to find ways to connect teenagers with literature. Youth librarians are constantly looking for new ways to engage teens in reading. Many educators may not know that teenagers, more and more (and on their own), are coming together around stories in fandom. A fandom is a community of people that comes together because they are all fans of the same thing. This one thing can be a sport or hobby, but the word, these days, is most often used to describe a group of people dedicated to a story, be it a book series, television show, movie, a webcomic, etc.. A fandom is where someone goes once the canonical media has been consumed. People in fandom write fanfiction, draw fanart, and, most importantly, share ideas and love for the media they brought them together.

This community revolving around art and literature gives teenagers an outlet for their creativity and a safe space to explore their own identities; a community they might not be able to find in their non-internet lives. This study sought to discover what young people perceive to be the impact of being in such a community, on their growth as people and as readers.
Literature Review.

1 Adolescent Development

Erik Erikson’s stage of psychosocial development for adolescents (typically defined as ages 13-19) revolves around the search for identity. He posits that, in searching for this identity, adolescents in this stage of development may try on various iterations of self in their search, potentially identifying with one group at a time in hopes of finding a way to define themselves in that group. Interacting in groups or communities is an important part of the identity seeking process, because adolescents need to try out different ways of thinking before coming to informed decisions about what they want out of life. This stage of life can also be very trying, and seeking solace in a group of like-minded individuals can provide comfort and certainty in these times.

[Adolescents] help one another temporarily through such discomfort by forming cliques…they also insistently test each other’s capacity for sustaining loyalties in the midst of inevitable conflicts of values (Erikson, 1983, p. 420).

1.1 Affinity Spaces

Affinity Spaces, a term coined by James Paul Gee, are places, either physical or online, where groups form around a shared interest in informal learning about a particular subject. The phrase transcends definition as a community, as it refers to a space where people can interact on a variety of levels. Some may find community in the space, and others may be there specifically for the information aggregated by others. It is the common endeavor that unites people of every race, class, gender and on either end of the spectrums of knowledge and ability level.
Gee believes that learning happens best in these spaces, where learning is rooted in common interest instead of any of the aforementioned demographics. Here, all types of knowledge are valued and there are many ways to be seen as a leader, and individuals may see the learning as a journey where they meet others who may be very different than themselves, learning about themselves as well as the unifying material in the process. Despite this, this form of learning, focusing on the informational learning space bringing people together to learn, is not often seen in schools. Rather, a more competitive and narrow angle on education is the norm. Young people of today, because of their interactions in virtual affinity spaces, are well versed in this type of learning, and do it often on their own online. Educators taking note of this trend may be able to encourage the young people under their influence to learn in this way (Gee, 2004).

2 What is Fandom?

While there is some scholarly research on the subject of fandom, the concept, at least in the sense I am studying it, is fairly new. Online fandom really only gained popularity around 2002, and while many fans themselves have written a lot about the subject, not much formal research has been done about fandom in relation to how it affects the lives of young people.

2.1 History of Fandom

Fandom is the culture and community that surrounds a common interest. People have been using the word “fandom” since the late 19th century, first using it to describe sports fans (Romano, 2012), though people use the term now to refer to fans of just about anything from books to video games to bands (Grossman, 2011).
Before fandom had the communicative reach of the internet, things were slightly more difficult. Amateur Press Associations, or APAs, are groups in which fans write stories, copy them, and mail them out to others in the group for feedback. These have been around for a while- Donald A. Wollheim established the first Fantasy APA in 1937 (Pugh, 2005). While these served their purpose, they, along with fan clubs and sporadic conventions, did not offer the immediate response that today’s online fandom world can, and some participants felt as though they were “writing in a vacuum” (117).

Fandom is a part of remix culture, which is to say that it is about taking an established canon and remixing it, remaking it into something new and different, and sharing that with others (Romano, 2012). Fandom is not about the passive intake of media, but about interacting with it (Grossman, 2011).

2.2 Fanfiction

The most common form of fan interaction in literary fandom is the reading and writing of fanfiction.

The concept, though gaining ground in the digital age, is nothing new. In ancient Greece and Rome, intertextuality, or the writing of one text around or in relation to the history of another, was common practice. Virgil’s *Aeneid* is based on Homer’s *Iliad*, and Dante’s *Inferno* even includes Virgil as a character. The practice of borrowing from classic stories is also a common practice: Joyce’s *Ulysses* is a retelling of Homer’s *Odyssey*. More recently, the number of stories that have been set in the world of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is staggering. From movie adaptations to a great many continuations of the Austen story, to the retelling with the addition of the undead: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith.
2.3 Legality
Fandom occasionally gets bad press, or at least a negative stigma, especially among adults, for issues regarding copyright. The fact that fanfiction is free typically keeps it safe from legal issues, but people still argue about whether fanwork is derivative, meaning it adds nothing new to the original work, or transformative, meaning the work builds on and adds to the canon. There has been a rise in the popularity of these works in recent years, the and the fan-run Organization for Transformative Works has been working assert the transformative nature of fanwork, which asserts the legality of fanfiction, since fair use policies apply to transformative works. (Romano, 2012; Burns & Weber, 2009).

3 Why do People Turn to Fandom?

3.1 Connection with Story
Teenagers start off reading fanfiction because they want more of a story. They connect with the characters they love, and they want more. From there they start observing in fandom. They read fanfiction, look at fanart and fanvideos. Eventually, they start creating works themselves. (Moore, 2005).

There is not much literature on this subject, but I intend to look into the concept in the course of my study.

3.2 Creative Practice and Process
Teenagers might have a hard time coming up with their own characters and settings when they are first learning to write, so writing fanfiction is a way for them to work on aspects of writing such as plot and pacing. They also learn grammar, dialog, and
continuity when they act as beta readers (editors) for other writers. (Burns & Weber, 2009). Sheenagh Pugh discusses this as well:

A fanfic writer on a supportive mailing list is in effect a member of a global online workshop in which she can get feedback, ideas and criticism from like-minded readers and writers all over the world. She can be rigorously edited for free by her beta-readers, while if she performs the same service for them she can greatly improve her own editing and critical skills. She has a far larger audience than would be the case in a real-life workshop” (Pugh, 2005, p128).

The same is true of all forms of communication in fandom, not only mailing lists.

Rebecca Black discusses many skillsets that people pick up from being a part of fan communities. She argues that young people learn skills they may or may not be learning in school as well, such as the ability to self-direct their interests into a finished, well researched fanwork product. Also important are the technological skills that online interaction fosters. In order to take part in fandom, one must utilize resources “distributed across networks of people and different technologies…fans choose the most effective media, tools, language, and resources to accomplish specific communicative purposes” (Black, 2008, p. 127).

Fandom also appears to be a nexus for encouraging creativity in its participants. Fan-made art and writing are perhaps the most well-known, but fans learn quite a few creative skills in their time in fandom ranging from musical instruments involved in fansongs to sewing skills when creating cosplay. Black discusses the potential importance of this in a society where arts programs in schools are being cut and teachers are less able to provide in-class time for creative endeavors:

Creativity and innovation are twenty-first century skills that are very much in evidence in [fan] spaces…Ironically, at the same time that forward-thinking workplaces are calling for creative skills, the imposition of standardized testing seems to be shutting down options for innovation in classrooms (p129).
3.3 Search for Identity and Community

The teenage years are fraught with the perils of searching for identity and dealing with the issues of becoming an adult in a challenging world. Seeing the world through the eyes of another is often difficult for teens to do, since those years are often full of self-worry, and teens can learn new ways of thinking about things as they empathize with the characters they know and love, which is an extremely valuable behavior (Moore, 2005).

This is a significant part of the development process of young people, as they need to be confronted with different ideas of possible selves before they can hope to make decisions about what they want out of life (Erikson, 1983).

3.3.1 Sexual and Gender Identity

Fandom subverts stereotypes and allows people to rebel against the heteronormative constraints that they have to deal with in their regular lives. People can explore their identities in many ways in fandom, but sexual identity exploration, via the characters they are reading and rewriting, is a huge part of fanfiction and fandom in general. Slash, the term for homosexual pairings, is a well-established type of fanwork (Romano 2012).

The majority of people in fandom identify as female, and in a reaction to a male-dominated society and entertainment industry, many women choose to create fanworks for canons they find problematic or misogynist, creating their own agency through the agency they give the female characters they care about (Jenkins, 2006).

Much of the young adult literature dealing with LGBTQ issues is tragic, or about the problems facing LGBTQ. It can be refreshing, and uplifting to read fairy tale type stories rewritten to be about gay characters (Moore, 2005). No matter what the tone,
though, being able to explore these aspects of themselves online has drawn more and more young people together in fandom.

Fandom allows people to engage with characters, appropriating the canon in order to explore these things they are trying to understand in themselves, from the safety and anonymity of a computer screen, free from the judgment and possible danger of exposing their true selves in their regular lives.

When most teenagers are faced with the miserable advice of sex education (put a condom on a carrot, use a mirror to look at your bits), or the miserable version of sexuality in porn, fan fiction offers a more honest way to engage with relationships and sex (Wolfson, 2012, web).

These young people are not only able to find out more about themselves through participatory fan work, but they are able to find and make connections with others who may be there for the same reasons.

### 3.3.2 Connection with Community

The communal aspect of fandom is also heavily stressed. Participating in fandom necessitates interaction with others, typically people who would not otherwise have an opportunity or reason to meet. This interaction is based on the benefit of sharing work and giving and receiving feedback. (Burns & Weber, 2009). Most importantly, the communities built in fandom are usually comprised of people who may have trouble making friends otherwise. With their varied (and sometimes strange) interests, and often shy dispositions, the forum of the internet and the subject matter of beloved stories is often the best, and sometimes the only, place many teenagers have to turn (Moore, 2004).

Matt Hills calls fandoms “communities of imagination.” Simply reading or watching the source material isn’t enough— you can’t just read the book series and be a
part of the fandom, you must take it a step further and engage with others about it. It is a communal act, no matter how you are involved (Hills, 2002).

There are plenty of people who are satisfied with the source material, and never seek out anything else, but there are others who want more. They may want more story, or they may just want someone to share their excitement. Since many people in fandom feel marginalized in one way or another, meeting in their fannish communal spaces allows them to feel validated in ways they may never have been before (Romano, 2012).
Research Questions

How do young people perceive the effect of being in fandom on their lives?

Do young people read more after being involved in fandom?

What do young people see as the benefit of having been involved in fandom?

- Do they perceive that observing and creating fanworks has made them better writers, better artists, and stronger readers?

- Do they perceive a supportive effect of feeling a part of a community?

- Do they perceive an effect on their growth as individuals because of their involvement in fandom?

- Do they feel like fandom is a safe space to explore their sexuality and gender identity?

- Do they get something more out of fandom than the canon can provide?

What do young people identify as the issues with being involved in fandom?

- Do they believe that the rest of the world takes them and their passions seriously?

- What do they think of the interpersonal conflicts that arise in communities?
Methodology

1 Methodology literature

This study was designed to assess how teenagers in fandom (or people who were in fandom when they were teenagers) perceive how being in such a community has affected them. I studied how they perceive that their lives, especially their literary habits and involvement with reading, as well as their development as young adults, have been affected by their interaction in these communities.

I chose to use an anonymous online survey to solicit information about the fandom activity, reading history and self-development of young people. Online, anonymous surveys are a useful research tool in that they allow the researcher to reach a global audience very quickly and easily. In addition to this, certain populations are better suited than others for online surveys (Creswell, 2009).

The survey was a cross section of a population; the data was collected at one point in time. The sample I targeted was a snowball convenience sample, with the survey takers sharing the link to the survey with others. Since I am measuring a specific population that is based around spreading information, this fits well. (Creswell 2009) It is possible to identify attributes of a large population from information gathered from a smaller group of individuals (Babbie, 2007).

The size of the target population is impossible to determine, as fandom is wide ranging and fluctuating. I decided to target a representative sample, the Tumblr userbase.

The way I obtained this information was via a self-administered Qualtrics survey. Once the survey was created, I disseminated it the way information travels in fandom- via
blogs. Since fandoms typically congregate online, I met them where they are. These days, fandom is most prevalent on Tumblr, a blogging website, so that is where I chose to post the survey. On Tumblr, when someone posts, they add tags to their post to identify the subjects covered in the contents. Tumblr users track the tags they are interested in, or use the tag search function to search for them. People can “like” posts, or “reblog” them, which means they can put the post on their blog, with added commentary, for their followers to see, and spread further if they wish.

I created a separate Tumblr account for this purpose, and posted, asking people in fandom to take the survey and spread it throughout their fandoms as far as they can. As for promotion, all I did was tag it with the tags “fandom,” “signal boost,” “survey,” “fanfiction” and “fanart,” so as not to appeal to any one Tumblr fandom over another. From there I let it be, and let it travel whatever avenues it could through Tumblr.

For the survey itself, I tried to leave as much of it as possible open-ended, so as to avoid suggestion bias. The questions regarding how participants discovered fandom, how it has changed their lives, and their least and most favorite things about fandom were completely open ended, and the purpose of these was to spot the trends that appeared in what information people volunteered, not what they would say when directly asked.

2 Data analysis

When setting up the data to be analyzed, I had to edit some entries for clarity, fixing punctuation and spelling errors. In cases of numerical range, such as in response to the questions “Number of hours read per week before discovering fandom,” and “number of hours red per week after discovering fandom,” I averaged the two numbers, except for in 2 year ranges in case of age, when I used the smaller of the two numbers, since being
11.5 years old is the same as being 11 years old. When answers were not precise enough, such as “In my late teens” as an answer for “Age at which you discovered fandom,” the answer was discarded.

For the questions in which multiple answers could be given, such as ways respondents participate in fandom, which fandoms they participate in, or the open ended questions about how fandom changed their lives and their favorite and least favorite things about fandom, I presented the data in the form of a bar chart. When only one answer per respondent could be given, or the data was coded in a way that only one response was taken from each person, such as gender, how they discovered fandom, and their reading and writing habits, the data was presented in the form of a pie chart.

2.1 Coding
Coding is the “process of transforming raw data into a standardized form” (Babbie, 2007 p325). For the open ended questions I developed a method of identifying subject matter inside them. After reading over the answers a few times to notice themes, I constructed categories of answers, looking at each response one at a time and tallying up mentions of themes in their respective categories. This was based on whether a concept was mentioned or not in a response, not how many times a concept was mentioned in a response, so each category could only receive one tally mark per response, no matter how many times a respondent mentioned the concept.

3 Limitations of the study
This study sampled only users of the blogging website Tumblr. As such, it is a cross-section of fandom in its current most popular state, but there are certainly people in fandom who do not use tumblr.
Users were allowed to enter their own information in categories such as “age” and “hours per week spent reading prior to discovering fandom.” Some survey participants entered ranges or gave vague answers, so the information is not as precise as it would have been, had they had a scrolling list of numbers to choose from.
Results and Discussion

1 Summary:
I had 215 viable responses to my survey. Respondents ranged from 18 to 43 years of age, with the majority on the younger end of that spectrum. They were also mostly women, with 80% identifying as some type of female, which is fairly typical of fandom in general. Homestuck and Harry Potter were the two fandoms most mentioned, by far, with 149 and 126 of participants listing them as a fandom they participate in, respectively. The two most popular fandom activities listed were reading fanfiction and looking at fanart, which were both listed by 95% of participants, followed by blogging at 79%. When it came to the open ended questions, participants mentioned first finding fandom on their own after finishing a work and googling, wanting more of it (39% of respondents). Fifty nine percent mentioned interpersonal drama as the largest issue they have with fandom, but the questions of how they perceived that their lives were changed by fandom, as well as what their favorite aspects of being in fandom revealed that participants stressed the value of community (49% of respondents) and found friends through fandom (56%).

2 Definitions
Fandom - A group of people online who are fans of young adult literature, and, together, interact by sharing fanworks based on the canon material they share an interest in.

Young adult literature - novels, webcomics, graphic novels, and manga, read by young adults.
**Fanwork** - Art, fiction, videos, songs, cosplay, etc. about or relating to an the canon.

**Canon** - An established body of writing (again, novels, webcomics, graphic novels, and manga) which serves as the original text that a fandom is based around.

**Fanmix** – a playlist of songs inspired by the canon.

**Fanvideo** – A music video inspired by the canon, containing fanart or original footage if the medium of the canon is film.

**Fanmusic** – Music written by fans about or inspired by the canon.

**Fanart** - Artwork created by fans of an original work that is inspired by, or depicting the characters and situations from, the canon.

**Fanfiction** - Stories written by fans of an original work that are inspired by, or using the characters and situations from, the canon.

**Meta** - Meta-analysis is the discussion of the finer details of a story: characterization, relationships and plot, sometimes against the larger context of society as a whole.

**Fanon** – Ideas about the plot or characters of a canon that were created by the fans and have taken hold in the fandom to a point where they are considered almost canon.

**Roleplaying** – acting out dialogue or scenes as characters from the canon.

**Cosplay** – The product or act of dressing up in costume as a character from the canon.

**Tumblr**- A blogging website where a majority of fandom congregates to share ideas via posting about fandom and reblogging others’ ideas.

**Reblogging**- the act of re-posting someone else’s Tumblr posts, with or without new commentary.

**Cisgender**- Identifying with the physical gender you were born with.
3 Demographics

3.1 Age

Mean age: 21.3 years

Median age: 20 years
Mean age: 12.9 years

Median age: 12 years

This study sought to analyze the effect of fandom on young people, but, due to IRB constraints, was restricted only to people over the age of 18. I controlled for this by including a stipulation in the consent form that all takers must be over the age of 18.

Some underage participants took the survey anyway, so I discarded all information given by anyone who answered the question about their age as anything under 18. The median age of participants was 21.3 years, and almost all participants seemed to speak of their
adolescent selves with the reflection even a few years allows. Development does not stop after the teenage years, either. The median age reported for first introduction to fandom was 12.9. The averaging method may have skewed this number slightly young, but should be accurate within a year. The beginning of the teenage years is intense, as people that age are developing emotionally, intellectually and physically, and are looking for guidance from those around them. The fact that so many participants encountered fandom at such a formative age speaks to how much they believe it to have affected their lives, which is discussed further below in the open ended question section.

### 3.2 Gender

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<th>Gender Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Genderfluid, preferred masculine pronouns</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderfluid/genderqueer/neutral pronouns</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, with optional neutral pronouns</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, specified Cisgender</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, specified FtM</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agender</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agender</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
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I specifically worded the question regarding gender to ask for “gender/preferred pronouns” and left the answer open ended in order to get the most specific results I could. I hypothesized that being in fandom allows for exploration of all kinds of identity, and
specifically gender and sexual identity. I did not want to specifically ask participants their sexual orientation or transgender status, but instead was interested to see what they would volunteer.

The fact that 80% of respondents identify as some variant of “female” is unsurprising, as fandom is largely populated by women. It is also telling that more people identified as outside the gender binary (12% all together) than as male (8% all together). It is difficult to find accurate figures about the percentages of transgender, agender, and genderfluid people in the general population, but it is safe to say that it is a significantly smaller number than the 15% of survey respondents who self-identified as something outside cisgendered male and female (and this is only the percentage of people who chose to disclose this information-others may have not gone into detail, for example a transwoman choosing simply to say “female” instead of sharing more details. There is something to the fact that people outside the gender binary are drawn to fandom, or that fandom does something to encourage people questioning these aspects of themselves to explore them more fully, which will be discussed in the sections about how fandom shaped peoples’ lives and their favorite things about it. It is also telling of the general idea that these issues are at the forefront of conversation in fandom, no matter what your gender identity, since 4% of women went out of their way to specify they were cisgender (identifying with the gender that matches your physical gender assigned at birth).
3.3 Fandoms represented

Since I posted the survey to Tumblr and let it travel through the paths of reblogging from there, I was not sure which fandoms would get the most representation. The results did end up showing what seems to be an accurate cross section of Tumblr fandom at this time. Homestuck was the frontrunner, having been mentioned by 149 participants (69% of the total number of survey respondents), followed by Harry Potter with 126 mentions (59% of respondents). These are both literary fandoms. The impact of Harry Potter is still being felt strongly, as, at the time of this survey, it has been 2.5 years since the last movie and 5.5 years since the last book. Homestuck is a webcomic created by Andrew Hussie which started in 2008. The webcomic format has become quite

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fandom</th>
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<td>Sailor Moon</td>
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<td>Buffy The Vampire Slayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naruto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pokemon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Of The Rings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hetalia: Axis Powers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sherlock (Bbc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor Who</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Potter</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestuck</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since I posted the survey to Tumblr and let it travel through the paths of reblogging from there, I was not sure which fandoms would get the most representation. The results did end up showing what seems to be an accurate cross section of Tumblr fandom at this time. Homestuck was the frontrunner, having been mentioned by 149 participants (69% of the total number of survey respondents), followed by Harry Potter with 126 mentions (59% of respondents). These are both literary fandoms. The impact of Harry Potter is still being felt strongly, as, at the time of this survey, it has been 2.5 years since the last movie and 5.5 years since the last book. Homestuck is a webcomic created by Andrew Hussie which started in 2008. The webcomic format has become quite
popular in recent years- it allows creators to publish their stories on their own terms, uploading new panels as they finish them and avoiding the publishing industry altogether if they wish. Homestuck, specifically, is known for its multimedia approach to storytelling, incorporating panel art, dialog, music, flash animations, and even occasional interactive game sequences. Mike Rugnetta, the host of PBS’s Idea Channel, called Homestuck the “Ulysses of the internet” for its massive appeal despite, or perhaps because of, its length and complexity (2012). Doctor Who (25%), Supernatural (23%) and the BBC production of Sherlock (21%) were the next most mentioned. These three are all television shows, but, as I will discuss further in the sections on fandom activities and what people like about fandom, much of the fanwork involves transforming the media into the written word.
3.4 Methods of Participation

For this question, I listed typical fandom activities and asked participants to select the ones they take part in, as well as entering any others unlisted in the space marked “other.”

Participating in fandom involves not only intake (reading, watching, playing) of source media, but also the creation and intake of derivative media (fanfiction, fanart, etc.), meta-analysis of both source and derivative media, and interaction with others in fandom. Two hundred and four survey respondents (95%) mentioned both reading fanfiction and looking at fanart as a way they participate in fandom. Watching fanvideos (65%) and listening to fanmixes (61%) were also well represented. These observational
activities indicate that participation is not limited only to creation, but appreciation for what others in fandom have done as well.

As for the creative aspects of fandom, 65% of respondents said they wrote fanfiction, 56% draw fanart, 54% create cosplay, 40% roleplay, 22% create fanmixes, 12% make fanvideos, 5% make fan-dubs, and 2% make fanmusic. These expressions of creativity are a large part of being in fandom and aren’t limited to these areas— in the area for write-in answers I received things on a range from fandom-themed dance routines and costumes in a burlesque troupe to programming fandom-specific software for other fans.

Another way that people participate aside from observation and creation is analysis. Blogging, at 79% (2% were vloggers, or video bloggers), was the largest method of interaction with canon and fanon material, and 23% make rec lists (recommendations and reviews of fanworks) and primers (introductory guides to fandoms for newcomers). In the “other” section, 8% of respondents wrote in meta, which is an umbrella term for essays, theories, and character and plot analysis in fandom, and a lot of blogging revolves around this. A large part of fandom revolves around understanding the motivations of the characters and the direction of the plot, especially when a book or television or comic series is unfinished. Forums, another location aside from blogs where meta happens, was written in by 3%. The percentage for these two would likely have been higher, had I included them in the initial list.

While much of this is about community interaction, there are a few activities that particularly reflect the interaction between people in fandom. Fifty four percent said they attend fan meetups and conventions. When it came to the write-ins, 6 people (3%) mentioned organizing or moderating online fan groups, communities, clubs, or contests,
and 2 people mentioned fan activism and volunteering. Again, these numbers would likely be higher if I had included them in the original list of options.

### 3.5 Methods of introduction to fandom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Introduction</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends/significant other</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline fan club/magazine</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved a story, looked online for more</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found it through other online community</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you discover fandom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other significant data:

- Six percent mention writing fanfiction, creating fanart, or roleplaying before they knew what fandom was
- Thirty one percent specifically mention a book fandom being their first.

This was one of the entirely open-ended questions. I was looking for trends involving the method of discovery as well as noting any mentions of motivation behind it. Many people mentioned a person they knew introducing them as the way the learned about fandom, with 24% mentioning a friend or significant other and 4% mentioning a family member. Twenty seven percent said they learned about fandom through another
online community they were already a part of, such as Tumblr or the Neopets forums, and 5% said they learned about it through an offline fanclub or magazine.

Forty percent of respondents, however, said that no one told them about fandom, that they discovered it themselves after finishing the available canon media. They mentioned the internet as the place that finally worked, “I can only imagine the lure of a world of information at my fingertips led me to the first thought: where can I find more Star Trek?” Many were wanting more while waiting between books in a series.

I was impatiently awaiting the final Harry Potter novel and I just couldn't wait any longer. I went online looking for someone who agreed and stumbled onto a fanfic. The rest is history. Of course it is arguable that I was lost the day my cousin took me to see The Sorcerer's Stone and after handed me the book. It was that day that Harry Potter owned my life. Harry Potter is a gateway fandom.

Others finished all there was to a canon and still wanted more.

I become very involved in a book or movie or TV show or video game and then...finish it. It can be a little hard to let go of story when you fall in love with it, so I would talk about it incessantly to whoever would listen. But by the time I figured out few were interested, most people stopped listening. So I started drawing - the characters, myself with them, whatever. But one of the people who never stopped listening (my Dad) heard about FanFiction.net from a friend and told me...and it kind of took off from there.

Responses like this, where the reader participated in fannish behaviors without even knowing fandom was there, were more common than I had expected; six percent of respondents mentioned drawing fanart, writing fanfiction or roleplaying on their own before realizing they weren’t the only ones to do so.

This shows that the thirst for more is present in many young people, before they even know there is something out there for them. No matter how they discovered fandom, a significant trend in responses was that people want more than simply the canon material- these people went looking for something else after they fell for a story, and
fandom gave them what they were seeking. Not everyone mentioned in their responses which fandom was their first, but 55% of people volunteered the information that a book fandom was their very first one.

4 Effects of being in fandom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways fandom has changed the lives of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>read less original fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learned technical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>found new fandoms and stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>didn’t commit suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences and opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less social in regular life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more outgoing/better social skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>found stories they love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fanwork they love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shaped professional/academic goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>significant other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative outlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical thinking/intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open mindedness/awareness of social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coped with sexuality/gender/selfimage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>better/more art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unrecognizably different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less depressed/lonely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>better/more writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shaped beliefs/personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less bored/more invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>found friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number/percentage of respondents mentioning
4.1 Do they get something more out of fandom than the canon can provide?

I had wondered if a significant part of the draw to fandom was wanting more of a story. I discussed this briefly in the section above, but many people discussed this idea in their answers to the questions about their favorite things about fandom and about how it changed their lives, as well. Seven percent of people mentioned the idea in some way when discussing their favorite things about fandom, and even more brought it up when talking about how it changed their lives, saying things like, “fandom gave me a feeling of connection when I had none, and an escape that reading books alone in my room wasn't giving me.”
“I feel like with fandoms, I get to appreciate the book/movie/game/work that much more than if I was just experiencing the medium myself. The art is usually phenomenal, as well as fanfiction, which enhances the experience.”

This drives people to want as much of the story as they can get their hands on, which leads to more reading and writing and practicing their art.

### 4.2 Do young people read more after getting involved in fandom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours spent reading per week before and after discovering fandom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respondent Number</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Before discovering fandom:**
- Median 10 hrs
- Mean 15.6 hrs

**After discovering fandom:**
- Median 16 hrs
- Mean 21.1 hr
The mean number of hours spent reading per week before becoming involved in fandom was 15.69, and the median number was 10. The median number of hours per week spent reading currently, after having discovered fandom, was 21.1, with a median of 16. This means that people read, on average, 5.41 hours more a week after they get started in fandom. These answers varied greatly, though, with a range of 0-100 for before
discovering fandom and 1-115 hours after discovering it. Quite a few people qualified their answers with explanations. Some people mentioned reading less after discovering fandom because they grew up and got jobs or started college, stating things like “this is unrelated to discovering fandom, but now that I attend college I never find time to read!” Another said they read less now because they spend more time writing, currently. Others said they originally read “very little, but I was also very young,” implying that reading more post-fandom discovery was in part due to the fact that they grew up and their reading skills strengthened.

The majority, though, read significantly more after discovering fandom, and, if they commented on it at all, mentioned the correlation between joining a fandom and wanting to read more. Others cited additional reasons, such as “fanfiction is much easier to read, since it's all digital and I can just read it on my cellphone.”

While 55% of respondents said they didn’t choose books based on whether or not there was an active fandom connected to them, 43% said they were more likely to read something they knew had an active fandom surrounding it, and only 2% said they’d be less likely to do so. When asked whether or not their favorite books had active fandoms, however, 83% of respondents said yes.

One respondent, in answer to the question about how their life would be different without fandom, replied, “I would be less interested in the media since there would be no other fans to communicate with.” Another person said they wouldn’t have “read the books, or watched movies that I have. Fandom isn't just good for one work; it also provides an entire network of recommendations. ‘If you liked X, try Y!’”
All of this indicates that young adult readers are more likely than not to pick up a book they know has a fandom to go along with it, but that it doesn’t dissuade them from reading other books, either. There also is a correlation between books with fandoms and favorite books. In either case, the relationship between books that young people love and books with fandoms exists.

The desire young readers feel for more of a story encourages them to read as much as they can. Five respondents specifically mention the gaps between the publications of Harry Potter books. One said that this gap “probably had a lot to do with my insatiable desire for more to read.”

4.3 Do people in fandom perceive that observing and creating fanworks has made them better writers, better artists, and stronger readers?

In addition to the increase in number of hours spent reading per week after joining fandom the sentiment in the responses largely showed that fandom has helped young readers become stronger writers, readers and artists. When asked how they believe their
writing has changed since joining fandom, 75% of respondents said their writing had improved. The other 25% was made up of 1% saying their writing had worsened, and 12% each said it had stayed the same, or that they don’t write. In the open-ended question about how fandom changed their lives 21% of respondents reiterated the sentiment that fandom helped them become better and more prolific writers and 16% mentioned the same in terms of their artwork.

For many people, simply loving a story was motivation to want to write. One person said, “It was about the time the first Harry Potter books were released here. Reading them invariably made me want to write my own stories.” Once they discovered fandom, though, the drive became stronger. Another person commented on their creative drive, saying, “I would not have nearly the same motivation to create, both in writing, and in art.” And it stays strong, “a space that's generally boundless about its forms and themes of expression,”

This creativity is met with enthusiasm and constructive criticism. Many people expressed the following sentiment in all their fanwork: “for the most part everyone is so supportive of each other. I receive honest feedback and encouragement on every story I write.”

Many people simply brought up the joy of reading and the ability to do more of it with others who feel similarly. One person said, “I love reading and looking at that passion, and seeing that there are people that love what i love just as strongly as I do.” Others continued this sentiment of infectious enthusiasm and inspiration, saying they “love seeing how creative everybody is. It makes me feel part of a bigger thing, and it makes me want to try harder at the stuff I like to do so I can show it to everyone else.”
This artistic expression has value in fandom. Others in the community respect art as a useful and admirable skill, encouraging each other to pursue art further.

I wouldn't have the artistic drive that I have - fandom both inspired me to make fanwork and showed me the impact that narrative art can have on people's lives and that yes, creative careers are valid and important careers.

When it came to the open ended question about what their favorite thing about fandom is, 20% mentioned its ability to inspire their creativity and 16% brought up that they liked that fandom is a space for meta-analysis and discussion, improving their critical thinking and textual analyzation skills. Ten percent mentioned that they learned ideas and skills from other people in fandom they hadn’t learned anywhere else. One respondent said “it provides a forum people to be passionate and deeply analytical about the cultural products that matter most to us.”

Fandom has also let me practice critical thinking which does wonders for my grades in literature based classes. If it wasn't for fandom, I doubt I would be as successful in my English classes.

Dive into any fandom and you're sure to find meta on some thing or another--and right, some people find it "reading too much" but it's awesome to see people dive into in-text things and come out with 50 different messages.

The ways we are encouraged in fandom to analyze and discuss our canon text really helped me when I studied literature in university, I was getting the top marks for my analytical essays, which I personally think was just my luck that I had been scouring texts for subtext and parallels etc. since I was young!

Fandom gives people who want more story more to read, and it sharpens their minds in the process.
4.4 What do young people identify as the issues with being involved in fandom?

### Least favorite thing about fandom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>loss of productivity/timesink</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immaturity</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>judgement of artistic/writing skill</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fighting between fandoms</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elitism/arrogance</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside perception/stigma</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interpersonal drama/differences of opinion</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1 What do they think of the interpersonal conflicts that arise in communities?

Just like in any close-knit community, issues arise and disagreements happen, and these had to be addressed. When asked about their least favorite thing about fandom, 59% of respondents mentioned interpersonal drama over differences of opinion. Many people admitted that this stems from some of the things that make fandom great, namely the passion, and the fact that, “like with all communities, people are the best and worst thing about it.”

It can be really dangerous when a sufficiently large group of people feels passionately about something, especially if that something is subjective and open to interpretation (as all creative works are). The slightest thing can set someone off, and once one person gets angry, everyone else tends to pile on.
This sentiment seems to be widely accepted, but 12% of respondents went further to add that it seems to be a small yet loud minority which stirs up this kind of trouble, saying things like “Terrible people will always be the loudest and most memorable of any group, and often give large fandoms a bad name.” In fact, quite a few people seemed more interested in dispelling these ideas than wanting to give up on fandom because of them, saying that “despite our problems we are all in this together.”

When talking about this fighting, one respondent said “This sort of ridiculousness makes us look even more crazy to non-fan culture, and we need to fight that image in order to gain legitimacy.”

4.4.2 Do they believe that the rest of the world takes them and their passions seriously?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the general public count fanwork as legitimate art?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no 78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part of the purpose behind this study is to show what fandom is all about to those who may not know. Perhaps because of the fact that it happens behind the doors of the internet, a lot of people have misconceptions or no conception at all of what it is all about. It is clear from the responses people have given that they feel passionately about their participation in fandom, and are proud of what they have created there.

Despite this, there remains a stigma on the concept of fandom, and this is not lost on my survey respondents. When asked if they thought the general public considered fanwork legitimate art, 78% replied no, they don’t. When asked if the general public should consider fanwork legitimate art, 95% answered yes, they should.

There are works of fanart that take 100s of hours to create, and there are works of fanfiction that are longer than the original text itself. There are costumes people sew for cosplay that would rival a movie studio’s. Also, of course, there are other works that are made by beginners, but with the same amount of passion driving them. And yet, almost everyone surveyed felt that the rest of the world does not believe this to be real art,
worthy of value. After the discussion of in-fighting, the next highest number of mentions of a problem was the concept of a negative stigma.

So many responses were about the joy felt in participating in something like this, so having to keep it to yourself around the rest of the world seems to be draining for many respondents. Some mentioned that their least favorite part of fandom was “feeling like I have to be ‘closeted’ about it until I can figure out if the people I'm around in real life will be okay with it.”

This feeling only does more to isolate fandom life from the rest of the world. One respondent said their least favorite aspect was “the fact that it is considered fringe and perverse (which enhances the insular, obsessive nature).”

### 4.4.3 Other issues

A large part of fandom is there because they feel marginalized from the rest of society because of their race, gender, sexuality or other characteristic. Because of this, fandom is often a forum for discussing these issues, and, since they are all nuanced and controversial topics, there is often conflict in this area.

Eight percent mentioned that their least favorite part of fandom is the people who are not informed on these issues of social justice. Six percent further mentioned the fetishization of certain sexualities, races and religions that occasionally crops up in fan communities. For example, the prevalence of male/male relationships, called “slash” explored in fanwork can be gone about in many ways, and the exploration of one person’s sexuality is not the same as another person reducing that sexuality to simply an act and not taking into account the issues accompanying it. One person said a large issue is the “the endless glorifying of m/m slash; the endless demonizing of m/m slash.”
Homophobia, misogyny, racism, etc. are, unfortunately, everywhere, but in a community that bands together because of these issues, they come to light more often.

Other people mentioned that they learned to deal with these issues because of fandom. After all, learning to navigate issues in a group of people is part of growing up, and learning the ropes in a supportive space may be helpful, in the end. As one person said, “You have to learn when to disengage and how to use fandom as a solely positive outlet to have fun. That took a while.”

4.5 Do they perceive a supportive effect of feeling a part of a community?

4.5.1 Making friends

![Have You Made Friends Through Fandom?](chart)

Being a part of a community was, overwhelmingly, the largest factor people mentioned in why they love being in fandom so much. When asked if they’d made friends through fandom, 94% said they had. Fifty six percent reiterated this when
discussing how their lives would be different if they had never found fandom, and when answering what their favorite aspects of fandom were, 35% mentioned making friends and 49% mentioned the value of feeling like a part of a community.

Many people mentioned the fact that this community grows out of a love for a common thing. Twenty nine percent mentioned the joy of sharing the excitement over the media with others as one of their favorite things about fandom.

I believe that everybody who experiences a text will take something different away from it, and because of this, everybody has a unique version of that text inside their own heart. I love that due to fandom, we get to share and expand and experience each other's versions of the text, we all have a perspective to contribute. I love feeling connected like that. Nothing else gives me the same sense of belonging and community.

Since a lot of people in fandom feel different, having this level of acceptance can be hugely important to them in terms of finally finding a place of their own. Many people mentioned the fact that it is “also a good way to discover more common ground and get to know people if you're socially awkward.”

We're all people who love the same thing, who've found other people who love the same thing. It's hard for a lot of us to make friends, I think, and a common interest with people who think about and relate to it in a similar or interesting new way has been an incredible springboard for so many of us.

That we're slightly weird and that's okay. That the best ones really do feel like you're part of a community. That it's a fun place to react together about the latest episode or whatever. That you can meet people and form friendships that last years (I've known my BFFs since I was 15/16, and I'm now 24). That it's fun and serious and silly and full of heart and intelligence and learning and just a wonderful place to be.

### 4.5.2 Community as a safe space

Sixteen percent of people mentioned that a favorite thing about fandom for them was the fact that it is a safe space for them. As I mentioned before, fandom is made up of
many marginalized groups of people, who, upon interacting with the canon in new ways, subverting stereotypes and making it their own, understand more about themselves.

When they find each other, it can be invaluable.

I really like the fact that we have platforms for nontraditional publishing that are not only accepted, but widely used and central to the operation of fandom. The ease of making fanfiction available to the public was thrilling to me at 11 years old, and at 18 I know its power. Fanfiction allows stories to be told that would never exist otherwise. Fanfiction can be empowering to people with marginalized experiences and identities. It is not always, maybe not usually, but it is an amazing tool.

This can be especially important if the fan has no other place they feel safe, as this person summed up, “it's like having a family, and for a lot of fans who don't feel so wanted by their families and communities, that's really important. A lot of people find safety in fandom.”

Fandom as, a predominantly female-identified space, allows women of all kinds to engage with narratives about their gender in positive ways, teaching them tools for dealing with misogyny in real life while they’re at it.

The fandoms I have been in have been one of the safest spaces for female-perceived people on the internet, although at times not the best for female-perceived characters. It was also my introduction to being more critical about the media I consume, and taught me lots of tools to critique it with.

Escapism is a reason many people enjoy reading fiction, but for some, the need is far greater. A few people mentioned stressful or even dangerous home lives growing up, and how fandom gave them somewhere else to escape, as well as the support needed to keep going.

My family has problems with drug and alcohol abuse, is often emotionally draining and stressful, and at times has been physically violent. These friends gave me a safe environment and a sense of normality while fandom gave me an
escape. Fandom also helped me grow as a person, respect myself and other people, and learn that you can pick who to include in your life.

**4.5.2.1 Sexuality and gender**

One of the marginalized communities that has found a safe space in fandom is the considerable segment that identifies somewhere along the spectrum of LGBTQ. Only 3% mentioned it specifically as their favorite thing about fandom, but many more referenced it as a concept, or alluded to the idea. Fourteen percent mentioned fandom helping them feel more comfortable in their own bodies as they coped with their sexuality and/or gender issues.

Fandom is a place where “the reclamation and creation of queer narratives from a world of almost entirely heteronormative and cisgendered media” is commonplace. Because of the fact that “most public works are not nearly as willing to explore certain ideas and are far less representative of same sex - or healthy opposite sex – relationships,” fandom fills that gap, giving queer people a voice where they previously had none. While it is not a 100% safe, perfect place for any kind of person, as mentioned above in the section about the issues coming along with fandom, the fact remains that narratives and discussion about sexuality and gender are accepted and encouraged.

As for the people who mentioned being something other than cisgendered and heterosexual, they all related their coming out to fandom. For example:

I also have friends made through fandom who walked me through sexuality in ways that I never would have been able to accomplish face-to-face with them, but felt natural through the internet, over shared likes and happy subjects.

At a very young age (8-10), I was also very homophobic. Finding fanfiction/fanart that was gay was my first glimpse into homosexuality, and ironically, it 'humanized' homosexuality for me by placing characters I loved into a gay context, without changing anything else about them. I guess it showed me that being gay is just a small aspect of a person, not their entire being, and I had no
reason to hate somebody for it if everything else about them was perfectly likable and charming. I came to terms with my own homosexuality very early because of this, I believe I was only 11. I wouldn't doubt that I would have remained homophobic for years longer if not for silly fanart and fanfiction!

Fandom was actually very important to me as a young queer person. Putting aside issues of fetishization by heterosexual people, many fanworks represented male-male and female-female couples as relatively mundane, and certainly in abundance. I encountered many people with politics further left than my own. I also met queer and transgender people, a first. When I began to identify as bisexual around age 12, it was against a backdrop of relative acceptance of queerness. I would not consciously question my gender for a few years, but exposure to basic transgender issues was incredibly important. That is not to say that fandom is automatically a safe space for trans people; I would not have gained basic knowledge of what it is to be transgender without direct exposure to people who identified as such.

The simple exposure to these ideas ended up having monumental effects on these people in their formative years. Coming out is a difficult process and having a support network behind you as you do it can be vital.

For those people in fandom who find themselves to be cisgendered and heterosexual, they receive the benefit of being surrounded by lives that differ from theirs, making them more open minded about sexuality in general.

I didn't know much about same-sex relationships until I read slash fiction, and I learned many things through commentary and meta which led me to do my own research and I don't think I would have as many queer friends as I do without this shaping me.

And of course, open discourse about sexuality helps anyone who is curious, not just LGBTQ people.

Without so much open discussion about sex and sexuality I experienced in fandom, I can't imagine what my sex life would be like...I would not have the confidence I have to talk about sex and pleasure with my partners now, either.
4.5.3 Depression

Twenty six percent of respondents mentioned that without fandom their life would be significantly more boring, and they wouldn’t feel as invested in things that matter to them. Nineteen percent went further to say that fandom helped them feel less lonely and depressed. As young people navigate the difficult paths of growing up, they are bound to find some pitfalls, and being in fandom seems to have helped out people dealing with small hurts as well as extremely large ones.

Homestuck fandom has really helped me through my parents’ divorce and major depression and stress. Whenever I felt down, I could always rely on the fandom to cheer me up and take my thoughts off of it for a bit. Without it I would have probably broken down and was in a much worse place then where I am now. I would probably be unable to concentrate on the things that are important or have a positive outlook on life.

Five percent of respondents were forthcoming enough to admit an even more personal detail: fandom stopped them from ending their lives.

I might be dead. Not exaggerating. Fandom gave me a feeling of connection when I had none, and an escape that reading books alone in my room wasn't giving me. Reading fanfic and meta and personal blogs of authors made me feel like I was a part of something big and inclusive. I was able to talk with other people dealing with trauma and depression, and learn that I wasn't going crazy and that other people understood me. Fandom was somewhere to turn to when I was suicidal. And fandom taught me that there were people out there in the world I could connect with, I just had to look; this gave me motivation to talk to people in meat space.

I probably would not be here. I am very serious. One of the in-person friends I made via the Harry Potter fandom introduced me to the hobby of historical re-enactment. The people I've met through that hobby have literally saved my life: they have kept me from suicide when I was at my worst depths of Depression, reminded me that there's no such thing as "normal" and that I am loved

While the above respondents credit fandom for helping them overcome these obstacles, others are still struggling with these issues.
To be honest, knowing that there are people like me out there is the only thing that’s keeping me alive right now. If I hadn’t discovered my fandom, I would have committed suicide.

This may seem like an extreme reaction, but the fact that this many people mentioned this topic, unprompted. The feeling of connectedness and community is strong enough to have brought these people back from the edge of self-destruction. According to the Center for Disease Control, 157,000 youth between the ages of 10 and 24 are treated for self-inflicted injuries each year (2012). The people I surveyed found more than just more information on a book they liked; they found a group of people who convinced them that their lives were worth living.

4.6 Do they perceive an effect on their growth as individuals because of their involvement in fandom?

Everything I have discussed so far in the results section is related to personal growth and development. Understanding your sexuality, making friends and dealing with depression are all significant parts of growing up and understanding yourself as a person. This section is for the rest of the specific skill sets and ideas participants mentioned learning from their fandom experiences.

4.6.1 Sociability

As previously stated, many people in fandom feel socially awkward or uncomfortable around other people. While they definitely value the friendships they find with one another in “their place,” a significant number of them also mentioned how fandom prepared them better to interact with the rest of the world, as well. Seven percent mentioned that their social skills increased, that they feel more confident around other people or as outgoing.
One person said, “I would be much more closed off from the rest of the world without fandom, as I would retreat into my head more often than I would interact with someone else.” Others mentioned the opportunities they’d have missed without fandom, for example, “I certainly wouldn’t be comfortable in social situations, which might mean that I wouldn’t have the (pretty awesome) job that I currently have.”

4.6.2 Diversity leading to new views

As I mentioned in the section on sexuality, many people cited being surrounded by differing viewpoints than their own leading to a more well-rounded and open-minded view of life. This was brought up often in the open ended questions. One person said “I think it's lead me to be more open-minded about my personal life because I had a way to realize certain things weren't ‘wrong.’” Others credited this diversity for helping them understand and befriend other people, saying things like, “I also wouldn't be able to relate to people as much, because through fandom I'm exposed to many different types of people and ways of thinking.”

Ten percent of respondents said that their favorite thing about fandom was learning from others. Fourteen percent said that, without fandom, they would be less aware of social justice issues and would be more closed-minded. It is this experience of trying on different personas and ideas that Erikson’s stage of teenage development is all about. Many respondents seem to be extremely aware of this (as well as many other subjects), also.

[Fandom] brings so many talented people from all walks of life together. There's this big sense of unity surrounding us all, helping and changing people as they grow and develop. Fandoms change who you become as a person.
Fandom encourages people to meet and talk to others, and open their view of things! I think, when somebody likes the same thing you do just as powerfully, it makes you sympathetic towards them when you otherwise might not be. I think it can encourage people to befriend the sort of people they would otherwise have never considered.

They seemed to understand the importance of meeting people like themselves as well as people not like themselves in their own personal development. One respondent had this to say when describing favorite things about fandom.

The sense of community! Hundreds and thousands of other people who enjoy something as much as I do, who understand my feelings for something, who appreciate my efforts. The possibility to meet people like me. And, most importantly, meeting people who aren't like me! People who are interesting, with different views on things; things I would never have thought about or known about if I had not met them.

### 4.6.3 Identity formation

Again, the entirety of this section is about identity formation, but certain responses captured just how much people believed fandom was responsible for in their own lives. Twenty four percent of respondents, when asked how their life would be different without fandom, said that it was responsible for shaping their beliefs and personality. In fact, 17% of respondents answered the same question saying that they could hardly comprehend the notion because of how deeply entrenched the concept of fandom was in their personalities.

Yes. (Just yes, I literally could not imagine my life without it. Every single aspect of my life, my ambitions, and my personality is so deeply entrenched in fandom the two could simply not be separated - even in speculation)

The following responses were represented in the percentages of all the things they mentioned, but they did not fit into any specific section about the impact of fandom.
because the message behind each statement is representative of how fandom affected the entirety of the person.

I wouldn’t have honed my creative skills, I would’ve never met some of my closest friends, I would’ve been a worse person, I would’ve never seen so much creativity and positivity, I would’ve fallen into worse depression, would’ve always been the odd-one-out, would’ve never even thought of getting help for my mental problems, I would’ve never read many of the stories I have read.... I would be a completely different person, sad, alone, terribly confused, without the energy necessary to continue.

I would probably not be much like me at all. I wouldn’t have been nearly as inspired to seriously pursue creative hobbies, and as a result would probably not be studying art at a university, without the extra drive to measure up to other fanartists. I wouldn't be nearly as comfortable with myself and my body, and I don't think I would be as critical and thoughtful of media/ life in general if I had not been able to participate in fandom discussions and analyses. I wouldn't have near as many friends, either, as most of my close friends today are people I met and interacted with through fandoms.

Well, I wouldn't have met any of my friends (the irl ones or the online ones), hell every friend I've ever had that wasn't met out of social obligation was met through fandom so all of my dearest friends would be out of the picture, I'd be a whole other person, my personality would probably be a helluva lot worse, I'd have a lot more problems being myself, a LOOOOT more image issues oh god, more social problems, I'd get into a shit ton of more trouble than I ever did, I wouldn't have such good a relationship with my sister, I probably wouldn't want to draw or write ever again, so uh. . . . My whole life. My whole life would be different without fandom! I wouldn't even be me it would be weird nega-not-me. Wow it's actually really scary to think about all the things that I wouldn't have done without fandom in my life. . .

4.7 Other benefits
While not as well-represented as some of the other answers, the following effects were reported by enough people to be worth mentioning.

4.7.1 Technical and job related skills
Four percent of respondents, when mentioning their favorite thing about fandom, brought up the technical skills they have learned. This percentage may be higher in a
sample with a higher average age. One person mentioned that writing fanfiction was relevant to their “screenwriting interests, it is also very similar to the practice of script speccing, which is a skill that can actually be useful to my future career.” A few mentioned reading in relation to their decisions to be English majors or writers, as well. One person said, “I would have not found my major in college or my graduate degree, I would not have improved in writing as much as I have,” were it not for fandom. These people’s skills, as well as their academic and career choices were shaped by fandom.

I may not have been interested in learning how to use photo- and video-editing software. Also, discovering fandom and joining international websites greatly helped improving my English language skills. My understanding of both spoken and written English would have been significantly less without my involvement in fandoms. It also helped developing both my essay- and creative writing skills.

On a more practical level: because I participated in fandom, I ended up writing stories and critiques and drawing characters and comics much more than I otherwise would have, and consequently became much better at writing and drawing in general. I think that this experience helped me immensely throughout my schooling and also in my adult day-to-day work life (resumes and cover letters, email writing, product design, technical drawing, etc). If I had not had that experience, I would not be nearly as polished in my writing and artwork, and my professional life might have suffered as a result.

I definitely wouldn’t be pursuing the same college or career choices that I am now, for starters. Roleplaying and writing fanfiction got me interested in writing, and watching Lost throughout my middle and high school years got me interested in writing for television. Now I am enrolled at a prestigious college for screenwriting and well on my way to achieving that dream. Without fandom, I wouldn’t have gotten the inspiration I needed or the interest in writing that has kept me wanting to go to school. Without that goal of becoming a screenwriter, there’s a good chance I would have simply dropped out.

4.7.2 Charity efforts
Six percent of respondents mentioned charity and altruism when discussing their favorite things about fandom. Some simply mentioned the fanwork people do and dedicate to one another, and others discussed fan-related charity initiatives, such as the
two well-known fundraising groups: John (young adult author) and Hank Green’s Nerdfightaria, which is one of the largest groups on the crowdfunding website, Kiva.org, and the Homestuck fandom’s Can Town initiative.

Fandoms can be just incredibly innovative, such as one of the fandoms I am in starting up a well-known, fandom wide food drive/donation, wherein members of the fandom bring cans of food with them to meetups or conventions, build a town out of the cans, and at the end of the day all the food is donated to a food pantry. It really brings together a community where people can build off of each other and do amazing things.

People in fandom recognize what they have done for each other, and these recent trends toward giving to other communities show that fandom is learning to share this sense of communal dedication to the rest of the world, as well.
Conclusions

In looking at the results of my survey, I can conclude that fandom is seen by those who participate in it as a solid community, with both the benefits and difficulties that come along with any kind of community. Because this community is built around a shared interest (an affinity space), the bonds that form are strong. Respondents reported high levels of emotion connected with the source material, and this intensity transfers to the connections they make with one another. The faults respondents reported, while still a problem, gave them the opportunity to engage with others over these social issues in an open forum.

In many cases, respondents discussed the fact that their lives would be completely different without fandom in ways they do not want to imagine. Because of fandom, they read more, care more about what they read, create more, and care more about what they create. They also reported feeling happier and better equipped to take on life’s challenges in general. Taking part in this participatory culture revolving around stories seems to be directly linked to the development and reading interests of young people.

My research not only showed that fandom affects the lives of participants in positive ways. It also indicated that those affected are extremely interested in sharing their experiences. Almost every survey participant took the time to write detailed, thoughtful responses to the questions, and the responses were gathered incredibly quickly, as well. People seemed to jump at any opportunity to share their feelings on the topic of fandom. They feel positively about their interactions, and want to share this
knowledge with the rest of society, whose opinions on fandom can range from mystified to disdainful.

Young adulthood is a difficult time period for many reasons, so the fact that this subculture is out there, acting as a ready support network, an influential nexus of new and formative ideas, and an incentive to read (not only to read but to analyze, discuss and engage with the text), is extremely significant. Some young people are struggling to find connection with their peers, and others simply need something extra to really get them hooked on a story. Fandom offers both, and the more that the general public, educators and librarians included, understands about the benefits of this kind of community, the easier and more accepted participation will become. In the eyes of adults, worries are mounting about the youth of today not reading as much or engaging as strongly with what they do read. Fandom is here to combat this fear, and to bring new young people into its many inclusive circles.
Implications for future research

This study was largely exploratory. In asking open-ended questions I got a sense of the themes in what people in fandom believe to be valuable about their experience. Now that these themes have been identified, more research could be done to ask specific questions about the areas that people seem to be interested in.

Some areas, such as meta-analysis and activism, did not get as much attention as they may have, had I included them in the original list of ways to participate.

Fandom happens out of the public eye, for the most part, and when it does get exposure it is not always good press. More and more people in fandom are seeking to share their experiences and promote the concept of fandom to the uninitiated. This may also be because of the fact that the first huge generation of online fandom is now grown up, and has had time to reflect and realize what fandom has done for them.

There is a lot out there that could be specifically studied, and the purpose of my research was to identify these topics.
Appendix

1 Survey questions

1. Age:
2. Gender/preferred pronouns:
3. Do you consider yourself to be a part of any fandoms? If so, list up to 10 you participate in. (non-book-based fandoms are okay, too!)
4. How old were you when you first discovered fandom?
5. How do you participate in fandom? Check all that apply (read fanfiction, write fanfiction, draw fanart, look at fanart, cosplay, roleplay, blog, vlog, make fanvideos, watch fanvideos, make fanmixes, listen to fanmixes, fan-dubs, rec lists, primers, attending meetups/cons, other-please describe).
6. If a book/comic/manga you have heard of has an active fandom, are you more or less likely to want to start reading it?
   - More likely to start a book or comic with an active fandom
   - Less likely to start a book or comic with an active fandom
   - It doesn’t matter to me
7. Do your favorite books/comics/manga etc. have active fandoms? (yes/no)
8. On average, how many hours per week would you estimate that you read before discovering fandom?
9. On average, how many hours per week do you read (fanfiction counts!) now that you are involved in fandom (or when you were previously involved if you are no longer)?
10. Since joining fandom, what do you think has changed about your writing skills (for fanfiction or for any other kind of writing)?
   - Gotten worse
   - Stayed the same
   - Improved
   - I don’t write
11. Have you made friends through fandom? (yes/no)
12. Do you think the general public counts fan work as legitimate art? (yes/no)
13. Should the general public count fan work as legitimate art? (yes/no)
14. How did you first get into fandom?
15. How would life be different for you if you never discovered fandom?
16. What is your favorite thing about fandom?
17. What is your least favorite thing about fandom?
2 Consent form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Consent Form Version Date: 01/29/13
IRB Study # 13-0133
Title of Study: The Effect of Fandom on the Literary Lives of Young Adults
Principal Investigator: Kristen Street kstreet@live.unc.edu
Faculty Advisor: Brian Sturm sturm@ils.unc.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies? You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

Why should you not be in this study? If you are under the age of 18, you should not participate in this study.

What is the purpose of this study? The purpose of this research study is to collect data about how people in fandom believe their lives have been affected by being a part of the communities they are in.

How many people will take part in this study? If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 80 people in this research study.

What will happen if you take part in the study? Your part in this study will last approximately 15 minutes. During this study, you will complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask you about your reading habits and your fandom activities. There are also a few open ended questions where you can describe the impact fandom has had on your life.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study? Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study? I anticipate few risks in this study. There is a small risk of embarrassment if you are uncomfortable talking about your fandom habits. If this happens, feel free to stop participating at any time.
How will your privacy be protected? All of the data you provide will be stored anonymously for the duration of the study, and then deleted. This means that there will be no way for anybody to ever link your data or the results of the study to your identity.

What if you want to stop before your part in the study is complete? You can withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty and skip any question for any reason.

Will you receive anything for being in this study? Will it cost anything? You will receive no monetary reward for participating in this study. There are no costs associated with being in the study.

What if you have questions about this study? You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. Contact the principal investigator or their faculty advisor listed above with any questions, complaints, or concerns you may have.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant? All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, please contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Participants will be shown a link that says “I consent.”

3 Recruitment post for Tumblr

Hello!

Are you or have you ever been a part of a literary fandom (books, comics, manga, webcomics, etc)? Are you over the age of 18? Would you like to contribute to scholarly understanding of fandom by sharing how fandom has shaped your life? My name is Kristen Street. Aside from being in fandom, I am a Master's candidate in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am studying the effect of being a part of communal fan culture on the personal development and reading habits of young people.

Should you choose to participate in my Institutional Review Board approved study, know that your privacy will be retained. I will be collecting no identifying information, and the act of reblogging my request for survey participants does not imply that the person reblogging has participated, nor is it necessary to reblog in order to participate. Feel free to reblog, however, in order to boost the signal, if you feel comfortable doing so, whether you participate or not.
Just follow the link below, which will lead you to a consent form and then the survey. The survey is comprised of 14 yes/no and short answer questions about your reading habits and fandom activities, and 3 open ended questions about how fandom has affected your life. The survey should take only about 5-15 minutes of your time, depending on the length of your open ended responses.

Thanks,
Kristen Street
Feel free to contact me with any questions at kstreet@live.unc.edu

4 Other Fandoms
These are the fandoms which would not fit on the graph.

Fandoms mentioned by 9 participants: Bleach, Firefly, Glee, Mass Effect

Fandoms mentioned by 8 participants: Death Note, Inu Yasha, Legend Of Zelda, Les Miserables, Marvel Comics, Merlin, The Hobbit, X-Files

Fandoms mentioned by 7 participants: Dc Comics, Gundam Wing, My Little Pony, Puella Magi Madoka Magica, Sherlock Holmes, Sonic The Hedgehog, X-Men

Fandoms mentioned by 6 participants: Anime, Assassin's Creed, D. Gray-Man, Digimon, Discworld, Dragon Age, Stargate: Atlantis, Twilight

Fandoms mentioned by 5 participants: Community, Elementary, Good Omens, Marvel, Motorcity, Persona, Tamora Pierce, The Social Network

Fandoms mentioned by 4 participants: Bandom, Batman, Dc/Marvel Comics, Downton Abbey, Durarara!!, Football (soccer) Rpf, Katekyo Hitman Reborn, Lost, Once Upon A Time, Persona 4, Pirates Of The Caribbean, Teen Titans, The Legend Of Korra, Warrior Cats, Watchmen

Fandoms mentioned by 3 participants: Ace Attorney, Criminal Minds, Dexter, Disney, Dresden Files, Furry, Gravity Falls, Gurren Lagann, Heroes, Hikaru No Go, House Md., Mortal Instruments, Ncis, Neon Genesis Evangelion, Nerdfighteria, Portal Shakespeare,
South Park, Star Trek (2009), Stargate Sg-1, Steam Powered Giraffe, Tf2, The Vampire Diaries, True Blood, Vocaloid, Yu Yu Hakusho


**Fandoms mentioned by 1 participant:** .Hack//, Amanda Palmer, American Gods, American Horror Story, Amnesia, Animal Crossing, Anne McCaffery, Ao No Exorcist, Asimov, Barbie, Battlestar Galactica, Ben 10, Biggles, Black Butler, Black Cat, Black Widow, Blazblue, Blood+, Bomb Girls, Borderlands, Broken Sky, Burn Notice, Cabin Pressure, Cadfael, Callahan’s Crosstime Saloon, Canis Canem Edit, Cardcaptor Sakura, Cave Story, Chaos Walking, Charlie And The Chocolate Factory, Chihayafuru,
5  Fandom wordle
Bibliography


