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# Common among wizards, popstars, and cowboys: Performance and participation in media fandom

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**COMMON AMONG WIZARDS, POPSTARS, AND COWBOYS:  
PERFORMANCE AND PARTICIPATION IN MEDIA FANDOM**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

By explicating the most prominent forms of participatory fan-art produced and consumed by members of the fan communities regarding *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys*, this study has contributed to the field of fandom studies by presenting findings that are generalizable beyond a singular fannish context, and by explicating the unfounded categorizations that have divided the discipline.

The fan communities studied perform their fandom through the creation of participatory fan-art, and the fan-art created across all three fan communities can be divided into three distinct categories: the recontextualization of characters, the recontextualization of images, and the recontextualization of videos. The fan-art shared, consumed, and reciprocated within each fan community is scrutinized to a varying extent. Those works of art that claim greatest fealty to their source material are scrutinized most thoroughly by their consumers. Nonetheless, all three fan communities share an understanding about their characters' quintessence, and require complete mastery of the source material from all involved in the production, consumption, and reciprocation of participatory art.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Some fans are perfectly content tuning in on Sundays to watch their favorite team play, or to pick up the next book in their favorite series. Others seek out like-minded individuals to discuss, critique, and celebrate their objects of affection. Then there are those fans who have persistently inserted themselves into those narratives most dear to them.

In their 2007 article “Fan Culture – Performing Difference,” authors De Kloet and Van Zoonen trace the origin of the word fan to an abbreviation of “fanatic,” a word that comes from the Latin word “fanaticus.” While the term originally meant, quite simply, “of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee,” its meaning quickly slipped towards more negative connotations of hysteria and pathology. These negative connotations have remained at the forefront of fandom discourse. As stated in *Fan Culture* (Larsen & Zuberis, 2012, p. 9), “the stereotype persists that fangirls are overweight cat ladies with unhealthy fixations on the male leads of their favorite television shows.” De Kloet and Van Zoonen challenge this notion, proposing that “when one looks at the actual investments, practices and interactions involved in being a fan, one sees many similarities between the fan of popular culture, the connoisseur of literature and classical music, the collector of art, the ideal citizen in democracy and even the scholar doing academic research” (2007, p. 322). These seemingly different groups share extensive knowledge of the object of their fandom; they are emotionally connected to their object; they spend large amounts of time on it and appreciate exchanging their experiences with other likeminded people. But whereas the connoisseur, the citizen and

the scholar are praised for their intensive investments, the fan is more regularly accused of indulging silly pleasures.

In particular, those fans who share their passions with the world, be it in convening in public or by publishing their art on the Internet, have been the object of often uninformed critique. Yet the practice best described as participatory fandom, and the transformative works of art it produces by taking existing artifacts and adding to or altering them to create a new message or meaning, is by no means a modern occurrence. Accounts of *fanfiction*; the unauthorized continuation or exploration of literary worlds by fans (also known as *fan fiction* or *fanfic*), can be found as early as in the Victorian era. *Cosplay*; the variety of performance art in which participants craft and wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific fictional character, can be traced back to the early 1900s. *Vidding*; the unauthorized continuation or exploration of cinematic worlds by fans through the re-editing of the original film or television series, began more than four decades ago. These are just three examples of the vast and ever expanding world of participatory fandom.

Participatory fandom is currently enjoying a position as close to the forefront of popular culture as it has ever been, as exemplified by the sustained success of media texts such as *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre, 2007). This television series, following the social mishaps of a group of highly educated friends, has broadcast over 200 episodes, and its main cast's involvement in many prominent fandoms such as video gaming and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Tolkien, 1954) has consistently been posited as being amongst their major characteristics. Regardless, most scholarly work on fandom explores the practices of fans themselves detailing their forays into participatory fandom, ranging from auto-

ethnographies to readings of individual pieces of transformative works of art through a particular theoretical lens. The reasons that individuals have chosen to join fan communities, and their motivation for becoming involved in the production of transformative works of art, are often merely approximated based on the scholar's reading of the fan-produced text. While these reports make for engaging and insightful articles, they fail to make any generalizable statements about participatory fandom as a communication practice. Consequently, certain assumptions regarding the motivation of fans have proliferated without sufficient evidence.

To extend the study of fandom beyond the individual assessments of single pieces of fan art by academics and fans, it is paramount to understand the multidimensional ways of participation and productivity of fan-artists. Most scholarly research has focused either on the individual readings of a text that has attracted fans, on the performance of fandom, or on the participation of an individual within a fan community. I hypothesize, however, that the performance of fandom and the participation of an individual within a fan community are interrelated – and if this is indeed the case, it is important to understand how specific expressions of fandom influence one's interaction with fan communities, and how, conversely, the established rules of fan communities shape the produced fan texts. A scholarly inquiry such as the present thesis, which simultaneously explored these interrelated components of fandom study as well as the very nature of their interrelationships, was necessary in order to illuminate possible (dis)similarities across and between discrete varieties of fandom, varieties whose distinctions have been overlooked or ignored by the fandom scholarship conducted to date.

For the present thesis, three distinctly different types of fandom were selected. I studied how fans engage with the texts of the *Harry Potter* book series (Rowling, 1997-2007), the boyband *One Direction*, and the American Football team *The Dallas Cowboys*, as well as chronicled how fans subsequently perform their fandom and participate within their fan community. By uncovering the distinct commonalities and differences across different, selected types of fandom, much has been learned about the multidimensional ways of participation and productivity driving fan-artists to perform fandom.

As will be illustrated in the next chapter, several models have been developed with the intention of explicating how individuals become initiated into a fandom, perform their fandom, and participate within a fandom. However, even the most comprehensive model in each category does not allow for a more generalizable understanding of the field of fandom studies as a whole. To understand how individuals perform their fandom and participate within a fandom, fan interactions and fan texts have been coded and analyzed using a grounded approach with no preconceived categories, in the tradition of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (*The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, 1967). Websites and message boards dedicated to *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom were the main source of data for this study.

I hypothesize that the performance of fandom and the participation of an individual within a fan community are interrelated, and that the performance and participation across various forms of media fandom bear similar characteristics. By uncovering the (dis)similarities across and between discrete varieties of fandom I have bridged the current components of fandom studies, and have come to a more generalizable understanding of fandom.



## Looking Ahead

The field of fandom studies is still in its early stages of inquiry, and much room is left for additional research. It was paramount to make an inventory of major strides taken within the field, to underline theoretical threads and expose gaps in the literature. In the following chapter I review the existing literature on the subject. Then, in Chapter Three, I provide an in-depth explanation and description of the methods of my original research. In Chapter Four, I explore how fandom is performed, through the examination of the most prominent forms of participatory fan-art associated with *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom. Finally, in Chapter Five I tie all the findings together and analyze the significance of the similarities and dissimilarities across these categories of media fandom.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the field of fandom studies will be thoroughly explored. Firstly, the field will be situated within the discipline of cultural studies. Subsequently, the work of seminal fandom scholars will be contextualized and reviewed. As mentioned above, most scholarly work on fandom explores the practices of fans themselves detailing their forays into fandom, or looks at fandom in the abstract. Studies can be roughly divided as intending to explicate how individuals become *initiated* into a fandom, *perform* their fandom, and *participate* within a fandom, and this division will structure this literature review. These various approaches to fandom studies will be brought together in Chapter Three, and will thereby provide the basis for this study's original contribution to the field of fandom studies as we look across different genres of fandom, in search of patterns or similarities.

### **Popular Culture and Fandom**

As Graeme Turner explains in *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (1996), the development of cultural studies in the 1950s and 1960s signaled a break with two dominant principles in the humanities and social sciences. Firstly, no longer would only “higher,” elitist forms of art such as literature and classical music be the focal point of scholarly interest. The traditional definitions of culture would be broadened, to include “lower,” more popular forms of art, which previously might have been condemned by those of “good taste” as commercialized interests of the general public. This broadened definition came to include not only popular music and Hollywood films, but later also immersive computer games and television programs such as soap operas.

Besides breaking down the barriers inherently related to the “high culture/low culture” dichotomy, cultural studies scholars also turned their attention to the subjects of culture, and focused on how audiences are constructed by ordinary social and cultural practices such as playing sports and being subjected to marketing and advertising. The cultural studies movement resisted the idea of a passive audience at the mercy of the surrounding and influential top-down expressions of culture. Cultural texts were therefore redefined as texts dependent on the differing interpretations by different social, cultural, or economic groups. As Turner summarizes, “Culture, as the site where meaning is generated and experienced, becomes a determining, productive field through which social realities are constructed, experienced, and interpreted” (1996, p. 14).

### **Initiation**

**What Makes a Fan.** Acknowledging the agency inherent to active audiences – including but not limited to fans – it is subsequently of great importance to understand how various levels of engagement with and readings of media texts shape the audiences’ experiences. A most prominent champion of the active role of the audience is Stuart Hall, the Jamaican-born cultural theorist who left an impressive mark on the field with his 1980 article “Encoding/Decoding.” Hall distinguishes among three different modes of reading the “decoder-receiver” can use to interpret texts: the “dominant-hegemonic or preferred reading,” the “negotiated reading,” and the “oppositional reading.” Respectively, these modes of decoding refer to reading a text according to its dominant ideology, the possibility to negotiate this dominant ideology and incorporate adaptive and oppositional elements, and the possibility to go against the dominant ideology with a purely oppositional reading.

The encoding/decoding model was later revised by Sherry Turkle, in her 1996 book *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. She refers to a text according to its dominant ideology as “the seduction of simulation” (p. 71), and redefines the dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings as found in Hall’s original text. According to Turkle, the reader of a text can either surrender to its seduction (“simulation resignation”: the dominant reading), reject it (“simulation denial”: the oppositional reading), or “take the cultural pervasiveness of simulation as a challenge to develop a more sophisticated social criticism” (p. 71) by analyzing the assumptions and presuppositions that are built into the simulation; as Turkle explains, “understanding the assumptions that underlie simulation is a key element of political power” (p. 71). Thus, to gain agency in any divisive or political field, it is necessary to fully understand the dominant ideology’s position.

It is important to understand that neither Hall’s nor Turkle’s model is hierarchical; a dominant-hegemonic reading does not indicate a lesser involvement or intellect of the decoder-receiver than would an oppositional reading. It is thus vital to recognize how different readings may signal different types of fandom.

One of the seminal works on fandom is *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), in which Henry Jenkins distinguishes five characteristics of fan cultures. The first characteristic of fandom concerns a particular mode of reception. “Fan viewers watch television texts with close and undivided attention, with a mixture of emotional proximity and critical distance” (pp. 277–278). Secondly, “fandom involves a particular set of critical and interpretive practices” (p. 278). This implies that becoming a fan means becoming accustomed to the vernacular of the fan community, and

familiarizing yourself with the group's preferred reading of the source text, to understand covert references to the text playfully and establish one's rightful place amongst fellow fans. Thirdly, Jenkins recognizes fandom as a base for activism, as he sees fans as the only ones speaking back to the producers and networks. Thus, fans give a voice to an invisible audience. As a fourth characteristic, "fandom possesses particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices. [...] Fandom generates its own genres and develops alternative institutions of production, distribution, exhibition and consumption" (p. 279). Consequently, fandom creates its own alternative economy. Finally, fandoms create their own alternative social communities. Fans endeavor to establish a "weekend-only world" outside of dominant cultural values of work, where fandom becomes a space "defined by its refusal of mundane values and practices, its celebration of deeply held emotions and passionately embraced pleasures. Fandom's very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture" (p. 283).

**Reader-Response Criticism.** The "particular set of critical and interpretive practices" that Jenkins (1992, p. 278) describes as a characteristic of both fan and fandom echoes the beliefs of reader-response criticism, a school of literary thought that focuses on the audience and its experience of a literary work. In her 2006 book *Critical Theory Today* Lois Tyson dates the discipline back to the 1960s, as a reaction to other schools that focused on the Romantic ideal of authorial intent or the Formalist understanding of literary structure. The reader-response theory attributes the reader with the agency to impart meaning to a text through interpretation.

There are multiple approaches within the theoretical branch of reader-response criticism. Tyson distinguishes among five recognized reader-response criticism

approaches, while acknowledging overlapping beliefs and practices. Transactional reader-response theory asserts that a transaction occurs between the text's inferred meaning and the individual interpretation by the reader, influenced by his or her personal emotions and knowledge. Affective stylistics involves the claim that a text cannot have meaning independent of the reader. Subjective reader-response theory focuses on the individual reader's response for literary meaning, and consequently compares these responses in order to find continuity of meaning. Psychological reader-response theory argues that readers' preexisting motives affect how they read. Finally, social reader-response theory (an extension of affective stylistics) is based on the idea that any individual interpretation of a text is created in an interpretive community of minds consisting of participants who share a specific reading and interpretation strategy.

The name most often associated with (social) reader-response theory is Stanley Fish. Fish, a famed literary theorist, has been at the forefront of reader-response theory since the 1967 publication of "Surprised by Sin," a reader-centric analysis of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Fish's work centers on textual interpretation, as he dismisses the notion that just any meaning can be found in the text, in favor of the belief that meaning is provided by the readers. However, he does not see the assigning of meaning as an individual or idiosyncratic endeavor. To explain readers' attribution of meaning, Fish introduces the concept of interpretive communities in his 1976 paper "Interpreting the Variorum," and expands upon it in his book *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1982). Interpretive communities, to Fish, are groups that communally construct meanings through a shared pattern of consumption; an audience reading, viewing, or hearing the same text together comes to a common understanding. Fish believes that

readers cannot be distanced from the text, as they are embedding their own meanings into it:

One cannot appeal to the text, because the text has become an extension of the interpretive disagreement that divides them; and, in fact, the text as it is variously characterized is a consequence of the interpretation for which it is supposedly evidence. (1982, p. 340)

According to Fish, there is no correct or objective reading of a text, as the matter is entirely dependent on the audience's interpretation. Henry Jenkins may admit to a more active role on the part of the individual reader, yet the communally negotiated preferred reading of a text is an important part of understanding fandom, and understanding deviating practices within a fandom.

**Para-Social Interactions.** Another attribute strongly associated with fandom is the deep connection certain individuals feel for specific characters of a certain media product. In (one-sided) relationships commonly referred to as "Para-Social Interactions" (PSI), media audiences perceive the "personas" they encounter in the media they consume (such as fictional characters, celebrities, and athletes) as talking directly to them. These interactions are not limited to mass media characters or personalities, of course, as individuals have established similar bonds with political figures, deities, and forces of nature over the course of history. However, the term has become synonymous with media and communication studies since Horton and Wohl explored the different interactions between mass media users and media figures in "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction" (1956). Research into para-social interactions has been instrumental in debunking the misconception that more involved forms of fandom are

indicative of lacking elements in the personal lives of fans. In early studies, perceived relationships between media audiences and personas were considered as compensating for a lack of “real” social contacts (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). These assumptions were later contested by studies which showed how para-social interactions do not correlate with either loneliness or escapism (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). More recently, para-social interactions have come to be regarded as extensions of normal social cognition, specifically in terms of the use of the imagination (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). It is thus incorrect to make assumptions about media audiences based on their (perceived) para-social interactions, as individual motivations for engaging in this sort of relationship vary greatly.

### **Productivity**

**Performing Fandom.** Released in the same year as Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers*, John Fiske’s article “The Cultural Economy of Fandom” (1992) takes an approach that differs from that of contemporary authors. Where others seek to explicate the different degrees of involvement in cultural texts, Fiske makes a distinction based on what people do or perform with their fandom. To do so, he distinguishes three levels of fan productivity. First, at the level of semiotic productivity, he recognizes that the consumption of popular culture entails “the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity” (p. 37). Secondly, at the level of enunciative productivity, those meanings constructed at the semiotic productivity level are “shared within a face-to-face or oral culture” (p. 38). This level includes the appropriation and development of a specific subcultural style, by mastering the vernacular of the fandom and adhering to certain expectations regarding,



for instance, dress and behavior. The third level of fandom concerns textual productivity; “fans produce and circulate among themselves texts which are often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture” (p. 39). These three levels of productivity distinguished by Fiske explicate the intimate relationship between the fan and his or her preferred object of fandom, and reveal the delicate line between fan and non-fan.

The performative dimensions of fandom are further explored by Sarah Thornton, in her 1995 book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Sub-cultural Capital*. Echoing the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Thornton believes fans establish a sense of distinction through their accumulation of sub-cultural capital. The distinction between cultural capital and sub-cultural capital is significant, as it challenges the hierarchical idea of culture that, despite the efforts of cultural studies theorists, has prevailed.

By understanding sub-cultural capital not as a sad substitution for cultural capital, but as the primary and most desirable currency within a sub-culture, cultures outside of the imagined mainstream hierarchy of tastes are acknowledged as willingly and knowingly diverting from the norm. In Thornton’s example, patrons of discothèques are understood as not surreptitiously pining for opera, but rather as actively preferring the discothèques’ thumping beats over an opera’s orchestral score. By valorizing sub-cultural capital, Thornton made an important step towards approaching fandoms as individual communities.

In *Life on the Screen*, Turkle (1996) not only adds a historical dimension to her exploration of participation (as discussed previously), she also differentiates among three types of subcultural roles of engagement in the modern (post-Internet) era. As she

explains, “I have introduced the terms hacker, hobbyist and user to refer to specific people. They are best understood as different modes of relationship that one can have with the computer” (p. 32). According to Turkle, a user is “involved with the machine in a hands-on way, but is not interested in the technology except as it enables an application.” Hackers are “the antithesis of users.” They are passionately involved in mastery of the machine itself. The hobbyists “in their own way [are] equally enthralled” (p. 32). Whereas the user sees the computer as a tool, and the hacker approaches the computer as a world to be mastered in its own right, the hobbyist seeks to facilitate his or her exploration of both the computer itself and its application as leisurely as possible. While the distinction among these three uses of the computer does not hold up quite as much now, some two decades after Turkle’s publication, her consideration of the Internet’s impact and her foray into modernity have been instrumental in establishing the contemporary field of fandom studies.

Turkle’s innovative distinction between individual members of a fan community proved influential on other scholars, as evidenced by the work of Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, who created their own distinction among different categories of fans. In *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (1998), they distinguish among fans, cultists, and enthusiasts. “Fans are those people who become particularly attached to certain programmes or stars within the context of a relatively heavy media use” (p. 138), whereas “cultists are more organized than fans. They meet each other and circulate specialized materials that constitute the nodes of a network” (p. 139). Finally, “enthusiasts are, in our terms, based predominantly around activities rather than media or stars” (p. 139).

Even the renowned Henry Jenkins subsequently tried his hand at defining individual members of a fandom's audience, in his 2002 article "Interactive Audiences?" Opting for a dichotomy situated within his own "textual poachers" metaphor, he divides consumers of media into fans and culture jammers. Culture jammers "want to opt out of media consumption and promote a purely negative and reactive conception of popular culture," whereas fans "see unrealized potentials in popular culture and want to broaden audience participation." Jenkins describes fan culture as "dialogic rather than disruptive, affective more than ideological, and collaborative rather than confrontational," meaning that whereas culture jammers want to disrupt and incapacitate the dominant media, fans (or "poachers" as he alternatively refers to them) "want to appropriate their content, imagining a more democratic, responsive, and diverse style of popular culture" (p. 167).

## **Participation**

**Understanding Fan Communities.** In addition to understanding *how* one becomes a fan and *what* fans do, it is equally important to understand *why* they choose to become involved in participatory forms of fandom. One possible explanation is given by Kristina Busse, in her 2009 article "Gender and the Politics of Fan Production." She recounts the late 1960s, when groups of science fiction fans started focusing on television series and films, "foregrounding characters and narratives." These predominantly female fans began creating art, such as videos and novels, that "continued, expanded, and analyzed the narrative universes and transformed the visual stimuli" (p. 104) of such media properties as the aforementioned *Star Trek* (Roddenberry, 1966). An example of the transformative art created by these fans was "slash-fiction" writing, a type of fan productivity in which likely and unlikely couples of media characters are imagined in

situations of an explicit nature. In “slash-fiction,” the *Star Trek* characters Captain James T. Kirk and his First Officer Spock, traditionally portrayed as heterosexual, may thus be imagined as engaging in a romantic or sexual relationship.

In this example, the male gaze (see Mulvey, 1975) is inverted and the male characters are posited as the sexual objects of that gaze. This has become such a staple of *Star Trek* fandom that “slash-fiction” has been named after the punctuation in the “Kirk/Spock” fanfiction subgenre (Booth, 2013), often with homosexual connotations.

Technological and societal changes, such as the increasing ubiquity of television and the increase in financial independence of young men and women, changed how people spent their time and money, and fandom blossomed. The first fanzine, *Spockanalia* (Langsam & Comerford-Burley), featuring stories, analyses, and drawings debuted in 1967; 1972 saw the first specific fan convention; and 1975 saw the first proto-fan *vid*, created when Kandy Fong synced *Star Trek* stills on a slide projector with music from a cassette player. This particular fan community has been studied extensively, and many of today’s female fans regard these earlier fans as their predecessors.

In “Computer Games as Participatory Media Culture” (2011), Joost Raessens positions the debate around audience participation within the realm of video games. Synthesizing many of the theoreticians mentioned above, his explanation of audience participation proves applicable beyond only computer games. As Raessens explains, “the view that participation is a new, exclusive, and essential characteristic of computer games ignores the fact that radio, film and television, for example, each have their own versions of this concept” (p. 373). Fan communities, such as that which emerged around the science fiction television series *Star Trek* (Roddenberry, 1966) in the late 1960s, were

enabled by devices such as Xerox machines and audio/video recorders not only to copy, but also to edit other people's material. Consequently, early fan magazines and video essays were produced, and participatory fan culture (as we understand it today) was born. An important distinction in Raessens' work is between "culture participation" and "participatory culture." Culture participation is "a broad concept that refers generally to the fact that we participate in the surrounding culture," either in a passive and consumptive manner, or in a more active and productive way. Raessens considers participatory culture "a more active attitude that makes special demands concerning the interpretation, the reconfiguration, and the construction of [media]" (p. 383). As he concludes:

Negotiated, oppositional, and deconstructive readings (more so than dominant ones), configuration and selection (more so than exploration), and construction (more so than reconfiguration) are all, in their own specific way, part of what I call participatory media culture. (p. 383)

**Understanding Adaptation.** To fully understand the notion of fan production, it is important to understand the practices of adaptation. In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon analyzes the ubiquity of adaptations in all their various media incarnations, and challenges their constant critical denigration. As she notes at the beginning of her book, adaptations are not a recently occurring trend; "Shakespeare transferred his culture's stories from page to stage and made them available to a whole new audience. Aeschylus and Racine and Goethe and da Ponte also retold familiar stories in new forms" (p. 2). As long ago as the time of Aristotle, *imitatio* (imitation) was seen as part of the instinctive behavior of humans, and considered to be the source of their

pleasure in art. For an artist, imitating great works of art was considered to be a sign of respect, as well as a great pedagogical tool. Indeed, *imitatio* went together with *aemulatio*, (improving upon great art), linking imitation and creativity. Adaptation, therefore, is not slavish copying; it is a process of making the adapted material one's own. Nevertheless, in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary and derivative; "if an adaptation is perceived as 'lowering' a story (according to some imagined hierarchy of medium or genre), response is likely to be negative" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 3).

Contrastingly, Hutcheon explains adaptations as approaching a story in a different way: [Adapters] use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew. (p. 3)

Adaptation can thus be seen as repetition, but specifically as repetition without replication. Hutcheon mentions many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation, positing that "the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying" (p. 7). With adaptations, both the producers and the audience seemingly desire the repetition as much as the change. Adapted media can therefore be considered as "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; as a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; as an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted

work” (p. 8). Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative; a work that is second without being secondary. “It is its own palimpsestic thing” (p. 9).

A specific form of adaptation, especially prevalent in participatory fan communities, is remediation. In their eponymous article, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1996) argue that new visual media achieve their cultural significance by paying homage to, rivaling, and refashioning such earlier media as perspective painting, photography, film, and television. Primarily, they distinguish a double logic of remediation. As they note, our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: “it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying technologies of mediation” (p. 312). As a prime example of remediation in art, they reference *trompe-l'oeil*, and the example of the Sistine Chapel, where the architecture of the building itself is continued in the paintings on its ceiling.

In this case, the remediation creates an ironic paradox: “the artist's success at effacing his process and thereby himself became for trained viewers a mark of his skill and therefore his presence” (Bolter & Grusin, 1996, p. 320). Of course, the paintings themselves were a remediation of many Biblical tales, and the practice of “repurposing” a media text into a different medium has become a staple of contemporary entertainment. Bolter and Grusin warn us that with reuse comes “a necessary redefinition,” but there may be “no conscious interplay between media” (p. 339); if at all, the interplay happens only for the reader or viewer who happens to know both versions well enough to compare them. The implicit and sometimes explicit goal of remediation is “to refashion or rehabilitate other media” (p. 346). There are varying degrees to which this actually happens, as Bolter and Grusin explain, identifying a variety of ways in which digital

media remediate their predecessors; “[it is] a spectrum depending upon the degree of perceived competition or rivalry between the new media and the old” (p. 339).

**Contextualizing Participation.** Regardless of historical precedents, Raessens (2011) is hesitant to explain contemporary participatory fan cultures in archaic terms. Referring to the remediation of the participatory effect of other media by computer games, he argues that that one runs the risk of becoming a victim of the “horseless carriage syndrome; the inclination to understand new techniques (the automobile) in terms of old techniques (horse-drawn wagons)” (p. 374). Raessens considers focusing on remediation as misguided; a video game is not simply a film in which you move the protagonist, just as a film is not simply a book told in pictures. The academic focus on remediation, as prevalent in video game studies as in fan studies, should therefore be expanded to incorporate a (participatory) medium’s distinguishing, specific characteristics or principles. To arrive at this more precise alternative, Raessens distinguishes “three domains of participation: interpretation, reconfiguration, and construction” (p. 373). He sees interpretation as playing through a video game, not deviating from the developer’s path. This definition is not unlike Hall’s idea of a “dominant” reading.

Raessens deviates from Hall’s (1996) model with his next domain of participation; reconfiguration. He explains reconfiguration as “the exploration of the unknown,” which in computer games represents the process of exploration. “The player is invited to give form to these worlds in an active way by selecting one of the many preprogrammed possibilities in a computer game” (Raessens, 2011, pp. 380-381). Both the “negotiated” and “oppositional” readings in Hall’s model are grouped together here,



as equal ways of participating with a media message confrontationally. Finally, construction, “understood as the addition of new game elements” (p. 381), happens when users create new video games, or modify existing games by introducing new elements. Extended beyond the realm of video games, construction can be observed in other participatory fan cultures, in expressions of fandom such as *fan fiction* or *vidding*.

**Mechanisms of Fan Communities.** Echoing the work of Thornton (1995), Busse (2009) attributes fans with a deep sense of community, and sees them engaged in a complex subcultural economy. A difficulty with the works of fan art shared within and by a fan community lies in the fact that most of them require at least an understanding of the source text, if not the fannish context, to become comprehensible. Explaining how and why a particular scene resonates for a fan “may indeed rely on the shared knowledge of a story, vid, or central fan discussion” (Busse, p. 105). Consequently, for example, many of these works of art might not strike a casual reader as feminist, yet this is exactly how Busse describes many early works of art by the *Star Trek* fan community of the 1960s. This is “because the feminist impetus lies in the way women manipulate and co-opt media representations” (p. 104). As the story of media fandom “is one steeped in economic and gender concerns” (p. 105), Busse explains the feminist impetus of the *Star Trek* fans as reactionary to a history in which women are the fetish, “in both the psychosexual and socioeconomic arenas: women (or at least parts of them) have often been fetishistic objects while also adding value to commodities, often without gaining capital themselves” (p. 106). As a result of this fetishistic suppression, women began creating the narratives commercial media wouldn’t offer them and their fan communities,

which grew into the nonprofit advocacy group for fan-produced texts, the *Organization for Transformative Works*.

However, Busse is quick to warn us that fandom is always more complicated than the stories we tell about it, and scholars “need to be careful not to create an imaginary feminist idyll” (p. 106). Simply assuming that female fans do nothing more than invert the male gaze “may keep subject/object relations unquestioned—a concern that has become especially important as queer and trans studies have complicated any naive feminist binaries that may have held sway during early years of media fandom” (p. 106). Female fandom transcends simply looking at men, as men would look at the fans. Recent scholarship on media fandom in particular has attempted to take into account the ever-growing diversity of fans and fan works, often focusing on a particular fandom or even a single fan’s production. “In fact, legitimizing fan works as objects of study in their own right, rather than merely products of an interesting subculture, may be one of the most important shifts in fan studies” (p. 105).

One such study of a single work of fan art is Francesca Coppa’s 2009 article “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness,” her feminist reading of *vidding*. In this article, she approaches *A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness (Hot! Hot! Hot!)* (2005), a fan vid made by collective “the Clucking Belles,” through a critical lens, and considers the act of vidding by the female collective as an act of defying patriarchal media production. Practiced overwhelmingly by women (as opposed to fan filmmaking, which remains male dominated), vidding is an art in which clips from television shows and movies are set to music to make an argument or tell a story. As Coppa explains: “The song is used as an

interpretive lens; the music and lyrics tell us how to understand what we see” (pp. 107-108).

Echoing Kristina Busse’s argument about women as objects of fetishists, Coppa quotes Mary Anne Doane’s (2000) argument that it is “extremely difficult, if not impossible” for women to be fetishists, for they do not have the requisite lack (Doane, 2000, p. 425). However, for many fannish vidders fetishism is associated not with lack and loss, as in the tradition of Jacques Lacan (*Écrits*, 1966), but with surplus and pleasure. As an example, Coppa’s titular fan vid invites its female spectator “to a veritable orgy of scopophilia” (p. 107). Coppa describes the vid vividly:

Creating a rhythmic montage of beautiful people, “A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness” is not about people; it’s about tropes. Scenes of people dancing give way to more metaphorical kinds of dancing: montages of men shoving at each other, montages of swordplay, montages wherein characters defy the laws of gravity by floating in midair or swinging from ropes. [...] The clichés of mass media are reinscribed, and appreciated, as erotic choreography. (p. 108)

Vidding, as an art form made through editing, does not only complicate the expected spectatorship of women; it also complicates the familiar symbolic characterization of women sewing and men cutting.

As Coppa explains: “Vidding women cut, slicing visual texts into pieces before putting them together again, fetishizing not only body parts and visual tropes, but the frame, the filmic moment, that they pull out of otherwise coherent wholes” (p. 107). By selecting only parts – tropes, movements, frames - from larger narratives, and presenting

them as unified and complete, vidders reassemble media into coherent wholes of their own devising. “Their vids reappropriate objects and turn them into sites of pleasure and surplus” (p. 109).

Apart from appropriating fictional characters from television and film, an important subgenre of *vidding* consists of creating compilations of notable public and private appearances of celebrities. Capturing candid moments of stars (such as the members of boyband *One Direction*) in interviews and fan encounters has become a form of fan productivity practiced by many a YouTube user. As Richard Dyer explains in *Stars* (1979/1998), celebrities intentionally blur the lines between “being a real person” (p. 34) and their mediated and cultivated characters, extending the cultural texts produced by a star (in their music videos, for instance) into their personal life.

**Positioning Fan Communities.** An often overlooked, yet inherently important aspect, of fandom studies is the socio-economic context in which media texts are produced, consumed, and appropriated. As Matt Hills recognizes in *Fan Cultures* (2002), fandom has a contradictory relationship with capitalist consumerism. To impose a resistance-versus-compliance dualism is consequently inadequate. As Hills explains, “fans are both commodity-completists and they express anti-commercial beliefs or ‘ideologies’” (p. 44). The identity of a fan is dialectically constructed inside and outside commodification, which means it is vital to focus on the different practices of fandom. Considering the performative dimension of fandom, one is confronted with its underlying struggles for power:

Thinking of fans as performers means displacing an emphasis on the text/reader interaction, and focusing instead on the myriad ways that fans

can engage with the textual structures and moments of their favoured cult shows, reactivating these in cultural practices of play. (Hills, 2002, p. 41)

An example of the commodity-completists side of fandom is the consumption of so-called *collector's items*: paraphernalia such as toys and clothing produced in limited quantities and marketed upon release or as an aftermarket item towards a particularly devoted set of fans. Fans partially perform their fandom by fervently consuming these products. Although this commercialized aspect of fandom has received mainstream attention (to the extent of walls lined with action figures becoming part of the image of the prototypical fan in popular culture), many items of great subcultural value are worthless within the context of the dominant culture. The above-mentioned *vids* and fan fiction novels and novellas may attract an audience of millions and receive heaps of praise, yet do not make their creators a penny in profits. As has been made apparent by the publishing and entertainment industries, both videos and literary works of fandom share the potential of being commodified. It is thus important to understand the lack of profit generated by works of fan art as a conscious and well-guarded decision and a defining characteristic of many fan communities.

In “Should Fan Fiction be Free?,” author Abigail de Kosnik (2009) posits that the authors of fan fiction have never, as a group, sought payment for their labor. She considers this choice as worthy of scrutiny, as fan fiction “is becoming increasingly visible to non-initiates through major media outlets in the United States and the United Kingdom, indicating that the genre is moving away from the margins of American and British culture” (pp. 118-119). When an alternative form of cultural production gains mainstream attention, this is often accompanied by commercialization; “some

enterprising force realizes an opportunity for profit in a little-known but interesting subcultural practice” (p. 119), and ventures to translate it into a more accessible mainstream form.

An example brought forth by De Kosnik with strong similarities to fan fiction (and other transformative works of fandom) is *hip-hop*, the musical genre that began to develop in the South Bronx in New York City in the 1970s as an underground urban movement, before rising to cultural prominence in the following decades. Hip-hop, like fan fiction, is a genre fundamentally based on artistic appropriation. Digital sampling, the incorporation of sections of prerecorded sounds and music into new recordings, is one of the two pillars of the genre, together with rapping over said recordings.

Whereas the sampling of other people’s intellectual properties was considered a form of “fair use” during the genre’s early days, its rise to cultural ubiquity spurred on many lawsuits by samples’ original composers in the hopes of preventing release or participating in a hit song’s profits. As De Kosnik notes, over the past decades of sharing their transformative works, fan fiction readers and writers have generally felt wary of commodifying “a form of cultural production that is essentially derivative and perhaps subject to copyright infringement lawsuits” (2009, p. 120). Without the revenue of major hip-hop stars, fan fiction writers are individually accountable for any and all lawsuits and their financial ramifications. If a case involving fan fiction and copyright infringement were to result in a court ruling, that ruling might accept the framing of fan fiction as productive, nonthreatening, or promotional rather than derivative and competitive, as is customary in most fan communities. However, as De Kosnik rightfully mentions,

[To date] no court case involving either printed or online fan fiction has yielded a judge's decision establishing whether this type of work constitutes fair use or infringement, or whether guidelines for licensing fees must be established before authors can sell appropriations of copyrighted works. (p. 122)

There is a second dimension to fans' hesitance about the commercialization and commodification of transformative works of fan art, which play central roles in the maintenance of fan communities. De Kosnik posits fandom as inherently a gift culture, as fans strive to keep their communities and their transformative works of art free – “free of charge, but also free of the social controls that monetization would likely impose on it” (p. 122). This defensive posture is echoed in the mission statement of the Organization of Transformative Works, one of whose primary goals is to redefine fan works as transformative and therefore legal: “The mission of the OTW is first and foremost to protect the fan creators who work purely for love and share their works for free within the fannish gift economy” (Organization for Transformative Works, n.d.). Fan fiction is a genre of cultural production that many consume alone, not unlike the romance novel. The reading and writing of fan fiction thus becomes a form of self-pleasuring, and therefore “writing fan fiction for personal gain - financial, psychological, or emotional - aligns with the fact that self-enrichment is already inherently an important motivation for women to produce and consume fanfic” (De Kosnik, 2009, p. 123).

In “A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture” (2009), Karen Hellekson explores the internal economics of subcultural communities, and which forms of capital

are most highly valued. She approaches becoming a part of a fan community as completing various stages of initiation:

To engage is to click, read, comment, write, make up a song and sing it; to hotlink, to create a video, to be invited to move on, to come over here or go over there—to become part of a larger metatext, the off-putting jargon and the unspoken rules meaning that only this group of that people can negotiate the terrain. (p. 113)

According to Hellekson, being initiated into a fan community means learning how to engage with other fans using their vernacular. Further, she argues, “the metatext thus created has something to say, sometimes critical things, about the media source, but for those of us who engage in it, it has even more to say about ourselves” (p. 114). Hellekson subdivides this meta-textual exchange into three elements: giving, receiving, and reciprocating. The tension and negotiation between these three elements results in “fan creation of social relationships that are constructed voluntarily on the basis of a shared interest” (p. 114). *Star Trek* and *Harry Potter* fans will thus form distinct, yet analogous, social communities.

The gifts given, received, and reciprocated in fandoms have a value within the fannish economy, and fulfill the important role of demarcating exclusivity. The gifts are designed to create and cement a social structure, but the gifts themselves are not meaningful outside their fannish context. This means that there is no incentive for outsiders to get in on the fannish economy, consequently ensuring that such outsiders remain uninvolved. The insistence on a gift economy in lieu of a commercial one goes



beyond self-protective attempts to fly under the radar of large corporations and their legal muscle.

Hellekson's understanding of gifts and gift culture echoes the work of anthropologist Marcel Mauss, whose *Essai sur le Don* (1925) explains the anti-utilitarian nature of gifts meant to cement a social structure. Mauss analyzes the economic practices of various "archaic" societies of the Pacific Northwest, Polynesia, and Melanesia, and finds that they share a practice centered on the reciprocal exchange of disposable items, such as totems to burn or beaded figurines to throw into the ocean. Hellekson understands fannish gifts as a symbolic extension of the literal destruction that Mauss describes, as "items offered as gifts are not destroyed but are incorporated into a multivocal dialogue that creates a metatext, the continual composition of which creates a community" (p. 115); the individuality of a gift is lost as it becomes a part of something greater. As Jean Baudrillard explains in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981), a fannish gift is an element of symbolic exchange, creating a symbolic relationship between members of a fandom through Maussian gift exchange. This symbolic exchange "defines itself precisely as something distinct from, and beyond, value and code. All forms of value (object, commodity or sign) must be negated in order to inaugurate symbolic exchange. This is the radical rupture of the field of value" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 125).

On this renegotiated field that rejects commercial exchange, fans engage with their metatexts and each other by presenting and reciprocating gifts in certain approved, fandom-specific ways, and by providing commentary about these gifts. Hellekson

describes the gifts that fans exchange, which, importantly, require skill and effort to make, as taking on various forms:

They may be artworks, as in vids, podcasts, fan fiction, or manipulated images. But they may also be narrative analysis, known as meta, of the primary source or of a fan artwork. They may be fan fiction archives, bulletin board forums, screencapture galleries, fandom-specific wikis, or other aggregates of information. But the items exchanged have no value outside their fannish context. (pp. 114-115)

Interestingly, the vast majority of the gifts exchanged within fan communities have no tangible or physical form; the aggregation of fans and fandom in online environments means that the items exchanged are hyperreal and capable of being endlessly replicated. An example would be a book cover, illustrated by an artist in appreciation of their favorite fanfiction. The gift in this case would be an electronic file; an image that can be used by the author and everyone that comes across it. As philosophized by Hellekson, “in the realm of symbolic relations, where the market economy has been removed as a factor, all exchanges result in social cohesion. In fandom’s gift culture, gifts correlate to aspects of the self, such as time or talent” (p. 116). Each gift, then, representing an expression of self, contributes to the larger whole. “The metatext is not the pretext for the community; rather, its generation comprises the community and is its goal. Each proffered item represents an aspect of the giver: time, talent, love, desire” (p. 117).

**Unfounded Demarcations in Fandom.** Important as gift cultures may be, the aforementioned commercialized aspects of fandom invite a continuous stream of advertisers attempting to seduce fans to express their fandom through consumption, and

channel their energy away from the production of fan art. While mostly attempted in vain, as many fans are fiercely protective of their gift culture, there are fandoms associated primarily with the consumption of commercial commodities. An example of this is sports fandom. In *Sports Mania* (Hugenberg & Haridakis, 2008) the authors examine the experience of sport in a variety of mediated contexts. Focusing on fan experience in particular, they analyze the evolution and application of new communication technologies, and how these strengthen the bond between consumer and sport. The book is divided into five sections focusing on sports media content, the sports fan, fan identification, fan motives, and fan-produced content. Hugenberg & Haridakis venture to make a contribution to the understanding of the meaning of sports fandom, and the growing power of sports to both entertain and sell. As fans are continuously bombarded with new mediated ways to engage with both their sport of choice and each other through television, sports websites, and social media, sports are forcefully trying to become an integral part of their lives.

While this is not any worse than advertisements one might encounter in other aspects of life, it may have categorizing consequences. As quoted previously, the stereotype persists that fangirls are overweight cat ladies with unhealthy fixations on the male leads of their favorite television shows (Larsen & Zuberis, 2012). Interestingly, similarly negative connotations were originally present in the representation of sports fans. As noted in “College students' perceptions of sports fandom as a social status determinant” (End, Kretschmar, & Dietz- Uhler, 2004), for much of the late 1980s and early 1990s the typical sports fan was depicted as “a slack jawed overweight male with a 5 o'clock shadow and several tattoos, who lives to drink beer and watch sports events”

(p. 115). Nonetheless, many of the ugly stigmas associated with fandom seem absent from the media's portrayal of contemporary sports fans. A sport such as American Football does not just generate revenue for the National Football League, as licensing deals and collegiate divisions have exponentially increased the amount of stake holders in sports fandom. The economic impetus for flattering or pandering to the audiences of sports is thus clear, and its prominence in mainstream media has had the result of sports fandom accruing an individual significantly more amounts of cultural capital.

Sports' categorization as a type of fandom unlike those of film, television, literature, or music has had the effect of distinguishing the field as separate from other fandom studies. This was implicit in the literature discussed on the previous pages, where film, television, literature, and music fandom were mentioned several times, whereas sports fandom was wholly absent. Yet many of the studies conducted focusing solely on sports fandom ventured into territory long explored by fandom studies more generally; most of sports fandom research is preoccupied with understanding how individuals become initiated into a fandom (see Eisenberg, 1997).

### **Looking Ahead**

Despite the major strides taken within the field of fandom studies, there are several severe gaps in knowledge. First, the strands of research focusing on the individual readings of a text, the performance of fandom, and the participation of an individual within a fan community, fail to make any generalizable statement about the field as a whole. Second, the apparent dissimilarities across different genres of fandom have resulted in unfounded categorization. The following chapter will explain how this study

has attempted to close these two gaps in the field, and thereby make an original contribution to the fandom studies literature, by answering the following questions:

*RQ1: How do individuals perform fandom?*

*RQ2: How do fans respond to and interact with participatory fan-art?*

*RQ3: What similar characteristics can be found across various categories of media fandom?*

### CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In the previous chapter, I contextualized and reviewed the main strands of fandom studies. Through the process of uncovering the rough divide of scholars who explicate how individuals become *initiated* into a fandom, *perform* their fandom, and *participate* within a fandom, it became apparent to me that the fandom literature currently fails to include studies that look across genres of fandom. As a result, the current literature fails to provide a more generalizable understanding of the field as a whole. In this chapter, I will explain how I have attempted to close this gap.

#### **Uncovering the Branches of Fandom**

As detailed in the introductory chapter, the individualized approach characteristic of contemporary fandom studies has created an interesting absence of generalizability. Consequently, little has been written about which categories of fandom may be considered the genre's "branches." Building upon the research reviewed in the pages above, the primary distinguishable categories of media fandom studies involve *film*, *television*, *literature*, *music*, and *sports*. By uncovering the distinct differences and commonalities across different, selected types of fandom, much can be learned about the multidimensional ways of participation and productivity driving fan-artists to perform fandom.

In order to conduct my study, I have chosen three media properties that are representative of primary categories of media fandom: the *Harry Potter* series; American football team, The Dallas Cowboys; and the boyband, One Direction. These properties, as described below, have been selected based on their popularity, broad appeal, and accessibility. This will guarantee culturally relevant insights, as well as facilitate both the

researcher and the reader to draw from previous knowledge of and experiences with the discussed properties.

### **Objects of Study**

Nearly two decades after the release of its inaugural book, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) needs little introduction. Over the course of seven books, the series, about boy wizard Harry Potter and his struggle against the dark forces of the villainous Voldemort, has captured the imagination of millions around the world. *Harry Potter* has become the best-selling book series of all time by quite a margin, with all the books in the series topping the United States best-seller list and selling more than 450 million copies worldwide (*TIME Magazine*, 2013). The inquiry into *Harry Potter* fandom began at *pottermore.com*, the official website for the book series that launched in 2011 with a flurry of content, both familiar and new, including social networking capabilities.

While the sport of baseball has historically been referred to as "America's pastime," American football has been the most popular sport in the United States for over three decades (Harris Interactive, 2014). Whereas football beat out baseball by a single percentage point when the question was first included (1982), 2014 saw 35 percent of fans call football their favorite sport, more than double the amount of fans choosing baseball (Rovell, 2014). Over the same period of time, the total number of viewers for the *Super Bowl* (the annual championship game of the National Football League) has risen from 85 million to over 112 million in the United States alone. In 2015, Super Bowl XLIX became the most-watched American television program in history. It is thus safe to say that American football is the country's primary sports fandom. The annual Harris Poll also ranks each NFL team by popularity. A six-year run as the most popular team in the

NFL came to an end for *The Dallas Cowboys* in 2014, yet the 2015 poll saw the Texas team regain its position at the top of the list. The inquiry into *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom began at *dallascowboys.com*, the official website for the team, which fosters a vivid community of sports fans with a multitude of message boards.

*One Direction* is an English-Irish pop boyband, composed of singers Niall Horan, Zayn Malik, Liam Payne, Harry Styles, and Louis Tomlinson. The group rose to international prominence after performing in the seventh series of the British televised singing competition *The X Factor* (Cowell, 2004) in 2010. Currently the first band in the United States' *Billboard 200* history to have its first four albums debut at number one, *One Direction* is yet to be surpassed as the boyband with the most avid followers. The inquiry into *One Direction* fandom began at *onedirectionmusic.com*, the official website for the boyband. Despite the band's 2016 hiatus, the website attracts over 600,000 individual users each day (SimilarWeb.com) who partake in the website's videos, news, and forums.

### **The Grounded Theory Approach to Fandom**

As was explained by Turkle in *Life on the Screen* (1996), the advent of the Internet has had an unprecedented impact on participatory fandoms. By both uniting the often diffused fan communities, as well as opening up their practices to those previously uninitiated, websites dedicated to fans can be associated with the current proliferation of the production of transformative works of fan art. Importantly, a well-maintained online presence means that a wealth of information may be created, found, and accessed, from anywhere in the world. Websites and message boards dedicated to these media properties



(and the transformative works of fan art they inspire) have thus been the main sources of data for the present study.

To understand how individuals become initiated into a fandom, all studies mentioned above have resorted to studying the various ways an individual may read a text. However, distinguishing between the dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings of a text (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 1980) does not lead to noteworthy results. As Jenkins rightfully states, "fandom's very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture" (*Textual Poachers*, 1992, p. 283). Particularly the forms of fandom studied in this thesis are a product of negotiated readings of texts, as neither dominant nor oppositional readings would allow for or encourage participation. More fruitful would be an inquiry into the motivations of individuals for becoming involved in fandom and the production of participatory fan-art. However, this is beyond the scope of this study.

To understand how individuals perform their fandom and participate within a fandom, fan texts and fan interactions were analyzed using a grounded theory approach with no preconceived categories. The grounded theory approach was pioneered by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, in their seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967). This research method is founded on the idea that the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded will determine the basis of theory, and that these codes and categories are fluidly changing while the researcher is gathering data. Consequently, the scope and terms of a study's analytical frame may continuously be altered until late in the project. The first stage of the grounded theory approach is coding as many categories as possible from the

data. As mentioned before, no preconceived categories were used. Instead, the categories were inductively generated. Websites and message boards dedicated to *Harry Potter*, *The Dallas Cowboys*, and *One Direction* fandom were the main sources of data for this study.

To understand how individuals perform their fandom, it was particularly important to begin with uncovering the most prominent forms of fan productivity. This was accomplished by coding the fan interactions found on websites and message boards, and identifying the three most popular genres of fan-art of a particular fandom. Secondly, the limitations of this study required a comprehensible sample of texts. Consequently, the three most popular fan-texts of each of the three most popular genres of fan-art were studied. This was accomplished by referring to statistics such as the number of views or comments on a particular piece of fan-art. Finally, the chosen texts were analyzed thematically. This will be accomplished by coding recurring tropes and story-elements. For example, a category named “Friendship” was created because this theme was found in at least one fan-text.

To understand how individuals participate within a fandom, the fan interactions found on the above-mentioned websites and message boards were analyzed. Firstly, I paid attention to a fan-artist’s introduction of his or her piece of fan-art. This could be a video’s description, or a story’s foreword, for example. Secondly, I analyzed the feedback received by a fan-artist in the form of comments and ratings. Thirdly, I analyzed the direct interaction between fan-artist and fan. This was accomplished by coding the forum posts found on most fan-websites. This analysis of fan interactions has not only illuminated how individuals participate within a fandom, but also shed light on whether or not fan-artists adhere to the expectations and limitations set by their fan community.

**Sample Study: Delicate.** An example of the type of data studied, is the *fanfiction* created by fans of the *Harry Potter* series. In the forums at *pottermore.com*, fanfiction is one of the fandom's most prominently discussed forms of productivity. Since the series' inception, many texts have been produced on almost as many websites, some of which did not stand the test of time. Luckily, in an effort to preserve this wealth of information, *harrypotterfanfiction.com* has come forward as both a database and outlet for writers, currently providing access to over 84,000 original Harry Potter stories by over 38,000 authors (other than J. K. Rowling, the author of the published book series). The website's most popular story is *Delicate*, written by author padfoot4ever between 2008 and 2013. This novel-length fan text has been read over 2 million times, and serves as an excellent entry-point into transformative works of *Harry Potter* art. In the open coding stage of my research, I have gone through a text like *Delicate* line by line, marking those clusters of text that suggest a category. The following snippet is taken from the first chapter of *Delicate*:

I start to hyperventilate and think that I am most certainly about to die. I am literally shouting at myself in my own head! Maybe I'll come back as a ghost, like Moaning Myrtle. I could haunt this sixth year Gryffindor girls' bathroom – Rose Weasley, the pregnant ghost of Gryffindor house. That has a nice ring to it.

In this small excerpt, several categories may be distinguished. For example, the mentions of “Moaning Myrtle” and “Rose Weasley” indicate that the author used characters originating in the original *Harry Potter* book series, and the mention of “[the] sixth year Gryffindor girls' bathroom” indicates the book is at least partially situated within the

physical space imagined by author J. K. Rowling. The categories “Source material character” and “Source material location” were thus created. Additional characters or locations that originated in the published *Harry Potter* series mentioned in *Delicate* and other fanfiction have also been coded as belonging to these two categories. Moving on to a different form of fan-art, such as *Harry Potter vids*, it became apparent these two categories occur beyond fanfiction. Further moving on to a different form of fandom, such as *One Direction* fandom, it became apparent these two categories occur across different *genres* of fandom. In addition to this textual analysis, the excerpt also allows for thematic analysis. Both “Teenage pregnancy” and “Anxiety” can be distinguished as themes. Additional categories were developed once the entire 145,821-word story was read.

Furthermore, *Delicate* has been reviewed by 8,075 users. The following review, posted on August 4, 2016, by *harrypotterfanfiction.com* user halfvics, is indicative of the general tone of the more favorable reviews of the novel, the type of review found most often:

I don't think you'll see this but let me tell that even though I've been a part of the hp fandom for so many years, not once a fanfic caught my attention like yours did. It was so amazingly written and it's quite beautiful, although we did went through a lot of drama to get this ending. Thank you so much for writing it. I loved it. More than words can tell. I cried, I laughed, I wanted to beat the crap out of these stupid Weasleys and Potters and Malfoys! So many emotions to so short words. I can't wait to read the sequel.

Another review, posted on April 4, 2016 by *harrypotterfanfiction.com* user Zie, is exemplary of the type of critical feedback found most often in response to both *Delicate* and other fan-texts on the website: “Some of the character's mentioned don't fit their house at all. Like the Hufflepuff Captain being narcissistic (more slytherin no?).” As may be recognized, the writers of both the glowing and the critical reviews refer to the text and its characters and themes using a particular vernacular, which appears to be co-constructed by both the original series and the fan community. To make this vernacular understandable outside of its fannish context, and make my findings more broadly applicable, I created a codebook. Mentions of specific vernacular such as “Hufflepuff” and “Slytherin” were recorded, yet categorized as “Source material group/organization,” for example. This way the vernacular’s fannish context remained intact, yet was generalizable beyond the constraints of the fandom. Coding these fan interactions helped me gain an understanding of how individuals participate within a fandom.

Considering the wealth of information found in fan-texts, forum threads, and personal profiles on websites and message boards, it is important to keep the process of coding for all possible categories under control. In order to do this, any new information was compared with information that had already been coded into categories. Incidents of fanfiction have thus been compared to previously coded incidents, and the coding of *One Direction* and *Dallas Cowboys* fandom was based on the categories found when coding *Harry Potter* fandom, for example – as well as additional categories suggested by the *One Direction* and *Dallas Cowboys* texts. Categories were consolidated wherever reasonable.

## Looking Ahead

After the most prominent fan-interactions and fan-texts associated with *Harry Potter*, *The Dallas Cowboys*, and *One Direction* fandom were coded, it became apparent how the performance of fandom and the participation of an individual within a fan community are constituted and interrelated. Additionally, a dimensional analysis determined which dimensions run across all three fandoms. This has brought the field of fandom studies closer to understanding what similar and different characteristics can be found across various categories of media fandom. These dimensions distinguished have been used to create a more inclusive taxonomy of fandom.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I explained how I intended to come to a more generalizable understanding of the field of fandom studies. As I will show in the present chapter, I have explored how fandom is performed, through the examination of various forms of participatory fan-art. Furthermore, I have studied how fan communities respond to and interact with these forms of fan-art, through the examination of comments and reciprocal works of fan-art. By conducting this research, I have come to an understanding of what similar characteristics can be found across various categories of media fandom, the details of which will be presented and analyzed in Chapter Five.

For the present study, I have studied the fan communities surrounding the *Harry Potter* series, the boyband *One Direction*, and the American football team *The Dallas Cowboys*. Websites and message boards dedicated to these fandoms have been the main sources of data for this study. In this chapter, I will detail the three most prominent forms of fan productivity of each fandom, and the three most popular fan texts that have been produced within each form of fan productivity. Consequently, nine fan texts have been studied per fandom, resulting in twenty-seven studied fan texts in total. The study of each individual fan text is composed of a detailing of its creation, and an overview of the responses the fan text solicited from its fan community. In Chapter Five, I will look across all three fan communities for similarities and dissimilarities.

### **Exploring Harry Potter Fandom**

The *Harry Potter* series needs little introduction. Nearly two decades after the release of its inaugural book, millions have been captivated by boy wizard Harry Potter and the trials and tribulations he encounters with his best friends Ron Weasley and

Hermione Granger during their time at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

The magical world created by author

J. K. Rowling has expanded across media, resulting in an ongoing film series, a hit musical, and a wide range of merchandise. However, there are fans who have taken it upon themselves to add to the Wizarding World by producing various forms of fan-art.

My inquiry into performative *Harry Potter* fandom started at *Pottermore.com*, the official website for the book series that launched in 2011 where many fans convene to discuss their object of affection. A subject of constant discussion is the fan-art produced or consumed by the users of *Pottermore.com*. However, the website does not allow users to upload their own *Harry Potter* art. Consequently, the most popular forms of art produced by *Harry Potter* fans must be accessed elsewhere on the Internet. Three forms of participatory fan-art were studied: fanfiction, fan-made images, and fan-made videos. The study of each individual piece of art is composed of a detailing of its creation, and an overview of the responses the fan text solicited from its fan community.

**Harry Potter Fanfiction: Continuing of the Story.** The most often discussed and dearly appreciated form of participatory fan-art discussed on *Pottermore.com* is undoubtedly *Harry Potter* fanfiction. However, as the website's main function is providing author J. K. Rowling with an outlet for expanding upon her Wizarding World, users are not allowed to upload their own stories. Users may discuss works of fanfiction, and direct others to other websites to read these stories, but *Pottermore.com* does not provide its users with the tools to publish their fanfiction stories on its message boards.

*Delicate.* Writers *are* allowed, however, to upload their works of *Harry Potter* fanfiction to the appropriately named *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*. This website has



emerged as a library of stories, currently housing over 84,000 original *Harry Potter* stories by more than 38,000 authors. Due to the impressive size of its library, *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* serves as the host for most of the fanfiction stories discussed on the *Pottermore.com*. The website's most popular story is *Delicate*<sup>1</sup>, written by author "padfoot4ever" between 2008 and 2013. Read by close to 2.8 million people, the story is categorized as a "Next Generation" fanfiction. This entails that the story follows the life and times of the children of the original series' protagonists.

Over the course of 35 chapters and 145,821 words, padfoot4ever chronicles a year in the life of Rose Weasley, the daughter of Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, introduced as a child in the last chapter of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007). In *Delicate*, Rose is sixteen years old when she discovers she is expecting a child. The child's father is Scorpius Malfoy, the son of her parents' childhood nemesis Draco Malfoy. Over the course of the novel, Rose struggles with the social stigma against teenage pregnancy she experiences at Hogwarts, and the strain it puts on her interpersonal relationships with her friends and family at school, and with her parents at home. As Scorpius Malfoy, unaware of the fact that he impregnated Rose during their one night together, begins a relationship with Rose's best friend and cousin Dominique Weasley, the novel primarily focuses on the emotional turmoil experienced by Rose as she explores her budding romantic feelings for the father of her unborn child. Padfoot4ever explores the lives of Rose's immediate family, touching upon such themes as sports rivalry, mental health, and academia, interspersed with these more melodramatic passages. The novel does end on a more positive note, as Rose and Scorpius decide to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/viewstory.php?psid=240987>

keep their child, and raise him together. As Rose summarizes in the final chapter of *Delicate*:

I have to admit that despite the fact that I was twice humiliated in front of the school, my parents broke up and reconciled, I lost my grandfather, I got pregnant and I broke up with Scorpius Malfoy, this year had to be the best one I've had.

*Delicate* has been reviewed by over 8,000 users. The following review, posted on February 24, 2008, by *harrypotterfanfiction.com* user "Katie," is indicative of the general tone of the more favorable reviews of the novel, which is the type of review found most often:

this story is a reason to read fanfiction. i originally started reading hp fanfics because i love the books but your story could stand on its own. your style is beautiful and humorous and i can not wait for the next chapter. [...] you rock the online hp community.

Another review, posted on April 4, 2016, by user "Zie," is exemplary of the type of critical feedback *Delicate* has received: "Some of the character's mentioned don't fit their house at all. Like the Hufflepuff Captain being narcissistic (more slytherin no?)." The theme of fidelity to the source material brought up by Zie recurs through the comment section, as multiple users remark on padfoot4ever's handling of existing characters, organization, and institutions. As "onestop\_hpfan18" commented on February 22, 2008, "I think you're doing a great job on both Hermione's and Ron's reactions. I can see Ron being the one that is upset and Hermione being more understanding." Despite *Delicate* being set more than a decade after the conclusion of the *Harry Potter* series, fans

gravitate towards characterizations in line with J. K. Rowling's original, and seemingly take deviations from the source material poorly.

*Still Delicate*. Author padfoot4ever returned to the story of Rose and Scorpius with her follow-up novel *Still Delicate* (2008-2012). Rising through the ranks of *harrypotterfanfiction.com*<sup>2</sup>, the story has become the second-most read story on the website as more than 1.6 million readers finished the 35 chapter-long novel. Set five and a half years after the events of *Delicate*, the story sees a 22-year-old Rose Weasley grappling with life as a young single mother after her relationship with Scorpius Malfoy, the father of her child, has broken off. As she plots and plans an opportunity to reveal her feelings for Scorpius and urge him to give their relationship another try, it is revealed that Scorpius has in fact married his girlfriend whilst in Las Vegas. Heartbroken, Rose seeks comfort in the arms of her friend Tom, to whom she eventually becomes engaged. Whereas this might seem to be the end of this chapter, the mutual attraction between Rose and Scorpius sees them circle in and out of each other's lives over the course of the following months. Eventually, Rose's inability to leave Scorpius behind leads to the end of her relationship with Tom, as Scorpius' love for the mother of his child causes his own marriage to crumble. Faced with the facts, the two give in to their passion, and vow to start a life together, as a family.

*Still Delicate* has been reviewed by over 11,000 users, far exceeding its original. Again, the majority of the comments have been positive, praising the author's continuation of her story, and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series as a whole. On June 10, 2016, user "Just Another Daydreamer" commented:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/viewstory.php?psid=260113>

I must say, I love the idea of next generation stories - and your books had so much that I practically hold as cannon, I think I'll adopt this storyline in my head until JKR tells me otherwise. :) (Like please, Al is clearly in Slytherin and best friends with Scorpius, and likewise Rose/Scorpius is obviously intended to be.)

On November 21, 2015, user “Ruby Anne” was more critical of the author’s plotting: “Not a criticism, but it made me laugh every time you mentioned Lavander Brown because she actually died at the Battle of Hogwarts.” Interestingly, the critiques voiced by readers are not simply concerned with the “appropriate” use of characters from the source material. On May 7, 2016, user “Jenna” found fault with the way the author handled the character arc of Scorpius Malfoy:

All in all, I liked your story very much, although i wasn't happy with all of the turns it took. [...] Scorp was being such a scumbag while he was with Daisy, and I didn't know if i could forgive him at all. Don't get me wrong, I am happy that Scorpius and Rose ended up together (they were meant to be together, and also Aidan needed to have a proper family), but in my opinion, you were a little exaggerating about his behavior. He was kind of too malfoyish, if you know what I mean. I would have liked him not to be so ignorant

Apparently, the emotional connection felt by some fans with the original characters is not limited to J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, as padfoot4ever is held to similar standards of fidelity, and corrected whenever her characters transgress beyond the (ill-defined) characteristics expected by her audience.

*How to Tame a Marauder*. The third-most popular work of fanfiction on [harrypotterfanfiction.com](http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com)<sup>3</sup> is the novel *How to Tame a Marauder* by author “melian.” Written between 2009 and 2013, the story has been read over 1.5 million times. Categorized as a “Marauder” fanfiction, the story is set in the 1970s and follows the academic careers of Harry Potter’s parents, their closest friends, and their enemies.

Over the course of 62 chapters and 300,758 words, the author chronicles the relationship between Laura (an original character) and Sirius Black (James Potter’s best friend, and Harry Potter’s future godfather) during their final three years at Hogwarts. Spanning several years, this ambitious novel differs from the more straight-forward *Delicate* and *Still Delicate*. Whereas the relationship between Laura and Sirius encounters many of the same problems as in these novels, such as infidelity and overblown misunderstandings, the story is set against the looming war between the evil Lord Voldemort, his followers the “Death Eaters,” and all of wizardkind that stands in their way. These events cast a dark shadow over even the most mundane passages in the novel. As the Wizarding War to which the novel builds has been canonized by J. K. Rowling as the most formative event preceding the *Harry Potter* book series, any reader familiar with the source material will be aware of the persistent sense of tension throughout this work of fan-art.

*How to Tame a Marauder* has been reviewed by close to 4,000 users. The considerably difficult task of imagining the events leading up to one of the most pivotal moments in the *Harry Potter* series (the Wizarding War) invites close scrutiny, and melian’s ability to satisfactorily fill in the blanks is met with significant praise. As user

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/viewstory.php?psid=262894>

“Fugacity” wrote on April 8, 2016: “It is exceptionally well written. You did a good job sticking to cannon and making it all seem real.” On June 30, 2016, user “Mello George” complimented melian’s characterization: “The way you described the marauders was excellent!! It captured their personalities perfectly.” Interestingly, the author has replied to nearly all of the comments posted, allowing us a rare insight into her creative process. On the topic of characterization, she had the following to say: “I put a lot of work into it and tried to stick as closely as I could to canon [...] so it's really lovely when people recognise that.”

**In Summary.** What has become apparent from studying the three most popular fanfiction novels on *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* is the high standard of fidelity to which the readers of such stories hold their authors. This does not simply extend to the honoring of conventions and characteristics explored in the original *Harry Potter* book series, such as expecting the characters introduced by J. K. Rowling to speak in their own voices. Even those characters mentioned only in passing by Rowling or those created by the authors of the fanfiction novel must be portrayed with consistency and fidelity to the Wizarding World in which they exist.

Interestingly, none of the three novels read rely heavily on occurrences of magic. Of course, nearly all of the characters in these stories are capable of feats of wizardry, yet these abilities are never used in the narratives as the cause or solution for a problem. Teenage pregnancy in *Delicate*, for example, is the result of unprotected sexual intercourse between two inebriated 16-year-olds, who eventually resolve their conflicts through dialogue. This sets the fanfiction novels apart from the *Harry Potter* book series, which does not shy away from more grandiose themes, such as immortality and the

corruption of power. As none of the novels' fans mention the lack of magic in their comments, it is reasonable to assume that the standard of fidelity does not extend to thematic consistency.

**Harry Potter Fan-Art: Altered Images.** On *Pottermore.com*, fans discuss more than fanfiction alone. A particularly popular form of fan-art on the website is the type of image created by fans through the manipulation of photos to represent certain characters and scenes from the *Harry Potter* book series. To understand these pieces of fan-art exchanged within *Harry Potter* fandom, it is helpful to turn back to “A Fannish Field of Value” (Hellekson, 2009), as discussed before. As Hellekson argues, being initiated into a participatory fan community involves learning how to engage with other fans using their vernacular, so one would be able to discuss both the source media (the *Harry Potter* book series, for instance) and the expressions of fandom at hand (such as a fanfiction text). This results in a meta-textual exchange, which Hellekson subdivides into three elements: giving, receiving, and reciprocating. The gifts given, received, and reciprocated in fandoms have a value within the fannish economy, and are designed to create and cement a social structure, but the gifts themselves are not meaningful outside their fannish context. Fans engage with their metatexts and each other by presenting and reciprocating gifts in certain approved, fandom-specific ways, and by providing commentary about these gifts. Hellekson's understanding of gifts and gift culture echoes the work of anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1925), as the individuality of a gift is lost as it becomes a part of something greater.

Using the example of fanfiction, the exchange described by Hellekson begins with a writer posting his or her work of fanfiction on a website, which may be considered as

the giving of a gift. Subsequently, those that frequent the website may read the work of fanfiction, and then discuss their appreciation or critiques with the author. This may be considered the receiving of a gift, as the readers are invited to consume the work of fanfiction without charge or consequence. Finally, certain readers may want to express their gratitude for an author, and reciprocate the author's gift with an offering of fan-art of their own.

*How to Tame a Marauder.* This delicate fannish economy can certainly be distinguished when studying the exchange of fan-art on *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*. Of course, the clear majority of the gifts exchanged within this fan community have no tangible or physical form, as the items exchanged are hyperreal and capable of being endlessly replicated. An example would be a book cover, illustrated by an artist in appreciation of their favorite fanfiction. The gift in this case would be an electronic file; an image that can be used by the author and everyone that comes across it. As an example, the story *How to Tame a Marauder* (2009-2013) by user melian is advertised on the website by use of a banner, in lieu of a more traditional book cover. This banner is credited to a different user (".Candy") than the author, indicating the banner to be a reciprocation for the text, and a sign of the artist's appreciation for the author.



(Image 1: The banner for *How to Tame a Marauder* by .Candy)



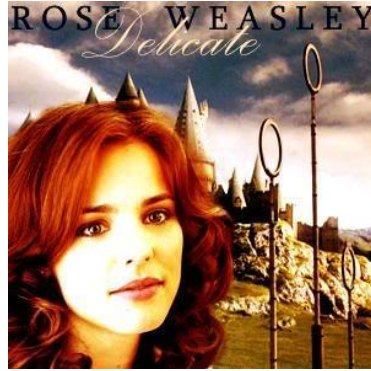
*Still Delicate*. A similar sign of respect was shown to the previously mentioned author padfoot4ever. Her story *Still Delicate* (2008-2012) is similarly adorned with a banner, credited also to a different user (“PhoenixAlthor”) than herself. Interestingly, this banner has been updated throughout the unfolding of the story to reflect accolades bestowed on the author. Consequently, the banner in its current form shows a winged, golden ball next to the story’s title in remembrance of the “Best Next Generation” award presented by *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* to padfoot4ever in 2009. Other than being an example of the complex fannish economy found on the website, it also illustrates how impactful the existence of a well-developed infrastructure can be on the fostering and sustaining of a fan community.



(Image 2: The banner for *Still Delicate* by PhoenixAlthor)

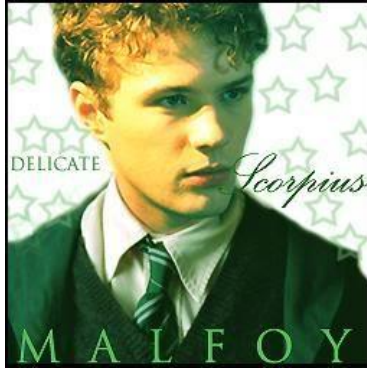
*Delicate*. Finally, the fan-art surrounding the story *Delicate* (2008-2013) by padfoot4ever is worthy of closer consideration. Interestingly, the author’s gift to the fan community of *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* is twofold, as she writes the fanfiction and has illustrated various chapters of her story with “chapter images” – small images that illustrate the characters described in the story. These chapter images are created through a particular process of image alteration, as the heads of celebrities and models are cut from their original pictures and Photoshopped into scenarios reminiscent of scenes described in the story. The first chapter image shared by padfoot4ever depicts her protagonist Rose

Weasley against a backdrop of the Hogwarts castle and its Quidditch pitch as an indication of the studious and athletic character's primary passions in life.



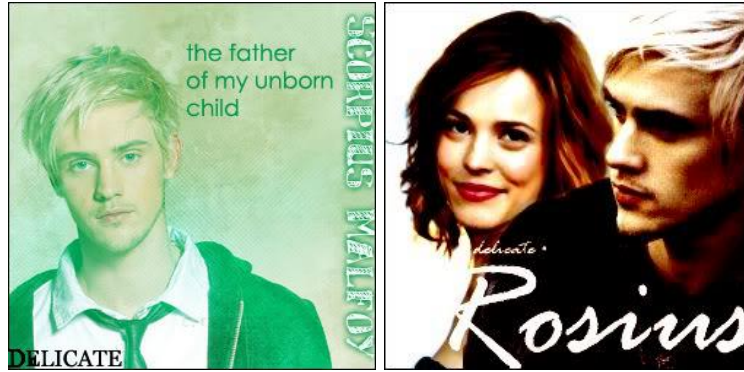
(Image 3: A chapter image by padfoot4ever)

Interestingly, the creation of these images does not simply hinge on finding photos of people that match the physical description of fanfiction characters. Especially when the images use the likeness of a celebrity, this individual's personality may prove problematic when it does not adhere to the readers' conception of a character's quintessence. For instance, padfoot4ever illustrated the character of Scorpius Malfoy with an image of American actor, writer, and director Ryan Phillippe. Many of the particular chapter's readers took offense at the use of Phillippe, as he first and foremost is not Scottish (as Scorpius Malfoy is supposed to be), and at the time was known mostly for playing notorious playboy Sebastian Valmont in the film *Cruel Intentions* (Kumble, 1999). Interestingly, no comments were made regarding the fact that Rose, a British teenager, was illustrated using the likeness of Canadian actress Rachel McAdams.



(Image 4: Ryan Phillippe as Scorpius Malfoy)

The author responded to the critiques, lamenting the difficulty of finding pictures of attractive, blond men of the right age. Her lamentations were heard, as one of the following chapters again featured a picture of Scorpius Malfoy. Created by a fan of the author (user “earthfarie”), the new depiction of Malfoy was deemed by the fan community to be more authentic than the author’s original. Eventually adopted by padfoot4ever, the new face was used in an illustration of “Rosius” (a portmanteau of Rose Weasley and Scorpius Malfoy, indicating their romantic involvement), and the individuality of the gift (a newly imagined Scorpius Malfoy) is lost as it becomes a part of something greater (the representation of *Delicate* as a whole). This intricate exchange is a fitting example of the way fans engage with their metatexts and each other by presenting and reciprocating gifts in certain approved, fandom-specific ways. Fans receive gifts, provide commentary about these gifts, and reciprocate with gifts of their own in a continuation of the fan community’s economy. Fans interact not solely with the source text of their fandom, but also with their fellow fans and these fans’ performance of fandom.



(Image 5: The canonization of earthfarie's image)

**In Summary.** As has become apparent by studying a sample of the altered images exchanged on *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*, the exchange is more complex than simply giving and reciprocating gifts. Heavily intertwined with the works of fanfiction found on the website, the altered images are held to similar standards of fidelity. As the images need to adhere to the (ill-defined) quintessence of character that are both canonical and new additions, as well as provide photos that convey the personality and physical appearance of these characters, the artists must be completely attuned to the expectations and agreed upon conventions of the *Harry Potter* fan community, as well as be fluent in using this community's vernacular. Appreciation is thus not shown simply by the creation of reciprocal art, but by the creation of art that fully encapsulates the original artist's intentions. Fittingly, this process is an art more than a science.

**Harry Potter Fan Videos: Visualizing the Story.** Other than the fanfiction stories and altered images found on websites such as *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*, the form of fan-art most shared by fans of the *Harry Potter* series congregated at *Pottermore.com* is created by fan filmmakers. Whether best described as a *vid* (the form of art in which clips from television shows and movies are set to music to make an argument or tell a story), as a production with an original story, or as a parody, these videos expand upon J.

K. Rowling's Wizarding World in their own unique ways. As neither *Pottermore.com* nor *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* allow users to upload their own videos, the videos most prominently circulated all are hosted on *YouTube.com*, the website that has become nearly synonymous with user-created videos. The three most viewed *Harry Potter* fan videos hosted on *YouTube.com* will be discussed in greater detail below.

***Through the Pensieve. Harry Potter – Through the Pensieve*** by Gen Ip appeared on *YouTube.com*<sup>4</sup> on May 25, 2011, and has been viewed over 1.2 million times since. Stylistically, this video adheres closest to the conventions traditionally associated with the practice of *vidding*. Clocking in at exactly 4 minutes, this fan-made video utilizes a compilation of scenes from all eight *Harry Potter* films, accompanied by dialogue from these films repurposed as voice-overs and set to two pieces of music. The audio tracks act as the interpretive lens Francesca Coppa described as “[telling] us how to understand what we see” (2005, pp. 107-108), through which the visual and narrative tropes and motifs of the *Harry Potter* franchise become reimagined and re-contextualized.

Initially, the video follows the narration of the first song (*Stamp of Origin: Take a Look Around* by Dredg) both literally and metaphorically. For example, the lyric “Watch them run away” is accompanied by various scenes of the films’ protagonists fleeing from imminent danger. The theme of the song could best be described as the inevitability of demise, and this is aptly visualized by the juxtaposition of introductions and farewells. For instance, the video features both the first cinematic look at Hogwarts, as well as the castle’s perishing under the attack of Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Furthermore, a montage of impactful character deaths is preceded by a montage of these characters’

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbH0nbilYek>

introduction within the cinematic universe. The lyrics of the accompanying song, “The people walking by / Buildings built so high / Will be gone someday” guide the viewers’ interpretation of the presented scenes.

As the first song ends, the hero’s journey of Harry Potter is briefly recapped by a combination of expositional scenes that show Harry’s aging between the first and the eighth film in the series, and snippets of dialogue from his various mentors that summarize his character’s progression, from Harry’s introduction to the world of magic by the famous “You’re a wizard, Harry” to Albus Dumbledore’s “Dark times lie ahead.” Following the very brief characterization of Harry Potter, his most prominent friends and confidants Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger are paid similar cinematic homage. As the music changes into the second song (the instrumental *Down to the Cellar* by Dredg), the video visualizes character growth by again resorting to the juxtaposition of introductions and scenes from later films in the franchise. The line “And I will be a knight,” spoken by Ron Weasley toward the end of the first film in reference to a game of chess, is thus re-contextualized as foregrounding Ron’s displayed bravery in later installments. Hermione’s “Are you doing magic? / I have tried a few simple spells myself,” as spoken during her first conversation with Harry and Ron, is juxtaposed with scenes from later films showcasing her impressive feats of witchcraft. The video ends with a final juxtaposition, as a shot of Lord Voldemort raising his wand at Harry Potter near the climax of the saga is immediately followed by a similar shot, in which Voldemort raises his wand at Harry as a baby. After crediting the video’s editor, the screen fades to black and the video ends.



(Image 6: The exploration of visual motifs in *Through the Pensieve*)

The video has been received well on *YouTube.com*, proclaimed by one of the highest rated comments as “one of the best fan videos ever.” The video does require more from its viewer than a basic understanding of common tropes in film and television, as would be the case for the vids described in previous chapters. Certain knowledge of the *Harry Potter* franchise is expected, especially when the video explores instances of cause and effect. The montage of significant character deaths, for instance, would not be as impactful for those unfamiliar with either the *Harry Potter* films or books. Consequently, the video is less accessible than *The Mysterious Ticking Noise*. Many do champion the video for striking the right emotional tone, as illustrated by another highly rated comment by Lilie James:

This is entirely perfect. My favorite part where I lose my shit is when Ron's like 'TLL BE A KNIGHT' and the beat drops, like hell YEAH you'll be a knight, man. And then Hermione's like 'I've only tried a few SIMPLE ones myself' and then you show clips of older Hermione being the brightest damn witch of her age, and I just swell with pride for my babies. I love them. I love this. I love you. Thank you.

This comment is indicative of the strong emotional attachment felt by many individuals involved in *Harry Potter* fandom, and of the importance of the video's creators' fidelity.

Vidders might reassemble media into coherent wholes of their own devising, yet are expected to adhere to ill-defined yet prevailing expectations regarding the quintessence of J. K. Rowling's characters.

*Severus Snape and the Marauders. Severus Snape and the Marauders – Harry Potter Fan Film* by Broad Strokes Productions first appeared on *YouTube.com*<sup>5</sup> on March 1, 2016, and has since been watched over 2 million times. Clocking in at 25:33 minutes, this video, produced by writer/director Justin Zagri and his filmmaking team, would best be described as fan filmmaking, which Coppa differentiates from vidding (2005, p. 107). Consequently, the video is not comprised of repurposed scenes and audio from the *Harry Potter* film series as would be the case with vidding, but is, rather, an original production. Set decades before the events described by J. K. Rowling, the film tells a story virtually unexplored by the original books. The producers paid particular attention to the production design of their video, as the actors bear an uncanny resemblance to the characters described by Rowling. Furthermore, the members of the (primarily) American cast speak with convincing British accents, and are dressed as fans would expect from the canonical information available, such as the characters' appearance in several *Harry Potter* films. Using a clever combination of physical sets and visual effects, the production team exceed in making their small story feel as though it is taking place in the sprawling Wizarding World.

The first scene of the video shows Severus Snape drinking alone in a dimly lit pub. He is joined by a figure wearing dark robes and a hood, who recognizes Snape as having a bad day and offers to buy him a drink. The hooded man asks Snape to recount

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmsntGGjxiw&t=1377s>



his misfortune, stating that he “enjoys a good story.” As Snape turns away, and stares into the distance, the screen goes black and the film’s title appears.

The film resumes with what turns out to be a retelling of the events leading up to Snape drinking solemnly. Inside a different pub, we find James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew (collectively known as “the Marauders”). The group’s cheery disposition turns grim as Lupin brings up the looming battle against the evil Lord Voldemort and his ever-growing army of devoted Death Eaters. However, Lupin is silenced as Severus Snape enters the pub. Worried about the possibility of Snape joining the ranks of Lord Voldemort, Potter proposes the Marauders “deal with [Snape] once and for all.” Snape gives in to Potter’s provocation, and extends his hand towards him. Upon the first touch, all five “apparate” (a form of teleportation commonly used as a means of transportation in the *Harry Potter* universe) and reappear in a forest.



(Image 7: The Marauders and Severus Snape)

Potter and Snape discuss their respective relationships with Lily Evans, Snape’s childhood friend and Potter’s future wife. Following this exchange, both men draw their wands and commence a fierce duel. Snape overpowers Potter, prompting the remaining three Marauders to step in and join the duel. Eventually, Snape succeeds in overpowering

all. It is not until the appearance of Lily Evans that Snape regains his composure. She urges him to stop, and Snape apologizes for threatening their friendship by calling her a “Mudblood” (a slur in the *Harry Potter* universe aimed at wizards and witches with non-magical parents). As he promises to break off all contact with her, Lily embraces him and expresses her forgiveness on the condition that Snape leave behind his past dabbling in the Dark Arts.

The screen fades to black, and the final scene of the film returns us back to the pub where we first found Snape drinking. The hooded man compliments Snape on his handling of the situation, and goes on to praise Snape as being “exactly what he is looking for.” An agitated Snape urges him to reveal himself with an exclamation of “Who are you?,” and the man turns sideways towards the camera. For the first time, we can see underneath the man’s hood, and look into the pale, serpent-like features of Lord Voldemort. “You know who,” he whispers, and the film ends.

As the summary above illustrates, this fan film is very high in context. Not only is the viewer expected to be familiar with all the characters appearing in the film, with their personalities, and with their interpersonal relationships; the viewer is also expected to be aware of the events leading up to and following the events of the film, both of which are only alluded to in J. K. Rowling’s book. The effects of the high-context nature of the fan film are twofold. On the one hand, the film’s reliance on “deep cuts” from the *Harry Potter* franchise will establish the filmmakers’ credentials as serious and literate fans of the series. On the other hand, the high-context invites viewers with similar levels of knowledge regarding the world of *Harry Potter*, who will scrutinize the film far more

closely for issues of character and continuity, as is illustrated by the following review by *YouTube.com* user Jesse Camacho:

This is a frustrating one for me. On one hand, the acting, special effects, dialogue and essence of the characters are TOP NOTCH. Really well done. But I do have a major issue with this. When did Snape become the most powerful wizard alive?? Sirius and James were famous for being the best in their year. It is said many times that James was more talented than Snape and that Snape was jealous. Yet in this film, he EASILY takes on all 4 marauders at once and almost murders James. That took me out of the film completely.

Whereas many commenters voice their appreciation for Broad Strokes Productions' willingness to go out on a limb and produce a piece of fan-art with such grand ambitions, the high rating of many more critical reviews is indicative of the risks associated with fan filmmaking at such a high-context level.

*The Mysterious Ticking Noise. Potter Puppet Pals: The Mysterious Ticking Noise* (2007) by Neil Cicierega is the oldest of the three videos watched, as well as the most enduringly popular. Since its appearance on *YouTube.com*<sup>6</sup> on March 23, 2007, the video has accrued over 172 million views. On its face, the video is deceptively simple, staged as a children's puppet show with handcrafted title cards and hand puppets.

The opening of the curtains at the beginning of *The Mysterious Ticking Noise* reveals Professor Severus Snape investigating the source of an incessantly ticking noise. Remarking how "catchy" the sound is, he begins to vocalize, in time with the ticking,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx1Xlm6q4r4>

lyrics composed entirely of his own name. He is soon joined in his vocalization by Professor Albus Dumbledore, who exclaims only his surname in time with the ticking. Professors Snape and Dumbledore are subsequently joined by the pair of Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, both of whom exclaim their names at alternate intervals in time with the ticking. All of them are lastly joined by Harry Potter, who, wildly flailing his arms and legs, exclaims his full name interspersed with grunts and cries of joy. The camera cuts to a close shot of Professor Snape and Harry Potter heatedly shouting their own names in each other's faces, until they are interrupted by Professor Dumbledore's exclamation of his surname, whilst fully and inexplicably disrobed. The camera returns to a wider shot of the entire puppet theater, where all five characters sing their names at various intervals and finally join in a chorus of "Singing our song, all day long at Hogwarts!" Following this crescendo of sorts, the camera cuts to a close shot of Ron Weasley, who reveals the source of the ticking as being a pipe bomb. Flashes of bright lights and a shower of felt and stuffing make known the untimely demise of all five characters. The final shot of the video reveals a maniacally laughing Lord Voldemort as the culprit of the bombing, tapping his wand at the same rate as the bomb before its explosion and singing his name. Lord Voldemort exits the theater, and a handmade sign proclaims "The End" of the video after 1:57 minutes.

*The Mysterious Ticking Noise* would best be described as a parody, and as such holds a particular place within the canon of *Harry Potter* fan videos. Whereas one would normally expect the requirement of a vast knowledge of the cultural artifact parodied, this video seemingly has transcended its fandom in favor of a larger audience. This is illustrated not only by the exponentially larger amount of views for this video than for

any of the other videos studied here, but also by the video's highest rated comments. As users of *YouTube.com* wonder if "[they are] the only one who tried to do everything by [themselves]," not a single comment reflects on *The Mysterious Ticking Noise's* connection to *Harry Potter* canon.

That is not to say that the parody is devoid of content that would speak to fans of the franchise. Of course, the video is enjoyable at a base level by everyone in appreciation of the undeniably catchy rhythm of the five signing characters, but this alone would not explain the video's heavy and continued circulation among *Harry Potter* fans, even as its tenth anniversary is approaching. It is thus important to understand the layered nature of the video. Though minimalistic in design, the appearance of the puppets is impressively true to J. K. Rowling's literary description. As is evidenced by details such as Snape's hooked nose and Ron's freckles, the video's creators chose to steer away from the more glamorous portrayal of the characters in the feature film series.



(Image 8: The *Harry Potter Puppet Pals*)

Furthermore, though most characters say little more than their own names, an apparent amount of thought has gone into the characterization of each puppet. From his tone of voice to his stubborn bravado when arguing with Snape, the Harry Potter shown

in *The Mysterious Ticking Noise* at times adheres closer to Rowling's description of the character than to the brooding teenager portrayed by Daniel Radcliffe in the films. Finally, the video proves of interest to fans of the *Harry Potter* series by its playful addressing of the inherent limitations of the mythology of magic. The belief (often expressed in a tongue-in-cheek manner) that Lord Voldemort would have easily succeeded in killing Harry Potter and his friends if only he had relied upon non-magical weaponry, such as firearms or explosives, is cheekily addressed by the same character's use of a pipe bomb to rid himself of his foes. It is by use of these minute facts of lore that the video achieves its widespread appeal to viewers; fans and those uninitiated alike.

**In Summary.** As has been illustrated above, videos have the ability to appeal to an astronomical audience when the right balance is found between high-context and low-context content; as a result, they can become accessible and enjoyable to audiences beyond the *Harry Potter* fandom. However, that is not to say that all videographers strive for such broad appeal. Certain videos cater exclusively to the fan community, and unapologetically require encyclopedic levels of knowledge on the part of their viewers. Interestingly, those videos aimed most squarely at devoted fans invite the highest level of scrutiny. The displayed magical skill of Severus Snape in the *Marauders* video thus becomes problematized to a much larger extent than the unexplained disrobing of Albus Dumbledore in *Potter Puppet Pals*. In other words, higher-context videography is held to higher standards of fidelity by its core audience.

### **Exploring One Direction Fandom**

*One Direction* quickly became one of the most visible musical acts in the world. The English-Irish pop boyband, composed of singers Niall Horan, Zayn Malik, Liam

Payne, Harry Styles, and Louis Tomlinson, rose to international prominence after performing in the seventh season of the British televised singing competition *The X Factor* (Cowell, 2004) in 2010. The band's first four albums debuted at number one on the United States' *Billboard 200* charts, which is an unprecedented and unmatched feat. Despite Zayn Malik's departure from the band in 2015, and the band announcing their hiatus in 2016, *One Direction* is yet to be surpassed as the boyband with the most avid followers.

The inquiry into *One Direction* fandom began at *Onedirectionmusic.com*, the official website for the boyband where many fans convene to discuss their objects of affection on the message boards designated for fan discussions. A subject of constant discussion is the fan-art produced or consumed by the users of the website. However, *Onedirectionmusic.com* does not allow users to upload their own *One Direction* art. Consequently, the most popular forms of art produced by fans must be accessed elsewhere on the Internet. Three forms of participatory fan-art were studied: fanfiction, fan-made images, and fan-made videos. The study of each individual piece of art is composed of a detailing of its creation, and an overview of the responses the fan text solicited from its fan community.

**One Direction Fanfiction: Where the Music Doesn't Matter.** The most often discussed and dearly appreciated form of participatory fan-art discussed on *Onedirectionmusic.com* is undoubtedly *One Direction* fanfiction. However, as the website is devised as a "hub" where the band may post press releases, videos, and messages directly to their fan base, *Onedirectionmusic.com* does not provide its users with the tools to publish their fanfiction stories on its message boards. However, the users

are allowed to discuss works of fanfiction, and direct others to other websites to read these stories.

***Dark.*** One of the most notorious works of fanfiction is *Dark*, written by user “H28” of the no longer existing website *Onedirectionfanfiction.com*. Since that website has disappeared, it has become difficult to find the story’s original webpage and determine the date it was first made available. However, many of the novel’s fans have uploaded the story to alternative fanfiction outlets, often with rave reviews and an abundance of views. For instance, on the alternative fanfiction website *Onedirectionfanfiction.org*, the story has been read by close to 4.5 million people, and on *Wattpad.com* the novel found an audience of over 11.1 million. The novel chronicles the relationship between Harry Styles and Bo, an original character. Set in a reality in which *One Direction* does not exist, Harry is reinterpreted as a controlling and sadistic boyfriend. Over the course of their tumultuous relationship, Harry grows to be more caring, and Bo gains the confidence to stand up for herself. After 62 chapters, the story ends on a cliffhanger, with Harry defending Bo’s honor in a bar despite their relationship having been broken off, leading Bo to give in to her feelings for him. *Dark*’s widespread popularity and the sadomasochistic tone of many of its erotic passages have caused many readers to liken the story to the popular *Fifty Shades of Grey* saga (James, 2011-2012), which itself originated as a work of fanfiction. Consequently, the story has become somewhat of a standard against which other works of *One Direction* fanfiction are assessed.

***Relief Next to Me.*** To preserve the art created by fans and counter the decentralization of works such as *Dark*, the aforementioned *Organization for*



*Transformative Works* created *Archive of Our Own* in 2008. This nonprofit open source library of fanfiction currently hosts more than 2 million fanfiction stories, curated and organized in over 23,000 individual fandoms. The website's most popular work of *One Direction* fanfiction is *Relief Next to Me*, written by author "dolce\_piccante" between January 2014 and September 2015. Read by close to 480,000 users, the novel explores the relationship between Louis Tomlinson and Harry Styles, after they meet through *Craigslist.com*. The story sees the men blossom as they find love, leading both to strive for the achievement of their professional goals and culminating in their wedding after 25 chapters and 333,703 words.

Interestingly, the band *One Direction* does not exist in the alternate universe of the story. Its protagonists, Harry and Louis, work as a baker and graphic designer, respectively. However, they still are meant to be Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson. Consequently, the artist must again adhere to an ill-defined norm of fidelity. As user "Defuncts" comments: "i'm actually really impressed how in-character they are [...] the only thing that made me snort was the idea of a cooking Louis. you wouldn't want that in your kitchen." This comment may be considered as a reflection on Tomlinson's (perceived) personality, as his boyish fascination with football and disorganized demeanor have become part of his public persona, and clash with the more traditionally female roles of cooking and housekeeping. The author goes out of her way to defend the liberties she's taken: "Louis is my favorite, so I wanted to have a little fun with him and give him some random characteristics, like the cooking and being clean thing." None of the more than 1,700 comments posted on *Archiveofourown.org* mention the fact that the

(presumably) heterosexual members of *One Direction* are portrayed as openly homosexual.

*You'll Breathe Me In. You'll Breathe Me In (You Won't Release)* by LoadedGunn is the second-most popular *One Direction* fanfiction story on *Archiveofourown.org*. At 95,482 words, it is the shortest novel studied. The story follows the budding relationship between 17-year-old Harry and the 25-year-old Louis, his driving instructor. Over the course of four chapters, the men grow closer as Louis takes Harry under his wing, and helps him explore his sexuality. Interestingly, this story is the most sexually explicit work of fanfiction read, with most of the erotic scenes best described as "Daddy Kink," a pornographic subgenre in which the appeal partly lies in the age difference between those individuals sexually engaged.

Despite the rather peculiar niche into which the novel falls, the story has found an undeniably impressive audience. Many readers appear to be taken with LoadedGunn's use of the members of *One Direction*, despite the fact that neither the band nor their music is featured in the story. On March 15, 2014, user "flutterbutt" shared the following compliment: "You're one of those fic writers that make me want to stop writing forever. there aren't any flaws in your fic that i can see. your characterization, relationship dynamics, build-up, dialogue, all of that -- it's immaculate." The only points of critique found in the more than 550 comments on the story are aimed at which characters are *not* used. As user "amphisbene" commented on March 9, 2014:

I do wonder where Liam is, though. I don't know whether you didn't include him because you don't like him/are currently mad at him because he should never be allowed on Twitter again, or because he simply didn't

fit in this story, but the fact is that everything feels kinda weird without him around. It's like those fics about the Marauders that don't even mention Peter Pettigrew.

**In Summary.** As the members of *One Direction* have come to prominence in a post-social-media era, the information available regarding each of them is massive. Not only may fans turn to magazines to learn the minutiae traditionally shared in interviews, but they are able to share all their knowledge within their social- and fannish networks, and will learn more information directly from the boys' own social networking profiles. Fans are able to find out virtually everything about their idols, from their musical preferences to their culinary experiences. Consequently, little room is left for invention, and the call for fidelity easily matches or exceeds the one found in the aforementioned *Harry Potter* fan community, as the "characters" are bound unequivocally to their real-life counterparts. However, it is not explained exactly how it has come to be that the sexuality of the members of *One Direction* is one of the select areas authors are allowed to interpret freely.

**One Direction Fan-Art: The Images, The Music, The Cookbook.** As is the case with the *Harry Potter* fandom discussed earlier in this chapter, the fans of *One Direction* are engaged in a complex fannish economy, stretching across various websites and social media. The gifts given, received, and reciprocated within this economy are again designed to create and cement a social structure. One complicating aspect of *One Direction* fandom is its decentralization. In the absence of a designated and maintained library as extensive as *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*, the fan-art produced by *One Direction* fans has become scattered across a variety of websites. Whilst this has certainly not

hindered fans from sharing their work, it has become increasingly difficult to attribute the art to its creators.

*Dark.* The notorious fanfiction story *Dark* by writer H28 has inspired countless artists to create their own depiction of protagonists Harry and Bo, but without an infrastructure in place to credit an image's creator, the origins of the hyperreal, capable of being endlessly replicated, become impossible to trace.



(Image 9: A banner for *Dark* by an anonymous artist)

*Relief Next to Me.* To preserve the art created by fans and counter the decentralization of works such as *Dark*, the aforementioned *Archive of Our Own* was created in 2008. On *Archiveofourown.org*, its most popular work of *One Direction* fanfiction – *Relief Next to Me* by author *dolce\_piccante* – is accompanied by a large variety of reciprocal fan-art. Interestingly, artists have not only been inspired to create graphic fan-art, such as the banners previously discussed, but also have taken it upon themselves to build upon *dolce\_piccante*'s story by giving life to many of the recipes she describes, and create playlists of songs deemed fit to accompany various scenes and chapters.



(Image 10: Reciprocal fan-art by Ashley R. Guillory and Li)

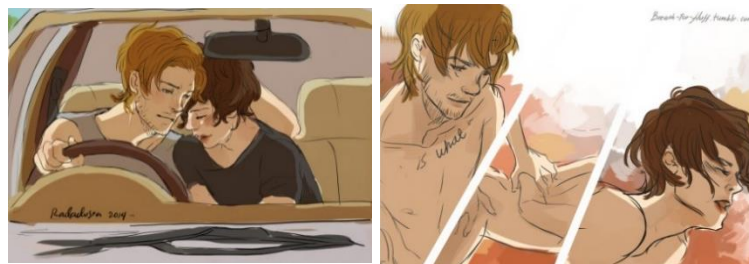
A *Tumblr.com* user by the name of “Li” paid homage to the story by baking the lemon bars *dolce\_piccante* described in the nineteenth chapter of her story. As the baker comments:

As a kind of homage to this wonderful work of art, I tried my hand on this type of baked good, I also imagined Harry going a little schmoopy [maudlin] while being without Louis for the week, so I used the cookie cutters on them.

The creators of the reciprocal fan-art thus must not only take into consideration the works of fan-art they intend to honor, but also the fan-artists’ intentions, and the silently yet communally agreed upon “correct” way of representing each individual member of *One Direction*.

***You’ll Breathe Me In.*** The (largely self-imposed) restrictions on the portrayal of *One Direction* its fan community honors becomes even more difficult to navigate when artists combine several timelines to create their own alternate universe. For example, in the fanfiction story *You’ll Breathe Me In (You Won’t Release)* by author “LoadedGunn,” Harry Styles is supposed to be 17 years old, whereas Louis Tomlinson is supposed to be 25 years old. In reality, the men were born on February 1, 1994 and December 24, 1991, respectively. To account for the added difference in age, those artists wanting to visualize

LoadedGunn’s story thus must take into account how Harry looked when he was a mere 17 years of age. In practicality, this mostly comes down to depicting the men with the right hair length and the appropriate amount of facial hair. The fan-art created by artists “breath-for-fluff” and “Ros,” for example, are included in LoadedGunn’s story as “chapter images,” and both works of art are praised for depicting Harry with his “mop top,” as opposed to with the long hairdo he sported at the time of publication.



(Image 11: Era-appropriate fan-art by breath-for-fluff and Ros)

**In Summary.** As has become apparent by studying a sample of the *One Direction* fan-art exchanged on *Archiveofourown.org* and *Tumblr.com*, the exchange is more complex than simply giving and reciprocating gifts. Heavily intertwined with the works of fanfiction found on the websites, the altered images, drawings, and recipes are held to similar standards of fidelity. As the images particularly need to adhere to the (ill-defined) quintessence of “characters” (the members of *One Direction*) with a very real basis in reality, the artists must be completely attuned to the expectations and agreed upon conventions of the *One Direction* fan community, as well as be fluent in using this community’s vernacular. Appreciation is thus not shown simply by the creation of reciprocal art, but by the creation of art that fully encapsulates the original artist’s

intentions and the shared (or perceived) personalities of the band's members. As mentioned before, this process is an art more than a science.

**One Direction Fan Videos: Heroes, Humanitarians, and Lovers.** Other than the fanfiction stories, images, and recipes found on websites such as *Onedirectionfanfiction.org* and *Archiveofourown.org*, the form of fan-art most shared by fans of *One Direction* congregated at *Onedirectionmusic.com* is created by fan filmmakers. Whether best described as a parody, as a *vid*, or as a tribute, these videos all explore aspects of *One Direction* fandom in their own unique ways. As *Onedirectionmusic.com* does not allow users to upload their own videos, the videos most prominently circulated all are hosted on *YouTube.com*. The three most viewed *One Direction* fan videos hosted on *YouTube.com* will be discussed in greater detail below.

***The Adventurous Adventures of One Direction.*** *The Adventurous Adventures of One Direction* was released on May 29 2012 by Mark Parsons on *YouTube.com*<sup>7</sup>. Since its release, the video has accrued close to 44 million views. The video begins with an introduction by its creator, in which he recounts his experiences reading *One Direction* fanfiction, and his realization that most of it was written by women. Consequently, he was inspired to write his own fanfiction story, which he subsequently animated.

The bulk of the video is the animated story, in which the members of *One Direction* are revealed to lead a secret life of crime fighting. After being interrupted during their breakfast by their manager Psymon, the boys reconvene in their base. A disembodied projection of Psymon's head tells them about the disappearance of thousands of pussycats, presumably by the hand of the evil Lord Faptaguisse. One

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o3fcUH-yPQ>

Direction members Liam, Niall, and Zayn are instructed to infiltrate Faptaguisse's base, and subdue Faptaguisse and his henchmen. Harry and Louis are to travel to the Marmitian swamp, to seek the wisdom of Sir Paul and learn how to attract pussycats. Inside Lord Faptaguisse's base, Niall and Zayn resort to crossdressing to distract the guards while Liam sneaks past them. As the guards see through their disguise, the boys run for safety, and mistake a garbage chute for an elevator. Whilst Niall and Zayn are stuck in a garbage pile, Liam hacks into the computer system and frees all the pussycats. However, he is caught by the guards, and brought to Lord Faptaguisse's "Torturitorium" to be submerged in a bath of acid. In the Marmitian swamp, Harry and Louis are interrupted in their quest for Sir Paul when they quarrel and go their separate ways. Deep within the swamp Louis finds Sir Paul, who is revealed to be Sir Paul McCartney of the Beatles. Sir Paul leads Louis to a machine that can be used to attract pussycats, called "the Pussy Magnet." The machine is operated by singing a high note, which Sir Paul demonstrates by signing the Beatles' "I Saw Her Standing There." Harry is reunited with Liam in the "Torturitorium." Louis attempts to free them from the hands of Lord Faptaguisse, yet is unable to reach the high note necessary for the Pussy Magnet to work and is seized by the guards. Harry attempts to use the Pussy Magnet, singing a few bars from the One Direction song "Gotta Be You," but he is unable to reach the final high note. He prompts Louis to hit him in the testicles, which allows him to sing as high as needed and save the day. Following brief credits, the video ends after 18:11 minutes.





(Image 12: One Direction in their crime-fighting costumes)

As becomes apparent by the description (and title) of the video, *The Adventurous Adventures of One Direction* is a light-hearted parody of the public image of One Direction and its members. At face value, most of the video's humor is derived from double-entendres and slapstick comedy. Most of the highest rated comments on *YouTube.com* refer to these "dirty jokes," often in references to the viewers' initial unawareness of these adult undertones due to their young age when first viewing the video. As writer "alliyah" quips; "I first watched this when I was 10 and I now get all the jokes...oh my god."

However, that is not to say that the video has no redeeming value beyond its crude humor. Interestingly, the video features a plethora of visual references to other successful franchises. The most obvious homage is paid to *Star Wars*, as the pivotal character Sir Paul is a clear reference to Alec Guinness' character Obi-Wan Kenobi in the original *Star Wars* trilogy (Lucas, 1977-1983). Furthermore, the video references the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* franchise (Eastman & Laird, 1984 -), the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* franchise (Sugimura & Toujou, 1993), the character *Popeye* (Segar, 1929), the *James Bond* franchise (Fleming, 1953), and the *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* television series (1983-1985).

Besides its visual references, the video is also rife with riffs on *One Direction* fandom. Occasionally, the video features on-screen text informing the viewers of *One Direction* “fun facts” in the style of teen magazines. As these facts are mostly trivial, such as referring to Harry’s favorite type of food and the name of his cat, the video seemingly pokes fun at the fans’ fascination with inconsequential information. However, the comments on the video do not indicate that the video has gained its popularity by being subtle – the crudely humorous aspects of this otherwise high-context video can be considered ways to appeal to a lower common denominator.

***The Most Emotional Video of One Direction.*** The aptly titled *The most emotional video of One Direction* was uploaded to *YouTube.com*<sup>8</sup> on September 29, 2014, by user “OneDirectionZic,” who also uses the alias “1D\_SuperGirl.” Her real name is unknown. Since its release, the video has accrued close to 4 million views.

Of the three videos associated with *One Direction* fandom, this video adheres closest to the conventions traditionally associated with the practice of *vidding*. Set to the music of Michael Jackson’s *Heal the World*, the video is composed of a compilation of archive footage detailing the charitable endeavors of the members of *One Direction*. Featuring clips of the boys providing humanitarian aid in developing countries, the band meeting fans in support of the “Make A Wish” foundation, and each individual member becoming emotional in light of their experiences with the less fortunate, the video is unambiguous in its message and sentiment.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvH2XtjGUec>



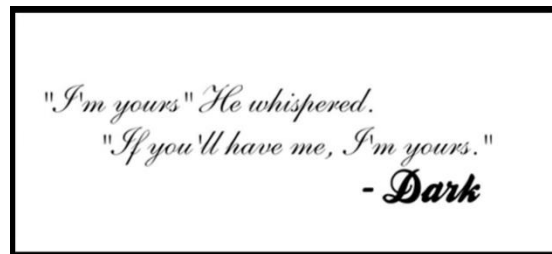
(Image 13: The members of *One Direction* meet a young fan)

Through the interpretive lens of *Heal the World*, we are invited to consider the members of *One Direction* not as teen idols, nor as singers or musicians. Instead, the author's note accompanying the video positions the band as "angels." This sentiment is shared unanimously by the top-rated comments accompanying the video. As fan "Wolves & Angels" summarizes:

...Seriously, how to be able to hate them??....I understand the ones who don't like their music, but the haters and the ones who say they are useless, stupid, untalented or really bad persons, honestly, you're jealous huh?? Because all I see when I see them is light, kindness, and five wonderful hearts and deep souls... They are amazing. They are One Direction. <3

Neglecting to pay attention to *One Direction*'s music as well as the personal lives of the band's members, the boys' humanitarian efforts take center stage. This provides ample ground for fans of the band to gush about their idols' kindhearted actions, while at the same time silencing those who might discredit *One Direction* for its "bubblegum pop" music or heartthrob public personas, as it is difficult to criticize good deeds presented in such overwhelming succession.

*Rock Me. One Direction – Rock me* was shared on *YouTube.com*<sup>9</sup> on January 6, 2013 by Penny Lane. Since its release, the video has accrued close to 3.5 million views. Interestingly, the video is based on the fanfiction story *Dark*, and consequently is conceived as something of a companion piece to the story. The video clocks in at 3:33 minutes, and is composed mostly of archival footage of Harry Styles, interspersed with more esoteric scenes that depict the blossoming and deterioration of a relationship between the protagonists of the story. As certain scenes are of a more risqué nature, a variety of body doubles stand in for Harry Styles. This transition is rather seamless, as Styles appears to be in various stages of undress in much of the archival footage. Finally, the video ends on a quote from *Dark* before fading to black.



(Image 14: A visual reference to *Dark*)

The video is set to the *One Direction* song “Rock Me,” which features the recurring lyric “I want you to rock me.” As this lyric is consistently paired with depictions of a couple engaged in sexual intercourse, the audio track acts as the reversal of the interpretive lens Francesca Coppa described as “[telling] us how to understand what we see” (2005, pp. 107-108). In the case of *One Direction – Rock me*, the video is

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUd-seJYuzA>

showing us what we are hearing, as the double-entendres of the song are unequivocally explained to be referring to carnal desires.

As the video is based entirely on the fanfiction story *Dark*, it is very high in context. Consequently, many viewers that stumbled upon this video due to its connection to *One Direction* were disoriented by the erotic scenes, and were quick to voice their disdain for this seemingly distasteful distortion of Harry Styles. As the comment on *YouTube.com* by Annie Merk summarizes:

Seriously I read a lot of coments saying that the vid has nothing to do with 1D...Well...you are partly true..First the video depicts several scenes from movies,videos etc...But wake up people,this is supposed to be a trailer for a book that is not entirely based on all of 1D ...Its one hell of a book and this is one hell of a vid.

Those fans of the band unaware of the fanfiction story from which this video originates are hesitant to embrace this dissenting interpretation of their object of affection. Void of the general appeal of *The Adventurous Adventures of One Direction*, a video like *One Direction – Rock me* casts a much more narrow net. This aptly underlines the differences in potential audience between high- and low context videography.

**In Summary.** Interestingly, the music of *One Direction* plays a very little part in the fan videos studied. Whereas their music is featured in *Rock me* and *The Adventurous Adventures*, none of the videos showcase the members of the band performing the music for which they have become famous. Instead, the videos focus on the perceived (or imagined) personalities of Niall, Zayn, Liam, Harry, and Louis. However, as seemingly unconcerned as the fans of *One Direction* are with the “truthful” representation of their

objects of affection, they do require fidelity of character. Harry Styles, for instance, may certainly be reimagined as a crime-fighting superhero, as long as his playful bravado and quick wit are properly translated to this new iteration.

### **Exploring Dallas Cowboys Fandom**

While the sport of American Football has not found an audience as internationally widespread as either the *Harry Potter* book series or the boyband *One Direction*, its impact on the United States of America is undeniable. In 2015, the championship game of the National Football League (*Super Bowl XLIX*) became the most-viewed television broadcast of any kind in American history, attracting 114.4 million viewers. As a major source of entertainment, American Football inspires a great amount of passion, and all teams in the League enjoy a devoted fan base. The most popular team in the NFL is *The Dallas Cowboys*, the Texas team established on January 28, 1960. The Cowboys have won five *Super Bowl* appearances, and surpassed football club *Real Madrid* in 2016 as the most valuable sports team in the world according to American magazine *Forbes*<sup>10</sup>. Fans of the Dallas Cowboys fondly refer to themselves as the “*Cowboys Nation*,” and perform their fandom in various ways.

The inquiry into performative Dallas Cowboys fandom began at *dallascowboys.com*, the official website for the team, which fosters a vivid community of sports fans with a multitude of message boards. As a more open ecosystem than the guarded and stylized *Pottermore.com* and *Onedirectionmusic.com*, the website allows users to post videos, images, and lengthy forum posts on a broad range of topics. Three forms of participatory fan-art were studied: fantasy football, fan-made videos, and fan-

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2016/07/13/dallas-cowboys-head-the-worlds-50-most-valuable-sports-teams-of-2016>

made images. The study of each individual piece of art is composed of a detailing of its creation, and an overview of the responses the fan text solicited from its fan community.

**Dallas Cowboys Fantasy Football: The Couches Coaches.** In the game of fantasy football the participants serve as the general managers of their own (virtual) American football team. All participants choose their teams in a drafting process, in which all players of the National Football League are available. Fantasy football is essentially a game of statistics, in which each player strives to earn the most points, based in the actual performances of the drafted players in their real-world competition. If a participant were to draft Tony Romo (the quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys), for instance, all achievements of Romo during a season in the NFL (such as yards gained or completed touchdown passes) would translate to points. Participants' success is thus partly contingent on their ability to correctly gage and predict each player's potential. However, there are a multitude of variables to take into consideration, such as the weather conditions of the game's hosting city, minor injuries sustained by players during practice, and the abilities and accomplishments of the opposing teams. Those players most successful in the game draft their teams on the basis of home-made algorithms that keep track of thousands of variable statistics<sup>11</sup>. Traditionally, the game of fantasy football was played among family members, coworkers, and friends, in local leagues comprising a handful of fantasy teams. In recent years, a host of websites (most notably *Fanduel.com* and *Draftkings.com*) have started offering online versions of fantasy football, where fantasy coaches can compete against virtual strangers across the United States and around the world for cash prizes of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mq785nJ0FXQ>

*Dallascowboys.com* dedicates a special section of its message boards to fantasy football. Here, Cowboys fans can share their experiences playing the game, engage in discussions regarding their successes and misfortunes in drafting players, and ask each other for advice. As the website does not facilitate fantasy football leagues of its own, the tone of the discussion threads is generally friendly and non-competitive, and members are more inclined to express their appreciation for those players drafted by the Cowboys' rivals. On September 28, 2013, user "Juggernaut" created a discussion thread within the fantasy football message board titled "What's your worst fantasy football mistake this year?" He started off the conversation detailing his own misfortune:

I gambled on not starting Vernon Davis. I was hoping Rob Gronkowski would finally have his season debut and play this Sunday. [...] Anyway Davis ends up getting just 18 yards Thursday night, but he also hauls in a touchdown. Not bad, I thought, but Gronk will match that or do better.

Well that's what I thought until I checked Twitter today and saw this:

Patriots TE Rob Gronkowski and WR Danny Amendola did not travel to Atlanta and will not play Sunday night vs. Falcons.

Appraising athlete Rob Gronkowski higher than Vernon Davis, Juggernaut lost out on a game's worth of points after Gronkowski never made it onto the field. However, the ramifications of a single day's misfortune are quickly put into perspective when other members of the Cowboys Nation join Juggernaut in lamenting their losses. As user "beware d-ware" reflects:

I have had a lot of bad picks so far this year, but the one that sucks the most is David Wilson. I loved him coming into the year, and thought he



might turn into a CJ Spiller kind of player. When Andre Brown went down, I was pumped. But just a month into the season, he is in the coaches doghouse, the Giants have abandoned their run game, and the whole team is dead in the water. So that's where my RB2 is at, and I don't expect it to improve any time soon.

The comments above indicate how a lack of success in the game of fantasy football becomes attributed to fundamental errors in judgement and the misattribution of quality to disappointing players within the NFL. When confronted with extraneous circumstances or unaccounted-for variables, many fantasy coaches are quick to dismiss this information in favor of their own intuition. As user “hadenough” confidently proclaimed, when notified of quarterback Rayne Dakota Prescott’s inability to play due to a minor injury, “I have Dak as my starter. I just have this feelling this kid is going to shine.”

**In Summary.** Fantasy football coaches discuss players as if they were characters, with static statistics and an innate ability apparent to those that pay close enough attention. Of course, the statistical game of fantasy football is dependent strongly on extraneous factors. However, the fantasy football coaches on *Dallascowboys.com* largely fail to mention these factors when justifying their successes and losses, instead opting for narratives in which their own sense of judgement is deserving of praise or criticism.

**Dallas Cowboys Fan Videos: A Cowboys Nation of Vidders.** Other than the fantasy football leagues discussed at length, *Dallascowboys.com* has designated message boards for other expressions of fandom. An important part of participatory fandom enjoyed by many members of the Cowboys Nation is the creating of videos. Whether

they take on the form of a music video, the summary of a season, or the highlight reel of a player's career, all of the most popular videos make an argument or tell a story.

While *DallasCoyboys.com* does allow users to embed videos in their message board posts, the website does not have designated server space for the hosting of videos. Consequently, most of the videos shared on the website have been uploaded to *YouTube.com*.

***Cowboy Anthem.*** The video *Mr. Mince - Cowboy Anthem ft. DJ London* by Jeremy Mincey (uploaded using the moniker "Mr. Mince Productions Inc.") first appeared on *YouTube.com*<sup>12</sup> on August 14, 2015. Watched by more than 900,000 viewers, *Anthem* is the most popular Cowboys fan-made video studied. Clocking in at 4:05 minutes, the video would best be described as a music video for the song "Cowboy Anthem" by artists Mr. Mince and DJ London. It begins with black and white footage of ranchers trekking through the desert astride horses, as the sounds of galloping and whinnying are accompanied by a heavily distorted voice chronicling the team history of the Dallas Cowboys. The first bars of the music are played as the footage of ranchers fades and is replaced with footage of televised football games played by the team. A variety of pre-game rituals are shown, such as players warming up and fans taking their seats in the stadium. The song's hook, the lyric "I'm always throwing up the X with my Cowboys" is the first line sung, accompanied with various instances of Dallas Cowboys players crossing their underarms over their heads ("throwing up the X"), as an apparent greeting to fans and display of team pride.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXfqDkl23dw>



(Image 15: A player “throwing up the X”)

The vast majority of the video is a compilation of highlights from previously televised games played by the Cowboys, relying heavily on footage of completed passes and touchdowns.

Lyrically, the accompanying song addresses themes of perseverance despite hardship, the importance of hard work, and the appreciation of loyalty through times of turmoil. By focusing on the team’s successes, both lyrically and visually, the video depicts those that doubt the might of the Cowboys as mere “fair-weather fans,” while praising those fans who have shown loyalty through seasons of injury and lost games as deserving to stand side-by-side with players and technical staff in moments of jubilation. Through the interpretive lens of “*Cowboys Anthem*,” the Dallas Cowboys’ trials and tribulations are reframed as minor moments in a history of excellence, and as opportunities to differentiate between real fans and imposters.

***Every Touchdown.*** The video *Every Touchdown of 2014 Dallas Cowboys* by “Stangboy57” was first uploaded to *YouTube.com*<sup>13</sup> on January 30, 2015. Attracting an audience of close to 313,000 viewers, the appropriately titled video chronicles every touchdown made by the Dallas Cowboys during the 2014 season. Clocking in at 5:37

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhr5\\_5IUyWA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhr5_5IUyWA)

minutes, these moments of athletic excellence are interspersed with shots of Dallas Cowboys fans cheering, the players warming up before a game, and fireworks and pyrotechnics lighting up the stadium.

This fan-made video is set to the song “Take Me Alive” by artists Polina and Ben Evolent. Lyrically, the song deals with themes of achieving greatness through hard work, and persevering despite encountering hardship. The last few bars of the song are interjected with an audio track of commentators gleefully reporting on the touchdowns shown in the video. As the video comes to a close, the music fades as the players of the Dallas Cowboys football team can be seen walking off the field muddied, bruised, and victorious. The last lingering shot of the video is of a fan, holding up a cardboard sign reading “Finish the Fight.”



(Image 16: A visual call to action)

As the description above illustrates, the video adheres closest to the stylistic conventions most commonly associated with the practice of *vidding*. Combined with the commentator audio tracks, the uplifting lyrics of the song invite the viewer not to think back on the 2014 season as one in which the Cowboys were defeated during the Playoffs. Instead, this compilation of excellence (without specified context, nor specifying whether or not the

athletic feats shown in the video were taken from games in which the team was victorious) posits the team as ambitious and perseverant.

The video has been well received on *YouTube.com*, drawing compliments from fans and adversaries of the Cowboys alike. As A. J. McGowan commented: “Eagles fan here. man this 2014 team was good. they definitely deserved the nfc east. Romo ain't no joke and im positive when he comes back he'll be great. have a good day! much respect!!” This sign of respect from a self-proclaimed fan of the Philadelphia Eagles (the Cowboys’ most notorious rivals) was met with overwhelming appreciation, as dozens of Cowboys fans replied to McGowan’s comment to thank him for his kindness. As user “LaffSumMo” summarized: “See, that is a football fan at the end of the day. One who can actually give props where it's due. There are certain players who I can respect their skillsets even though they aren't Cowboys.” For many others, the video seems to work as a reminder of why they identify as a member of the Cowboys Nation in the first place. As user “YEP ISAIDIT” remarked:

I was born in 1991 and I remember when my uncle had a super bowl party in 1996. I remember all the blue and silver, all those stars, all that love, and all that passion. I was 4 years old but for some reason I have always remembered. That's where my love for the DALLAS COWBOYS started and I will love them for the rest of my life.DC4L

*The NFL's Best Scrambler. Tony Romo - Dallas Cowboys - Is He The NFL's Best Scrambler?* by “Enemy Nation” appeared on *YouTube.com*<sup>14</sup> on August 7, 2014, and has been viewed close to 435,000 times since. Clocking in at 6:39 minutes, this fan-made

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NMI-iGikW4>

video is a compilation of Tony Romo performing “quarterback scrambles.” This impromptu maneuver, performed when a quarterback is under pressure by the opposing team’s defense, sees the player run forward, backward, or laterally in an attempt to avoid being tackled behind the line of scrimmage.

Tony Romo has had a tumultuous career playing for the Dallas Cowboys, marked by ill-fated injuries and the inability to win a *Super Bowl* during his tenure. Consequently, his legacy is an often hotly-contested subject among fans. This video seemingly was produced in an attempt to both silence those who doubt Romo, and showcase the élan he has brought to the team. The video’s highest rated comment, by user “OcpCommunications,” summarizes this sentiment well:

People who think Romo sucks? They have no idea what the hell they are talking about or they just watch the constant stream of the moments when he doesn't light up the sky on ESPN and NFL Network. The hate this guy gets is unreal and quite frankly disrespectful. If you know football? And watch this man play the game every sunday? You would have no doubt of his skills let alone his status as a top ten quarterback. Debate he sucks all you want. His game tape says otherwise.



(Image 17: Romo avoids being tackled by a rival)

Accompanied by the up-tempo song *Bombs over Baghdad* by American rap duo OutKast, the video draws from a library of televised games played by Romo. Interestingly, the lyrical content of the song in no way lines up with the themes of the video. Showcasing Tony Romo as an agile athlete at the height of his abilities, the video does not invite viewers to contemplate OutKast's provocative lyrics regarding President Clinton's bombing of Iraq in 1998. Rather, the song seems to be chosen to match the intensity of Romo's performance. At 155 beats per minute, the song is exceptionally fast for a hip-hop song, requiring the members of OutKast to deliver their lines at a frantic pace. This stylistic choice is not appreciated by all of the video's viewers. As the author of one of the higher rated comments, user Charles Mims makes his disdain for the choice of music clear: "can't stand this garbage music.." Use Teejay Trujillo retorts: "Usually I can't either but no other song I know can keep up with all the twists and bounce Romo had to perform just to stay alive." Consequently, the audio track acts not as the interpretive lens described by Coppa (2005, pp. 107-108), but more so as a visceral frame for the action of sports.

**In Summary.** Though it may not be a term used by its creators, the fan-videos shared on *Dallascowboys.com* adhere closest to the conventions of *vidding* of all the fan communities studied. More straightforward and less esoteric than many of the aforementioned videos, the vids created by fans of the Dallas Cowboys are used predominantly to make an argument. Whether the videos are taking the form of a music video, the summary of a season, or the highlight reel of a player's career, the Dallas Cowboys are consistently posited as amongst the best teams of their sport. The argumentative role of these videos is underlined by the comments shared by their

viewers. There is no room for doubt and negativity, as the majority of the highest rated comments preach to the choir about the significance of their objects of affection.

**Cowboys Fan Images: Pictures in Dialogue.** On the message boards of *Dallascowboys.com*, a constant recurrence is the use of digitally altered images created by fans. Some of these images bear a striking resemblance to the fan-art encountered when studying the *Harry Potter* fan community. For example, the previously mentioned user Juggernaut created a banner to represent part of his fantasy football team, which he proudly displays in his electronic signature. This means that every time he posts in any of the discussion threads on the *Dallascowboys.com* message boards, his fan-art is shared.



(Image 18: Fan-art created by Juggernaut)

Of course, Juggernaut is not the only user to decorate his electronic signature with images. User “Howard C” chooses to proudly display the Gadsden flag and the so-called “Betsy Ross” flag, both of which are traditionally associated with the American Revolutionary War, American patriotism, and political movements such as libertarianism. Underscored with “These are the flags I care about,” Howard C is unapologetic in voicing his political beliefs.





(Image 19: The flags about which Howard C cares)

A less-polarizing picture is found in the signature of user “Willpak.” His chosen image portrays three Dallas Cowboys players helping an injured teammate off the field, underscored with a quote from the great football coach Sir Alex Ferguson: “Hard work will always overcome natural talent when natural talent doesn’t work hard enough.” This image aptly illustrates the themes of sportsmanship and perseverance found throughout the message boards of *Dallascowboys.com*.



(Image 20: An illustration of team spirit)

A third type of image is found as frequently as the examples previously given, but is not shared with the same level of consistency as the electronic signatures of users like Howard C or Willpak. Throughout the *Dallascowboys.com* message boards, users share humorous memes. Whereas the signatures work more in a framing capacity – quickly conveying parts of the user’s personality whenever he or she posts on the message boards – the memes are used dialogically. Without claiming ownership, users engaged in a

discussion thread will share these memes to convey their point, generally attempting to make light of a situation.

A fitting example would be the controversy regarding DeMarco Murray, the running back drafted by the Dallas Cowboys in 2011. When Murray left the Cowboys in favor of the Philadelphia Eagles in 2015, many fans were outraged by this perceived betrayal. However, as Murray injured his hamstring in the third week of the season, the fans' outrage quickly turned into glee. A popularly circulated meme depicts Chip Kelly (the Eagles' then-coach) attempting to return Murray's jersey to owner, president, and general manager of the Dallas Cowboys Jerry Jones, who smirks and exclaims "Sorry, no returns!"



(Image 21: Jones denies Kelly the return of Murray)

**In Summary.** Interestingly, the fan-art circulated among fans of the *Dallas Cowboys* is not indicative of a larger fannish economy. As distinguished in *Harry Potter* and *One Direction* fandom, some fans use their own art as currency to enter a larger conversation. An artist might be inclined to make his or her own chapter images for a fanfiction story like *Delicate*, or make a video that illustrates *Dark*, in an effort to become a part of the fan-art he or she admires. This is seemingly not the case in *Cowboys* fandom. In this fan community, fan-art is not used to *enter* the conversation – it *is* the

conversation. In *Dallas Cowboys* fandom, using the right pictures is indicative of being familiar with the agreed upon vernacular of the fan community. Whether the images shared are images that reinforce identity, images that forge community, or images that make light of adversity, the images have a conversational use – not a use as currency.

### **Looking Ahead**

I have studied the various forms of participatory fan-art associated with *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom, and have explicated how fan communities respond to and interact with these forms of fan-art. During the process of coding, several similar characteristics have arisen which can be found across these various categories of media fandom. In the following chapter, the three studied fan communities and their practices will be compared side by side. Analysis will determine the significance of the similarities and dissimilarities across these categories of media fandom, and, where deemed significant, those dimensions so distinguished will be used to create a more inclusive taxonomy of fandom.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, I explored how fandom is performed, through the examination of the most prominent forms of participatory fan-art associated with *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom. The study of each individual fan text was composed of a detailing of its creation, and an overview of the responses the fan text solicited from its fan community. This exhaustive analysis of individual fan texts was necessary to explicate the intricacies of each fan community. In this chapter, I will tie all the findings of the previous chapter together. I will analyze the significance of the similarities and dissimilarities across these categories of media fandom, and, where deemed significant, those dimensions so distinguished will be used to create a more inclusive taxonomy of fandom. After tying up the various elements of the conclusion, I will discuss the implications and limitations of my study, as well as make recommendations for future research.

### **Exploring Fandom**

The communities involved in *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom may strike an uninitiated observer as vastly different. One might expect, since we are considering a book series, a boyband, and a sports team, that these properties' target demographics would hardly have any overlap, and their fan communities' works of participatory art would, consequently, bear little resemblance to each other. However, delving past face value reveals multiple similarities among these communities on multiple levels.

**Starting the Inquiry.** As detailed in the previous chapter, the inquiry into the fandoms surrounding *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* began at each property's respective official homepage. The websites visited (*Pottermore.com*,

*Ondirectionmusic.com*, and *Dallascowboys.com*) all have been constructed following a similar outline. Whereas each website features social networking capabilities, such as message boards and personal profiles, they function primarily as outlets for their properties' keepers. In the case of *Pottermore.com*, the website functions primarily as a way for author J. K. Rowling to revisit her Wizarding World. In the case of *Ondirectionmusic.com*, the website allows the band's members and managers to communicate directly with fans through press releases and personal photos and videos. In the case of *Dallascowboys.com*, the team's management turns to the website for everything from press releases to ticket sales. In all three cases, the social networking capabilities of the websites are not optimized for the creation of participatory fan-art, leading fans to merely discuss works of fan-art, and provide links to alternative websites where this art can be found. Consequently, the official websites take on the role of a portal, and act as simply the first step toward discovering the world of participatory fan-art.

**Distinguishing the Most Prominent Forms of Fan-Art.** In the previous chapter, the three forms of participatory fan-art most associated with *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom were examined. Interestingly, the participatory fan-art produced within each individual fandom can be divided into three distinct categories: the recontextualization of characters, the recontextualization of images, and the recontextualization of videos.

**Recontextualized Characters.** The most apparent instance of the recontextualization of characters occurs in the fanfiction written by fans of the *Harry Potter* series. As the most often discussed form of participatory fan-art on

*Pottermore.com*, the writing and reading of fanfiction has become a dearly appreciated pastime of many of the boy wizard's fans. The recontextualization of characters is an inherent characteristic of fanfiction, as the unauthorized continuation or exploration of literary worlds is often dependent on the use of characters originating in the source text. That is not to say that a fanfiction story must take place during the time span described in the books. A story might take place before the events described in the *Harry Potter* books (such as *How to Tame a Marauder*, which is set in the 1970s) or be set after Rowling's epilogue (such as *Delicate* and *Still Delicate*). However, as described in the previous chapter, the fanfiction stories most heralded by fans of the *Harry Potter* series rely heavily on characters originating in Rowling's book.

A similar trend may be distinguished in the fanfiction written by fans of *One Direction*. On *Onedirectionmusic.com*, fanfiction is the most discussed form of participatory fan-art. This may seem unlikely, as the members of the boyband of course are actual people, living in our reality. But that does not keep *One Direction* fans from approaching their objects of affection as characters, to be recontextualized however they see fit. Consequently, the members of *One Direction* are reimagined by fanfiction writers as graphic designers, bakers, and driving instructors, longing for one another's love. Interestingly, the most popular fanfiction stories recontextualize the boys as living ordinary lives away from fame, in worlds where *One Direction* does not exist. However, fanfiction authors go to great lengths to assure their readers that they are indeed reading about the exploits of Niall, Zayn, Liam, Harry, and Louis.

A third instance of the recontextualization of characters occurs in the fantasy football leagues discussed by fans of *The Dallas Cowboys*. The game of fantasy football

may not immediately seem comparable to the writing of fanfiction, and such claims would likely be dismissed by practitioners on either side of the comparison. However, the two practices bear many uncanny resemblances. As illustrated by the analysis of *One Direction* fanfiction, a person's existence in the real world does not exclude him or her from becoming recontextualized as a character in a fanfiction story. In effect, this is also what happens when a fantasy football coach drafts a player for a fantasy team. Though fantasy football in recent years has been rebranded as a game of skill, akin to poker (most notably by *Fanduel.com* and *Draftkings.com*, in an effort to circumvent gambling law), most players choose their fantasy teams based on intuition and the favorable feelings they harbor towards certain actual NFL teams and players. While the heavy reliance on statistics would complicate claims of willful recontextualization of characters (as one would be most likely to pick whichever player has the highest statistical chance of being successful), the observed practices of fantasy football dismissed this doubt. On multiple occasions, fantasy football coaches have chosen to dismiss statistics in favor of intuition, choosing less-than-optimal players for sentimental reasons. This leads to the conclusion that fantasy football, in its more commonly played casual form, adheres closer to the norms associated with the writing of fanfiction than with the rules of gambling.

***In Summary.*** Interestingly, the writing of fanfiction is a practice not solely reserved for fans of fictional characters. As exemplified by the fan community surrounding the boyband *One Direction*, people living in our reality are not exempt from being abstracted into characters, and recontextualized into situations far removed from their actual lives. Perhaps surprisingly, a similar practice has been uncovered in the fan community surrounding *The Dallas Cowboys*, as fans of the team routinely discuss, trade,

and play with the players of their favorite team (as if they were fictional character) in fantasy football leagues. Consequently, the *recontextualization of characters* has arisen as a practice shared among the fandoms surrounding *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys*.

***Recontextualized Images.*** The recontextualization of images occurs throughout all three fan communities, yet takes the most consistent form in *Harry Potter* fandom. A particularly popular form of fan-art discussed on *Pottermore.com* is the type of image created by fans through the manipulation of photos to represent certain characters and scenes from the *Harry Potter* book series. Importantly, these images are used in *Harry Potter* fan communities as part of a meta-textual exchange (Hellekson, 2009), and often serve as reciprocation for other works of fan-art. In the previous chapter, multiple instances of reciprocal fan-art exchanged on *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* are discussed, where manipulated images are used by authors and readers to illustrate the characters of the fanfiction novel.

Venturing away from the more uniform websites officially associated with each media property (which comprise similar interactive features, yet often do not allow fans to share their fan-art), fans seeking participatory fan-art will encounter a wide variety of alternative websites. In certain cases, such as *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*, the alternative website has been sustained and developed over a long period of time, resulting in an ecosystem that supports authors through the implementation of such structures as rankings and awards ceremonies, and fosters community through the facilitation of discussion and the exchange of (reciprocal) fan-art. However, not every alternative website has grown to be as expansive and organized as *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*,



leading to a decentralization of fan-art. Thus, even though the fans of *One Direction* are engaged in a complex fannish economy in which the gifts given, received, and reciprocated are designed to create and cement a social structure (as is the case within *Harry Potter* fandom), the fan-art produced by *One Direction* fans has become scattered across a variety of websites. Interestingly, the fan-art created by fans of *One Direction* is much more difficult to categorize than the art created by fans of *Harry Potter* and *The Dallas Cowboys*, which becomes particularly apparent in the altered images exchanged within the *One Direction* fan community. Whereas the images created by fans of *Harry Potter* and *The Dallas Cowboys* are generally created through the manipulation of photos to represent certain characters or situations, the reciprocal fan-art created by fans of *One Direction* has taken the form of manipulated photos, hand-drawn images, and paintings (and that is excluding playlists and recipes). Interestingly, the art created by fans of *One Direction* does function similarly to the art created by fans of *Harry Potter*, as the art is still used to create and cement a social structure, to help fans of fanfiction authors to reciprocate a fan-gift, and to become a part of the fanfiction author's imagined world. However, the decentralization of the (reciprocal) fan-art has led to a deregulation. In *Harry Potter* fan communities, the existence of a website such as *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* works as a regulatory agent, normalizing in which ways fans are able to reciprocate the fan-art they consume (by creating chapter images, for instance). The absence of such a regulatory agent in *One Direction* fandom has led to a richer variety of fan-art, at the price of coherence and consistency.

The website *Dallascowboys.com* does exhibit much of the visual consistency found in *Harry Potter* fan communities, and consequently the fans of *The Dallas*

*Cowboys* exchange images strongly resembling the altered images exchanged on websites such as *Harrypotterfanfiction.com*. The digitally altered images generally comprise “characters” (such as the *Cowboys*’ players or managerial staff), recontextualized in ways that make light of adversity or reinforce the sense of community upheld by members of the *Cowboys Nation*. However, the images exchanged by fans of *The Dallas Cowboys* do not seem to be a part of a fannish economy, as can be distinguished in fan communities surrounding *Harry Potter* and *One Direction*. Fans of the *Cowboys* do not create banners for one another’s fantasy football teams, for instance. The images are thus not used reciprocally. Rather, the images can be considered as part of a meta-textual exchange (Hellekson, 2009). As Hellekson argues, being initiated into a participatory fan community involves learning how to engage with other fans using their vernacular. By understanding how to interpret, create, and respond to the altered images exchanged on *Dallascowboys.com*, the exchange of images takes on a conversational use.

***In Summary.*** The *recontextualization of images* has arisen as a practice shared among the fandoms surrounding *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys*. While each fan community uses altered images in its own unique way, the use of images can generally be understood as falling on a sliding scale between conversational use and economical use. Most consistent is the importance of long-standing and well-maintained websites in fostering and sustaining fannish ecosystems, in which fan-art can be created, shared, and discussed. However, this consistency comes at the cost of the websites taking on the role of regulatory agents, normalizing the fan-art created and appreciated by their fan communities.

***Recontextualized Videos.*** The recontextualization of videos by fan-artists has become synonymous with the practice of *vidding*, and each of the three fan communities studied partake eagerly in the creation of this form of fan-art in which clips from television broadcasts and movies are set to music to make an argument or tell a story. Whether these videos explicate the recurring motifs in the *Harry Potter* film series, position the members of *One Direction* as respectable humanitarians, or defend Tony Romo's athletic abilities, each fan community studied enjoys *vids* as ways to celebrate its objects of affection.

However, that is not to say that there is no other genre of video produced and enjoyed within these fan communities. Within the fan communities surrounding the *Harry Potter* series and *One Direction*, several of the most popular videos are original productions. Particularly interesting is these productions' ties to the world of fanfiction. In some cases, the videos started out as fanfiction stories (such as *The Adventurous Adventures of One Direction*) or were directly inspired by fanfiction novels (such as *One Direction – rock me*). Other videos, such as *Severus Snape and the Marauders* and *The Mysterious Ticking Noise*, adhere closer to the conventions of fanfiction than to the conventions traditionally associated with *vidding*. Consequently, certain videos would be better described as recontextualizing characters, as opposed to recontextualizing videos.

All of the official homepages studied (*Pottermore.com*, *Onedirectionmusic.com*, and *Dallascowboys.com*) prevent users from uploading their own videos. Instead, users of these websites are allowed to post links to other websites, or embed videos in their comments. Consequently, the videos most prominently circulated all are hosted on *YouTube.com*, the website that has become nearly synonymous with user-created videos.

This is most likely explained by the costs associated with designating server space to the upkeep of a video library.

***In Summary.*** Interestingly, the practice of *vidding* and the *recontextualization of videos* has not only arisen as a practice shared among the fandoms surrounding *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys*, but furthermore remains consistent in style and execution across fandoms. It is important to underline that not every video shared, discussed, or appreciated by fan communities adheres to the format associated with *vidding*. However, all of the videos studied are uniform in sentiment, championing the fan communities' objects of affection while shielding them from criticism.

**Assessing the Response to Fan-Art.** The three forms of participatory fan-art most associated with *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom have not been created in a vacuum. As has become apparent, fan communities are akin to ecosystems, which encourage the production, consumption, and reciprocation of fan-art. However, there are rules that govern the proliferation of fan-art, which this study made apparent.

***Fidelity.*** The major emergent theme across all three studied fan communities is the relentless cry for fidelity. The consumers of all studied forms of participatory fan-art have displayed high standards to which they hold the artists whose works of art they consume. This does not simply extend to the honoring of conventions and characteristics explored in the original media properties, such as expecting the characters introduced by J. K. Rowling in the original *Harry Potter* book series to speak in their own voices, or expecting the members of *One Direction* to maintain their interpersonal relationships among each other. As the "characters" from all three media properties (the fictional

characters in *Harry Potter*, the members of *One Direction*, and the players of *The Dallas Cowboys*) have been detailed in a variety of media, little room is left for invention. Not only may fans turn to the book series, music albums, and sports broadcasts that popularized their objects of affection to learn the minutiae used to characterize their participatory works of art, but they are able to share all their knowledge within their social and fannish networks, and will learn more information directly from the media properties' keepers through interviews, press releases, and social networking profiles. In fact, as *Pottermore.com*, *Onedirectionmusic.com*, and *Dallascowboys.com* have been designed with the specific purpose of providing each media property's keepers with a direct outlet to their fan communities, it is reasonable to expect that the amount of information fan-artists need to take into account will only increase over time.

It is important to note, however, that there appears to be a direct relationship between the amount of information referenced by the fan-artist, and his or her audience's expectations of fidelity. Certain works of participatory fan-art cater exclusively to their fan community, and unapologetically require encyclopedic levels of knowledge on the part of their consumers. Those works of art that claim greatest fealty to their source material will be scrutinized most thoroughly by their consumers. This explains how minute changes, such as Severus Snape's increased magical skill in the high-context *Severus Snape and the Marauders*, can be perceived as glaring mistakes, while major alterations such as *One Direction's* crime fighting career in the lighthearted *Adventurous Adventures* video are quickly accepted as artistic license.

***Mastery of Material.*** Nevertheless, though the level of scrutiny is related directly to the degree to which a fan-artist flexes his or her knowledge, those works of

participatory fan-art lower in context are still held to high standards. Specifically, it has arisen that all fan communities studied require complete mastery of the source material. That is to say, communities involved in *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* fandom seemingly share an understanding about their characters' quintessence. One would, in theory, be allowed to recontextualize the character of Harry Styles as a baker, as long as the recontextualized version of the character does not lose the mannerisms and characteristics associated with the character in the source material. Harry the baker would thus be unacceptable if he did not portray the quick wit and boyish bravado that endeared his source material-namesake to his fans. In a similar vein, Harry Potter could be reimagined as a middle-aged man, as long as his core traits of loyalty and bravery were correctly translated. Tony Romo might leave the Cowboys for a fantasy coach's team, as long as his talents for quarterback scrambling and unfortunate injuries were taken into account.

*Normative Agents.* Interestingly, the cries for fidelity are thus problematized by certain allowances for artistic license. As mentioned before, it is not explained exactly how it has come to be that the sexuality of the members of *One Direction* is one of the select areas fan-artists are allowed to interpret freely. While the bending of genders and sexualities has been a hallmark (see Drushel, 2013) of participatory fandom (especially fanfiction) since the "Kirk/Spock" fanfiction written by the predominantly female fans of *Star Trek* (Roddenberry, 1966), it would be shortsighted to assume that the participatory fan practices of the *Star Trek* fan community can be effortlessly translated to the fan communities studied more than fifty years later. It would be incorrect to explain the bending of genders and sexuality as noted in participatory fan-art created by members of

the *One Direction* fan community as a reflection of the underrepresentation of women and female sexuality in media (as *Star Trek* fanfiction traditionally has been; see Drushel, 2013), as the media landscape has changed drastically since the 1960s, and as this behavior has not been noted in any of the participatory fan-art created by fan communities surrounding *Harry Potter* (nor *The Dallas Cowboys*, perhaps less surprisingly).

Rather, the larger liberties taken by artists of *One Direction* fan-art seem indicative of the lack of normative control characterizing *One Direction* fan communities. On websites such as *Harrypotterfanfiction.com* and *Dallascowboys.com*, the longevity of their fostered fan communities has ushered in a sense of stability, in the form of leaderboards and lists of the highest rated works of participatory fan-art. Whenever an individual explores these fan communities (and the participatory works of art it produces), one will likely begin by consuming these highest rated works of art. Consequently, he or she will be introduced to the technical and stylistic conventions of these forms of art (such as the writing of fanfiction, the drafting of a fantasy football team, or the creating of vids) by a limited set of examples, over time popularizing these conventions as rules. This explains the comparatively normalized expressions of fandom in *Harry Potter* and *Dallas Cowboys* fan communities, and the more outrageous expressions of *One Direction* fandom. With no organizing and normalizing agent in place, fans of the boyband are less likely to learn the technical and stylistic conventions of participatory fan-art from the same limited number of sources.

**Reciprocation.** Certain works of participatory art have been created as a sign of appreciation for fellow fan-artists, in the form of banners, videos, and memes. As has

become apparent by studying the fan-art exchanged on any of the websites visited for this study, the exchange that occurs is more complex than simply giving and reciprocating gifts. Indicative of a larger fannish economy, some fans use their own art as currency to enter a larger conversation, in an effort to become a part of the fan-art they admire. Regardless of the intended goal of creating reciprocal fan-art, these fan-artists are held to even higher standards of fidelity than the artists responsible for the original work of fan-art. Not only must the artist be completely attuned to the expectations and agreed upon conventions of their fan community, as well as be fluent in using this community's vernacular – their reciprocal fan-art must also fully encapsulate the original artist's intentions.

## **Conclusion**

As I have explicated in the literature review of my study, there are several severe gaps in knowledge within the field of fandom studies. Divided into strands of research focusing on the individual readings of a text, the performance of fandom, and the participation of an individual within a fan community, scholars interested in fandom fail to make any generalizable statement about the field as a whole. Additionally, the perceived dissimilarities across different genres of fandom have resulted in unfounded categorization, creating a further divide in the discipline. In this study, I have attempted to close these two gaps in the field, and thereby make an original contribution to the fandom studies literature, by answering the following questions:

**How do individuals perform fandom?** The fan communities surrounding the *Harry Potter* series, the boyband *One Direction*, and the American football team *The Dallas Cowboys* perform their fandom through the creation of participatory fan-art. At



face value, the art produced within each individual fandom may strike an uninitiated observer as vastly different. However, the fan-art created across all three fan communities can be divided into three distinct categories: the recontextualization of characters, the recontextualization of images, and the recontextualization of videos.

**How do fans respond to and interact with participatory fan-art?** The fan-art shared, consumed, and reciprocated within each fan community is scrutinized to a varying extent. Those works of art that claim greatest fealty to their source material are scrutinized most thoroughly by their consumers. Nonetheless, all three fan communities share an understanding about their characters' quintessence, and require complete mastery of the source material from all involved in the production, consumption, and reciprocation of participatory art.

**What similar characteristics can be found across various categories of media fandom?** By conducting this research, I have come to an understanding of what similar characteristics can be found across various categories of media fandom. Nonetheless, the studied fan communities are not blindly interchangeable. Since we are considering a book series, a boyband, and a sports team, one might expect that these properties' target demographics would hardly have any overlap, and their fan communities' works of participatory art would, consequently, bear little resemblance to each other. However, the primary dissimilarity distinguished across the various categories of media fandom is not an issue of demographics. Rather, it is found by studying the longevity of fostered fan communities. *Harry Potter* and *Dallas Cowboys* fan communities are centered around more inclusive and established websites, which have ushered in a sense of stability. This explains, at least partially, the comparatively normalized expressions of fandom in these

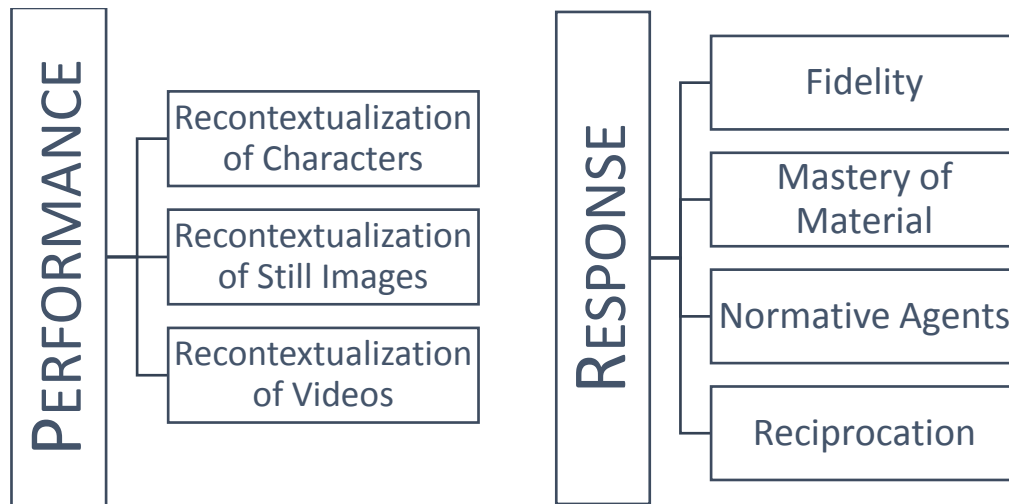
fan communities, and the more outrageous expressions of *One Direction* fandom. With an organizing and normalizing agent in place, fans are likely to learn the technical and stylistic conventions of participatory fan-art from the same limited number of sources. Consequently, the composition of fannish ecosystems has arisen as a factor of major influence.

### **Implications**

By uncovering the distinct differences and commonalities across different, selected types of fandom, much has been learned about the multidimensional ways of participation and productivity driving fan-artists to perform fandom. Though a small sample, the fan communities surrounding the *Harry Potter* series, the boyband *One Direction*, and the American football team *The Dallas Cowboys* comprise vastly different demographics, representing a range of nationalities, ages, and genders. However, as made apparent by this study, these differences did not impede the common development of certain important components of fannish performance. Specifically, this study has contributed to the field of fandom studies by presenting findings that are generalizable beyond a singular fannish context, and by explicating the unfounded categorizations that have divided the discipline.

**Toward Generalizability.** Particularly by explicating the commonalities across various forms of media fandom, it has become apparent that coming to a more comprehensive and generalizable understanding of fandom is a feasible and worthwhile endeavor for contemporary and future generations of scholars. The many elements common to the three fandoms I investigated may well be used as part of an initial model of inquiry into other forms of media fandom. The commonalities in the performance of

fandom across the fan communities surrounding *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* are significant, as these diverse forms of media consistently inspire their fans to recontextualize characters, still images, and videos. Furthermore, these forms of media provoke similar fannish responses to the participatory fan-art created by members of their fan communities. On the basis of the present study’s findings, scholars interested in exploring the performance of and response to media fandom may be well-served by keeping an eye out for the arisen commonalities illustrated below.



(Table 1: An initial model of inquiry into media fandom)

By explicating how fans across various forms of media perform their fandom, and by outlining how these participatory forms of art are assessed and appreciated, I have come to a deeper understanding of fan communities. Specifically, the findings of this study imply that the creation of a more inclusive taxonomy of fandom is within reach.

**Deviating from Unfounded Categorizations.** This deeper understanding of fan communities is derived from corroborated information, and disregards assumptions based on outdated findings or individual case studies. It is important to steer away from leading

expectations, based on demographic information and face-value impressions. As has become apparent, not all fan-art is created equal, for instance. The recontextualization of characters, still images, and videos by fans of the *Harry Potter* series bears a stronger likeness to the participatory art produced by fans of *The Dallas Cowboys* than it does to the art produced by fans of *One Direction*, despite the fact that the intended audience for a children's book series and a teenage boyband share more commonalities than a sports team marketed toward adult males.

By reappraising those websites that host fan communities not merely as portals, but as formative agents, the similarities and dissimilarities across various forms of media fandom can be assessed with integrity and authority. While the categorization of fan communities is neither impossible nor reductive, it is imperative to approach each fan community with fresh eyes, despite expectations or assumptions.

### **Limitations**

As the table above suggests, the present study has resulted in a model of inquiry that can help researchers interested in media fandom reach more generalizable findings. However, it would be presumptuous to assume that this study alone will be enough to fully develop an inclusive taxonomy of fandom. As mentioned before, the primary distinguishable categories of media fandom studies involve *film*, *television*, *literature*, *music*, and *sports*. Though the media properties studied collectively cover all of these categories, it would be unwise to assume that all fan communities surrounding works of literature behave similarly to those of *Harry Potter* fan communities, for example. More comparative studies will be necessary to corroborate the present study's findings. Furthermore, it is important to underline that mass media are not static. Consequently, it

would be incorrect to assume that the primary distinguishable categories of media fandom currently studied will remain prominent. It could prove interesting to look toward emerging categories of media fandom, such as fan communities originating online (for instance, the communities surrounding podcasts and vlogs).

Finally, the main limitation of this study is that it did not investigate fans on an individual level. The constraints of this study made it impossible to determine the exact composition of the fan communities. As most fan-artists share limited amounts of demographic information within their fandom, there is insufficient data to either support or refute assumptions based on the (perceived) demographic composition of fan communities. As discussed earlier, it also was impossible to consider the motivations of the producers and consumers of participatory works of art within the constraints of this study. While this limitation did not impede my exploration of the performance of and response to media fandom, certain findings of this study were left unexplored. For instance, members of all fan communities were engaged in para-social interactions with both their objects of affection and each other. However, as explained in this study's literature review, individual motivations for engaging in this sort of relationship vary greatly. Without an assessment of fan-motivations, the para-social interactions recognized in the fan communities surrounding *Harry Potter*, *One Direction*, and *The Dallas Cowboys* cannot be discussed without resorting to assumptions or stereotypes. Consequently, gaining insight into *why* people choose to become involved in fan communities will be vital in the creation of a more inclusive taxonomy of fandom.

## **Recommendations**

This study has made apparent that coming to a more comprehensive and generalizable understanding of fandom is a feasible and worthwhile endeavor for contemporary and future generations of scholars. To expand upon the body of work currently comprising fandom studies, future studies will need to move away from leading expectations and oversimplifications, in favor of a comparative and inclusive understanding of fan communities and expressions of fandom. Breaking away from the current pillarization of fandom studies, which seemingly favors outdated findings or individual case studies, a more inclusive taxonomy of fandom is within reach.

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