Television and Fanfiction Online:
Finding Identity, Meaning, and Community

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Abstract

This study focuses on fanfiction culture online, particularly how the stories relate to television fandoms and a need to participate or reinterpret a text on an individual and a global level to find meaning in the encoded messages. The study follows theoretical groundwork from Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding and Walter R. Fisher’s narrative paradigm. Philosophical considerations are given to communitarian ethics and how humans innately need community to successfully fulfill the need to communicate with others. Through ethnographic research, the study discovers how and why fanfiction is being used to uncover and discover identity, meaning, and community by exploring a community on fanfiction.net.

Keywords: fanfiction, television culture, participatory culture, narrative paradigm, encoding, decoding, communitarian ethics, meaning, identity, community
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Chapter 1: Introduction

With satellite providers and Internet websites (i.e. Hulu, Netflix), television viewing has changed to offer much more to a varying audience. The Internet Age has begun to provide viewers with more opportunities to find their own and discover new ideologies instead of relying on those in their direct vicinity. Since there are more options for television viewing now, fans of a particular series are more widespread. Even then, the fans within a geographic area may have dissimilar interests in a show or may interpret the shows and characters differently based on their own identities and meanings. Now, these fans seek out a place to fulfill their need to directly relate with a series and to fulfill their need for community. The Internet provides a space for people to interact more with a television series, allowing them to truly explore the visual-textual images being produced. Through the encoded messages from the show, viewers are reading and decoding them to discover and relate to their own meanings and identities. Following what Henry Jenkins’s (1989) claims is a participatory culture, the Internet is offering more outlets for this exploration; one way is through fanfiction.

Fanfiction, a story written within an already established and published universe, is one of the biggest aspects of online participatory culture in fandom studies. Through narrative communication, authors and readers are posting stories that expand or reimagine the original universe. There are various interpretations of a text, but one interesting thing about fanfiction is how much of the original story’s characterization and themes are kept.

1.1 Importance of the Study

Reading a visual text is not unlike reading a written text, although different literacies apply. In a visual text, such as television, the communication is presented in an audio-visual medium, but there are still encoded messages and people are still decoding these messages to
uncover their own meanings in the text. In *Television Culture*, John Fiske (1987) notes, “The reading position is the social point at which the mix of televisual, social, and ideological codes comes together to make coherent, unified sense” (p. 11). However, since there are so many programs and channels offered, viewers within close vicinity often do not interact with one another, and sometimes they participate in the instant gratification the Internet provides to fulfill communication needs. People are seeking out ways to express their readings in a social setting, and one of the ways this is done is through the creative expression and escapism that fanfiction provides. Jenkins (1989) states, “Fan culture reflects both the audience’s fascination with programs and fans’ frustrations over the refusal/inability of producers to tell the kinds of stories viewers want to see” (p. 162). Fanfiction grants viewers a chance to explore their meanings and identities through narrative expression. They are able to utilize storytelling to uncover their meanings within a text. There have been studies done on fanfiction and participatory culture, but the reasons why and how users are using and interacting with fanfiction for the purpose of finding meaning, identity, and community are often overlooked, which is why this study is important.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study is narrow in its focus on one particular aspect of television fandom’s participatory culture, fanfiction, in order to discover why and how fans are interacting through a narrative paradigm. The purpose was to uncover common decoded messages and to see how fanfiction authors were encoding their own messages into their stories to present their individual meanings and identities. Additionally, the fanfiction reader and reviewer were also observed to see who was interacting, why they interacted with a particular story, and how they built a community through similar meanings and narrative expressions. To accomplish this, one
particular television show’s fanfiction community (*Lost Girl*) was closely observed using ethnographic research.

1.3 Organization of Remaining Chapters and Definitions

To uncover how and why fans of a television series are interacting with fanfiction online to find meaning, identity, and community, the study utilized ethnographic research. In the next chapter, the previous literature on fanfiction is presented, with an emphasis on the two particular theories that were followed: Walter R. Fisher’s (1989) narrative paradigm and Stuart Hall’s (1974/2002) encoding/decoding theory. The literature review is organized to additionally present research completed on online fandom studies, meaning, identity, creation culture, and fanfiction culture. Chapter three covers the ethnographic research method and scope of the study. Chapter four presents the study results, including content analysis, participant observation, demographics, and interviews, before discussing what the observations really mean in light of theoretical framework. Finally, chapter five addresses limitations within the study, summaries, and conclusions.

Since fanfiction has its own culture and language, terms will be defined as they are discussed in the study.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review presented two theories, Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding and Walter R. Fisher’s narrative paradigm, as theoretical groundwork. Then, it considered the ethical assumption found in Clifford G. Christian’s communitarian ethics before identifying the methodological groundwork from online fan studies. Next, the review presented the current studies done on meaning, identity, creation culture, and fanfiction culture. The final section revealed the gaps and missing elements from the current literature and studies and presented a need for this study and its research question. Following the ethnographic approach, this study closely examined a television series’ fanfiction community, the Canadian-based Lost Girl; therefore, the literature review presented examples from this series and other shows for clarification and context of the fan culture.

2.1 Philosophical and Ethical Assumptions

Humans develop interpersonal relationships on a global level, even when they do not have physical contact with one another. They seek to build a community where they feel one is lacking, and computer-mediated communication makes this possible. John Fiske (1987) refers to a developed television culture, and Henry Jenkins (1992) notes that television fandoms have become a participatory culture. Social construction is a warrant, or underlying assumption, that is present within the fanfiction culture, since these stories are created to expand the conversation and develop a community of those following a specific television series that need additional outlets beyond the main text. Through social construction, “persons-in-conversation co-construct their own social realities and are simultaneously shaped by the worlds they create” (Griffin, 2009, p. 478). Fanfiction authors are creating their own realities within their individual interpretations or reinterpretations of the main text, and readers are interacting with each other
and through a created text to fulfill their need to expand the conversation and experience a creative culture community within the confines of a particular universe in which they have already become familiar.

Since fanfiction has developed its own culture, each fandom provides a place for people to find a community and sense of belonging. Christians, Ferre, and Fackler (1993) establish a communitarian ethics that “insist[s] that both community and personhood are central to the nature of human being” (p.54). Clifford G. Christians (2007) notes, “Fulfillment is never achieved in isolation, but only through the human bonding that results from our constructing and maintaining communities” (p. 124). Users who interact with fanfiction are actively seeking a community of like-minded individuals so that their own identities and meanings with the main text are represented and their need to interact with these like-minded individuals is fulfilled. Whether the user writes, reads, and/or reviews the stories presented, the community is developed by being available to those who look for it. Much of the previous research that has been done on fan culture reflects this need to establish and interact with people, particularly those with similar interests, and the Internet has provided a more global and immediate way to do this.

2.2 Theoretical Groundwork for Understanding the Fanfiction User

Since this study explored fanfiction, fan-created stories based on characters or worlds already created, communication is defined from a media and cultural studies approach. To fully interpret how the fanfiction user communicates, two theories were closely examined: encoding-decoding and narrative paradigm.

The first theory examined is Stuart Hall’s encoding-decoding mode, with an emphasis on television culture and identity. Previously, the cultural studies field focused on messages being received through a reception lens. However, Hall (1974/2002) took the field further by
examining the messages through encoding and decoding instead of just looking at how messages are received. Even though producers and writers develop a certain encoded message, the audience ultimately has the final say in the message received. This shift from a receptive, transmission model influences cultural studies by focusing on the complicated rhetorical process of creating and consuming a visual and verbal text.

As a result, the decoded message from the series or individual episode is very often revealed as different from the encoded message. What the writers and producers may seek to send through their encoded messages may not come across to the reader, or they may be interpreted differently from its original context. Again, the narrative experience aids the audience in the decoding process, regardless of the original encoded message. Hall (1974/2002) signifies that there is not one universal meaning. “There can be no law to ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning…in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer” (Hall, 1974/2002, p. 305). This more interpretative freedom within the message allows viewers to pick and choose what elements of the series or an episode argues for or against their particular meaning and/or identity.

Fanfiction has many subcultures within its larger culture, so more people can interact and find a community to express their varying meanings and identities. Stuart Hall (1996) denotes that identities are developed through the differences instead of the difference existing because of external factors. The Other is based on what is lacking, but the differences that people share develop communities from that very Otherness, which helps create various meanings and identities. Fanfiction writers are needing further exploration in the main text or seeking to develop what they feel is lacking so they build their own culture and community (and subcultures) from the various readings and messages. For example, writers can find a variety of
sexual rhetoric, or meaning, happening within a series. They are able to take their knowledge of the subtext within an episode or series and develop a sexual relationship for or between characters that is not directly shown either due to censorship, sponsorship, or encoded messages not being parallel with the decoded message. Don Tresca (2010) presents how the messages presented in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (and its spinoff series, *Angel*) may be decoded to include varying sexual “kinks,” or paraphilia. Writers and readers to whom these non-normative sexual desires appeal can create or read stories that include these repressed feelings or needs of expression through a varying narrative from their own personal experiences. One of the main themes of *Lost Girl* is sexuality, so these “kink” that Tresca (2010) lists are even more present in this particular fanfiction community. More people feel comfortable exploring their own decoded message because the encoded message being sent from the main text follows an “open sexuality” policy; even more, differences in sexuality are not discussed within the show, which sends a message to the viewer that “sex is okay, however you choose to do it.” The community members take this encoded message and begin to fit this into their own interpretation according to their own identities and messages.

Consequently, another useful theory is Walter R. Fisher’s narrative paradigm. Since fanfiction relies on storytelling to decode and reinterpret the messages, narration becomes an important communication tool necessary to try to understand the experience of the culture that is created. Fisher (1989) claims, “Viewing human communication narratively stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)” (p. 18). The audience is likely to take the message being received and reimagine and rationalize their own experiences into the context. They are retelling the story in their minds or recalling narratives to help them interpret or fit the original story into their own
meanings. For example, the viewer watches *Lost Girl* and interprets a scene where Bo, the main character, spends time flirting with Dyson with no success. They see Bo being rejected on screen and recall a time when they were rejected to help them understand Bo’s experience and *know* how she is feeling instead of just watching her act and react. Following this paradigm, to develop meaning from the main text message, viewers need to utilize Hall’s (1974/2002) model to decode the messages using their own narrative experiences, so they become part of interpreting the message being sent from their own personal narratives. A room full of twenty people can sit down to watch an episode of a television series, and nobody will be watching the same thing. Fisher’s theory shows how that is possible because everybody’s story and meanings are different.

Fisher (1989) believes that all forms of communication are essentially storytelling, and fanfiction is a community built from literal storytelling. A show’s audience is expected to interpret a message presented to them, and the audience responds and co-creates to the narrative by applying the text to their own meanings and identities. Because there are endless narratives, viewers are given unspoken permission from the producers to create their own messages, meaning, and identities from the presented text. Television has a culture all its own, since it provides a longer, serialized narrative that remains open longer than movies or books. In a movie and a book, there is an already established beginning, middle, and end, but with television, the beginning may be clear from a pilot episode, but the middle and end are slowly revealed, giving users more time to contemplate the message and feel a need to create their own message to follow their own meanings and identities from the more serialized main text.

Since meaning and identity are aspects of communication theory, the narrative paradigm explains the way human beings produce and disseminate these meanings and identities. Fisher (1989) notes, “The character of narrator(s), the conflicts, the resolutions, and the styles will vary,
but each mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a ‘truth’ about the human condition” (pp. 62-63). Similarly, Hall (1974/2002) states, “The event must become a ‘story’ before it can become a communicative event” (p. 303). Hall discusses how television inculcates these narrative conventions, and Fisher explores how these conventions help us develop our own personal narrative process. Again, fanfiction’s storytelling process provides a space for people to interact and develop a community using the main text’s narrative and fanfiction authors then interpret/decode and then encode into another story that resonates with them collectively and individually. Therefore, this study combined the two theories to understand how and why television fans use fanfiction to create meaning, identity, and community.

2.3 Online Fandom Studies as Methodological Groundwork

Online fandom studies is not a new concept. Henry Jenkins (1996) discusses a participatory culture, which has gained more momentum with the online fan. The historical aspects of fandom studies is the necessary groundwork to see how online fandom studies has developed over the last two decades. Jenkins identifies the participatory culture in the mid-1990s; since then, home computers and the Internet gradually became available, affordable, and necessary for more users in their daily lives. In “A Brief History of Media Fandom,” Francesca Coppa (2006a) states:

It’s a different thing to write about fandom historically (which presupposes the relevance of specific fandom activities rather than seeing those activities as evidence in a case study that analyzes trends in communication or the rituals of a subculture) or from a literary perspective (which presupposes that the writing is actually worth reading, rather than evidence of a fan’s behavior or ideology. (p. 41)
Before computer-mediated activity, fans were only able to interact through print-based fan magazines (fanzines) or with people they physically knew. If people lived in smaller towns, the likelihood of them finding a community within that small town that shared a similar love of the show was less likely than those who lived in larger cities. This leaves several people unfulfilled in their need to interact and search for their individual meaning. Now, users are able to find instant gratification through online participation. Previous studies have revealed how the audience is doing this and how researchers should focus their attention towards online fandom studies (Livingstone, 2004; Lotz, 2007; Meyer & Tucker, 2007; Thomas, 2006). Coppa (2006a) also mentions that ethnographic studies are the most common in online fandom studies simply because they provide this insight directly to the fan. This study will follow the groundwork and methodology utilized by previous researchers to fully establish and understand the fanfiction culture, which includes an ethnographic approach.

The changing audience is something that researchers must consider. In her book *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, Amanda D. Lotz (2007) discusses how television culture is now a post-network era, where television is consumed through various online methods instead of the traditional network-day-and-time method. She notes producers are using online fans and various mediums to help them keep and grow their audience. Sonia Livingstone (2004) questions what the audience researcher needs to do in the Electronic Age, specifically the Internet Age. She notes, “Audiences are increasingly *required* to participate audibly and physically, albeit that their activities require a subtle eye on the part of the observer” (p. 85; original emphasis). For this reason, the field of cultural studies is changing and new research needs to reflect this change, particularly in how the messages are currently being received.
Also, television reception and how the show is being watched makes a difference. How the messages are received also reflect what the audience selects and deflects from various stories and commentary. Marshall McLuhan notes, “The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 26). The television culture, or audience, uses narrative to explore the text, but the online fan now has the ability to get the original message in different ways. Helen Wood (2007) indicates the digital age of television is changing how these messages are being received. For instance, YouTube provides a place where specific clips can be shown of just one character or performer in a given episode or series, so the message that is being sent is solely for that character or performer. If a member of the community in America is reading a story based on the final episode of a series, but that final episode has not yet aired in America, then their message becomes different since they read the story before seeing the original message.

Accordingly, computer-mediated interactivity actually provides a place for producers to encode the medium to manipulate the message they want to send. Mark Andrejevic (2008) did an ethnographic study of online fans and mediated interactivity on the Television Without Pity website, which explores how the producers use this instant feedback in their own production of a series. The instant feedback provides a place for producers to read the vocal audience instead of relying solely on control groups. This allows them to know directly how an audience reacts to the messages, and knowing the medium how these messages are being delivered provide insight into the messages actually received. For example, *Lost Girl* has two complete seasons that completed airing in Canada (country of origin) on April 1, 2012, but the United States’s Syfy network did not complete airing the second season until September 14, 2012. This has affected
how people interact with the fanfiction community, since the complete message has not been received yet for some users. This affects how they respond to a story and an episode once they see it. For this reason, the third season in Canada was given a winter 2013 starting date instead of the usual fall season so that Americans and Canadians would experience the episodes together. Since *Lost Girl* fans in America were getting upset about spoilers being revealed before certain textual points aired, the show’s producers made the decision to simultaneously air the third season in Canada and America to avoid more mixed messages for online fans.

Similarly, Asim Ali (2009) did an ethnographic study of a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan community, where fans went onto the official show website to post on a discussion board. This mediated interactivity showcases a space where participatory culture becomes a direct link from audience to producer. In this case, the producers provided the community in that “if you build it, they will come” mentality. Online fandom studies should definitely consider how the community is created and who created it, as this will also determine the users. If a space is hard to find, then less users will interact. The more a space is used, the more likely it will show up on the first page of a search engine. If there is not a need for the community, then the search becomes harder to find but not always impossible. Harrington and Bielby (2007) discuss global fandom and global fan studies, and how their research has limitations within its own design merely because global fan studies is a difficult project to completely cover because of its vastness. Currently, global fan studies is more of a given or unspoken knowledge, similar to a philosophical assumption; while more work should be done on global fan studies, the necessity for this study stays with the underlying assumption that the Internet grants access to the global fan. There are several countries and cultures participating in a fanfiction community, so mentioning global fan studies
becomes important to reaching the scope of this study, though the global aspects are not what need to be considered as much as the community itself.

Since cultural studies is changing, the fieldwork is being done with more of a community and identification emphases. Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc (1999) mention a major issue in redefining cultural studies is how original theories and methods are presented as more academic and accurate. The authors note, “The new cultural studies has the potential to…initiate new alliances and dialogues between communities of thinkers who are separated by geography, language, or academic training” (p. 11). Members of a fanfiction community show this potential by placing new creations from the main text reinterpretations to their own interpretations of the text. With computer-mediated communication being global, the cornucopia of cultures and narrative experiences being brought together allow members the opportunity to create the various meanings and/or identities they need to express and find more people to instantly fulfill the need to interact with a community.

2.4 Fanfiction Culture

Fanfiction culture is a place where writers and readers can interact with the text by either creating or interacting with expanded canon or new reinterpretations of the characters. Stein (2006) explains:

Some authors write carefully within the canon, valuing fan fiction that fills in canonical spaces without breaking any canonical characterization or plot.

However, other authors define their fan fiction precisely as it breaks from canon, as is most evident in the fan understood category of the alternate universe (AU), in which fan authors take recognizable characters and place them in noncanonical contexts, so that the protagonists are recast. (p. 248)
Since Jenkins defines television fans as partaking in a participatory culture, fanfiction is one of the more detailed participatory cultures where fans build their own communities and interact with the text and messages directly. Stacey M. Lantagne (2011) presents the various arguments against fanfiction as a legal creative outlet, since writers are expanding or reinterpreting an original text, but she concludes that the list of arguments made against fanfiction “mirrors the argument for exactly why fanfiction should be permitted” (p. 175; original emphasis). While there may be some stories that question fair use and copyright laws, fanfiction exists because of fan response to a text and a need to directly identify and/or find meaning in the text.

Fanfiction allows the fans to share their own readings of the text and create a new performance of these readings. In “Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance,” Coppa (2006b) claims that writing fanfiction is actually a more performative art than a literary one. She imagines the world of the fanfiction writer as that of a dramatic performer or playwright. “This is not making authoring texts, but making productions – relaying on the audience’s shared extratextual knowledge of sets and wardrobes, of the actors’ bodies and their smiles and movements – to direct a living theatre in the mind” (Coppa, 2006b, p. 243).

Similarly, Angela Thomas (2006) claims that this performative element of fanfiction writing acts as a place for authors and readers to self reflect and understand how their own identities play a role in what they decide to read and write. She mentions the various types of fanfiction and how adolescents can find and develop their writing skills by interacting through this narrative process. Since they are already fans of a show, Thomas claims that their interests in the narrative are already present, so they place their messages into their own stories.

Also, subcultures appear within the fanfiction culture, usually regarding romantic couples or genres. Deborah Kaplan (2006) explains, “The community that produces and consumes fan
fiction is virtually the same as the community of fan critics; most fan fiction readers and authors critique and analyze source text” (p. 136). She also denotes a need for narrative structure and textual knowledge from the community to fully understand and interpret a story. Writers use these narrative structures to place the characters within various genres. Woledge (2006) discusses slash fiction, a “intimatopic” genre, as a space for two (or more) male characters to explore and express their homosocial desires and intimacy. This slash writing creates a subculture within a fanfiction community similar to that of one true pairing (OTP) subcultures, which include a romantic or sexual involvement of two specific characters from the main text. Driscoll (2006) explores the world of OTP and claims the romantic genre often seeks to replace real life sexual and romantic needs from readers and writers. She explores the use of romance and pornography in fanfiction writing and reveals the way writing and reading fulfills a fantasy that the reader or writer may need to explore in a safe space or community that accepts these fantasies.

Within the fanfiction culture, there are also non-authors. These are the lurkers, the readers and reviewers of a story, who interact with the author directly or indirectly. Often, the audience takes a direct approach by becoming beta readers for the authors. Angelina I. Karpovich (2006) examines the way the community becomes stronger by intimating these relationships. She notes that beta readers have their own reputations within the fanfiction community. They are people that a writer trusts will give them constructive criticism before they release the story or chapter to the masses. Reviewers also provide this for writers by directly responding or commenting on the narrative presented, but Karpovich also notes that there is a certain intimacy and trust that happens with the beta reader. She explains that writers who do not use beta readers reveal either egos in their writing or a better understanding of writing because of their education.
There are times when readers respond negatively to a story, and their impassioned commentary stems from their own interpretations within the main text. For example, a fanfiction reader who believes the Bo/Dyson love story is the best will avoid or negatively respond to a story that portrays the Bo/Lauren relationship as the best. Their narrative differs from that of the author’s, and they interact accordingly. Fisher (1989) suggests that a “competent audience…will know the distinctions between demonstration and argumentation, between arguers and audiences, the structure and techniques of practical reasoning, and the legitimate means of audience adaptation” (p. 131). This implies that members within a community are able to recognize what to avoid and what to find. However, researchers are finding that the audience is becoming less anonymous and more vocal (Busse & Hellekson, 2006; Coppa, 2006a; Derecho, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Karpovich, 2006).

2.5 Searching for Meaning

Finding meaning is the first step of audience interaction. Since everyone has different experiences, they will read a text differently, which produces several different meanings of one text. The audience utilize their narrative truths to decode the messages and construct a reaction and meaning from the episode or series presented. John Fiske (1987) claims, “The television text has to be read and enjoyed by a diversity of social groups, so its meanings must be capable of being inflected in a number of different ways. The television text is therefore more polysemic and more open than earlier theorists allowed for” (p.66). Since the Internet has made interaction with the text more global, the various readings have also managed to allow for people who have never met to build a community. Hall (1974/2002) signifies that the audience embraces the text in one of three ways: resistance, negotiation, and acceptance. Whichever approach is taken
determines how an audience responds and how these fans build the community from these varying encoded and decoded messages.

Fans find their individual meanings from their narrative responses to the messages. With fanfiction, the authors and readers are expanding their meanings through public dialogue. In his work on transmedia storytelling, a narrative format that spans the original story across diverse mediums, Henry Jenkins (2007) states, “Consumers become hunters and gatherers moving back across the various narratives trying to stitch together a coherent picture from the dispersed information” (para. 10). Consequently, viewers take the main text and begin to interpret and interact more with the show on individual levels while increasing and fulfilling their need for communication with others. This is how fanfiction stories are born: through this developed narrative meaning. Similar to how fans create videos to showcase their love of a series or character or couple through the use of music (Hill, 2009), fanfiction writers are pulling together from a created story to produce a different picture that fits their meaning. Again, a storytelling method is established to decode the messages so that the fandom either blossoms or dies. If the encoded message is too obvious and not easily decoded for other meanings, then the fan community cannot survive.

Predictably, fans create this community by resisting, negotiating, or accepting the fanfiction stories that are presented to them. While fanfiction writers are busy developing their own meaning from the actual show, readers are responding to the created text just like they would the original text because the individual story either does or does not fit their own personal meaning. Kathryn Hill (2009) denotes, “Media fandom not only disseminates but constantly reinterprets” (p. 173). When the writer creates something new, and readers respond, they are in process of creating a community. Louis Ellen Stein (2006) presents the new media as a basis for
how the stories are being told. Whether they are through live journals or expansive tales, she notes that new creations are still limited to their original text. Without the basic knowledge or awareness of the original encoded message, even if it is resisted or negotiated, the decoded message within a story does not coincide with the community’s needs. This is where the obsessed fan, those rabid in their belief for one specific meaning (i.e. Bo’s soul mate is Dyson; Bo belongs with Lauren), gives popular culture (particularly convention goers) a bad reputation within the academic world.

Online fans are often criticized for being overly obsessive with the text. Additionally, their meanings are often criticized within the fandom, which starts subcultures within the larger community. Meanings sometimes do not coincide with others and arguments surface about the one true meaning. Fans take away from the text only the things that they want to see; this comes from their direct narrative model and experiences. Jenkins (1992) defines “textual poachers” as those fans who take what they want from the text and create their own participatory cultures. This is also how the audience uses the Internet and these cultures to search for identity.

2.6 Searching for Identity

Often, members in the fanfiction community are also searching for identity through fan-made creations. Whether the producers encode a certain message, the decoded message determines the identity comparison that an individual reads. John Fiske (1987) notes, “The cultural specificity or ideology of a narrative lies in the way this deep structure is transformed into apparently different stories, that is, in which actions and individuals are chosen to perform the functions and character roles” (p. 139). For example, female leads in a science fiction series are expected to exhibit more masculine features in their appearance and personalities. They displace gender roles by still conforming to stereotypical gender definitions and formulas on
what it takes for a hero to physically fight a villain. Bo from the Canadian series *Lost Girl* is a prime example of this, since the lead character seeks to keep her “normal” feminine identity but is still expected to lead the collective team and defeat the monster of the week, even if that monster is real life. People involved in this show’s fanfiction community have used these narrative tropes and messages to help them parallel and uncover their own meanings and identities, and they publicly post and interact online so that they can voice and fulfill a need to communicate with others and build a community.

Computer-mediated communication has provided a space for community to exist, which does not require a person to reveal other parts of their identities other than their direct responses and interactions with the television text. However, Meyer and Tucker (2007) posit that the Internet is providing a space for more visibility than anonymity. Collier, Lumadue, and Wotten (2009) did a study on lesbian fans and their interaction with the texts online with the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* television shows. In their study, “participants reported strong needs to clarify confusion about their sexual identity, decrease isolation/develop community, and see images that affirmed and normalized lesbian feelings and experiences” (p. 594). Fisher (1989) claims that the audience identifies with a narrative when the story offers “good reasons,” the underlying message that is being sent (p. 194). The decoded messages are allowing for the user to not only find and accept their own identities, but there is also the opportunity to build a community with those who are outside of this identity and recognize the underlying message as true or acceptable. This is Hall’s (1974/2002) model in action. An example of this would be heterosexual users who positively respond to the lesbian text or subtext in a series of episode because the narrative qualities fit within a pattern of storytelling. While they do not directly understand or desire a lesbian relationship, they are able to recognize,
without prejudice, chemistry and what a character actually needs or wants in the overall narrative instead of what the producers and writers are trying to force on the character because of heteronormative ideals and censorship.

Fanfiction communities are providing a space for people to build a cultural identity, which exposes the identity on a global level. Hall (1996) defines identity as the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. (pp. 5-6; original emphasis)

Exposure is one way to mark an identity to help change be made. This interpellation by fans not only gives them an identity, but it gives them a space to recognize the injustice they may feel or the change they feel needs to be made. Natasha Whiteman’s (2009) study focuses on how fan identity is revealed using external and internal threats to the fandom, showcasing how fan interactivity becomes a catalyst for expressing the identity and anything that may threaten or oppose it. Similarly, Scodari (2003) concludes that the influx of more strong female characters becomes problematic for the cultural identity being expressed online. She states, “If the labor involved in reading against the grain mitigates determination of resistance, then such exertion in the service of hegemony is even more troubling” (pp.125-126). Still, there are various fanfiction writers and readers expressing their identities, regardless of accepted or good reasons.

2.7 Creation Culture and Finding an Outlet for Expression

A creation culture is one where the audience produces their own interpretations of a series. This includes fanfiction, fan videos, and fan made art. Previously, fan creations were
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generally only available in various fanzines, which were magazines created by fans. Now, the
Internet provides an outlet to produce these zines for free with websites that either cover the
expansive of fandom (fanfiction.net), or sites that cater to one specific fandom or one specific
pairing or character within a fandom. For fans to be able to create new things to showcase their
love or hate of a series, they must first communicate with the narrative of the main text.

The creation culture provides a new narrative that either coincides or delineates from the
original text. This is what Henry Jenkins (1992) calls textual poaching, where fans are interacting
with the text by playing with the legalities of the original text. Even though obsessive fans were
once criticized for ruining the main text (i.e. Trekkies), the Internet has shifted the television
culture into one that is much more accepting of the participatory elements.

In reviewing fan writing, Jenkins (1988) also claims that fan writers are generally more
female because women are more likely to express themselves. In her research on resistance and
science fiction television, Scodari (2003) notes that Jenkins’s conclusion is still accurate, since
women are more likely to express their resistance to the science fiction genre’s patriarchal
implications. While this still may be true of certain fandoms, other fandoms employ the opposite
of resistance necessary, since the main text itself is a resistance to patriarchy (i.e. Lost Girl).
Therefore, the narratives shift more to include the identity and meaning through feminist
readings of the text, which may account for more female than male creators. Abigail Derecho
(2006) argues that fanfiction is archontic literature, where “the larger philosophical import of this
type of writing is that it undermines conventional notions of authority, boundaries, and property”
(p. 72). She notes that fanfiction writers are exploring the subordinate, which includes gender
and minority concerns.
Consequently, fans take their meanings and identities and try to place themselves directly into the narrative. Chander and Sunder (2007) discuss the use of the “Mary Sue” character in fanfiction and the legal fair use of adding the personal self into the main text. Paul Booth (2008) also notes, “In creating an identity that bridges the divide between person and role, the poster also enables a way of tying narrative and identity together through the changing of a narrative” (p. 527; original emphasis). By adding the self into the narrative, the writer becomes one that seeks to establish his or her own meaning and identity and find those similar to them. However, as Chander and Sunder (2007) and Hellekson and Busse (2006) present the “Mary Sue” stories as generally bad writing, and that the communities are able to recognize this because of the lack of flaws in the main character. Instead, the “Mary Sue” creation stories are meant to represent a need for the author to fulfill a fantasy by placing themselves into the main text world and discounting the established main character(s).

Considering cultural studies, fans within the creation culture are all seeking to fulfill certain communication needs that are not easily or appropriately met in their real lives. According to Christine A. James (2010), fans are interacting with complete strangers but do not seem to mind, especially when those strangers are the performers or creators themselves. While generally focused on the fan-celebrity relationship, James’s conclusions are easily applied to the creator and audience in creation culture, where strangers participate in ethical scenarios through their interactions and through building these communities and publicly revealing their identities and meanings.

2.8 Rationale

Previous research shows how computer-mediated communication (CMC) plays a pivotal role in defining the 21st century culture and how much change can happen within just a decade.
Thurlow, Lengel, and Tomic (2011) state, “To know what a field is about is really only to know what people who describe themselves as members of the field are actually doing” (p. 15). This is equally true for current studies in television fandoms. Coppa (2006a) mentions, “Not only has a comprehensive history of media fandom not been written, but there also have been very few histories of individual fandoms and the works of art they produce” (p. 41). Since the Internet and mobile devices are providing more opportunities for television consumption and interaction, research has and is being conducted on various aspects of fandoms and CMC’s effects on the fandoms, including the continuation and/or reinterpretation of the series and/or episode main text through the development of fanfiction (Coppa, 2006b; Derecho, 2006; Driscoll, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Karpovich, 2006; Lantagne, 2011; Stein, 2006). However, there is a lack of exploration on the intersection of identity and meaning and fan interactions with the main story.

While research has been done to establish identity and meaning from a text, there is still a gap in the research on how members of these communities are finding and/or interacting within these identities and meanings. Since every text can have multiple meanings, the participatory television culture becomes even more important with the global response that CMC provides. The aim of this study was to answer Meyer and Tucker’s (2007) call, “More work must be done from a qualitative perspective that addresses how fans utilize, participate in, and enjoy their respective fandoms” (p. 115). If more research is done on these cultures and subcultures, then fan studies do not become obsolete, since the fan and community are actually the direct subjects beings studied. Instead of speculation on the idea of a participatory culture that many researchers after Jenkins have observed, this study’s purpose was to uncover exactly how and why this participatory culture exists by closely examining one particular fanfiction community and how encoding/decoding messages and narrative methods help fulfill communication needs.
RQ1: How and why do television fans use online fanfiction to interact with meaning, identity, and community?
Chapter 3: Scope and Methodology

For this study, the research was designed to answer the research question of how and why television fans use online fanfiction to interact and find identity, meaning, and community by decoding/encoding messages and through narrative storytelling. The scope and methodology are grounded on Fisher’s (1989) Narrative Paradigm theory and Hall’s (1974/2006) Decoding/Encoding Theory. This chapter explains the scope of the study, the ethnographic methodology, the ethical considerations, and the validity and reliability of the study and design.

3.1 Scope of this Study

In order to understand the research design, a description of the communities in question must be established first. While fanfiction is read and written in the private setting, the online setting provides the community aspect. Therefore, it is important to study and note the places where these instances occur. Since the breadth of television fandom is much broader than any individual research could cover, this study narrowed focus to one particular fanfiction community: *Lost Girl.*

Since online fans utilize various methods to consume fanfiction, the website fanfiction.net is the one most closely observed, since it can be accessed more globally and stories can be presented in other languages. While this study did focus on one particular website, live journals, tumblrs, and individual author pages were briefly observed. These particular sites did not get much attention, since they focus more on the individual identity and meaning than on the community.

Participants in this study included the entire community on the fanfiction.net show sites and forums for *Lost Girl.* Since the research used virtual ethnography, the participant pool expanded to a more global level with emphasis on these two series. While the study is limited to
English-speaking participants, the availability of these sources in other countries allows access to anywhere with Internet and lack of censorship to these sites. Therefore, the participants expanded over six continents. Participation for the ethnographic aspects was open to anyone, as they had the autonomous ability to review and/or comment on the posts. Additionally, since this design was culturally diverse, participants varied in identity (i.e. education, socioeconomic, race, nationality, gender). This provided an understanding of how much of an impact and exactly who is interacting more or less within the community.

Participants were found through the Fanfiction.net website. Posted reviews and stories from fanfiction.net users allowed the researcher to directly link and observe changes to the particular community. Of the 431 stories posted at the time of the study, 223 stories were closely observed and examined. Since several of the stories were one chapter stories, only 223 stories were chosen for this sample, so that the researcher could observe interactions with the multi-chapter stories, since the one chapter stories did not house much interaction. All 431 were read and noted for theme and characters. With the 223 stories followed, the researcher read the stories to uncover common themes, elements, identity markers, and varying aspects from the reinterpretation of the main text. Also, the research read and observed similar patterns with the posted reviews. Since participant observation happened in a publically accessed site, informed consent was not required.

3.2 Methodology

This study consisted of a qualitative approach that combines people or behavior-oriented research, observational research, and interviews. Since the research question asks how and why television fans use online to build community, identity, and meaning, the study narrowed the focus to one particular television series’ fans—Lost Girl (which is still currently in production)—
and how fans of this series use fanfiction online to discover these elements. To accomplish this, a virtual ethnographic method was used as an aspect to the qualitative features of the research design (Hine, 2000), so that the study would fully “observe how people interact with each other and with their environment” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 138). For the purposes of this study, development of this ethnography occurred through content analysis by reading, writing, and reviewing various fanfiction stories, which helped to discover main themes and the various identities and meanings within the text. Then, participant observation was done with the community when the researcher wrote a story for the community and posted reviews to stories; again, this method was used to uncover meaning and identity but also allowed insight into the community aspects. Demographics of the community produced from interactivity was completed to see how many people (and from where) so that the community could be analyzed more from a global and multi-cultural perspective. Finally, interviews with a purposive and quota sample within the community allowed the researcher to answer why members interacted with fanfiction online while also gaining direct correlation to meaning, identity, and community.

3.3 Content Analysis

To answer how fanfiction online is being used to find meaning, identity, and community, the researcher first utilized content analysis of the Lost Girl fanfiction community on fanfiction.net. This was done by reading the 431 stories posted and following 223 of these stories from the Lost Girl fanfiction community on fanfiction.net. In addition, the researcher read and followed the reviews for each of these stories. Common themes and pairings were discovered throughout the community. Since this narrative method of storytelling reveals identity and meaning, content analysis provided a good starting point to uncover how members were interacting with the text. Fisher (1989) claims:
The story provides good reasons to accept not only this truth, but others as well….We learn these truths by dwelling in the characters in the story, by observing the outcomes of the several conflicts that arise throughout it, by seeing the unity of characters and their actions, and by comparing the truths to the truths we know to be true from our own lives. (p. 78)

By reading and interacting with these stories, the researcher is able to uncover exactly how members of the community are finding truth through the decoding (Hall, 1974/2002) of these messages by telling their own stories or interpretations.

Since this show is young when the study was completed (two seasons aired and third season finished with production), the stories available were not as plentiful as they would have been with another series. While *Lost Girl* has 432 stories posted on fanfiction.net, other communities have more users and stories posted. For example, the show *Glee* has 82,613 stories posted on the site and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has 44,864 stories posted. In the television section on fanfiction.net, only ten shows had more than 20,000 stories posted. This included shows mostly still airing. However, the same limitation is also beneficial to the study, since the researcher was able to observe a current show’s fandom interactivity with fanfiction. The show is also not aired on a basic cable channel, which makes the members more interactive with the show because of meaning, identity, and community. Choosing this smaller, younger community provided the researcher the necessary availability to read every story posted, which would have been more difficult with time limitations of this study with a community of over 20,000 stories.

3.4 Participant Observation

Through the content analysis, ethnographic data was gathered through direct participation within the fanfiction community. The research was designed to incorporate the researcher
directly into the community; therefore, the researcher wrote a multi-chapter fanfiction story (36 chapters, 139,100 words) for the Lost Girl community and posted it on Fanfiction.net, where readers had the opportunity to directly review or private message the researcher about the chapter/story posted. Participants also had the option to add a Story Alert and/or Author Alert (for messages to be sent every time activity was posted) and/or add a Favorite Story and/or Favorite Author (which shows on their member pages) through reviews and private messaging.

To ensure identification as a study, the researcher posted an author’s disclaimer at the beginning of each story to identify herself as a researcher and that information would be gathered from the reviews and story interaction:

I do not own any of these characters or the premise of the show. They are directly owned by the respective parties, and some of the dialogue in this is directly credited to the writers of the Lost Girl series. I am not making any money for this, though I am using it to gather research on how fanfiction works within a television fandom.

This early disclaimer was posted at the beginning of the first chapter, along with spoiler alerts for the actual series, rating, and story summary. From the content analysis, the researcher was able to establish this as a common fanfiction practice and introduction to the story, which allowed for the ethical principles of both understanding and induction.

For the multi-chapter story, the researcher posted at least one chapter daily (there were two days where two chapters were posted) over the period of 34 days. This provided an opportunity to gather and observe more data and how and how often the members of the community were interacting with the story. Reviews for the story were also observed, since there was a more direct understanding of why a particular meaning and/or identity were established from the story. The researcher directly wrote the story using her own identity and meaning,
which followed Hall’s (1974/2002) theory of encoding, and then the readers and reviewers were left to decode the fanfiction story, which itself was a decoded message from the encoded original text of the *Lost Girl* series.

Obstacles to this particular method deal with the creative aspect of physically writing a fiction story and the time limitations for writing a 36 chapter, 139,100 word story. Regarding the time limitation, a shorter story would have provided ample data, though the multi-chapter story did provide more opportunity to gather observations over a longer period of time. A one chapter story was not used, as it would not have provided enough information to answer the research question completely. However, the bigger limitation is the ability of the researcher to write creatively. Since the researcher had a background in creative writing, the research (and longer story) was easier to accomplish. Again, a shorter story would have worked just as well, as long as the author’s meaning (mostly of characters and themes from the main text) and identification with the show were placed directly into the narrative. One thing the community aspect of the study does well here is that the members will mostly be honest about whether a story follows their own interpretations of the text, whether they like the story’s content, and if the writing style is easily accessible (i.e. grammar, format).

### 3.5 Demographics of the Community

Fanfiction.net also provides statistical data on readers by story total, story chapter, and country of origin, which is separated into daily and monthly reports. To understand the communitarian aspects more, these charts were used from the participant observation method (written story) to uncover the demographics of the community. Participants included anybody who ever opened the story and/or chapter. This provided quantitative analysis on the fanfiction readership patterns more wholly than the sample who participated directly through reviews and
private messaging. This proves important for this study, since the number of members actually interacting and voicing opinions on the main text (through writing stories) or through the posted stories (through reviews) does not accurately reflect the total number of people actually relating to the *Lost Girl* series and/or the fanfiction stories presented.

Statistics showcased the number of participants to a particular artifact and showed the global mapping of these participants. For example, Fanfiction.net does direct mapping of how many participants to a particular artifact are coming from what country. This enables the authors to reveal how often, when, and from where their story or a particular chapter is being accessed. From the direct participation with writing stories, the author was able to collect data and statistics from her stories. This provides the study a closer examination into those that do directly interact with the series by voicing their opinions (either through stories, reviews, or private messages) and gives a better understanding of why these particular members connect more openly with the community.

Demographics can only provide numbers and country of origin of the audience of one particular story (the researcher’s). This does not provide much information to help answer why and how these users are interacting with fanfiction online. However, it does provide a better assessment of the community aspect of the research question. The study does a good job in recognizing the differences between the types of members within the community, which makes the purposive sample for the interview process and the analysis of both the content analysis and participant observation more credible.

### 3.6 Interview Process

With research collected from content analysis and participant observation, the researcher managed to develop a better purposive sample of participants for the semi-structured interview
questions with a bonus to open an informal dialogue with a more quota sample of those participants interested or available. For the interview process, participants were pooled from a purposive sample of reviewers and authors; these sample members were asked until fifteen participants were collected. Casual participants, or lurkers, were not included in this study since they were not available. However, a disclaimer was placed in the author’s written story for the direct participant observation method to extend an invitation to any interested in participating in a private capacity.

To avoid an untrue phased assertion within the questions, the researcher made sure that the written story for the direct participation had managed to establish a place for the researcher in the community. This also allowed for a more honest rapport with the community, so participants would be more likely to interact or respond. H. Russell Bernard (2011) notes, “The more you seem to know, the more comfortable people feel about talking to you and the less people feel they are actually divulging anything. They are not the ones who are giving away the ‘secrets of the group’” (p.165, original emphasis). The interview process was where the ethnographic principle of understanding became the most relevant.

Initial private messages were sent to the purposive sample to find interest in participating in the research, which started out with a short note identifying the person’s role or stories within the community, then identified the research topic. This example shows how initial contact was made:

I have to give a shout out to tell you how much I love (and miss) "Moonlighting." It's one of the most refreshing, well written, and interesting Lost Girl fancies I have read thus far. Congrats on winning that award, too!
I'm conducting thesis research on computer mediated communication use on television fandoms (i.e. fanfiction, fan videos) with an emphasis on Lost Girl (and Buffy the Vampire Slayer). It's actually what brought me here myself and prompted me to start writing.

You wouldn't randomly be interested in answering some "interview" questions? It's extremely informal and anonymous. I need [15] people and you're actually the perfect candidate. Feel free to say no, though; I won't be offended. It offers nothing and takes about 20 minutes (if that) to complete. Again, it is completely anonymous unless you designate that I can quote you (anonymously or with your handle). I am looking for interests and usage more than anything. (Hiker Chick, personal communication, August 6, 2012)

Since this was sent through private message to the individual, the researcher showed an interest in the person so that the claim “you’re actually the perfect candidate” would be taken more seriously. Also, the first paragraph directly identifies a story written by this member and also shows the researcher’s ethnographic induction into the community by identifying that she was paying attention to the other aspects of the community outside of fanfiction.net, which included a user-voted community awards poll.

If the members responded, they were given the initial interview questions which focused on usage with the fandom online (including usage with other online media, such as social networking and YouTube), interest with and within the show, how the show was being consumed (i.e. streaming, cable, torrents, or short clips), identification with the series and/or character(s), and community. (See Appendix A for the list of interview questions.) Some questions directly related to identity, such as “Do you identify with any character within the
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series? Why?” These questions were developed to uncover identity and meaning, using Fisher’s (1989) narrative paradigm and Hall’s (1974/2002) decoding/encoding. Fisher (1989) notes, “All rhetorical interaction is manipulative in the sense that communicators intend messages, and all communicators are strategic in their chosen causes, selection of materials, designs of composition, and styles of presentation” (p. 117). The manipulative rhetoric presented in the stories caused the researcher to develop questions like “What about *Lost Girl* interests you as an individual?” This helped to identify meaning. Finally, the question “Have you managed to form any relationships or fulfill any communication needs through your interaction with the series?” presents a way to identify how members are interacting within the community and using these interactions to fulfill Christians’ (2007) communitarian ethics.

When they sent back the interview questions, the participants were given the option to opt in or out of a longer private conversation regarding the shows and their individual usage of fanfiction. Tony L. Whitehead (2005) discusses a method called “natural conversational ethnographic interview,” where the interviewer conducts more informal, conversational techniques. After the semi-structured interview questions, some members did participate in the longer conversational interview through private messaging. Whitehead (2005) notes, “Structure begins to develop as the ethnographer may come to influence the direction of the conversation because of the research paradigm that he or she brings to the conversational scene” (p. 16). The conversations with the eight participants, which included a blend of authors and reviewers, allowed for more insight into the culture.

Still, the interview process was limited since the community is small, as well. Again, this limitation is also a benefit for this study, since the smaller community provided a better, more accurate purposive sampling and provided the researcher enough time to continue several
conversations at once. What this study did well with the interviews, besides the purposive sampling and semi-structured interview questions, was the continued natural conversation, as it provided the researcher more direct access and experience within the community, so answering the research question fully was not difficult.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethnographic research deals with specific and general ethical considerations. On a more general note, consent is an important element to any research. Participants had the option to reveal their real identities (which were already hidden through pen names), stay with their pen names, or change to anonymity. While the study does not directly quote any reviews from the fanfiction sections, the researcher still added a disclaimer to the author’s note section of her own story to let the audience know that observation and research was happening. In the story’s disclaimer section, the author identified herself as a researcher. Similarly, when contacting the individual participants, the author identified herself as a researcher again. This guaranteed informed consent was being given and that the researcher was clearly identified.

Age was another ethical factor considered, as these artifacts were easily accessible to minors, as well. To prevent legal issues, the researcher accessed personal user pages to ensure age appropriateness for legal consent for the interview process. Since the publicly accessed areas of the site do not provide much opportunity for anonymity, even with or without age appropriate consent, the researcher also contacted the user directly if using something from these areas was used. “Even if anonymity is not possible, researchers should protect confidentiality” (Neuman, 2006, p. 139). To ensure confidentiality, the study used more generalized observation and analysis than actual direct quotes from the public sector. Private messaging and email (the
private sector) provided direct consent and age appropriateness, so that the researcher could still use direct quotes when necessary in the analysis and discussion sections.

Ethical aspects related directly to ethnographic research are the use of naturalism, understanding, and induction. This study conducted a combination of an understanding and induction approach. To answer the research question, the researcher needed to have an understanding “of the culture in which action takes place” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 142) and become inducted into the culture itself. For these reasons, concerns about privacy became an issue, despite the fact that the posts and artifacts were directly accessible on a public, global facility. Private messages and email were encouraged for those wanting to participate but wanting to keep their answers private, and those participants in the interview process were asked and pooled accordingly.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Since this study measures one specific community, the validity and reliability of the design were considered. The research was intended to study how and why television fans are interacting and reacting with fanfiction online to uncover identity, meaning, and community, and the design was developed to measure exactly this. According to Rubin et al (2010), “Reliability refers to how dependable, stable, consistent, and repeatable measures are in a study” (p. 203). However, ethnographic research focuses reliability more on whether the study can be repeated. Even though the design can be repeated, subjectivity is still possible in another study since ethnography means that a particular community and group of people were observed at a certain time. Therefore, the design can be repeated, but the results may vary.

Similarly, the validity of an ethnographic study also varies from other qualitative and quantitative methods, since the community can change. However, the design was focused on
Fisher and Hall’s theories, so the soundness of the research design was established by following these two theories closely in the design. Since the research asked a question and the design observed an exact point in time and two specific communities at different times in their development, the design remains valid since the design was developed for this ethnographic purpose.

Since this study observed a series that was currently young and still in production, the reliability could change as the series progresses, as well. This is why two television series and fanfiction communities could be used for comparison in the study instead of only one that is currently in production. While *Lost Girl*’s fanfiction community provided information on how the fanfiction user interacts with a show as it airs, the community could change as the show continues and/or after it ends. This study, like all ethnography, examines one community at a given point in time, so results from redoing this study or a study on another community could vary. Despite this, the ethnographic method still provided the best research method to answer the research question and uncover exactly how and why television fans are using fanfiction online to find identity, meaning, and community.
Chapter 4: The Study

In this study, the research examined fanfiction communities online, particularly that of the *Lost Girl* television show, and how and why the members of these communities interact to find meaning, identity, and community. While there is existing literature on the subject of fanfiction culture (Coppa, 2006; Derecho, 2006), television culture (Fiske, 1987), and participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992), there are still gaps in the literature. Previous literature has examined how people are interacting with fanfiction and has revealed common themes or types of fanfiction; however, there is a lack of research on why fans choose these particular storylines and/or these particular fandoms. From initial observation, the researcher uncovered common themes with members using fanfiction stories to help them reveal or find identity, meaning, and community.

Through ethnographic research on the culture, the researcher uncovered exactly how and why members on the fanfiction.net website were using fanfiction online to interact with meaning, identity, and/or community.

4.1 Data Analysis

The first measurement tool was content analysis, where the researcher read and closely observed over 223 stories from the *Lost Girl* community to uncover common themes, meaning, and identity and to examine how members were participating through stories and reviews. Notebook logs were kept on common themes, characters, and storylines. Additionally, reviews on the stories were read and categorized for positive and negative responses and how closely each review followed the fanfiction story and the main text story.

Using the ethnographic principles of induction and understanding, the researcher directly participated in the culture by writing a multi-chapter story to uncover how the meaning, identity,
and community was happening directly, to get a direct feel and observation on how authors must feel, and to collect demographics on how many members were participating and/or accessing the story, which helped to show how the number of members and non members interacting made a difference in who was openly searching for meaning, identity, and community. Direct statistics were categorized for demographics and usage. Notebook logs were kept on the responses to the story and individual chapters.

Finally, in order to discover why members interacted with this culture, semi-structured interviews and continued conversations provided the proper insight into why these fanfiction readers and writers chose this particular method of participating with the show online. Responses were organized and coded for similarities and differences, and each respondent’s answers was catalogue for further review.

4.2 What is *Lost Girl*?

In order to understand the context of the study, some information on the show is needed. *Lost Girl* is a Canadian television series that began in 2010 and finished airing its second season in 2012; a third season will begin in January of 2013. The show is about a succubus, Bo, who was raised in the human world. A succubus is a female humanoid creature that feeds off of people’s sexual energy. Bo does not know that she is a succubus and has never heard of the “fae,” which is the group of fairy-tale and mythological type creatures that exists under the radar from the human world and has existed for centuries. Since Bo was adopted as a baby to human parents (who were hyper religious farmers), she does not know about her powers until she loses her virginity her senior year of high school. Since she killed the young man by “sucking his chi” during the act, she panics and disappears. She moves around a lot and is “lost” because she has
no idea why she keeps having these urges, can “feed” from people’s energy, and keeps waking up next to dead lovers. She feels guilt for killing people and runs whenever this happens.

When the series starts, Bo is working in a metro-based city as a bartender and attempts to save a girl who has been drugged. To do this, she kills the man who drugged the girl; her “sloppy kill” is found and the fae discover her and do not believe she has no knowledge of them. They are surprised to find she does not, so they put her to a test to choose one of the two political-based parties (Light or Dark). After she completes the test, she chooses neither, claiming that she wants to stay unaligned and be with humans. Since the fae believe themselves superior creatures, they own humans and treat them as just food and as slaves. According to them, nobody has ever been unaligned before, and the leaders of the Dark and Light discuss having Bo killed to prevent anyone else from getting any ideas. However, a man convinces them to learn more about Bo first, since it is strange that she could pass the test without any knowledge or training. They agree, and Bo becomes a private investigator, taking on cases from both the Light and Dark.

The fae world is full of secrets and old laws, and Bo fights her way through them. She eventually meets her birth mother, discovers that the Blood King (the old fae ruler) is her grandfather, learns control of her sexual urges and how not to kill when she feeds, uncovers dormant powers, and attempts to stay true to her ideals and ethics. Since she was raised with humans, she does not have the fae superiority complex about humans, so she often interacts with them. She even has an emotional and physical relationship with one: Lauren, who is a doctor owned by the Light fae. She also has physical relationships with several fae and learns the difference between the powers.

Since she is a succubus, sexuality is a major theme of the series, though it is never labeled or discussed. Another common theme in the series is independence, as Bo tries to prove
that someone can be unaligned and not show fealty to either side just to survive. Love and lust
and the difference between the two is also a common theme, as Bo tries to stay with her
emotional responses and learn to still be a succubus, even when everyone (even the human
doctor) tells her that monogamy is not possible. She often claims, “I am more than my species,”
which also shows the Other as a common theme since she is seeking to not be like any other
succubus or fae. These elements, coupled with weekly battles and sexuality, provide the
background and tone for the show, and this stays true in the fanfiction for the series.

4.3 Content Analysis

Through reading the entire 431 stories in the Lost Girl fanfiction community, the
common themes from the show (mentioned above) were observed. Also, character identification,
subtext, and language were noted.

Love, Lust, and Romance

All 431 stories presented a theme of love, lust, or both. The themes of love and lust – and
the struggle to differentiate between the two – are directly taken from the main text. Therefore,
the fact that all 431 stories, even those without plot but for pure “smut” purposes, portray love,
lust, or both, becomes important in developing the community aspect and not just identity and
meaning. Since the main character, Bo, is a literal sex monster, sexual themes are mentioned in
most stories, but not all stories have detailed sexual scenes. Driscoll (2006b) claims, “Beyond
market-framed generic conventions, romance consumers share, trade, and communicate through
romance, and romance is often understood as representing that community’s shared interests.
Porn exaggerates the discreteness of its consumption, representing itself as producing highly
specialized communities and solitary consumption” (p. 92). For this reason, the Lost Girl
fanfiction community is broken down into smaller subcommunities based on romantic pairings.
The majority of the stories present one particular main text romantic pairing, Bo/Lauren, housing 225 posted (51.7% of the total stories). Since these two characters are part of the main text triangle between Bo, Lauren, and Dyson, this is particularly interesting to note because there are only 23 total Bo/Dyson stories. The Bo/Dyson romance in the main text gets the most screen time, while the Bo/Lauren romance stays in what one participant calls “the angst zone.” If these two are presented with any happiness in the main text, they are usually back in the angst zone by the time the episode ends. Kaplan (2006) notes, “In the interpretative community of fandom, one individual’s interpretation in a work of fan fiction can inform another fan’s reaction to a later moment in the text” (p. 136). The lack of screen time for the Bo/Lauren romance is interpreted through the fandom, which create further meaning from the main text and play out fantastical scenarios, expand on scenes, or rewrite scenes to fit their own interpretations. One person in the community reads the story, then another, and eventually, the meaning and interpretation of the encoding done within the main text becomes a starting point for a subcommunity. Since the Bo/Dyson relationship is the one with the most screen time, and Dyson is Bo’s first relationship in the show, this interest through the online fanfiction community leaning towards the Bo/Lauren pairing is of particular importance since the main Bo/Dyson relationship is only 5.3% of the stories presented on fanfiction.net.

**Otherness and Independence**

In the stories, the most prevalent example of Otherness is within the Bo/Lauren and the Kenzi-centric stories. Several Alternate Universe (AU) fics explore this more than those stories that are reinterpretations or expansions from the main text. In these AU stories, the main character usually is defined by his or her Otherness. In stories that are Dyson-centric, the fact that he is a wolf shifter becomes a main point for the story’s action. In “The Skin He’s In,” the
author explores wolf history and Dyson’s “private life.” In stories that are Lauren-centric, the fact that she is human in the fae world (and her awkward “geekiness” and scientific rationality) are major aspects of her character and the story’s action. For example, in “Moonlighting,” Lauren is presented as a “bad ass” artifact hunter, which gives her character more independence within the story that she is not granted in the original series; however, Lauren’s original characteristics are still present as she tries to place herself in this new role. Similarly, Kenzi-centric stories follow her Otherness as a human in the fae world. In “The Ties That Bind,” the author presents Kenzi as the main character, trying to take lead in an original character (not from the original series; completely written by the author) romance while staying undercover to solve a mystery in a fae brothel despite being human. While some of the Bo-centric stories do put Otherness aside, several of the Bo stories do showcase how she is trying to be more than a succubus. Most often, this is related to her romantic pairings and ideals. In the majority of the Bo/Dyson stories, sex is the first component and then romance is considered, which follows the main text (i.e. “Dyson’s Claim”). However, in the Bo/Lauren stories, romance is considered and sex is tied in where applicable (i.e. “What It Takes”). In the series, Bo/Lauren do not have as much screen time and have only had sex twice by the end of season two (both times had negative consequences afterwards), so the fanfiction writers are taking a main text pairing, which is Other than the heteronormative, and are expanding and retelling the story to showcase the Other in more detail.

Another common theme in the series is independence. While this is not the most prevalent theme in the stories, it is still present in most as an underlying need. There are none that only focus on independence; this is usually tied in with the Other or romantic aspect. The majority of the stories with independence revolve around the Bo/Lauren pairing, where Bo is
trying to obtain or desires for Lauren to gain her freedom from slavery to the Light fae. For example, in “Mad World,” Bo discovers why Lauren is enslaved to the Light Fae (an alternate universe version that does not follow the original show’s reasons); the couple proceeds to battle to gain Lauren her independence. Similarly, some Lauren-centric stories present Lauren herself as desiring this, though the majority of the stories have Bo as the one who voices or acts upon this desire (i.e. “Lauren’s Lament”). Since she has been in servitude to the Light for five years, in the main text, Lauren’s character has learned to adapt and stay under the radar. She has learned to follow the rules and has become a trusted ward of the Ash, the Light’s leader. In the show, Bo often finds herself clashing with the Ash and demanding Lauren’s freedom. Eventually, her actions unveil the reasons for Lauren’s servitude, and Lauren herself begins to rebel. In the fanfiction stories, this need/want for independence is taken further, especially in first person Lauren stories, where the reader sees what the stoic doctor is actually thinking, or at least what the fanfiction author believes she is or should be thinking. A great example of this is “The Human Doctor,” which is told from Lauren’s POV as the action of the original series progresses; however, the story takes an alternate universe approach by telling Lauren’s story from her childhood to the end of season two (which the author did change to procure a happy ending).

**Subtext**

However, subtextual pairings are also presented, though not as much in quantity. These mostly involve secondary character Kenzi, Bo’s best friend and sidekick. There are no stories presented that follow her one main text (the actual show) relationship (that lasted eight episodes), but there are 104 of the total stories that present her in relationships based on the subtext from the show; there are also 13 stories that are strictly Kenzi-centric that either follow her POV of the events within the series or place her in relationships with original characters. There are 56 stories
that present Kenzi and Dyson together (47.8% of the Kenzi-centric stories; 13% of the total stories), 13 stories that place Kenzi and Hale (another minor character, Dyson’s sidekick) together (11.1% of the Kenzi-centric stories; 3% of the total stories), and 35 stories that either place Kenzi and Bo in a romantic relationship or examine their friendship more closely (29.9% of the Kenzi-centric stories; 8.1% of the total stories). Besides Lauren, who is 97.3% of the time paired with Bo, Kenzi is the other secondary character who gets the most stories. This is important to note, as it shows the importance of Kenzi to the main text, which translates over to the fanfiction community. Most of the comments in the reviews for these stories note how “funny” or “amazing” Kenzi’s character is in the show, and some of the reviewers even note how they can relate to Kenzi and identify with her “sidekick” role.

**Character Identification**

Interestingly, the themes between the fanfiction and the main text are similar, which may have to do with the blending of science fiction, fantasy, horror, drama, comedy, and romance genres that the show presents. Not surprisingly, the community mostly sought identity through representations mainly of the main character, Bo, and her role as a strong and independent female lead. Since Bo is able to defeat the “big bad” in the series but still have real-life problems both socially and romantically, fanfiction members appear to traditionally keep the main text meaning and put the heroines (or various other characters) into situations similar to the actual series. Of the 431 stories, 303 of them include Bo as one of the main characters. All of the stories present Bo either in a sexual or romantic situation, which follows closely with the series and Bo’s character as a succubus. Many of the one chapter stories present this as the only important aspect of the *Lost Girl* universe, such as “Playing Rough,” where Bo and Dyson have rough sex, and “First Date,” where Bo and Lauren go on a first date. For example, “Faeral” explores what
happens with Dyson after the events of the season two finale, where he is given back his love (which was previously taken from him in the season one finale and he has struggled with through the second season). The story considers how Bo would react to these events as Dyson tries to attack and rape Lauren, who Bo is paired with in the story. The action from the series is more presented as character identification in the multi-chapter stories.

**Language and Ratings**

Also of note about the stories is the fact that this website is housed in the United States of America. For this reason, most of the stories are written in English. Of the 431 stories, one was written in Polish (Kenzi/Hale), one was written in Spanish (Bo/Lauren), and two were written in Russian (one Bo/Lauren, one Bo only). However, though the majority of the stories are written in English, there are some stories that are presented from other languages (i.e. Russian, Spanish, Polish). These stories do limit those members whose native language is not English, so that translations do risk difference between meaning and identity. This is shown mostly in the reviews, or lack of reviews, from the mostly English-speaking communities. Since the researcher did not speak any of the languages fluently that were presented, observation was not directly possible for these stories.

Something extremely interesting to note here is the difference in ratings on the stories within the community. Since *Lost Girl*’s main premise follows an open sexuality theme (sex and love happens regardless of gender, and sexuality is never labeled directly), the fanfiction community has 43.1% of the stories that are rated M (mature audiences). Fanfiction.net defaults to K-T (Kindergarten through Teen) ratings when first accessing the community, and the community has 240 stories (55.9%) rated as such. However, despite the K-T ratings, the stories still follow the themes of love and/or lust. Further exploration was needed to discover exactly
why there was a difference, though initial observation here did recognize the influence of the networks in which the show were originally aired (Showcase in Canada and Syfy in the USA), the year in which the show started (2010), and the overall tone and themes of the show. The tone of the main text does have an impact in how users interact and find meaning and identity through the fanfiction stories. For this reason, more fantasy-sexual narratives were developed for fanfiction stories for *Lost Girl*.

**Reviews**

The stories that received the most reviews were those that delivered original ideas, were more grammatically coherent, and presented common themes from each show (i.e. love, lust, Otherness, independence). While stories that were missing these themes or ideas did still get positive reviews, there were not as many. Something interesting to note is the seriousness of the fanfiction writers and reviewers on the grammatical and mechanical aspects of the stories within the community. Most reviewers seemingly refrain from commenting on stories with bad grammar or translation, which possibly follows the adage “if you have nothing nice to say, then say nothing at all.” However, there are more serious and critical reviewers who will comment on the lack of coherence or grammar within the story. While most of these types of comments do not have a flaming-like tone, the authors could construe these messages as exactly that since their creations are being negatively criticized. This is why the participant observation through writing and reviewing was important to this study.

**4.4 Participant Observation**

After observations were made on the various stories and identity and meaning involved within the community, a multi-chapter story was written for the community that portrayed the researcher’s individual meaning of the text, while staying true to the content analysis. To better
showcase the ethnographic principles of understanding and induction, the story was created to directly identify one individual’s meaning and identity. Additionally, review responses were written to some of the stories/chapter that were posted on the fanfiction.net website but are not included in this research analysis.

Since the Lost Girl community only housed approximately 400 stories when the research started, a multi-chapter fiction was written to showcase the difference between how the members of a community interact with the fantasy text while the show was being aired and while it was in between seasons. The story included 36 chapters and 139,100 words total, with the average chapter being 3,863 words each. From the content analysis, research showed that longer chapters and stories produced more reviews and responses. Additionally, the story was a Bo/Lauren romantic pairing story, since the community mostly housed Bo/Lauren stories (51.7% of the 431 stories), and was posted a month after the season two finale aired. This was an Alternate Universe (AU) fiction, which reimagnines the events of their relationship if Bo and Lauren did not meet in the first episode of the series. Since this was a multi-chapter fiction, more insight was given into details of Bo and Lauren’s lives, alternating between POV of the two characters and written in limited third person. (See Appendix B for Chapter 1, which includes the disclaimer. The entire story was not included here, as it was over 200 pages, single spaced.)

Over the span of 31 days, one chapter was posted daily (two chapters were posted on four days). The story’s first chapter was posted on June 2, 2012, and the final chapter was posted July 3, 2012. At the end of October 2012, there were a total of 1,141 members who at least viewed one chapter, with a total of 5,658 total views. Of the visitors, the majority were from the United States. (See Section 4.4 on Demographics for further explanation.) There were 288 reviews for the story, with an average of eight per chapter. However, some chapters would get twenty
reviews while others would only get five. This was partially due to the consistency of the daily chapter updates. Also, observations noted lower numbers of viewers and reviews on weekends; weekdays seemed to be the days that the community was most active. Some reviews (on this story and other stories within the community) even noted the “break from reality” that users would get from reading these stories at work, in doctor’s offices, or after a bad day. This could have a correlation with the escapism that fanfiction stories provide, though more research would need to be done to study this specifically.

Reviewers of the story were also able to interact directly with the story. This follows the decoding (and meta-decoding) done through Hall’s (1974/2002) theory regarding messages of the main text and the delivered fanfiction text. The majority of the reviews were either comments on the chapter’s events or how the chapter’s events fit with the main text. Authors present their individual meanings and identities to the community, and reviewers let them know whether they agree or not. One reviewer noted,

“Great start. I love your writing style. It's all flowy and tight and nothing is careless. You managed to make the story entirely AU, yet still kept true to all the characters and also the world by weaving the canon story and setting with the AU.”

This was a common positive review at the beginning. As the story continued and deviated from the main text more, reviews were still mostly positive, though there were a few that noted a seeming attachment to the events and the characters. There were two reviewers that still followed the story but were not afraid to voice their dislike or disagreement with the events. Interestingly, they still claimed to enjoy the story, even if they felt the events were unethical or wrong for the characters. This was actually observed in other stories, as well, though not just from these two
particular reviewers, which shows the intense connection with particular meanings and identity (especially main text characterization deviations) that some users have with the fanfiction stories.

Additionally, by reviewing other stories, directly involvement occurred in the community through comments on others’ works. Authors were able to recognize the researcher’s name because of the posted story, which started a better rapport between researcher and author. Logging in to the site before writing reviews provided a link to the reviewer, making direct responses on the written reviews possible for the story’s author, which some of them did. From one particular review where the researcher noted literary devices of symbolism and foreshadowing being used, the author responded through private messaging:

“Yes! Thank you! I'm so glad you mentioned the door thing! I actually felt like a real writer with that one. ;p I'm in a quirky place at the moment, all mushy and gushy, so I guess the romance thing came a bit more naturally than the usual cynical snark.”

This rapport with the reviewers and authors on the site made the interview process easier, though demographics were viewed next to better determine a purposive sample.

4.5 Demographics of the Community

After directly participating with the fanfiction communities, demographics were collected on the entire story and individual chapters written by the researcher. This enabled the study to identify usage across the community according to location (country), times a chapter/story was viewed, and how many users have reviewed the stories.

First, the location of the members was identified by country. There was at least one viewer and view from smaller countries, such as Ethiopia and the Philippines, but the majority of the viewers and views came from more developed countries, such as Japan, Greece, Chile, New Zealand, and South Africa. All continents are represented in this demographic, and some
countries are more active than others. (See Table 1 below for the top ten usage.) The top five countries were more developed and economically rich countries, but some of the other countries in this top ten were surprising, particularly Singapore and Barbados.

Table 1

*Top Ten Number of Viewers and Views According to Country*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th># of Viewers</th>
<th># of Views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>4.46K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the demographics from the number of viewers to the number of times the entire story is viewed for the top ten countries. This gives a better breakdown of where and how often users are accessing this information. Since *Lost Girl* originally aired in Canada and immigrated to Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States respectively, there is no surprise that these four countries (where complete episodes are aired on television networks) are in the top five. Surprisingly, Canada was in the number six position for number of viewers and number five position for number of views. This could be because, while *Lost Girl* is a Canadian series, the fanfiction.net website is an American-owned website. However, in a Google Canada search, fanfiction.net still lists as the first place to interact with fanfiction for the series.
The globalization of the stories opens up several opportunities for multicultural readings on meaning and identity. There is also a correlation between a country’s native language and how many of those members directly interact within the community. This is also shown in the language barrier between the translation on reviews and stories. While there may English-speaking members from these other countries, the demographics actually show an accurate depiction of number of users to number of English-speaking members in each country. However, the most notable thing is the number of countries included on this list that were non-native English-speaking countries and the number of countries where Lost Girl does not air episodes on television. Since fanfiction communities rely on previous knowledge of the text, the number of views in correlation to the number of viewers in some countries becomes a place for further study.

4.6 Interviews

Using semi-structured questions (See Appendix A) that opened a natural conversational dialogue, common patterns between answers between both authors and reviewers were noted. Even though not all survey interview participants continued the dialogue, those that did provided further feedback on why the fanfiction from these two particular series presented opportunities for exploration into identity and meaning of the text and a place for community. Questions included those about usage, interest, identity, meaning, and community.

Regarding usage, all participants were reviewers, authors, or both of fanfiction, but several of them also interacted with the show through fan video, video clips, official websites, fan-made websites, social networking, official website discussion boards, and fan-made discussion boards. Since fanfiction.net provides users with usernames that do not provide any identifying information, the participants were given the option to disclose their age, race, gender,
and country of origin. Three participants chose not to disclose the information. Of those that did disclose, the majority were females with a ratio of 11:1 female to male. There were six participants age 18-34 and six participants age 35 or older. Seven participants were from the United States, two from England, two from Canada, and one from Australia. Seven members identified themselves as Caucasian, two were African-American, one biracial, and one Asian. Of the fifteen participants, seven of them stated that they interact with the show using mobile devices. Therefore, the demographics gathered for Section 4.3 did not apply when deciding the purposive sample of participants for the interview, though it was necessary to show further correlation between the actual demographics and those directly participating with the fanfiction community.

Next, participants were asked about what interests them in the show. Dagemsta (personal communication, August 24, 2012) stated,

“I gravitate towards shows with strong female leads and this show has them in abundance. The dialogue is smart and there’s fantastic humor throughout which makes it very engaging to watch.”

This participant was pooled from the Bo/Lauren sub community, and she also noted,

“That relationship has been built with such care and depth that it stands out even in the first series when it had relatively little air time. That alone shows just how special the connection they portray is.”

Other participants also mentioned the humor, writing, and acting as common elements of interest. Another participant (HikerChick, personal communication, August 10, 2012) noted,

“I also appreciate that it is a sex-positive show, and that the majority of the female characters are strong, resourceful, and intelligent. And I like the leather jackets.”
Another participant (QuickLookBusy, personal communication, August 10, 2012) noted,

“I also really love that turning on a show brings with it a feeling of total acceptance. For an hour a week you know that this whole community of open, like minded people are laughing and cheering right along with you. Sounds corny, but it really feels that way.”

These answers followed closely with what was observed in the entire community of posted stories in reviews during the content analysis section of the study. This also answered not only how but confirmed why members flock to this particular show’s fanfiction community.

Additionally, participants were asked whether they identified with the series or with any particular character. The majority of the participants identified Bo and Lauren, even those not within the Bo/Lauren pairing sub community. Kenzi and Trick, minor characters, were also identified. One person noted that she did not really identify with any character or aspect of the series and that she just enjoyed the show. Kath, one half of the RainbowWriters duo, wrote:

“I identify with the honest way they are dealing with Bo’s sexuality, that life is not as simple as choosing to pick same sex or hetero, it is about the person you fall in love with, the struggles you face with them and the way the world often tries to define things for you even when you know that they don’t understand the fundamentals of who you are of what you want – as Bo is struggling not only with her identity as a human or a fae or a hybrid of both almost, she is also struggling with issues of love and acceptance both for herself and others.” (Personal communication, August 9, 2012)

All but one of the participants identified with the series for one or all of the reasons mentioned above. Similarly, they identified with the Lauren character because of her Otherness and awkwardness.
Finally, participants were asked about the fulfillment of communication needs from interaction with the *Lost Girl* fanfiction.net community. OverWorkedWitch (personal communication, August 12, 2012) noted,

“My involvement in fanfiction has allowed, without question, for a great deal of communication with others based around a shared interest that I otherwise would not have had as neither the show, nor fiction in general, is something those I note as friend, or acquaintances, enjoy.”

The authors mention a need to tell their stories and how much they enjoy interacting with both fans of the show and fans of their stories. Spyklv (personal communication, August 7. 2012), a frequent reviewer in the community noted,

“Authors are usually grateful for feedback and I enjoy showing my appreciation for the free and highly engaging, escapist entertainment”

The reviewers mention the openness and friendliness of the community, and one reviewer participant even noted she would be staying with people she met from reviewing their fanfiction when they attended the Fan Expo together in Toronto, Canada, where the show is originally aired. Christians, Ferre, and Fackler (1993) note, “Human beings are social, though independent; they exist spatiotemporally as persons in community” (p.61). The *Lost Girl* community reviewers and authors on fanfiction.net have become these “persons in community” through their interactions. There is a general consensus among the participants that this particular fanfiction community is intimate, open, and accepting, which actually follows with the themes of the show and could warrant further exploration in other fanfiction online communities whose shows portray different themes than those of *Lost Girl*.

4.7 Discussion
Overall, the study has answered the research question and uncovered how and why fanfiction online is helping people find and interact with identity, meaning, and community through encoding/decoding messages (Hall, 1974/2002) and narrative storytelling (Fisher, 1989). This is achieved mostly through the participant observation and interview aspects of the study, though the content analysis and demographics did provide the necessary insight into the communities to be able to succeed in understanding and induction for the more direct participation aspects. Observations and collected data from the entire study helped to uncover some additional varying aspects that make this particular study unique yet relevant in the much larger fandom studies field.

For instance, availability to the TV series does make a difference in how users are interacting with fanfiction. A good example of this is the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Since *Buffy* has been off air for almost ten years, all seven seasons are available for free on various streaming sites, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu Plus. Also, DVDs are available of all seasons individually, or there is a collection that includes all seven seasons in one package, and reruns are shown on various television networks, such as Oxygen, Logo, and Chiller. Since these networks appeal to specific audience (women, homosexual, and horror fans respectively), the various meanings and identification that can be pulled from *Buffy* becomes more widespread for the overall television culture. Fiske (1987) notes, “More radical social and textual theories seek to expose the work of the dominant ideology in naturalizing a bourgeois resolution of contradictions, and work to recover and reactivate them” (p. 88). This is shown by airing reruns of *Buffy* on these particular networks, two of which appeal to minority audiences. The easier access to this show and its encouragement to non-heteronormative and female
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audiences does provide more outlets and opportunities for various readings and interactions (participation) with a show that has ended.

However, *Lost Girl* has the opposite problem. Since it was originally aired in Canada, the show did not air in the United States until mid-way through the second season in Canada. However, Youtube provided a global space for several clips, fan-made music videos, and video retellings, so online users throughout various countries had some short or hackneyed access to the show. During interviews, several members admitted to watching these videos or watching the full episodes in a less-than-legal manner. *Lost Girl* is only aired on SyFy in the United States and it is not available free on any sites in the United States, though the episodes are available on its parent network’s, Showcase, official website for the show; the problem here is that only residents of Canada have access to these free episodes. Since there is less access to this series, and since it has only completed its second season, it is not surprising that less fanfiction stories are written and lesser reviewers and users interact with this community.

How the original television narratives are perceived has the biggest impact on the fanfiction stories that are presented, particularly in the early years of a show airing, which is why *Lost Girl* was a great example for this study. Fisher (1989) claims:

The principle of coherence brings into focus the integrity of a story as a whole, but the principle of fidelity pertains to the individuated components of stories – whether they represent accurate assertions about social reality and thereby constitute good reasons for belief or action. (p. 105)

This is shown in the majority of the stories, though there are various representations and meanings experimented with in the community. Meanings are represented and identities played with through fanfiction using subtextual references to the main text, as discussed in Section 4.1
TV and Fanfiction Online

on Content Analysis. Coppa (2006b) asserts, “Fan fiction develops in response to dramatic rather than literary modes of storytelling and can therefore be seen to fulfill performative rather than literary criteria” (p. 226). This follows Fisher’s (1989) narrative paradigm, since fanfiction authors are using these stories to “perform” their own identities and meanings. These authors are creating new narratives based on events or characters from the story. However, there are not many “Mary Sue” characters in the Lost Girl community, which may have to do with the non-heteronormative text already presented in the show. Hall (1974/2002) notes, “Drawing attention to the symbolic/linguistic-coded nature of communications…precisely opens out into the area where cultural content…is transmitted,” but the codes serve to “displace meanings from one frame to another,” bringing the new meanings “to the surface in ‘disguised’ forms, the repressed contents of a culture” (p. 305). The participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992) of this community follows a closer examination of identity and meaning. Derecho (2006) notes, “Fan fiction is a genre that has a long history of appealing to women and minorities, individuals on the cultural margins who used archontic writing as a means to express not only their narrative creativity, but their criticisms of social and political inequities as well” (p.76). Since the show is still young, Lost Girl’s stories are mainly focused around the meanings and identities that are directly or subtextually represented in the series, and the study uncovered that the participants are mostly female (ratio of 11:1) and do relate to the strong, independent female lead and the Otherness of the storylines. The themes from the main text of love and/or lust are still presented in all of the stories posted. The principle of coherence is more closely followed for Lost Girl, which definitely showcases the principle of fidelity (Fisher, 1989). The narratives presented in these stories and through these reviews are showing how similar meanings and identities are helping to build the community. Those participating in this community seem to start with an enjoyment of
the original series but seek to reimagine the series for themselves, which is why there are possibly more alternate universe stories that are multi-chapter. Even when the author’s aim is to stay true to the original action, once the story is written, the elements within this new creation have become alternatives to the original text, as they now show the author’s own encoded messages.

Considering Christian’s (1993) communitarian ethics, fanfiction is showing how meaning and identity help fulfill this need to communicate with a group. Through observation, the researcher discovered a common element between stories. At certain points in time, reviewers and authors span across most of the stories together. For instance, one author writes and/or updates several stories within a given time and also reviews the other stories posted. Not surprisingly, when the author stops writing/updating regularly, he or she also stops reviewing regularly. Real life elements have an impact, but there is also a lack of interest possible here. Once the member has fulfilled their need for identity, meaning, and/or community within this particular series, he or she may move onto a different fandom. This often leaves several stories uncompleted. From open dialogue with the interview participants, the researcher also not surprisingly discovered the participants did not like this aspect of the community and felt abandoned much like the stories.

For instance, one frequent reviewer on the site posted a private message during the participant observation portion of the study. Even though this was the first chapter in the *Lost Girl* multi-chapter story written by the researcher, the reviewer noted that she did not usually “favorite” a story in the first chapter, preferring to wait until the story ended for this exact reason. Even though the story was added to members’ “favorite story” list as it progressed, the researcher did note a major influx to this when the final chapter was posted.
Since reading a message relies on other factors, such as age, race, nationality, sexuality, and education, the participants’ individual experiences were also considered. Hall (1974/2002) claims, “Whereas most people require a lengthy process of education in order to become relatively competent users of the language of their speech community, they seem to pick up its visual-perceptual codes at a very early age, without formal training, and are quickly competent in it use” (p. 306). Since *Lost Girl* is following common themes of love, lust, independence, and Otherness, the show’s encoded messages are not difficult to interpret even though polysemic. Since censorship is different in Canada, the amount of sexual activity actually shown on screen makes exactly what Bo is doing more easily accessible to read than innuendoes or euphemisms (though these are often used in conversation for comedic effect). Interestingly, the Syfy channel does not censor or cut much of the direct sexual activity; instead, the show is cut in dialogue and minor action (to accommodate the shorter run time for an episode in America). However, some fans (who have seen both the Canadian and American versions) note the difference between even the minor cuts. For instance, Bo/Lauren fans were not happy that a short interaction was cut, as they felt the particular moment cut was important to read the Bo/Lauren dynamic. The few seconds cut were of Lauren touching Bo’s arm to calm her from attacking the Ash when he had come to take Lauren back to her servitude. Since Bo manipulates by touch, fans saw this moment important to the show’s overall context since Lauren, a human, was able to manipulate Bo by a simple touch on her arm. However, fans that only saw the cut version were not as convinced that Bo and Lauren were as close. This shows how even simple cuts become important in the overall text, and fanfiction authors getting the varied texts sometimes miss the moments they are writing to produce because they see a lack.
Considering the research question, the ethnographic approach was more beneficial to discovering this particular culture. Fanfiction is nothing new, but the easy access to it globally through the Internet does make it easier to study. This also means that the fanfiction culture has changed dramatically thanks to the Internet and instant gratification. Instead of relying on fanzines that came out monthly or annually, fans now have that instant access to fulfill their needs for identity, meaning, and community in conjunction with the original television series. The serialized aspect of television also showed key observations in how and why fanfiction usage was so important for these narratives and decoding for meaning and identity to develop a community.
Chapter 5: Summaries and Conclusions

This study was meant to discover how and why television fans are using fanfiction online to uncover meaning, identity, and community. From the ethnographic research method, the content analysis served to uncover common themes and exactly how fanfiction users were interacting. To discover why they interacted, the interviews and participant observation provided more direct answers and understanding through inception into the Lost Girl fanfiction community on fanfiction.net. The findings corroborate with the ethical assumptions that these members are using fanfiction on this website to develop and fulfill a need for community.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

Since ethnographic research was done, the biggest limitation to this study is that results could vary given a different television series, different time period, and different members. Since Lost Girl falls within a specific genre (science fiction/fantasy) and has only completed two seasons, the results could change as the series progresses or ends. Following another theory could also present different results, especially since Lost Girl presents non-heteronormative storylines throughout the series (i.e. sexuality, Otherness). Similarly, fanfiction is traditionally used to present desired outcomes or fantasies within the established universe (Coppa, 2006a; Derecho, 2006; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Jenkins, 1992; Scodari, 2003; Thomas, 2006), so the play of character and identity could be found in the lack of voiced opinions through the Spiral of Silence theory or the need to fully participate and establish oneself in a universe through Fantasy-theme Analysis. However, even though the limitation could be on the various readings from theory to theory, the initial findings should still be similar.

Another limitation to this study was the relatively small group and short period of time and restrictions to channel access for Lost Girl. Conversely, this limitation also proved to be
positive aspect to this study, as it also presented the researcher with time and access to every story posted for the series on fanfiction.net and other websites. If research were done on another show with a bigger following, such as Star Trek or Buffy the Vampire Slayer, time would become a limitation for the study instead of the quantity of stories and members.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Study

If more time were allotted for this study, then several series should be observed, with a combination of various genres, show lengths (number of seasons/episodes), generational aspects (i.e. Gen X-ers, Millenials), and accessibility to the series taken into consideration when choosing what shows to include and comparing the results. Since this study was limited on time, Lost Girl’s smaller community provided a good starting point for this research, but much more observation should be done, particularly with those shows with a bigger audience and with fanfiction communities whose shows have ended more than ten years ago. Since the Internet provides access to find and post these stories, more research could also be done on how exactly the Internet has changed the interaction with fanfiction, particularly related to literary quality and quantity of stories posted. For instance, some research could be done on why shows like Glee have more stories in the fanfiction community even though the series is targeted to a more teenage audience (i.e. correlation between age of fanfiction writers and shows being presented). Another example would be why certain fanfiction authors slash (male/male pairings who are not romantically paired in the original text) family members, such as the brothers Sam and Dean Winchester from Supernatural. Another recommendation for further study would be for those fanfiction communities that lack a community, such as series where less than fifty stories are posted.
Even though fanfiction is not a new concept, the reasons why and how more members are reading, writing, and joining the community is an interesting pasture to roam. Since there are more television series and channels and censorship continues to loosen, the abundance of possibilities makes this particular aspect of cultural studies much more expansive. As long as there are people seeing a lack of something or wanting to rationalize a narrative more, fanfiction will exist. As long as shows continue to be produced, fandoms will exist. Therefore, this is a field that should be around for many more years to come.

5.3 Conclusions

Fanfiction provides a creative outlet for people to explore their own narratives and meanings within a community setting. “Fan writers do not so much reproduce the primary text as they rework and rewrite it, repairing or dismissing unsatisfying aspects, developing interests not sufficiently explored” (Jenkins, 1989, p.162). These writers are taking the messages received from the original series and “detotalis[ing] the message in the preferred code in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference” (Hall, 1974/2002, p. 308). Fanfiction authors are essentially rewriting or expanding the series to present their own interpretations, or what they want to see happen, of the encoded messages from the main text; through this text, they are addressing the lack that they see and expressing their own encoded messages within their stories.

Since the fanfiction community is presented on the Internet now instead of monthly print fanzines (Coppa, 2006a; Derecho, 2006; Jenkins, 1992), the access to these stories is no longer limited to a middle to upper class audience. Lower classes and minorities are also able to access this, so that “one no longer has to appeal to a privileged audience as the measure of rationality” (Fisher, 1989, p. 137). The reading of these signs and messages, both encoding and decoding,
becomes a process for the fanfiction author, reader, and reviewer to establish meaning and identity to a much larger community. This study’s findings followed this, as the demographics of the community and the interview participant demographics showcased that viewers were reading this text and interacting with fanfiction through a multicultural lens. There were straight women who believed the lesbian romance in the series (Bo/Lauren) more than the heterosexual one presented (Bo/Dyson). Since this particular show presents itself with a theme of open sexuality (Bo’s sexual preference is never directly labeled), the audience reader is using their own rationality through the signs with the writing and performances, even if it does not directly relate to their own identity. “Rationality is grounded in the narrative structure of life and the natural capacity people have to recognize coherence and fidelity in the stories they experience and tell one another” (Fisher, 1989, p. 137). The text presented in *Lost Girl* and the fanfiction stories for the series establishes how rationality is changing because of the online access to these stories, and this study uncovered how and why fanfiction online is being used to find identity, meaning, and community.
References


Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Do you wish to remain anonymous, or may I use your name or user name? Please keep in mind that I may not directly use your answers in quotations. This is just a formality for consent purposes.

2. (Optional and definitely not disclosed in the research on individuals)
   a. Age
   b. Gender
   c. Race
   d. Country of Origin

3. How long have you been a fan of Lost Girl?

4. How do you interact online (i.e. fanfiction, fan videos, Discussion boards)?

5. How often do you interact with the series using each of the following? (on average, how many hours per day. If you do not use them, please write 0 or n/a)
   a. Fanfiction
   b. Fan video
   c. Video clips
   d. Official websites
   e. Fan-made websites
   f. Social networking
   g. Discussion boards (official)
   h. Discussion boards (fan-made)

6. How exactly and specifically do you interact with the series using each of the following? (i.e. reader, lurker, writer, poster, creator. If you do not use them, please write 0 or n/a)
   a. Fanfiction
   b. Fan video
   c. Video clips
   d. Official websites
   e. Fan-made websites
   f. Social networking
   g. Discussion boards (official)
   h. Discussion boards (fan-made)

7. What interests you about this show?

8. Why do you interact with the series online?

9. Do you use a mobile device (i.e. phone, tablet) to interact with the series? [If yes, please go to question 10. If no, skip to question 11.]

10. How often do you interact with the series via mobile device using each of the following? (on average, hourly per day)
    a. Fanfiction
    b. Fan video
    c. Video clips
    d. Official websites
    e. Fan-made websites
    f. Social networking
g. Discussion boards (official)

h. Discussion boards (fan-made)

11. How exactly and specifically do you interact via mobile device with the series using each of the following? (Check all that apply.)
   a. Fanfiction
   b. Fan video
   c. Video clips
   d. Official websites
   e. Fan-made websites
   f. Social networking
   g. Discussion boards (official)
   h. Discussion boards (fan-made)

12. Do you have preferences in how you interact (i.e. fan video, fanfiction)? Why?

13. Are there certain types that you avoid or do not like? Why?

14. What about Lost Girl interests you as an individual?

15. Do you identify with any aspect within the series? Why?

16. Do you identify with any character within the series? Why?

17. Do these particular interests play a role in how you interact via online and/or mobile device?

18. Have you seen all of the episodes? If not, how many (from seasons 1-2) have you seen?

19. How do you watch the episodes? (Note: If you get them by less than legal means, be aware that your confidentiality will not be compromised. In other words, I won’t tell on you. This is just so I know exactly how people are watching the episodes.)

20. Will you continue to watch the series? Reruns and/or new episodes? Why? How?

21. Have you managed to form any relationships or fulfill any communication needs through your interaction with the series? (i.e. friendships, acquaintances)

22. Do you interact differently when the show is airing than when it is in hiatus? How? Why?

23. What other television series do you interact with online?

24. Additional comments about the show and/or using fanfiction?
Appendix B
Participant Observation: First Chapter

Title: All in the Family

Category: Lost Girl, Bo/Lauren

Disclaimer: I do not own any of these characters or the premise of the show. They are directly owned by the respective parties, and some of the dialogue in this is directly credited to the writers of the Lost Girl series. I am not making any money for this, though I am using it to gather research on how fanfiction works within a television fandom.

Spoilers: Up through season 2, though mostly as references out of order. This story is AU.

Rating: M for Mature.

Story Summary: AU. Bo and Lauren meet under different circumstances a year after Bo discovers she is fae. Family secrets; fealty battles; crazy succubus hijinks. What could possibly go wrong?

A/N: This story is an epic novel-length fiction that has a lot of things happening at once, so the pacing reflects this. I also utilize the alternating POV method, so each section is perceived by either Bo or Lauren. Keep in mind that not everything is how we see it.

The single lane road leading to her grandmother's house was much narrower than Lauren remembered; the last time she was down this road was fifteen years ago, before her grandfather had died. When she was growing up, she used to love riding in the back driver's side, behind her father, while he drove them here to visit on the weekends. The small family gatherings at her grandmother's farm were always so magical, an escape from the reality of her father's politics and mother's schmoozing. Here, there were no politicians or housewives to mingle and "impress" for her parents; here, there was only her gram, cousins, aunts, and uncles. The seclusion and expanse of the farm always gave her a break from a world from which she always felt separated.
Driving this road now, as an adult, felt different. Maybe it was knowledge of the world; maybe it was knowing that she was not going to those slightly comfortable and warm family gatherings this time. No, this time her gram had called her for her medical expertise, though she was not sure what she could do since she rarely worked on animals. When she had asked the Ash about taking leave to help her gram, Lauren was surprised when he finally granted the permission. It had been four years since he had allowed her any live visits to see old family or friends; he rarely allowed her the contact via email or phone. Not that they called or wrote very often anyways. Lauren was used to the brush off from her parents and brother and sisters. She was the oldest, but she was the only one who did not follow the appropriate "role" her parents had set for them all. Her youngest sister married a doctor, which was great, but becoming a doctor herself was against some unwritten family gender laws. When she came out of the closet her freshman year of college, her parents did not even seem to care, since they had already written her off when she decided to declare her double major in biochemistry and microbiology. From there, it did not matter what she did. She could never do anything more shocking than not follow her family's legacy.

When she saw her grandmother's house up the road, she felt her body relax slightly for the first time in four years. Her tenure with the Light Fae had proven to be both exhausting and exhilarating. She would never admit it aloud, or even to herself most days, but being indentured to the Ash was more freedom than she ever had being indentured to her family. She felt a certain freedom, even in servitude.

Pulling into the gravel driveway, Lauren felt her body become rigid again. The large antebellum home was still as beautiful and intimidating as she remembered. Her hands gripped the steering wheel even tighter, her palms slick against the leather. Four years with no familial contact changes a person; she had learned that in her mistrust and new role as "chattel" in the fae world. She was not sure she was ready to feel that warmth and love again that she knew was always abundant and forthcoming from her gram. Would she still smell like freshly baked biscuits and honeysuckle? Would there be fresh dried fruit for her afternoon snack? Were there still crayons and a Huckleberry Hound coloring book in the cabinet below the TV in the living room? Would they finally talk about her family's fae heritage? Did her gram know that her cattle were actually underfae creatures?

There was too much to worry about, and Lauren did not have time to find out much beyond that last question. The Ash had given her two weeks, stating that if she finished her work before then,
that she should return to the compound promptly. There was no question, no hint of an underlying motive in his voice. Lauren obeyed; she always had.

Stepping out of her car, Lauren noticed that the farm was still the only thing you could see for miles. The snow-peaked mountains in the distance and the vast woods that surrounded them held many memories for Lauren. Her grandfather had bought this land when her mother, aunt, and uncle were still in grade school; Lauren did not know why or how her mother had become so swayed by her husband's lifestyle. Money and privilege from two separate worlds (human and fae) does a lot to change a person, too, she supposed.

The crunch of the gravel alerted her that someone was behind her. Turning around, she expected to see her gram had come from the barn to greet her. Instead, she saw a woman, an extremely beautiful woman, standing there with her left eyebrow arched in question. Lauren must look lost to this woman, standing in her crisp white shirt and pristinely ironed dress slacks, clutching the door to the seemingly sterilized black Jaguar the Ash had granted her for the trip. She had wanted to argue that a truck or SUV would have been better to take to a farm, but she rarely got to leave the compound, let alone drive a fancy car. In fact, when she first sat down in the car to leave, Lauren worried that she had forgotten how to drive. Her initial panic diminished after that initial adrenaline surge mellowed when she first backed out and almost hit one of her nurses, Boston Harpy Greta. After that, Lauren just took a deep breath. She could not decide if she was more nervous about seeing her gram again or from driving again.

"Can I help you?" The young woman, in her late 20s Lauren suspected, brought her out of her trance.

"Oh, sorry." Lauren cleared her throat, trying not to notice the other woman's cleavage that was on display from her top-unbuttoned black and navy flannel shirt, which fit nicely to curves and muscles. Lauren stood straight again and chastised herself for openly ogling this woman. She had not been here for two minutes and her relaxed nature had already asserted itself. This farm always had that effect on her; she would have to remedy that soon, as well. To her credit, the woman did not look like she minded that Lauren had checked her out in the non-professional sense.

"Are you lost?" The woman sighed, as she loosened her stance slightly from the protective one she previously had.
"Oh, sorry." Lauren could not stop staring at the woman. She was gorgeous and obviously knew how to work her assets to her advantage. There was a pull, an attraction that was so instant and breathtaking that Lauren worried about why she had lost her professionalism so easily. She figured, again, that it was being in this place.

"You said that already." The woman seemed amused now, openly smiling one of the most endearing and beautiful smiles Lauren had ever seen.

"Sorry." Lauren felt her blush really reach her neck and cheeks this time. Even though it was only 54 degrees outside, she felt the temperature rise. Lauren took a minute to steel herself again before replying. "I am looking for Gram, um, Mrs. White."

"You're Lauren?" The other woman really loosened then, coming closer. Lauren noted that she smelled like fresh citrus and honey; an interesting combination, but it somehow worked really well on the brunette.

"Ye-yes. I'm Lauren." Lauren cursed her stutter briefly, wanting to keep her confident and professional appearance.

"Bo." The woman moved closer again, this time invading Lauren's personal space. Their bodies were only a few inches apart, and Lauren could not help but wonder if the woman knew what she was doing to her. From her arched facial expression, Lauren suspected the other woman knew the effect she was having on the blonde.

"Excuse me?" Lauren breathed in too fast, trying to catch her cool. On the outside, she knew she held her professional, detached demeanor; on the inside, she was boiling.

"I'm Bo. Nice to meet you." The woman just smiled knowingly, though Lauren was not sure what the woman knew. "Come. I will take you to your grandmother. She is just inside."

"Thank you." Lauren just followed behind her, not knowing what to expect but knowing her nervousness was suddenly gone about reuniting with her gram and replaced with something new.

Though Bo suspected Lauren knew the way to her own grandmother's kitchen, she felt a sort of pride about leading the woman inside. When she had first approached the blonde, Bo just stood
and watched the other woman for a bit, noticing how her eyes lit up and her body language relaxed upon scanning the surrounding area. It really was a beautiful place. Eventually, she felt guilty for staring at the blonde, so she approached cautiously, making sure the gravel crunched beneath her work boots so the other woman would not be so alarmed.

"Yo, Bo-Bo! Gram tells the best stories. Wait until you hear about her time with the…” Kenzi stopped talking, thankfully, when they approached. The young girl usually did not stop talking, but seeing the stranger beside her must have meant the conversation was extremely classified. "Hey! How was cow tipping?"

"Kenzi, this is Lauren." Bo noticed Kenzi's feet propped up on the counter, leaning back in the stool. She and Gram both had warned her that she would fall over in the old stool. When Kenzi fell down, she just got back up and continued her previous sitting position. Falling off of a stool did not seem to faze the young woman, and she had seemed to adopt that sitting place since they arrived yesterday.

"Lauren? Gram's Lauren?" Kenzi let the stool fall back and moved her legs from the counter, at least looking somewhat apologetic at letting her boots defile the cooking surface. "About time you got here. I was beginning to wonder if the Ash-hole was going to let you."

"Ash-hole?" Lauren looked mildly offended, though Bo noticed an air of amusement behind her eyes.

"Silly, Kenzi." Bo moved further into the kitchen and laid the fence keys on the counter. "Would you go find Gram? I am sure that she wants to know Lauren made it." Kenzi gave her a look of "who do I look like" before conceding and leaving the room.

"Wow. I cannot believe how much different this looks." Lauren walked further into the kitchen, really dissecting every item and wall pattern. Bo found her look of amused concentration quite adorable. "I'm sorry. Bo?"

"You apologize a lot." Bo smiled, leaning forwards against the counter to watch Lauren, not feeling a bit guilty that the girls were pushed forward more, giving the blonde a nice view should she choose to observe them with that same amused concentration.
"Sor-" Lauren stopped herself and rolled her eyes playfully while grinning. Bo wondered if the woman knew how adorable she was. "I do not mean to sound rude, though I am aware that this probably does sounds this way, but who are you?"

"Well, who is anybody really?" Bo smiled, hoping the woman would pick up on the flirtation. "I'm a…contractor, here to help your grandmother. The Morrigan sent me."

"Oh! You're Dark Fae?" Lauren looked alarmed, grabbing her necklace between her thumb and forefinger. Bo knew that symbol; it meant Lauren was Light Fae. No wonder she seemed concerned.

"Fae, yes. Dark, no." Bo pushed herself from the counter to come around to Lauren, who was standing in the middle of the cooking area. The high ceilings made Bo feel like they were much smaller than they actually were. "I'm…unaligned, I guess you could say."

"Why did the Morrigan send you then, if you're unaligned?" Lauren was looking around, apparently listening for the approaching footsteps.

"How much did the Ash tell you?" Bo could not help but wonder what superpower Lauren had; she seemed so…Bo wasn't sure the word. Besides, she did not want to explain how she was paying off a favor that Kenzi had foolhardily promised to the Morrigan.

"Gram's cattle are underfae. There have been some problems with the meat and dairy being harvested from this farm; humans getting the food are exhibiting…strange symptoms. It reads like mad cow disease in the human hospitals, but tissue and blood samples are telling me otherwise. There seems to be a neurotoxin being transmitted to the human brain, causing major behavioral changes. It seems to be affecting fae, as well, except much more strongly. The Fae DNA I sampled seemed to shift when exposed to the food. I have a hypothesis, but I need to take more direct samples and see if we cannot reverse the underfae before eliminating them, since they provide a large source of sustenance and revenue for the clans." Lauren's facial expression and hand movements were so yumilly distracting. Bo could not help but smile at seeing professional, confident Lauren. There was something extremely appealing about this woman. "Something wrong?"

"No, no. Not at all. I was just…thinking about what you said." Bo was not 100% certain she knew everything Lauren had told her; she was almost embarrassed to admit she was ogling
instead of really paying attention to the explanation. Science was never her best subject in school. Kenzi would notice the longing glances, though, and scold her later if she did not find a way to curb her hunger around the blonde. She did not think her best friend would want to take her to the farmer's market again to feed, and she knew Dyson was out of the question now. Besides, why would he drive all the way out here just to feed her? He made it clear they were over, and she was fine with that. She had even made friends with his new girlfriend, Ciara.

Footsteps into the kitchen and Gram's squeal of delight snapped Bo back to attention. Kenzi looked at her, worried, probably because her eyes were clouding blue. She should not be this hungry.

"Lauren, my girl! Oh, Lauren." Gram had Lauren enveloped in the biggest hug Bo had ever seen. If Lauren were not taller and skinnier, Bo was not sure she could decipher where bodies separated. They looked like one being; then again, she knew what it felt like being away from family for so long. Even though Mary Dennis had not talked to her for ten years, Bo wondered if her own homecoming would be this pleasant. She romanticized that it would but let her reality tell her no. "Did you have trouble getting here? I know it has been fifteen years. I was worried you would get lost."

"No, Gram. I will always remember how to get here." Lauren's body language finally relaxed completely before she released the older woman.

"I have your room ready for you upstairs. Not much has changed, I promise." Gram hugged the blonde again. "Lauren, thank goodness the Ash let you come."

"I don't think he was going to let me. I convinced him it was in the Light Fae's best interest." Lauren smiled proudly.

"Bo, would you help Lauren with her bags and help her get settled before supper? Kenzi, can you help me prep, dear?" Gram seemingly could not resist grabbing Lauren in another hug before releasing the younger woman to Bo's care.

The two walked back outside to the Jaguar. Lauren really did not need help, as she only had her duffle bag of clothes and medical equipment bag. Still, Bo grabbed the large medical equipment bag and was not wrong when it turned out heavier than it looked. She smiled at Lauren's
protveness when it looked like she was going to drop the bag twice, but brushed Lauren off when she tried to take it from her.

Upstairs, Bo took Lauren to the room across from hers and Kenzi's. It was sterile looking: plain white walls, plain white down comforter and sheets. There were very few decorations and only a few pictures on the shelves. The rest of the room was covered in books, binders, and notebooks. She placed the medical bag down by the bed and went to help Lauren with her duffle bag, though she knew the blonde did not need help. She just wanted an excuse to touch her.

"Thank you. That was not necessary." Lauren smiled again. This time, it was warm and…flirty? Bo was not sure.

"I know it's, like, some big etiquette thing no-no in the fae world to ask, but I have to know. What type of fae are you?" Bo watched Lauren unzip her medical equipment bag before neatly arranging medicine-y items on the table before removing a few books, notebooks, and a heavy duty clipboard. Lauren just smiled.

"The insatiably curious human doctor type." Lauren's smile could be heard in her voice.

"You're human?" Bo was honestly surprised, as Lauren turned around to face her, placing some paper securely into the clipboard. Bo could not help the doctor fantasy that went through her mind at that simple action. "I mean, your grandmother…"

"Is fae, yes. A Hestian, which is why this place always feels so warm and home-y. So was my grandfather, who was a Gaean. They have been the only fae from opposing clans that were allowed to marry because of this farm. The land is in a marginalized county, away from true fealty and jurisdiction. They still report to the Morrigan and the Ash when necessary, though, since the city is the closest neighboring fae county." Lauren removed her brown leather jacket and brushed it with her hand before hanging it in the closet. Bo found this oddly endearing.

"But you're not fae?" Bo sat down on the edge of the bed and watched Lauren unpack her clothes, hanging each shirt and pair of jeans in the closet. She did not look like she had packed to visit a farm until the blonde removed some t-shirts from her bag. Everything looked like it had just been ironed before it was placed in the bag. Again, Bo found this oddly endearing. She usually just stuffed things that were unfolded from her closet and drawers into a bag.
"No. My mother is, but my father is human. I found out about the fae while on a research grant in the Congo. The clans, knowing my mother and grandparents, offered me a chance to serve and I was returned back here before finishing my work there. The Ash was the one who found me; he had respected my grandfather and wanted to extend a favor to him by not killing me once I knew. Plus, I helped them cure this fae epidemic that was killing off several clans, so the Ash saw my potential. When I got back, they offered me a…job…in exchange for my fealty." Lauren appeared nonchalant about recalling her life story, though Bo suspected there was something not being said. She did not know if it was something she assumed Lauren thought she knew. Bo felt so ignorant of fae politics sometimes.

"So…I love your Gram." Bo saw the blonde's brow raise in amusement, though she never faltered from her task of refolding her shirts before placing them into the drawers. "I mean, I haven't met many fae I like, especially Dark Fae, but I love your Gram."

"She is quite loveable." Lauren turned around, seemingly embarrassed as she looked into her bag. Bo assumed she had unpacked everything but her underwear and did not want to do that in front of the other woman. Again, Bo smiled at the blonde, knowing that she was probably sending erotic waves with her hooded eyes from the thought of Lauren and her underwear. The woman was quietly and awkwardly sexy.

Bo stood from the bed and made her way to stand directly in Lauren's personal space again, loving how the blonde jumped to a ten automatically when she moved this close. Looking down into the bag, she confirmed her suspicions and internally smiled at the simple white cotton underwear and bras that were neatly folded and arranged in the bag. She looked back to Lauren and found it hard to control her hunger as she found her upper body leaning forward, watching Lauren's eyes get wider and hood over as she got closer, anticipating the kiss as much as she was. All she needed to do was lean a…little…bit…

"Bo!" Kenzi's panicked voice brought her from Lauren's gravitational pull. She stepped back, stung and ignoring the deep released breath both she and Lauren exhaled. "Damn, girl. Keep it in your pants and let the poor doctor settle in. Grub's up, and you can definitely thank the sous chef. Gram is turning me all domesticated, yo."

"Thanks." Bo hoped her eyes extended how thankful she was for the cock block. Seeing Kenzi's nod, she knew that her best friend understood. They would be going out after supper to satiate
Bo's other hunger. She wasn't sure how much control she could keep around the blonde. There was just…something…about her aura that called to the succubus.