Go Write Your Own Story:
An exploration of online fan fiction and authorship
through the themes of authority, conflict and legitimacy

Gemma Bothe BA (Hons) 2012
The University of Western Australia

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Abstract

The relationships between media producers, consumers and fans are essential to understanding the production and consumption of media products. This thesis seeks to examine the relationships between those that participate, create, consume and engage with mass media through the lens of fan fiction, and other fan-associated practices within the Web 2.0 environment. The concept of authorship is shown to be authoritative, economic and emotional, which fan-fiction participants both subscribe to and reject. Focusing specifically on the *Arrow* (2012–) fandom, as well as various other canons, I examine the themes of authority, conflict and legitimacy in order to argue that the notion of authorship plays a central role in how consumers and producers interact with media and each other.

This thesis uses online participant observation, as well as semi-structured interviews with published authors and fan-fiction writers, to study several sites of fan and media producer interaction. These sites of interaction include: the social-media and fan-fiction discussions of romantic relationships (termed ‘ships’ in fan-fiction parlance) in the television series *Arrow*; episodes of the television series *Supernatural* (2005–); actor Stephen Amell’s *Facebook* page; and the commercial fan-fiction website, *Kindle Worlds*. At each of these sites, the discussions, conflict and interactions between fans and media producers are examined. These interactions are used to show how both media producers and fans construct themselves as sites of authority and legitimacy in regard to the media. This is the result of a cultural
formation of oppositional engagement in which media producers and fans struggle for control over the ways in which their media products are interpreted, used and consumed.

Through media producers’ and fans’ construction of themselves as authors, authorities and ‘real fans’, this thesis shows how media producers and consumers are affected by and exert power within a digital environment, as those engaged with the media seek to implement a dominant vision of the field of media production and consumption. Despite the current landscape of production, distribution and engagement with media undergoing significant change, contestation over what authorship is and who can lay claim to it continues to be central to understanding how producers and consumers of media are created and recognised in a digital environment.
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Thesis Declaration

The examination of the thesis is an examination of the work of the student. The work must have been substantially conducted by the student during enrolment in the degree.

This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.

Student signature

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Gemma Bothe
Disciplines of Anthropology & Sociology, and Communications & Media
School of Social Sciences
The University of Western Australia
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Something familiar, something strange

My introduction to fan fiction was like many others. It started with a love of stories before I had any inkling of what fan fiction was, or how big of an impact it would later have on my life. I used to stay up into the early hours of the morning devouring stories by Roald Dahl, Enid Blyton, Isobelle Carmody and Emily Rodda. My favourite stories usually involved perilous adventures, battles of wits, cunning villains, and a little bit of magic. I loved reading the stories and I loved knowing how they ended, but I also hated them ending. After finishing a book, there would be a period where it felt like I was saying goodbye to a friend. I would often start to daydream about what could have happened, what should have happened, what kinds of conversations I would have with the characters if I ever met them. During the long car trips from my family’s farm, where I grew up, to the city, I would gaze out the window and make up my own stories in the same world I had just read about. I was not ready for the stories to end, so I would not let them.
The first time I read fan fiction was by accident. A friend told me about this incredible story she had found online that was a *Supernatural*\(^1\) (2005–)/*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*\(^2\) (1997–2003)/*Harry Potter*\(^3\) (1997–2007) crossover. We had just spent the evening marathoning several episodes of *Supernatural*. When we had finished watching an episode, she grabbed my laptop and found the story on *LiveJournal*, bookmarking it so that I could read it later. I began reading it almost as soon as she had walked out the door. In this story I was introduced to a world where Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley were slayers, Sam Winchester was a wizard, and Xander Harris owned a bar in New York where they all liked to drink. Engrossed in this world that blended some of my favourite stories, I stayed up into the early hours of the morning reading a piece of fiction that emanated from the imagination of someone else who was not ready for those stories to end.

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\(^1\) *Supernatural* is an American fantasy horror television series. It was first broadcast in 2005 on the American television station The WB, and later on The CW network, which was the successor of The WB. The television series follows the lives of two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, who fight supernatural monsters.

\(^2\) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is an American supernatural horror television series. It was first broadcast in 1997 on The WB network, and later moved to the United Paramount Network (UPN). The series follows Buffy Summers who discovers she is a vampire slayer. Buffy and her close friends battle vampires, demons and other supernatural elements.

\(^3\) *Harry Potter* is a British book series written by J.K. Rowling and published by Bloomsbury Publishing between 1997 and 2007. The series follows Harry Potter, who at the age of 12 discovers he is a wizard. Harry Potter and his two close friends then engage in a series of adventures at a magical boarding school. The book series was later turned into a film series distributed by Warner Bros. Studios.
It was not until approximately six months later—during my honours year of study when I was reading an academic edited collection—that I realised the *Supernatural/*Buffy the Vampire Slayer/Harry Potter* story I had read was part of something bigger; it was fan fiction. It was then that I became fascinated by fan fiction. I went online and sought out fan-fiction websites, I started to read fan fiction for fun and I read scholarly articles about it. Since then my reading, occasional writing and academic engagement with fan fiction has not been accidental. I had discovered something that was both new and strange to me, but also part of a practice I had been doing my entire life—consuming media, telling stories and engaging with others who did the same.

The above story is part of an anthropological tradition that long predates my entry into the field. Although it spans many decades and does not involve flights to exotic locations, trekking through adverse terrain or floating down a river in a leaky boat, it documents my arrival to engaging with and studying fan fiction. It demonstrates my ‘being there’ (Geertz 1988, p. 13) in a field that transcends a geographic and temporal locale. In doing this I am also engaging in ‘explicit representation of authorial presence’ (Geertz 1988 p.16), which is for me (as the writer and author of this piece) is representative of the larger discussion that takes place in this thesis, as in this work I am focusing on the notion of authorship.

Shifting notions of authorship are bound to the co-production, produsage and remix that are occurring in our increasingly mediated society (Johnson 2013, p. 137). Using fan fiction and fan practices as a lens to examine these emerging digital media
practices I grapple with questions of authorship that have long been debated by
distinguished minds such as Foucault (1970; 1980; 1990), Barthes (1977), Geertz
(1988), and, more recently, by those in media and fan studies (Johnson & Gray 2013;).
The questions that form the conceptual and theoretical basis of this work are: Who
is an author? What power do authors wield? How do authors and consumers
negotiate power? Do authors still hold relevance in our increasingly transformative,
digital environment? In exploring these questions I argue that producers, consumers
and industry use the concept of authorship in regard to media products in order to
assert power within the field of media production and consumption.

What is fan fiction?

Fans, such as obsession_inc, have made distinctions between fan practices.

obsession_inc describes fandom as being affirmational or transformational
(obsession_inc 2009). Affirmational fandom seeks to celebrate the source material
the way it is. Affirmational fans typically engage with the object of their fandom on
creator sanctioned sites, defer to the author of the work in regards to meanings,
characters and rules of the universe, and are typically male (Hellekson & Busse 2014,
p. 3; obsession_inc 2009). Alternatively transformational fandom engages with the
canon in a creative manner; using the canon to illustrate a point, reinterpret the
meaning or recreate as aspect (Hellekson & Busse 2014, p. 4; obsession_inc 2009).
Transformational fans are seen to consistently hold a strong emotional investment
and can be highly critical of the canon (Hellekson & Busse 2014, p. 4).
In this distinction between affirmational and transformational fandom, obsession_inc (2009) paints affirmational fandom as being ‘the very most awesome type of fandom for the source creator to hang out with, because the creator holds the magic trump card’, while transformational fandom is typified by ‘a democracy of taste; everyone has their own shot at declaring what the source material means, and at radically re-interpreting it’.

Although these terms provide an interesting point through which to examine fan practices and define fan fiction, I would argue that rather than being two distinct categories fans exist along a continuum of affirmational and transformational practices. Practices such as fan fiction or shipping can ‘celebrate’ the story the way it or, or transform the canon into something new - depending on the consumers interpretation of the original text. Fan fiction sits more clearly within ‘transformational’ fandom as often fan fictions seek to actively engage with an aspect of the canon. Regardless of whether fans are engaging in affirmational or transformational fandom practices, their engagement in the field of media engagement is mediated through the social and cultural relationships of the agents within the field.

What constitutes fan fiction has been typically ill-defined, as scholars have put varied limitations on what is, and is not, considered fan fiction (Busse 2009; Derecho 2006; Jenkins 1992). At its most basic, fan fiction is understood to be a written story based upon a previously produced piece of media, typically by a reader, or ‘fan’, of the original work. However, describing fan fiction as simply fan-created stories
based on content that already exists is ultimately too broad a definition to be helpful. Fans and writers alike often refer to concepts such as *professionalism*, *commercial viability*, and the *status* of the work as part of the ‘canon’\(^4\) in order to define whether a work is fan fiction or not. This perception results in an artificial distinction between original, professional and commercially viable works that are *not* fan fiction, and ‘unoriginal’,\(^5\) non-professional and non-commercial works that *are* fan fiction. However, these categories are not as clear-cut as they might seem.

The plots, characters and archetypes in stories all borrowed either knowingly or unknowingly from other texts (Gray 2013, p.93); for example, the intertextual links surrounding Shakespeare’s works have been discussed in depth by academics and fans (Gray 2013, p. 90). Television series such as the BBC’s *Sherlock*\(^6\) (2010–) or plays such as *Wicked*\(^7\) (2003–) are commercial, reworked and reimagined creations based on existing stories and produced by fans of the original work, and so could, by some

\(^{4}\) The ‘canon’ is the commercially produced piece of media on which fans base their artwork, fiction, vidding or other fan works. The canon does not have to be the original work. For example, the *Harry Potter* book series and the *Harry Potter* film franchise can both be considered *Harry Potter* canon depending on the context or fan work being referred to.

\(^{5}\) *Unoriginal* is in quotes because what constitutes originality in relation to fan work is highly debatable.

\(^{6}\) *Sherlock* is a British-American television series that premiered on the BBC in 2010. The series is based on Arthur Conan Doyle’s book series of the same name. It is set in modern London and follows Sherlock Holmes and his friend Doctor John Watson as they solve a series of mysteries.

\(^{7}\) The play *Wicked* premiered on October 2003 on Broadway at the Gershwin Theatre. The play tells the story of the friendship between Elphaba (the Wicked Witch of the West) and Glinda (the Good Witch of the North), who struggle against the corrupt government of the Wizard in Oz.
definitions, be considered fan fiction. The play *Wicked*, for example, is based on Gregory Maguire’s 1995 novel, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. This novel, in turn, was inspired by the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, which itself was based on the 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. These inspired works were not commissioned by the canon creators, yet the inspiration for their content is clear. Works can only be seen to be completely ‘original’ and separate from the works around them if they are understood to have no past or no future (Gray 2013, p. 90).

Fans of the canon can, at times, end up producing and creating an aspect of the canon; thus the fact that a media item is ‘fan created’ is not sufficient to define it as fan fiction. For example, the producers of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television series *Sherlock*, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, have both said they were fans of Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock* books and short stories long before they worked on the television series (Hills 2012, p. 32). Another example of this can be

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8 *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* is a novel written in 1996 by Gregory Maguire and published by HarperCollins. The book takes place in the Land of Oz prior to Dorothy’s arrival. The story follows the life of Elphaba, who later becomes the Wicked Witch of the West, as she struggles to fit in among her friends, family and the corrupt government of Oz.


10 *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is an American children’s novel written by L. Frank Baum, and published by George M. Hill Company in 1900. The story describes the adventures of Dorothy and her dog Toto after they are swept up by a cyclone and land in the magical Land of Oz.

11 Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the Sherlock Holmes books and short stories between 1887 and 1927.
seen in the *Wheel of Time* series. The first book of the series, *The Eye of the World*, was written by Robert Jordan and published in 1990. Robert Jordan died in 2007 while working on the twelfth book in the series. Brandon Sanderson then took over the writing of the series at the request of Jordan’s widow. Sanderson, who will be discussed further in Chapter 4: Authorship, revealed at the 2013 Perth Science Fiction Convention *Swancon* that he had been a fan of the series since he was a child. In writing the final books in the series, he said he developed several characters along the lines he had imagined them developing when he was a reader and fan of the books, calling his work on the series ‘a kind of sanctioned fan fiction’.

As will be further explored throughout this thesis the line between fan author and ‘real’ author can be blurry. Fan writers such as E.L. James and Cassandra Clare have ‘transitioned’ from fan fiction writers to being ‘real published authors’. Additionally, it is an open secret among those who participate in online fan fiction that the fan-fiction writer astolat is also a well-known published, ‘original’ author. Therefore, the division that ‘original’ works are written by professional authors while fan fiction is written by amateur or non-professional authors is not as clear-cut as it may seem.

Fan writers often refer to the canon as a way of differentiating between what is and is not fan fiction. For example, SK\(^{13}\) states that she often thinks of the authors of film

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\(^{12}\) *Wheel of Time* (1990–2013) is an epic fantasy series published by Orbit Books.

\(^{13}\) Individuals who have been interviewed for this research will be referred to by their screen names, or initials, which have been italicised and underlined, for example SK. This will be expanded upon in Chapter 2: Methodology.
and television series tie-in novellas as ‘being paid to write fan fiction’. Yet SK then goes on to state that she does not believe that the tie-in novellas are fan fiction because: ‘... they're officially licenced ... it becomes part of the canon’, drawing a line between what is and is not fan fiction through the understanding of what is ‘officially’ considered part of the continuity of the ‘original’ story. Content created by a new creator, and sanctioned as ‘canon’, is not understood to be fan fiction, while content that is not sanctioned as canon can be considered fan fiction. Yet this way of defining what fan fiction is can become problematic because what is considered canon can change. For example, with the recent purchase of the Star Wars14 (1977–) franchise by Disney, and their intended continuation of the franchise, many of the tie-in novellas that were written about the lives of the original characters after the third film of the original Star Wars franchise, Return of the Jedi, have now been removed from the canon (Jackson 2014; Star Wars 2014). Many of the novellas were written by fans of the canon within the ‘world’ of Star Wars. The novellas are now considered ‘what if’ stories which explore potential scenarios that could have happened to the characters (Jackson 2014; StarWars 2014). At their essence, these novellas are now fan-produced works based on an original ‘canon’ but not part of the canon. Yet they are typically still not considered fan fiction.

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14 Star Wars is an American epic space opera franchise created by George Lucas. The first film in the series, A New Hope, was released in 1977 and the most recent film in the franchise, The Force Awakens, was released in 2015. The original trilogy comprises the films A New Hope (1977), The Empire Strikes Back (1980) and Return of the Jedi (1983). The films follow the adventures of various members of the ‘Skywalker’ family in a galactic battle between good and evil.
Many fans then refer to the lack of commercial engagement as a definitive fact in determining what is and is not fan fiction; however, this also has limitations. For example, the body positive fashion magazine *The Bare Truth* recently offered fan-fiction stories as a reward for donations to their crowd-funding campaign (Liley 2015). A donation of $10 allowed individuals to request a ‘Squeaky Clean Fan Fic’ where the donors could choose ‘... the theme, characters, plot – whatever you like – of your own 500-word fanfic’ (Liley 2015). Or for $15 the donor could request a ‘50 Shades of Fan Fic’ where ‘for only $5 more, you can make your fan fic as naughty as you like – but be warned, we take no responsibility for E.L. James style adjectives’ (Liley 2015). There is also fan fiction that is published and sold as ‘original’ work. These fan-fiction stories are often referred to as having had ‘the serial numbers filed off’, implying that their fan roots have been removed from the text (De Kosnik 2015, p. 121). Works originally written as fan fiction and then later published are typically not considered to be fan fiction—for example, *Fifty Shades of Grey*.15

The line between what is and is not fan fiction is not one that is easily drawn. It appears, however, that a work’s removal from its fan context is what marks the text’s shift to being a ‘professional’, ‘original’ or ‘commercial’ piece of work. In light of this, what is and what is not fan fiction, perhaps, hinges upon not only the status of the writing as ‘non-commercial’, ‘unprofessional’ or ‘not part of the canon’, but also on

15 The *Fifty Shades* trilogy is a series of erotic BDSM romance novels written by E.L. James and published in 2011 and 2012 by Vintage Books. It was originally written as fan fiction based on the *Twilight* novels by Stephanie Myer.
the social processes that are essential in the creation of the fictional stories. I suggest, therefore, that not only the text or piece of media defines fan fiction but also the social context and processes that result in the text or piece of media.

Booth (2010, p. 21) argued that new technology could not be understood without an understanding of the culture that preceded it. Similarly, fan fiction cannot be separated from the social processes that have created it. The intent and cultural context in which the text or media product is created must be taken into account when defining fan fiction. What the above examples demonstrate is not necessarily a strict set of definitional paradigms that can be used to determine what is or is not fan fiction, but a set of cultural principles that fan fiction is seen to sit within by those who primarily create and engage with it. Taking this into consideration, I assert that fan fiction is a cultural product created within the culture of a fandom more generally, and fan fiction specifically.

With these cultural ideas and practices in mind, the term ‘fan fiction’ will thus refer to fictional texts that have been produced for a non-commercial purposes within the online fan-fiction practices and culture that clearly exist in online fan-fiction sites, such as archiveofourown.org (AO3), and fanfiction.net (fanfic.net), or social networking sites such as Tumblr that allow for social interaction during the production of the texts. These sites, arguably, provide a platform for content that is definitely fan fiction, because the writers who post their stories there are intentionally producing fanworks.
Power, authority, legitimacy and authorship

In this thesis I examine media engagement through an exploration of fan-fiction participants’ social interactions and relationships with canon producers, media corporations, and each other. By focusing on the connections between fans, industry and canon producers in the creation of and interaction with media, I place those who create and interact with fan fiction at the centre of this research. In the current rapidly changing technological environment, the links between canon producers, fans and industry have all shaped, and continue to shape, the landscape of media consumption. Jenkins (2004, p. 34) states that, ‘media convergence has altered the relationships between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences’. Where ‘industry’ according to Booth (2015, p. 5), is ‘the larger commercial interests that guide the production (and consumption) of media texts’. With this in mind, this study situates the creation of fan-fiction stories within a complex and multifaceted series of relationships, resulting in various relational dynamics and conceptions of authorship among those who participate, observe, create, consume, and engage with media. I argue that creation and engagement with fan fiction, and associated fan practices, are part of content producers’ and consumers’ struggle for power to determine who can engage with media, and how, in a rapidly developing digital environment.

Recent approaches to fan studies have focused on the fan or audience as an organisational principle in defining a text and understanding individuals’ engagement with it (Booth 2010, p. 50). However, the concept of ‘the author’ is a
powerful one that has shaped the way people conceptualize and engage with media (Busse 2013; Gray 2013; Johnson & Gray 2013; Foucault 1970), not only in the past but, as I will argue, currently. The ways that fans, industry and content creators conceptualize what authorship is, who is an author, and the rights over the media that authorship affords, are integral to understanding the ways that media products are produced, consumed and reproduced. As discussed by Foucault (1970, p. 906) and Barthes (1977), authorship is inexorably tied to power and meaning; therefore, understanding the ways that power is negotiated between media producers, consumers and industry is essential when discussing authorship—because, for social agents, authorship represents power. The struggles for power and control are therefore expressed through the concept of authorship. In light of this, it is through the lens of authorship that each chapter of this thesis examines the ways that content creators, industry and fans express authority, legitimacy and control over media. By examining ‘specific sites and moments of interaction’ (Booth 2015, p. 5) between each of these groups and the media, I argue that their actions assert their authorship over media products in order to express their power and authority over the media.

It is within the interaction of fans, media producers and those engaged in the media industry that this thesis is situated, as it is the engagement surrounding the media that has defined the field of this research. Here, Bourdieu’s conception of the field is useful as a way of conceptualizing both the ‘field’ of research as well as the relations described throughout this thesis. Although Boudieu’s (1983) conception of the field
is traditionally applied theoretically and conceptually, I find this notion useful in both defining the parameters of the ‘field’ of research and understanding the interactions that occur within this field, because the field exists as ‘... a space of relationships [original italics] that is as real as a geographical space ...’ where ‘distances within it are ... measured in time’ (Bourdieu 1985, pp. 725–726).

Bourdieu (2005, p. 33) understands the ‘field’ to be a microcosm or social universe of forces that exists within its own laws, yet not completely independent from the world around it. It is defined by the interactions of those that occupy it. The structures and forces that make up the field are not static (Bourdieu 1983, pp. 321–322). The shifts that emerge within the field are influenced by stresses that are external to the field—such as economic or social pressures that come from the wider society as well as the shifting relationships of the social agents within the field (Bourdieu 1983, pp. 321–322). It is within this microcosm of media production and consumption, which both reflects and influences the broader social structures that surround it, that this discussion of fandom is located.

Fans, audiences, media producers and industry can all be understood as sets of social agents that make up the field of media production and consumption—a field that is experiencing technological and social shifts that have been afforded by the emergence of the Internet and its associated technologies. Social agents and groups of social agents are defined by their ‘... relative positions within the space ...’ (Bourdieu 1985, p. 724). Therefore, it is the social agents’ position in relation to one another that determines their power and hierarchical position. Each of the agents, or
groups of agents, have various kinds of capital—economic, cultural, social and symbolic—that they appeal to in order to legitimize their power and authority within the field (Hurtado, 2010, p. 55). Social agents within the field may belong to one or more ‘groups of agents’—fan, media producer and industry—as they engage in a variety of practices within the media field. This can be seen throughout this thesis when author Brandon Sanderson appeals to his fannish routes, actor Stephen Amell constructs himself as both an author and a fan, and fan writers such as Cassandra Clare and E.L. James publish ‘original’ works; each of these appeals to various social positions, wielding differences in legitimacy, authority and power.

The relationships within the field are dynamic and constantly changing due to the plurality of worldviews that exist within the field (Bourdieu 1985, p. 728). The sets of social agents that make up the field exist within the field. They construct, perceive, represent, as well as change, the forces that make it up (Bourdieu 2005, p. 30). Due to social agents occupying various positions and perspectives within the field, symbolic struggles emerge over the power to impose a dominant vision of the field’s social world and hierarchy (Bourdieu 2005, p. 36; Bourdieu 1985, pp. 723, 728).

This conception of Bourdieu’s field can then be paired with Foucault’s understanding of power as a force that emerges from everyday relations as represented by the flows and practices of everyday life, rather than being imposed from the top down (McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 7). Individuals are always in a position of both experiencing and exercising power (Foucault 1980, p. 98; McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 89). As power is embedded in relationships, it is comprised of a collection of
practices that make up the social body (Foucault 1980, p. 89; McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 22), resulting in power being both constructed by and constructing the world around us (Foucault 1980, p. 93).

Through these processes resistance to power also emerges as ‘where there is power there is resistance ... [as] ... resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power’ (Foucault 1990, p. 95). When this notion of power is connected with Bourdieu’s concept of the field, as a series of forces, we are able to see that power is both exercised and felt as a ‘force’ that constructs the social field in which agents exist. As power is productive, it privileges knowledge and creates social hierarchies, shaping aspects of our society, while drawing upon authority by referring to commonly accepted norms (McHoul & Grace 1993, pp. 65, 82–83).

In light of Bourdieu’s conception of the field as ‘... areas of struggle in which individuals and organisations compete, unconsciously and consciously, to valorise those forms of capital which they possess’ (Benson 2006, p. 190), when agents solidify or lose their position within the field it results in shifts in the existing power relations within the field (Bourdieu 1983, p. 314). Social agents are therefore taking part in a constant struggle over power within the field to legitimize their discourse (Bourdieu 1983, p. 317). The conflicts that emerge within the field are over the power to impose a prevailing perception of what the field should consist of, and how it should function.
As I outline the relations within the field, I will show that legitimacy and authority, and therefore authorship, are being constantly reconstructed by conflict among social agents who draw on socially constructed norms, legal understandings and practices in order to impose a particular vision of the field, thus highlighting the state of flux that exists within the field as agents negotiate their relations with one another. This conflict is then used to highlight the struggle that the social actors engage in over their authority and legitimacy to impose their view of the roles that exist within the field of media production and consumption.

**Why study fans?**

Fans’ continued engagement with media products through rapidly evolving digital media practices has resulted in them occupying a key space in media studies (Booth 2010, p. 20). Fans have been the focus of academic examination in various disciplines since the late 1980s/early 1990s. Early examinations of fan fiction have featured as part of wider inquiries into fans and fandom practices, such as Henry Jenkins’s (1992) study on science fiction fans at conventions, Camille Bacon-Smith’s (2000; 1992) examination of women science-fiction fans, and Constance Penley’s (1997) consideration of the intersections between science fiction and science.

More recently, fan fiction specifically has been the focus of academic inquiry. For example, Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse’s edited collections devoted to fan fiction (2014; 2006a) and Rebecca Black’s (2008) inquiry into how adolescents use
fan fiction to help learn English as a second language. Online fan fiction is a topic that crosses scholarly disciplines. Literary studies scholars have examined the prose of fan-fiction stories (Astrom 2010; Brennan 2013; Hagen 2014; Kaplan 2006), media scholars have studied the technological affordances that have allowed fans, including fan-fiction readers and writers, to increasingly connect and engage with one another (Coppa 2006a; Das 2011; Felschow 2010; Galuszka 2014; Johnston 2008; Karpovich 2006; Stein 2006), and cultural studies academics have situated fan-fiction stories within wider sociocultural contexts (Black 2006; Chander & Madhavi 2007; De Kosnik 2015; Derecho 2006; Hellekson 2015; Hetcher 2009; Lewis, Black & Tomlinson 2009; Scott 2015; Stroude 2010; Willis 2006). Previous studies into fan fiction have examined social themes through the lens of fan fiction—for example, Francesca Coppa’s (2009) work on exploring female fetishes in fan-made videos, Abigail Derecho’s (2006) construction of fan fiction as archontic literature, or Elizabeth Woledge’s (2006) work on ‘slash’ as a subversion of literary and cultural tropes. Fan fiction is an area of research that is perfectly placed for interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary engagement alike. With this in mind, I seek to add to the emerging field of research surrounding fan fiction and fan studies.

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16 ‘Slash’ is a genre of fan fiction where two or more male characters are written in a romantic or sexual relationship. The characters are usually written as taking part in sexual relations that are explicitly described. The term originated from the ‘/’ symbol between the names Kirk/Spock in Star Trek fan fictions to denote that the story depicted a romantic or sexual relationship between Captain Kirk and Spock. Slash has, and continues to be, the subject of academic inquiry across various fandoms, and in fan studies generally. For academic articles that examine slash shipping in fandom, please see Astrom (2010), Booth (2014), Brennan (2013), Busse (2006), Flegel & Roth (2010), Samutina (2013), Stasi (2006), Woledge (2006), and Zanghellini (2009).
As we will see in this thesis, the power, legitimacy and authority of the canon creators are celebrated and affirmed, as well as dismissed. The shifting field of media engagement has resulted in changes to the ways that power, authority and authorship are being negotiated. Current shifts in media—conceptualized as ‘Web 2.0’ (Banks & Humphreys 2008; Barton & Lee 2012), ‘remix culture’ (Lessig 2008), ‘prosumers’ (Bird 2011; Bruns 2010) and ‘convergence culture’ (Deuze 2007)—have resulted in changes to the ways that media items are consumed, produced and interacted with. ‘Remix culture’, ‘convergence culture’ and ‘prosuming’ are phenomena where audiences are understood to be active in both consumption and production of media products, with their engagement altering or enriching the original content (Bruns 2010). These changes have eased fans ability to engage in both affirmational and transformational practices, as well as allowing canon creators unprecedented access to all types of fans.

Online fan fiction has emerged within the landscape of Web 2.0 and prosumption practices. Specific fan-fiction websites, as well as social media websites used by fans, are all examples of Web 2.0 media platforms where users’ productivity is essential to the functioning of the website. Additionally, fan fiction sits firmly within the concept of prosumption. Fan-fiction participants are actively engaging with media products, creating and recreating media as part of their consumption habits.

17 Web 2.0 and presumption will be further discussed in Chapter 3: A History of Fan Fiction
This has created an, at times, uneasy relationship between media producers and audiences. The collapse of clear identities such as; consumer and producer in the era of Web 2.0, as shown by fan-fiction participants, has resulted in audience autonomy, media dominance, and authorship, being constantly negotiated. It is because of these traits that fans’ engagement with the media, as a subset of audiences who actively engage with media producers, provides a clear access point to emerging audience attitudes and practices. Therefore, online fan practices have been used as a way to examine consumption and engagement with media online.

**Disciplinary approaches**

With studies into fandom and fan fiction coming from so many different disciplinary approaches, along with all of their associated historical, theoretical and methodological perspectives, I feel it is important to outline my own academic background in order to situate this research. I completed an Arts Degree at the University of Western Australia (UWA) in 2011, majoring in Archaeology, History, and Anthropology & Sociology. I then completed Honours in Anthropology & Sociology also at UWA, in 2012. My background in these subjects, particularly in Anthropology & Sociology, has informed my approach to designing and conducting research into fan fiction. Anthropology & Sociology is the discipline through which I enrolled at UWA for this research, and it is the disciplinary gaze I find myself instinctively subscribing to. Anthropology, as a discipline that primarily focuses on the study of cultures, people and human interaction through the use of long-term
immersive fieldwork, is well placed to assist an inquiry into fan fiction and fan practices.

However, during the course of my candidature, I have also found myself engaging in perspectives and research from the discipline of Communication/Cultural/Media studies. Although this discipline is not my ‘home’ discipline it has provided invaluable perspectives through which to engage in fandom research. With this cross-disciplinary background, I have often found it difficult to write ‘for’ a particular discipline. There are underlying assumptions of knowledge, theoretical perspectives and language use that permeate all academic perspectives. Disciplinary members are effectively enculturated into their disciplines, resulting in them seeing academic research through a disciplinary lens. With this in mind, this thesis is intended to be a piece of cross-disciplinary social science research, speaking to the inter-disciplinary space that fan studies and Internet research often occupy.

Like the intermediary disciplinary space that fan fiction occupies, the intermediary space that acafans occupy also needs to be addressed. An ‘acafan’ is someone who identifies equally as a fan and an academic (Hills 2002). Acafans are then intimately tied to both academic and fan traditions, while at times not fitting comfortably into either category (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 45). The notion of the acafan is one that has permeated the very fabric of fan scholarship. Academics such as Hills (2012; 2007; 2002), Jenkins (2010; 2007; 2004; 1992), Tosenberger (2010; 2008), Hellekson (2015; 2009; 2006a; 2006b), Busse (2015; 2013; 2009; 2006), Stein (2010; 2009; 2006), Black (2009; 2008; 2006), Coppa (2009; 2006a; 2006b), Derecho (2006), De Kosnik

In the past, arguments have been made in regard to the level of active or passive engagement required for individuals to be considered, or consider themselves, a fan (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, pp. 17–18). The common construction of a ‘fan’ is someone who actively and consistently engages with a variety of fan activities. As my engagement with fandom has typically been motivated through academic inquiry, painting myself as an acafan feels disingenuous. I have always enjoyed the consumption of books, television shows and films; however, my engagement with fandom before this research began was limited. Although I had read fan-fiction stories, I had never attempted to write fan fiction or engage with fans online. During the course of this research, as I have embedded fan-fiction reading and writing practices into my everyday life, my appreciation of fandom and fans has grown. However, these practices have not significantly shifted the way that I construct my own identity.

Stating that I am not an acafan in some ways feels akin to academic suicide in fandom studies (as well as inviting derision by fans). Being an acafan is associated with an insider status that is seen to legitimize academic inquiry and data for both fans and academics alike. Studying fandom without being part of the community has

¹⁸ Although it is not the focus of this research, it is interesting to note parallels between the deconstruction of the studied/studier dichotomy, as represented by ‘acafans’, and ‘prosumers’ as the deconstruction of producers and consumers.
long been critiqued by fans and academics alike (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, pp. 48–51).
However, anthropologists have often not held a pre-existing ‘insider’ status when conducting immersive research. As more social scientists are researching phenomena in which they are embedded, this is acknowledged as having both limitations and benefits (Breen 2007; Greene 2014). Studying fandom ‘from the inside’ has been acknowledged as potentially resulting in researcher bias (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 48). While being an insider can give the researcher more ready access to data, a strong association with a particular group can also close off alternative avenues of data collection. Already being enculturated into a social practice or culture can influence the research questions, or data collected by the researcher, pre-determining the research focus. With this in mind, I do not necessarily see being an acafan as a requirement of research into fandom; rather, it is an identity, like any other, which holds both opportunities and limitations when conducting research.

**Thesis overview**

The negotiation of power between producers, industry and consumers is explored through the lens of authorship and engagement with the themes of authority, conflict and legitimacy. Each of these themes is examined by focusing on a particular site of media interaction, or issue of note. The case studies presented in each thematic chapter deconstruct the ways that the social actors in the field of media production and consumption are engaged in dialogues with one another, and actively negotiate the field.
Prior to the examination of these conceptual themes and sites of media engagement, the research methods used for the collection of data for this thesis will be outlined.

Chapter 2: Methodology initially conducts an examination of the limitations that apply to traditional qualitative research methods, such as participant observation in an online context. I examine how Tom Boellstorff (2009) and Bonnie Nardi (2009) use participant observation in what they call 'virtual worlds'. These texts are then used to highlight the differences that exist between conducting research in a 'virtual world', where experiences occur visually through an avatar, and online websites such as Archive of Our Own (AO3), Fanfiction.net (ff.net or Fanfic.net), Tumblr and Facebook, where engagement is based primarily in text or a series of images.

The field of research and the research methods are then contextualised. I outline my use of online participant observation, and the 21 semi-structured interviews carried out to conduct this research. Here, I show how fan-fiction stories have not been examined as literary texts in this research; rather, they have been examined as remainders of social interactions between fans and the canon media. This allows for the field of this research to be determined in line with Bourdieu's understanding of the field. The field is conceptualised as a 'social universe' that is relationally defined (Bourdieu 2005, p. 33). Therefore, the field is defined using participants’ interactions with each other and the online environment. This allows the 'social world’ that the participants engage with to determine the field of the research, rather than a subscription to physical or contextual boundaries.
Once the methodology used to conduct this research has been outlined and contextualised, Chapter 3: A History of Fan Fiction then outlines the history of fandom and fan fiction. This chapter defines the field of media and production through an examination of media development. The history of a field is essential to the functioning of the field, and emerges from the struggle between established understandings and emerging perspectives (Bourdieu 1983, pp. 339, 341). Therefore, the historical and contextual roots of media consumption, literacy and authorship will be highlighted in order to show how past power relations between consumers and producers inform current understandings of media engagement.

Foucault advocates for a ‘return to knowledge’ by engaging with subjugated knowledges that have been buried in order to portray a coherent narrative of formal systems (Foucault 1980, p. 81). Examining subjugated knowledges allows for the illumination of conflict and struggle that has occurred and that may contradict prevailing accepted perspectives or structures (Foucault 1980, p. 82). In incorporating historical and background knowledge of literacy, authorship and media consumption, I seek to disrupt the retrospective narrative that modern media producers and consumers often subscribe to—that is, that past engagement with media was functionally coherent and systemised. The dominant narrative of the roles of producers and consumers in the past have worked as ‘official knowledge’ in that they have functioned as a way to normalise ways of thinking and acting which, in turn, produces a hierarchy of knowledge (McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 17). It is only through an examination of historical processes that we can see beyond the dominant
narrative of literacy, authorship and ownership that forms current official knowledge to the conflict and negotiations that previously occurred (Foucault 1980, pp. 81–82).

Fan fiction’s current format on websites such as Tumblr, AO3 and fanfic.net are relatively recent developments. The chapter examines the evolution of media technology and fan practices in several areas: literary culture, the development of technology, and the evolution of fan cultures. Initially, the chapter outlines the social and technological shifts that occurred with the emergence of widespread literacy, as fan-fiction stories are part of evolving oral and literary traditions. From there, the chapter explores studies of offline fan fiction that have taken place, highlighting the early work of Henry Jenkins (2004; 1992), Camille Bacon-Smith (2000; 1992), and Constance Penley (1997). The work of fan scholars on online fan fiction specifically is then emphasised, examining, in particular, the collection of essays edited by Hellekson and Busse (2006a).

The chapter then focuses on the history of the Internet, showing how fandom has been enmeshed with the Internet from its origins (Rheingold 1994). Negative social interaction online is also explored through an examination of ‘trolling’ and ‘flaming’ practices, demonstrating how negative interactions can be useful in identity and community building. As the Internet is primarily a textual environment, the evolution of writing online is then examined. Online writing is shown to depend highly on writer, content and environment, demonstrating how specific digital literacies can indicate in-group, or out-group, status. The emergence of Web 2.0 is then outlined. The explosion of interactivity online is seen to mark a new stage in
Internet development, resulting in the Web 2.0 label. Web 2.0 has ushered in changes to the ways that consumers interact with and consume media, leading to a deconstruction of the consumer–producer dichotomy.

Once a thematic and contextual history of fan studies has been outlined we move onto the concept of ‘authorship’. Authorship is a central notion in regard to discussions of fan fiction as it encompasses the themes that are subsequently engaged with: authority, conflict, and legitimacy.

Chapter 4: Authorship utilizes both Ronald Barthes’s (1977) and Michel Foucault’s (1970) theories on authorship to focus on how fan-fiction participants and canon creators conceptualize authorship. Although fan fiction is premised upon the denial of ‘the author as God’, both fan-fiction participants and canon creators still, at times, defer to the perceived omnipotence of authorship. Using a series of commentaries posted online and interviews conducted with published fiction authors on the topic of fan fiction, the chapter examines canon creators’ perceptions of authorship. From this analysis, I demonstrate that canon creators perceive authorship as both a creative and emotional concept, as well as an economic one. Fan-fiction participants’ comments on authorship are then examined. I will show that their commentary demonstrates that they both subscribe to and reject traditional notions of authorship. I argue that this acceptance and rejection of authorship is predicated upon the perceived rights or authority that the fan feels an individual is entitled to. This is subsequently demonstrated in fans’ denial of the status of author to some writers who have transitioned from fan writers to published writers.
Moving beyond the broader understanding of authorship outlined in Chapter 4, Chapter 5: Authority explores how authority is negotiated among social actors in the field. Authority and authorship are closely linked concepts that require close examination (Johnson & Gray 2013, p.5). In order to provide some contextual information about how the notion of authorship has been legally and historically imbued with power and authority, the chapter begins by scrutinizing the emergence of the term ‘author’. In line with Barthes’s conception of an Author-God (Barthes 1977), as well as historical constructions of authorship in copyright and intellectual property law, canon creators are often assumed to have omnipotent and omniscient knowledge over their creations. Authors and media creators were constructed in the popular imagination as lone geniuses that produced media products ex nihilo (from nothing). This assumed that knowledge, in conjunction with traditional content producers’ ability to distribute their interpretations and understandings of the media to a wide consuming audience legitimates content producers’ power over the works that they have created. This conception of an all-knowing content producer is then understood to marginalize alternative potential meanings that could be drawn from the text, as the author is seen to have control over the messages that the media contains or portrays.

However, with the emergence of Web 2.0, media fans have been able to more easily engage in creating their own meanings and remixes of media products. Fan fiction and social media—as part of the Web 2.0 landscape—have allowed fans’ own interpretative frameworks to become more visible, challenging the omnipotence of
the author. In conjunction with these developments, Web 2.0 spaces have also
allowed authors to ‘talk back’ to fans. As canon creators hold pre-existing social
capital over the media that they have produced, their comments and engagement
are afforded greater weight than those of fans. It is argued in this chapter that this
provides canon creators with an avenue to ‘discipline’ fan interpretations and
practices, reasserting authorial control. Supernatural’s engagement with fans within
the canon has been thoroughly examined by other scholars and is therefore used as
an introductory example. The television series talks directly to fans in several
episodes, both encouraging appropriate fan behaviour and disciplining fan
behaviour deemed undesirable.

Moving beyond Supernatural, the Facebook page of Stephen Amell, who plays the
titular character in Arrow (2012–), is also examined. Amell’s Facebook page serves as
an outlet where he can use the discursive power associated with authorship and
celebrity to encourage, or influence, particular fan activities and conversations.
These situations highlight the tensions that exist over appropriate fan engagement
with media, as well as canon producers’ use of the authority associated with an
‘author’.

Having established how power is negotiated through claims to authority among
canon producers and fans, Chapter 6: Conflict then deals with the tensions that
emerge when social actors contest this authority. Conflict in this chapter is explored
through the lens of ‘shipping’. Shipping is the practice of desiring two or more
characters to be in a romantic relationship. Within fandoms it readily results in
arguments and antagonisms between groups and individuals, known as ‘shipping wars’. By examining two ships in the Arrow fandom, Olicity (Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak) and Lauriver (Laurel Lance and Oliver Queen), on Tumblr, Fanfiction.net, and AO3, this chapter depicts specific instances of conflict within the fandom and argues that this conflict emerges over competing interpretations of the canon text—namely, the desire for an individual’s interpretation to be the ‘correct’ interpretation of the source material. Conflict is not simply a matter of disagreement but a struggle for power and subsequently legitimacy and authority.

Using active audience theory, as well as conflict theory, this chapter demonstrates how interpretations of media can be understood as a limited resource over which competition emerges. This limited resource, in the case of fan fiction, is the hegemonic interpretation of the text. Although texts can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, only one interpretation at a time can be seen to be the hegemonic, or ‘correct’, interpretation of the characters, stories, and meanings presented. The hegemonic meaning, as the dominant or prevailing interpretation of the text, gains legitimacy from its widely accepted and subscribed-to status. When fan-fiction participants subscribe to their own reading of the media, they inevitably reject alternative readings of the canon. Conflict then emerges as individuals refuse to acknowledge the validity of alternative interpretations, rejecting other interpretations of the source media, and the subsequent legitimacy that would be afforded by that acceptance. This demonstrates fans’ struggle for the power to determine the meaning of the media.
Finally, in Chapter 7: Legitimacy, I explore how claims for legitimacy can move beyond claims for legitimacy in the field to echo claims of authorship, with appeals to affective, legal and social sources of power. The chapter examines this through fan-fiction participants’ relationship with commercial practices. Various attempts have been made in the past to commercialize fan fiction, and Amazon’s Kindle Worlds is the most recent of these attempts. Each of these endeavours has sought to commercialize fan fiction by presenting the platform as a legal and, therefore, legitimate form of fan fiction. Amazon launched the platform Kindle Worlds in 2013 (Amazon 2013) as a definitively legal platform to sell and distribute fan fiction. As outlined in Chapter 4: Authority, canon creators’ authority over the works they create is constructed through various legal, social and economic means. Chapter 7: Legitimacy explores how the publishing industry, as represented by Kindle Worlds, has attempted to legitimize its engagement in fan fiction to both fan-fiction participants and the general public. The platform seeks to establish its legitimacy through legal and moral appeals. However, the platform neglects the underlying inherent sociality of fan fiction.

Through a comparison to current fan-fiction practices that occur on AO3 and fanfic.net, the format of Kindle Worlds is shown to be at odds with ‘traditional’ fan-fiction reading and writing, which is predicated upon a series of social interactions. I describe how fan-fiction stories are created via a series of social interactions and non-economic labour. The fan-fiction story that is produced can then be seen as an end product, which is the result of social interaction that occurs between fans as
they discuss and engage with the object of their fandom. I will argue that Amazon's *Kindle Worlds* restructures the relationships engaged in when creating fan-fiction stories from social to economic. This restructuring has resulted in *Kindle Worlds* achieving limited success to date, highlighting the necessity of relationships in the engagement and the creation of fan fiction.

Each of these thematic chapters highlight the ways that power is negotiated among the social actors in the field of media production and consumption. The concept of authorship plays a key role in social actors’ appeals to legitimacy, authority and power. The emergence of Web 2.0 and remix culture has supported a burgeoning co-production between consumers and producers. This technological and cultural shift has resulted in a perceived change to the relationships between consumers and producers. In examining these sites of media interaction, I highlight how relationships between social actors within the field are constantly negotiated and renegotiated, as each group both experiences and exercises power through their interactions with one another.
Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines some of the current discussions surrounding digital social science research methodologies. This is done to demonstrate the suitability of the online and offline qualitative research methods that I have used. In this chapter I highlight some of the current debates surrounding conducting ethically and methodologically rigorous research online, and situate my research methods within those debates. In doing this I identify two primary concerns in conducting qualitative online research into fan fiction: defining the field and conducting ethical research.

The archetype of ‘the field’ in anthropological research is one that has both been long held and long problematized (Amit 2000, p. 1). As fan fiction is primarily engaged with online, it does not have a physical locus offline from which to begin an investigation. Additionally, fan fiction is engaged in by participants on multiple websites and through a variety of online practices (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 17). Fans often engage with fandoms and fan fiction across Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter,
Archive of Our Own, Fanfiction.net, fandom Wikis, and LiveJournal. This results in fan fiction not clearly occupying a particular ‘space’, or ‘field’, either offline or online. In light of this, my methodology has taken inspiration from a recent shift in media and digital ethnographic practices—a shift that has resulted in greater focus on the interactions, practices and engagement of participants in defining the limitations of the research, rather than seeking to physically demarcate it (Cruz & Ardèvol 2013, pp. 31–32; Hine 2009). This allows this research to focus on fan fiction as a series of interrelated practices that illuminate the ways that knowledge, ‘… meanings and values emerge from practices and events’ (Cruz & Ardèvol 2013). In doing so, it prevents the researcher’s preconceived notions of the scope of the research from determining the research outcomes, instead ensuring that both the participants and the researcher construct the field of research (boyd 2009, pp. 30–31). This places the research focus on what fan-fiction participants do and say, rather than on fan-fiction stories as semiotic or cultural objects.

The use of online qualitative research methods has resulted in several ethical and moral concerns. Ethical concerns over the privacy of research participants have long been a focus for ethnographers (Asher & Jahnke 2013), and digital researchers (Elm 2009). Many concerns that have been raised in regard to ‘offline’ ethnographic research come to life once again in regard to ‘online’ research. Discussions often focus on what constitutes public or private information, what ethical and moral obligations the researcher has to those being researched, and concerns over informed consent (Driscoll & Gregg 2010; Elm 2009; Goel 2014; Jarvis 2011). To add to
more ‘traditional’ ethical concerns, the legitimacy of online observation is also questioned, because without participation or engagement with the website, individuals or community, researchers are seen as ‘lurking’ and, therefore, ethically ambiguous (Armstrong 2003, p. 4). During the course of this research, ethical concerns were actively negotiated. Participant consent forms were discussed, and used, with participants that were directly engaged in the research. Additionally, the anonymization of participants was negotiated. Finally, the use of direct quotes from online fan-fiction stories was restricted in order to limit the chances of them being found online.

In order to follow fan-fiction participants’ practices and engagement with fan fiction, an approach that uses a diverse spread of qualitative research methods was essential to illuminate a coherent picture of events, debates and social practices. Online participant observation, online and offline semi-structured interviews, as well as textual and visual analysis, were all employed as methods. Individuals were recruited from both offline and online sources. The online fan-fiction platforms, Archive of Our Own (AO3) and Fanfiction.net (fanfic.net), were used as entry points into this research on fan fiction, as AO3 and fanfic.net are participants’ main sites of engagement with fan fiction. However, numerous other online platforms such as Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter and Kindle Worlds, as well as other offline platforms such as fan conventions, were also examined. These other sites of fan engagement appeared to function like ‘paratexts’ that surround a media item: although the sites
are often not essential for participation in fan fiction, knowledge of and engagement with them can deepen and expand knowledge of fan-fiction practices.

**Digital ethnography**

Research into online interaction is a rapidly growing area, as an increasing proportion of the world’s population spends a portion of their lives online. With the use of the Internet, accessing, collecting and storing large amounts of information has become increasingly cost effective and easy to access. Governments, corporations and big businesses are increasingly relying on data gleaned from online sources. The use of data mining, online surveys and statistics from online sources (big data) has become a staple of conducting online research (Kelty 2008, pp. 186–187). Programs and algorithms access and analyse information on the Internet providing reams of quantitative data for researchers. Online, individuals are easily reduced to statistics and numbers. No longer agents that engage with the digital world, they become data that can be mined in order to market products better and help companies earn greater profits; they are the victims of the structural constraints of ‘the Internet’. The recent trend of online ‘big data’ research reframes individuals online from actors to statistics, while at the same time creates generalities about Internet usage. Although big data are highly useful, and often essential, in creating a comprehensive picture of how the Internet is used, it habitually removes the individual from the equation by generalising online experiences and painting the online space as homogenous (Coleman 2010).
It is now generally accepted that the online world, like the offline world, is made up of a myriad of different communities, spaces and cultures (Coleman 2010). The use of social sciences research methodologies offline has been useful in engaging with the complexities of human engagement; therefore, it is logical that the usefulness of social science methodologies extends to online research. Ethnographic methods are useful in conducting online research because ‘... ethnography is a flexible, responsive methodology, sensitive to emergent phenomena and emergent research questions’ (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 6). Additionally, qualitative research methods, which are a staple of social science inquiry, are useful in highlighting the role that individuals, communities and subcultures play in the construction of and engagement with the world around us.

For a discipline such as anthropology, which has based a significant proportion of its identity on conducting long-term immersive research in a physical field site (Amit 2000, p.1), conducting methodologically rigorous research online may, in many ways, seem impossible (Driscoll & Gregg 2010, pp. 16–17; Kelty 2008, p. 188). Physical contact and engagement with the culture that is being examined is often held up as an ideal or defining characteristic in anthropological inquiry (Geertz 1988, pp. 10–13, 22). Traditional anthropological field sites were often romanticised as spatially determined areas that had delineated boundaries, such as a village (Amit 2000, p.3; Boellstorff et al. 2012, p.59). These spaces were often isolated and located away from a researcher’s ‘home’ requiring the researcher to physically travel to it (Amit 2000, p. 5).
However, in an increasingly globally mediated world, it is becoming ever more obvious that researchers are not immersed in their field sites to the exclusion of all other attachments and pursuits (Amit 2000, pp. 5–6); and that field sites cannot be conceived of as clearly demarcated, as global flows of information, goods and people pass through even some of the most isolated places on earth (Wulff 2000; Knowles 2000). Conducting online research requires a rethinking of the romanticised ‘field site’. It requires the anthropologist to move beyond methodological tropes of ‘immersive participant observation’ as ethnography, because the researcher can engage with, and leave, the field site without leaving their living room. Many of us, if not all, have various experiences with the Internet—we are already ‘natives’ of the digital landscape (Driscoll & Gregg 2010).

Internet that are highly contextualised in a physical locale. Yet to date, no online qualitative research methodology and ethical paradigm has provided a comprehensive set of methods. This results in each online research project needing to interrogate potential methods in order to design an appropriate methodology (Bakardjieva 2009; Gajjala 2009; Orgad 2009).

A common theme in all of these discussions of online research is that online qualitative research is structured as an exploration and description of online practices through which culture is constructed (Hine 2009, p. 8). In order to engage effectively with the range of practices, online researchers are required to be reflexive about the content and context of their research (Orgad 2009, p. 47), as the methods used and the way in which the researcher constructs the field site can have a significant impact on the data yield (Bakardjieva 2009, p. 55). Ethnography and qualitative research require a negotiation between the researcher and the context of the research (Mabweazara 2013, p. 100).

**The online ‘field’**

The online field has been understood in various ways. Some researchers have conceptualized digital or media field sites as a spatial locale. This locale can be a physical offline place, such as a region, town, Internet cafe, home, or school. This can be seen in Heather Horst and Daniel Miller’s work on mobile phone usage in Jamaica (Horst & Miller 2005). Horst and Miller bound their field site to a region in Jamaica, and then explored the ways in which mobile phones were used within that region. Further to this, Miller also used a group of Trinidadians in order to spatially
bind his field of inquiry when exploring how ‘Trinis use the Internet (Miller 2000).
This approach spatially locates the field site in a physical location, or locations, and then seeks to examine the technological or digital aspects of an online space, phenomenon, or group of people.

Alternatively, some studies have started in ‘bounded’ online spaces and then sought to explore people’s engagement with the platform, medium or computer program. This can be seen in studies such as Tom Boellstorff’s (2009) exploration of the online program Second Life, or Bonnie Nardi’s (2009) research into the online role-playing game World of Warcraft. Both of these studies situated themselves within an online community that have artificial boundaries constructed for them because of the nature of the computer program that was the focus of the study. Both Nardi’s and Boellstorff’s studies were in online places termed ‘virtual worlds’. These virtual worlds accommodate more traditional spatial approaches to a field of inquiry. World of Warcraft and Second Life are visual, bounded online spaces (Boellstorff et al. 2012) that require an individual to ‘log-in’, allowing a clear beginning and end to the engagement with the experience. These spaces are predominantly a visual medium, with images representing space as it is experienced in the ‘offline’ world. Images of fields, buildings, the sky, fabrics and objects that are all experienced in the offline world are recreated and experienced in this online forum.

Additionally, individuals create an avatar through which to experience the online world that they are engaging with. This online avatar may not visually reflect the individual in many ways—it may have fur instead of skin, purple hair, or be a
different gender or species to the person behind the keyboard—but the avatars provide a first-person point of view through which to see the world the person is engaging in; again, this is reflective of offline experiences. In regard to his methodology, Boellstorff (2009, p. 4) states that he ‘... engaged in normal anthropological methods including participant observation and interviews’. Boellstorff (2009, p. 61) explains that by engaging in traditional participant observation online he was taking part in the virtual world on its own terms. In these online ‘worlds’, little is changed from a physical field site in the offline world. Researchers can see individuals’ avatars and online participants can see researchers’ avatars. Through the medium of their avatar rather than their physical body, researchers can walk, talk, dance, raid, build, trade and share, just like offline.

However, conducting online research changes considerably when the online experience is no longer a world of images that reflect and can be engaged with like physical spaces, but are an accumulation of text, stories, images, sounds and film clips that intersect with each other across multiple mediums and websites. The online experience quickly becomes one that is not a reflection of the way that we experience the world offline, but is a new way of engaging with others and creating ourselves. Additionally, Garcia et al. (2009) argue that offline and online worlds are blending, resulting in lives that cannot easily be separated from one another using these terms. The distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘imagined’ is becoming increasingly impractical (Wilson & Peterson 2002, p. 456), as Internet users and researchers frequently cross between online and offline worlds (Postill & Pink 2012,
When most people think of their experiences online it is not a coherent narrative—the boundaries between online spaces, as well as online and offline lives, have become ‘liquefied’ (Picone 2013).

Researchers are then required to consider the use of data sourced from multiple online and offline sources. Kozinets (2010, p. 63) draws a distinction between communities online and online communities. Kozinets explains that researching the language, graphics and symbols used online is research into online communities, as these phenomena only exist online, whereas a community online is a social phenomenon that exists in the offline, physical world, but extends to having an online aspect. When researching a community online, Kozinets (2010, p. 65) sees online enquiry as having a supporting role; however, he encourages ‘pure netnography’ when researching online communities. Kozinets is advocating that the site of research should be in line with the site of identity construction, and the locus of the community.

Although Kozinets’s distinction between online communities and communities online provides a good place to start in regard to the use of offline and online methods, the use of any data needs to be evaluated within the context of the research that is to take place (Orgad 2009, p. 39). The use of offline or online data can contextualise findings, or add data that could not otherwise be accessed (Orgad 2009, pp. 39–41). Extending the field site to engaging with participants offline can ‘… be useful for capturing a holistic picture of the life of [the] community or
activity ... as the virtual and physical world sociality often intertwine in meaningful ways’ (Boellstorff et al. 2012, pp. 60–63).

Bourdieu’s conception of the field is useful in liberating the ‘field’ from a temporal or spatial dimension. As previously discussed, Bourdieu (2005, p. 33) conceptualizes the field as a microcosm or ‘social universe’. This ‘social universe’ possesses some autonomy from external pressures, and, therefore, functions mostly according to its own laws (Benson 2006, p. 188; Bourdieu 2005, p. 33). However, this ‘social universe’ is not completely independent from the external laws of the wider world that surround and permeate it, as the field exists as a microcosm within a macrocosm (Benson 2006, p. 188). This redefines the field from a ‘space’ to a network, or a series of relations, that exist between positions (Benson & Neveu 2005, p. 3), and allows researchers to take both internal and external factors into account when conducting research in order to create a more comprehensive depiction of the forces that shape the field (Bourdieu 2005, p. 33).

This conceptualization of the field is in line with how many online scholars treat their engagement with online research. The field is then conceptualized as a series of practices or interactions that make up a network of connections between people, objects and places (Cruz & Ardèvol 2013, p. 34). Conceptualising the field as a series of relations of practices allows the field to evolve with the research project (Hine 2009, p. 12). The researcher then makes use of the connections between the participants to determine the field of inquiry, rather than allowing the researcher’s preconceptions of the research project to determine the parameters (Cruz & Ardèvol...
2013, p. 36), thus ensuring that the boundaries of the research are being socially constructed by the researcher and the participants (boyd 2009, pp. 30–31). This results in a set of fieldwork boundaries being one of the outcomes of a project, rather than one of the parameters (Hine 2009, p. 18).

The ‘field’ of online fan fiction

In line with Internet scholars’ discussion of online field sites as a socially constructed series of practices (Boellstorff et al. 2012; Cruz & Ardèvol 2013; Hine 2009), the field of this research has been determined by the practices and connections of the participants. Those who engage with fan fiction generally use multiple websites, and over time migrate from one website to another. Fan activities are also not always contained to the Internet, with individuals physically meeting with other fan-fiction writers (Booth 2010, p. 17). Additionally, fan-fiction participants’ offline selves can ‘bleed through’ into their online engagement through author’s notes, comments, and their general interactions with each other—this results in the need to take the individual’s offline self into consideration during the research. Bourdieu’s characterisation of the field as a ‘social universe’ is useful as it allows the research field to follow fan-fiction participants’ social engagement across various mediums. In order to gain a holistic picture of online fan-fiction participants’ interactions, I conducted research in both the virtual and physical spheres in which the participants interact (Murthy 2008).

My own initial engagement with online fan fiction was through the fan-fiction website Fanfiction.net. Xing Li (Fanlore 2013) created fanfic.net in 1998 as a central
repository for online fan fiction. Today fanfic.net is the largest online repository of online fan fiction, with over 3 million registered users and over 6.6 million registered titles or stories as of 2010 (FFN Research 2011). Fanfiction.net was purpose-built for the posting and reading of fan fiction, as well as the discussion of fandoms on community boards. The website allows the posting of fan-fiction stories from a variety of fandoms, including canons from television, film, books, comics, manga, games, cartoons and plays.

Fanfiction.net was unequivocally the most popular online fan-fiction repository until the creation of Archive of Our Own (AO3) by the Organization for Transformative Works in 2008 (Fanlore 2014a). The website—also a multi-fandom archive for fan fiction—and the organisation were created as a response to ‘outsiders’ attempting to monetise and create the fan-fiction archive Fanlib19 (Jenkins 2007). At the time, Fanlib was seen as an imposition of outsiders’ values and understandings of fan fiction onto the fan-fiction community,20 as the website was created by individuals who did not participate in fan-fiction practices (Fanlore 2014b). This sparked a series

19 The creation and subsequent furore surrounding FanLib will be further discussed in Chapter 7: Legitimacy.

20 The concept of community has been long problematized by scholars due to its plasticity of use (see Anderson 1983; Amit & Rapport 2002; Bartle 2003). Although a significant amount of literature engages with the concept of ‘online community’ (see Baym 2008; Chua 2009; Haythornthwaite 2008; Postill 2008; Rheingold 1994; Yuan 2013) and ‘fan communities’ (see Booth 2010; Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington 2007a; Hellekson & Busse 2006a; Jenkins 1992; Obst, Zinkiewicz & Smith 2002a; Obst, Zinkiewicz & Smith 2002b), there is little consensus about what a community is. Due to the problematic nature of the concept of ‘community’, I will avoid using this term apart from when it is used by studies being reviewed throughout this work.
of discussions and debates on *LiveJournal*, culminating in *astolat*’s 2007 comment that the fan-fiction community ‘... needed an archive of their own’. From this proposal, the Organization for Transformative Works was born, creating not only *AO3* but also the *Journal of Transformative Works*, edited by well-known acafans, as a place for academics and fans to publish their academic writing on fan fiction, and *Fanlore*, a fandom wiki. The use of *AO3* is currently growing with over 183,000 registered users in 2013 and over 2 million stories as of April 2016 (Archive of Our Own 2016; Fanlore 2014a).

Many of my interviewees started their engagement with *fanfic.net* or *LiveJournal* before moving on to, or incorporating, *AO3* into their online fan engagement. During an interview, *CR* commented that how, and where, she engaged with fan fiction changed over time:

I mostly was involved with sort of the LiveJournal community for a long time - ah - early 2000s, probably through to late 2000s when people sort of started drifting away [from LiveJournal]. It was sort of the big - a fiction community - *fanfic.net* existed but was heavily associated with bad stuff written by kids, and had banned anything that was over about a 'M' rating, and so people weren’t terribly keen on posting there for a long time. Whereas *LiveJournal* was very popular at that point, and it was a good place to sort of – people would have their regular blog, so then they’d fan fic to a community, or to their own blog, and the commenting system was really good for just having the whole social aspect, which is a huge part of the whole community. So I posted there for a long time. I tended to have an archive on *fanfic.net* that I’d update when I got around to it. These days, of course, *AO3* is kind of the archive, which is becoming very popular.
Both AO3 and fanfic.net are exclusively fan-fiction sites. Many participants I have engaged with post stories on both AO3 and fanfic.net; however, fan-fiction participants often do not limit their engagement to specific fan-fiction sites. They will read and write stories on AO3 and fanfic.net while at the same time posting on social media sites such as Tumblr, following the actors and actresses on Twitter, and liking the Facebook pages relevant to their fandoms. These social media websites, like fanfic.net and AO3, are Web 2.0 websites—they rely on the users to create and engage with content on the sites to make them function.

_Tumblr, Facebook_ and _Twitter_ are all social media websites that need users to be ‘prosumers’. On _Twitter_ and _Facebook_ fan-fiction participants are able to ‘follow’, ‘tweet’, or ‘post’ directly to, canon media producers. _Tumblr_ functions as a more visual medium through which memes and GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format) can be easily shared. The use of _Tumblr_ as a fan platform has been growing rapidly. One participant commented to me that she could not believe that I did not have a _Tumblr_ account, as _Tumblr_ is ‘where fandom lives’. Another fan-fiction participant commented that she felt like she was ‘missing out’ because she was not on _Tumblr_ and only engaged with fan fiction through _fanfic.net_. Yet she was wary of engaging with _Tumblr_, as she was worried she would ‘fall down the fandom rabbit hole’.

_Tumblr_ is often used as a supplementary platform for fan-fiction participants’ engagement. Individuals create lists and rankings of the most popular fan fiction for
particular ships, creating challenges for fan-fiction writers to engage with, or request prompts to assist in, their own fan-fiction writing practices. Some fan-fiction stories are originally published there; however, individuals will routinely cross-post these stories to AO3 or fanfic.net with a note about where they were originally published.

As fan-fiction participants do not limit themselves to the sites they visit, the fan-fiction sites that they connect with have determined the boundaries of this study. This was done in order to capture the full range of their interactions, thus delimitating the field in terms of the social universe of fan fiction for participants, as represented by the topics and interactions of the participants, rather than a physical space (Garcia et al. 2009, p. 56). The online fan-fiction website Fanfiction.net (fanfic.net, ff.net) was used as an initial entry point into online fan practices. Fanfiction.net was used because it holds a significant proportion of online fan-fiction stories, and many online fan-fiction participants use it.

I examined multiple websites to try to engage with participants’ full range of engagement. Therefore, after my initial engagement with fan fiction on fanfic.net, my online presence and observation expanded to include the online fan fiction website Archive of Our Own (AO3). It was these two online websites that formed the

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21 A ‘ship’ or the act of ‘shipping’ is a term in fandom that is derived from the word ‘relationship’. A ship refers to a romantic relationship between two or more characters. An individual can ship characters whose relationship is canon compliant, but in many cases the ship is not represented or only marginally represented within the canon. The characters, although often from the same fandom, do not need to be. Shipping will be further discussed in Chapter 6: Conflict.
central sites from which this research into online fan practices occurred. However, I also engaged with participants on Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, as participants’ engagement with fan fiction extended to these sites.

These limitations still resulted in a large fluid research ‘site’ and a significant amount of potential research data. Benson & Neveu (2005, p. 3) state that Bourdieu’s conception of the field can be defined as ‘... a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions’. The relations between social agents define the field. From this network, the media products that are created can be understood as manifestations of the field (Bourdieu 1983, p. 319); therefore, the tweets, Facebook posts, Tumblr posts, and fan-fiction stories that are posted online are representations of the field. This has allowed my participants’ interactions with one another to determine the ‘field’ of my inquiry, which is in line with Bourdieu’s conception of the field as a ‘social universe’ that is relationally defined (Bourdieu 2005, p. 33; Benson & Neveu 2005, p. 3) and is ‘as real as a geographical space’ (Bourdieu 1985, p. 725).

Although my initial inquiry into online fan practices on these sites was not canon-specific, over time my research focused on fans engaged with the Arrow fandom. Arrow is an American television series on the CBS-Warner Bros (the CW) network, based upon the comic-book character Green Arrow (published by DC Comics). This occurred for a variety of reasons; firstly, the Arrow television series has not been the focus of academic inquiry to date. Secondly, Arrow initially aired during 2012, the same year that my research project began. This meant that the Arrow fandom was relatively small when my research commenced, allowing for easier observation of the
fandom. Thirdly, I was already watching Arrow. As a casual viewer, and then an ardent viewer of the series, I could observe the fan conversations with a base level of pre-existing knowledge. Finally, Arrow provided an interesting fan base to examine as it has fans that are both experiencing the Green Arrow mythology primarily through the television series, and other fans that have had prolonged exposure to the Green Arrow mythology through the DC comic books.

However, no participants in this research were exclusively fans of a single canon. It has been previously documented that individuals are often fans of multiple pieces of media simultaneously (Booth 2015, p. 65). Participants often outlined several series that they were currently fans of, and numerous more that they had been fans of in the past. The interviewees recruited for this research were fans of a variety of books, films, television shows, comics and manga. There was very little overlap between participants’ fandoms, except for the book (1997–2007) and film franchise (2001–2011) Harry Potter, the Arrow television series, and the Supernatural television series. In light of this, the numerous canons used as examples throughout this thesis reflect the shifting and multiple canons of the interviewees and participants of fandom more generally.

22 Manga are a style of Japanese comic books and graphic novels aimed at adults as well as children.
Participants and recruitment

Participants were recruited through various means. The main criterion for my participants was that they read, wrote, critiqued or beta read\textsuperscript{23} fan fiction now or in the recent past. Individuals were not limited by the type or genre of fan fiction that they wrote, or the websites that they used. Additionally, I did not limit my participants to a particular age range, demographic or gender, as I wished to engage with the variation that exists among fan-fiction participants.

I recruited participants through a variety of offline and online methods. In total, I interviewed 21 individuals who participated in fan fiction and followed their online activities. Additionally, I had discussions with 5 published science fiction or fantasy authors about their understandings and perceptions of fan fiction, either in person or via email. Twelve of the fan-fiction participants classified themselves as fan-fiction writers, 5 described themselves as previously being fan writers, while 4 classified themselves as readers; however, they all said they had attempted to write at least one fan-fiction story.

The 21 participants I recruited can be split into two groups. The larger group (18) consisted of 17 people from Perth, Western Australia and one who is currently from

\textsuperscript{23} Beta readers are the online fan fiction equivalent of an editor. They read a fan-fiction writer's work in order to correct grammar, spelling and typos, as well as flaws in continuity and characterization. Not all fan-fiction writers make use of a beta reader, but those that do are often considered to produce higher quality fan fiction. The term beta reader is an appropriation from computer programming. A computer program 'in beta' is a semi-final draft version of the program that is released to selected individuals for testing, i.e. to find any problems with the program.
Melbourne, having recently moved there from Perth. These 18 participants engaged in a variety of fandoms and their level and length of engagement with fan fiction varied widely. Although I do not wish to spatially define these participants it should be noted that the primary factor that links them is their location, Perth. The second group comprised of three participants that were all engaged with the *Arrow* fandom. These participants lived in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Germany.

I recruited participants using a variety of strategies. Initially, I recruited them coincidentally. During my university’s Open Day I was asked to give talks about conducting postgraduate study, and studying Anthropology and Sociology. During these talks I mentioned my research and that I was currently recruiting participants. This resulted in some individuals approaching me afterwards asking to participate.

My first targeted attempt at recruiting participants had limited success. After reading fan fiction for some time, I unsystematically selected several fan-fiction participants who had recently posted stories in the *Arrow* fandom. I sent out a total of 10 messages, through *Fanfiction.net*’s internal messaging system. I was limited to sending messages through *fanfic.net*’s internal messaging system, as AO3 does not have a system that allows users to send private messages; however, the majority of individuals to whom I sent messages used both *fanfic.net* and AO3 to post and engage with fan fiction. My message introduced me as a researcher and a fan-fiction reader, outlined my research project, and inquired whether the individual would be interested in being interviewed either via email or Skype for my project. Of the 10
participants that I messaged, 5 responded and all of these agreed to be interviewed. Three of the five then set up a time and were duly interviewed. However, the remaining two did not respond to follow-up emails, resulting in them not being interviewed for this project.

I also recruited participants via social media. I posted recruitment messages on the Facebook pages of Swancon and Supanova, two fan conventions run in Perth in February and March 2014, with the conventions’ permission. Using Swancon as a network proved to be fruitful, while engagement with Supanova was not as productive. This may be because Swancon is a small, locally run convention, while Supanova is a much larger, commercial event. Swancon allowed me to post on their Facebook page, place flyers in their convention bags, and distribute flyers at the convention. Additionally, one of the organisers of Swancon offered to ‘re-tweet’ my call for participants from the convention’s Twitter account if I initially ‘tweeted’ about my research. Swancon’s assistance was beneficial and greatly appreciated. It resulted in several individuals that I interviewed for this research.

Supanova allowed me to post a message on their Facebook page informing individuals about my research, and requesting participants. As I posted my message on their Facebook page from my personal account, my message was somewhat lost amid the other posts of those engaging with the Supanova page. Although my post was ‘liked’ by several users, this did not result in any participants.
Another recruitment method used that resulted in several participants was approaching the Science Fiction Club at my university. The club agreed to send out my recruitment poster to members and to let them know about my research. Finally, participants were also recruited via a snowball effect, through friends and acquaintances that participate in fan fiction. This resulted in two individuals who agreed to be interviewed, including the only male fan-fiction participant I was able to recruit.

Previous studies on fan fiction\(^{24}\) have established that fan-fiction participants are predominantly female, ranging in age from young adolescence to middle-age. Older participants are perceived to be well educated, often with a tertiary education. The range of individuals recruited for this research supports this finding. With one exception, all the individuals who agreed to be interviewed were women. Participants ranged in age from 15 to their late 30s/early 40s, although all stated that they first began to engage with fandom and fan fiction in early adolescence. The majority were tertiary educated, in the process of being tertiary educated, or intended to be tertiary educated. All participants had completed secondary education, with the exception of the 15-year-old participant, who was in the process of completing her secondary education.

This information is not easily accessible by only observing online fan-fiction participants. Online participants may, or may not, have profiles on fan-fiction sites. When participants do have profiles, many use the profile picture to show an image of one of their favourite fandoms or characters (these images are often made by other fans and distributed), or do not upload an image at all. The profiles will list the works that they have written, highlight their favourite stories, include a quote, or state their preferred ships. Some participants will use profile pages as a way of giving an overview of themselves, but this overview will generally concentrate on information about their fan interests or exploits.

Profiles will occasionally highlight an individual’s country of residence or other information such as ‘I go to university’ or ‘I am in high school’. If users actively engage with the fan-fiction sites they can sometimes leave ‘clues’ as to their identity in author’s notes or comments on others’ works. For example, *Bluesunset* has written in an author’s note at the beginning of a chapter: ‘Have to dash off to yoga (to then get zen). A little bit of a longer chapter – enjoy – Blue’. This generally results in the gleaning of some information about individuals from their online activities; individuals, however, do not typically place personal information that relates to their ‘real life’ in the public spheres of these sites.

As their personal data are closely guarded this can often extend to information useful to contacting these individuals outside of their fan exploits. Although fans are generally eager to link their multiple sites of fan engagement, their fan engagement is usually carefully monitored and patrolled so as not to interact with their non-fan
selves online. This has resulted in only limited information being gleaned about participants before directly contacting individuals. Even then, the information given is at the discretion of the individual. This was the case with *doggyvamp*. After contacting me on *Twitter* and offering to be interviewed, *doggyvamp* and I arranged a *Skype* interview. However, from the outset of the interview *doggyvamp* elected to not turn on her camera, resulting in the interview being purely audio-based.

**Participant observation, interviews and ethics**

Part of selecting an appropriate methodological approach to online research includes ensuring that the research conducted is ethical. The ethics of online research came under scrutiny by academics and the general public alike when, in March 2014, *Facebook* changed users’ newsfeeds without their knowledge to see if it would have an effect on their emotions. *Facebook* users around the world reacted with outrage and horror. Individuals claimed that *Facebook* had ‘no right’ to do such a thing, that it was ‘mind control’, and a violation of the users’ online space (Goel 2014). The head researcher of the project, Professor Jeffrey Hancock, claimed that he had had ‘no idea’ that people would be upset by the experiment (Goel 2014). I would argue that the *Facebook* users’ outrage suggests that they felt their *Facebook* accounts and feeds are extensions of themselves, rather than separate online identities. It seems that in *Facebook* users’ minds, this manipulation was a violation of themselves and their understanding of how their use of the program should be managed. Despite *Facebook* indicating that their actions were allowed under the terms of use agreed to by every *Facebook* user, this did not seem sufficient
justification to the millions of Facebook users around the world, thus demonstrating that what constitutes ethical online research is not always self-evident.

The disconnect between what the researchers and the subjects in the Facebook incident felt to be appropriate online research methodologies re-contextualises questions of what counts as acceptable or ethical research strategies. What is a private space online? Are all things that are publically accessible public spaces? Is it ethical to ‘lurk’ online to collect data? Can online lives be separated from offline interaction? These are all questions that I have considered when determining my methodological approach to collect data on fan-fiction participants. Conducting research ethically is essential in all research endeavours. Conducting research ethically online, however, appears fraught with more questions and issues than answers.

When conducting research, the interaction between researcher and participant needs to be kept in mind, along with the management of power relations that exist during the research. This is done to ensure that participants are ethically dealt with and data are ethically managed (Kelty 2008, p. 188). Ethical concerns can arise in research from the disparity in power between those who are being researched and the researcher (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 129). The researcher is using data gleaned from the participants for theorisation, debate and publication to further their career, while the participant may only minimally, if at all, benefit from their engagement with the researcher (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 129). The process of informed consent is designed to help counteract the power imbalance between the researcher and
participant. Participants, however, are often unaware of the implications of participating in qualitative research (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 133).

Further problems arise with informed consent when the notion of public and private spaces is pulled into focus. The division between public and private spaces is not clear offline; however, online what constitutes a public or private space is further blurred. The research described earlier that was conducted on Facebook highlights how public or semi-public spaces online, like social media sites, can still be felt to be private, despite individuals’ ability to access content. Users of the website can often understand, or feel, that the site is more or less visible to the general public than it may be (Elm 2009, p. 78). The division between a public and private space online is not clear, as both kinds of spaces co-exist—no space is exclusively public or exclusively private. They exist on a continuum (Elm 2009, pp. 74–76). Online fan spaces often occupy a space that is perceived to be private but may actually be publically available (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 19). The ‘publicness’ of interactions online may be obscured, as those that are being observed lack the ability to know when they are being watched, or to observe the watchers in return (Armstrong 2003).

Online, a person that visits sites but does not interact with them is commonly known as a ‘lurker’, a term that denotes a negative judgment reminiscent of offline characterisations of ‘peeping Toms’ or voyeurs. Online, individuals have no way of knowing whether or not the researcher is present, and, therefore, can be observed and recorded without being actively informed. The ability of others to discern
whether they are being observed feeds into the larger question of whether interactions on an easily accessible space online are necessarily always ‘public’ interactions, as private interactions can occur within public spaces (Elm 2009, p. 81). The intended audience may also impact on the content that participants upload on the websites. Even if participants are aware of the public nature of the online space, they may not realise that their actions can be analysed or documented by a researcher entering into the ‘public’ online space (Elm 2009, p. 77).

This research used several strategies to mitigate harm to those directly and indirectly participating. As previously stated, participant observation is a staple research method used by social scientists when conducting research. Kozinets (2010), Garcia (2009), Miller & Slater (2000), Boellstorff (2012; 2009), Coleman (2010), Postill & Pink (2012), and Hine (2009; 2000) all promote the use of online participant observation as an online research method. Participation in the online space seeks to mitigate some ethical concerns, while resulting in a richer source of data. Creating a physical presence on a website (participating) results in users being able to ‘see’ the researcher, to an extent. In light of this, participating in online activities is necessary in conducting social media ethnographic research (Postill & Pink, p. 128).

At the beginning of my candidature, I already owned an account on fanfic.net. Although this profile existed it had not been extensively used. Until the beginning of my research I had been a silent fan-fiction participant—i.e. not posting stories or reviewing others’ fiction. I chose to make use of this pre-existing profile rather than create a new one for my research; I did, however, change the ‘screen name’ attached
to the profile. The main reason for doing this was so that fan-fiction participants could see that I had been involved with fan fiction for some time, and was therefore not an ‘outsider’ seeking to research their interactions online, while also giving myself a somewhat ‘clean’ identity.

Once I received Human Research Ethics approval for my project at the end of 2012, I altered the information on my fanfic.net profile to state that I was a researcher at The University of Western Australia conducting research on fan fiction, and gave my university email address. My initial primary locale of engagement was fanfic.net, as AO3 requires users to submit a request to gain an account and this request took a few months to process. In April 2013, I was finally issued an account on AO3 with the same screen name used on fanfic.net. Additionally, once I had begun interviewing, the interviewees encouraged me to join and participate with other fans on Tumblr, which I joined in May 2014. I posted links between all three of these accounts, and used the same screen name to increase continuity of my online research persona.

During my fieldwork, I made a concerted effort to be an active fan-fiction participant. This involved regularly reading fan fiction on AO3 and fanfic.net, commenting, reviewing and leaving ‘kudos’ on stories, as well as occasionally writing fan-fiction stories and posting them. I found it increasingly difficult to post fan-fiction stories regularly, so my posts were sporadic. However, I responded to all

25 ‘Kudos’ refers to complimenting or praising an individual’s piece of work. Kudos on AO3 is given in the form of clicking a heart-shaped icon—this is roughly equivalent to ‘liking’ something on Facebook.
of the comments and reviews that were left on my stories. On Tumblr active participation involved re-blogging, responding to prompts left, and following a variety of fans.

I initially engaged with various fandoms; however, as I previously stated, after a time I found my interactions focused on the Arrow\textsuperscript{26} fandom. This occurred for a variety of reasons. The television show Arrow initially aired in the United States at approximately the same time as the beginning of my fieldwork. As the television show, and therefore, fandom, was relatively new, it was also quite small. This resulted in gaining access to writers and being able to track changes and trends in the fandom more easily, thus providing the opportunity to watch the fandom grow with the television show. Additionally, it was a television show that I was already watching; therefore, I held a base level of understanding of fan conversations that were occurring in the fandom. Even though I was not a ‘fan’ of the show at the time, during the course of the research I gained a deeper appreciation and understanding of the television series.

The 21 individuals who agreed to take part in my research were all presented with a participant consent form, as is required by the University of Western Australia. The form outlined the goals of my research and explained that the individuals could stop participating in my research at any time. The form also invited them to discuss the anonymization of their name and screen name. Many fan-fiction participants enjoy

\textsuperscript{26} A further discussion of the television series Arrow will occur in Chapter 4: Authority.
the anonymity that interacting online lends to their actions. One interviewee, BW, deliberately keeps her fan-fiction activities and profiles separate from her other online presences that use her name, such as social networking sites. During a conversation with BW in a public café, she often lowered her voice or stopped talking when people walked near us when discussing her fan-fiction activities. As privacy can be defined as ‘control over the extent, timing, and circumstances of sharing details about oneself’ (Buchanan 2009, p. 89), BW’s desire to limit the scope and extent of her engagement with online fan fiction indicated a desired level of privacy to be maintained in regard to her engagement with fan fiction.

When interviewed, participants were encouraged to ask questions in regard to the scope and use of the research, as well as to discuss the details of the participant consent form in order to ensure understanding of the research being conducted. This allowed participants to voice their own expectations regarding privacy (Stern 2009, p. 96). In order to protect both the online and offline identities of individuals, the use of screen names, real names or pseudonyms was negotiated with the participants. The use of individuals’ screen names was specifically discussed. Although these names may be pseudonyms, they are not anonymous and many individuals use these names as markers of their online fan identity (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 140). The majority of participants requested that their offline names be anonymized, but were less concerned about the anonymization of their online screen names. In light of this, data from interviews conducted have been attributed to participants through the use of their initials or their screen name, which have
been italicised and underlined—for example, *GB*. Screen names of individuals who have been directly engaged with have not been anonymized unless requested.

Fans’ often consider their engagement in online fan spaces as private, and therefore fans are often not comfortable being identified in academic writing without permission. Excerpts of fans’ work published in the *Organization of Transformative Works and Cultures* (OTW) have been met with caution, distrust and disapproval (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 51). Therefore, the screen names of individuals who were not direct participants in this research but whose work has been publically posted online have been anonymized where the information they have posted has been used. Additionally, where possible excerpts have been paraphrased and direct quotes have not been used in order to decrease the possibility of excerpts being found via an online search engine (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 140).

All participants engaged in at least one semi-structured interview, which took place either face-to-face or online during 2014. If geographically possible, interviews were conducted in person; where this was not feasible interviews were conducted via either *Skype* or email. The interviews conducted helped to shape my online interaction. For example, participants suggested I become engaged with *Tumblr*. This helped me to construct questions and lines of inquiry to pursue in interviews. The interviews provided a platform for participants to discuss their beliefs, motivations or perceptions (Boellstorff et al. 2012, pp. 92–93). Interviews can provide information about individuals’ views, social dynamics or conventions that may not otherwise be visible online (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 93). The initial structure and
questions of the offline and online semi-structured interviews were kept as similar as possible. A list of topics and introductory questions were prepared for interviewees; the direction of the interviews, however, were primarily informed by the responses, areas of interest, and information provided by the participants. Interview length was on average one hour. All interviewees were asked questions about their engagement with fan-fiction reading, writing and online communal interactions, as well as their opinions on events, objects, and occurrences that had happened in relation to fan fiction. All audio interviews (except one, because the recording failed) were transcribed and organised according to key themes and topics, alongside the notes and screen shots taken from my online interaction. The interviews made up the bulk of the information regarding individuals’ fan-fiction practices, opinions and preferences; however, this information was supplemented with my online participant observation.

In addition to the qualitative research methods outlined I also conducted a textual and visual analysis of the *Kindle Worlds* website. This involved examining the format, layout, instructions and legal contracts in order to gain an understanding of the goals and purpose of the website, and to understand how Amazon is seeking to market *Kindle Worlds* to the public. I also contacted a ‘world creator’, 27 Hugh

27 The authors, or legal owners of the media (also known as a ‘world’) on the *Kindle Worlds* platform are referred to as ‘world creators’. For example, the author of a book would be the ‘world creator’ of the book.
Howey, who has licensed his book series, *Silo*\(^{28}\) (2011–2013) through *Kindle Worlds*, in order to ascertain his perspectives on both *Kindle Worlds* and fan fiction generally. Finally, I attempted to contact several writers who had published content through the *Kindle Worlds* platform. Despite sending requests to several writers, only one responded. She subsequently answered a small series of questions via email about her engagement with *Kindle Worlds*.

**Conclusion**

Social science research, through the use of ethnographic research methods, is well placed to show the complexity of human sociality and engagement online. Although no set series of methods has been prescribed and agreed upon for this kind of research, many prominent researchers have proposed a variety of online qualitative research methodologies. Leading researchers such as Hine (2000), Boellstorff (2012; 2009), Kozinets (2010) and Miller (2000) have all proposed various research methodologies that seek suitable engagement with online research; yet none of them present a comprehensive research methodology. All of these researchers emphasise that their methodological approaches should function as guidelines to serve as a

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\(^{28}\) The Silo series consists of three books: *Wool*, *Shift*, and *Dust*. It is a post-apocalyptic science fiction series set in the future, taking place in an underground silo. Hugh Howey initially published the work through Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing system (which is related to but not the same as *Kindle Worlds*), which allows authors to publish original works, bypassing publishers. Howey has retained the full rights to the book series, and has since only sold the print rights to publishers, maintaining ownership over the work. The rise in popularity of the Silo series and streams of fiction and non-fiction alternative publishing endeavours is an interesting topic worthy of further study, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.
starting point for new researchers to interrogate and adapt when designing their own research.

Bourdieu’s (2005, pp. 30–36) concept of the field allows individuals’ participation and relations with online fan fiction to be used to determine the field of research. As fan-fiction participants often use multiple fan-fiction websites and forums simultaneously to engage with fan fiction and their chosen fan groups, I followed their interactions across these websites in order to construct a coherent picture of their engagement. Participants’ engagement with fanfic.net and AO3 as their primary sites of interaction with fan fiction resulted in these becoming my primary locations of participant observation. As the fan-fiction participants also engaged with sites such as Tumblr, Facebook and Twitter, observation and examination of these sites has been used as supplementary data. In order to both participate and observe engagement with fan fiction I created accounts and participated with fan fiction on AO3, fanfic.net and Tumblr while observing fan practices on Twitter and Facebook.

In addition to online participant observation, my research methods included semi-structured interviews in order to gain an understanding of how individuals conceptualize their engagement with fan fiction. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 fan-fiction participants who have various levels of engagement with fan fiction, and talked to 5 published authors. Interviewing individuals gave me the opportunity to engage directly with fan-fiction participants, and gave them the opportunity to state their perspectives on their actions, events, objects and
occurrences within fan fiction, shedding light on their motivations for engaging with fan fiction.

Throughout my research, I have sought to engage in ethical practices by taking into consideration the debate on public and private spaces online, the implications of consent, the desired level of anonymity of individuals engaging in fandoms, and the concept of ‘lurking’ online. Much like methodological approaches, ethical approaches to online research need to be interrogated and adapted to ensure that effective research occurs. In light of this, I have sought to mitigate potential unethical practices by requiring participants to sign participant consent forms when I have direct prolonged engagement with the individuals; this gave participants the opportunity to request a pseudonym for their online screen identity. Additionally, I created online profiles on AO3 and fanfic.net, clearly stating that my purpose on the websites was to conduct research. I used these profiles to participate in online fan-fiction reading, writing and commenting in order to increase my visibility on the sites. These research practices resulted in the data that I have used in this thesis.
Chapter 3: A History of Fan Fiction

Introduction

This chapter seeks to both historicize and contextualize research into online fan fiction. As previously stated, knowing the history of the field is essential to knowing how the field functions (Bourdieu 1983, pp. 339, 341). This history of the field of media production and consumption will highlight the technological, social and legal changes that have occurred. These changes, in conjunction with social actors who seek to conserve or transform the field (Bourdieu 2005, p. 30), have resulted in a field in which struggles over power and control are increasingly evident. Highlighting the history of the field will illustrate how conflict and struggle over power and authority have long been prevalent. This aims to contradict prevailing perspectives (Foucault 1980, p. 82) about the historical role of authors, media producers and media consumers (the field’s social actors). By exploring the history of literacy, authorship and ownership, we can see that conflicts and struggles have long been a part of the field (Foucault 1980, pp. 81–82).
In outlining this history, I will show how fan fiction can be conceptualized as part of both oral and written cultures, of fandom culture, as of digital and media studies. During fan fiction’s transformation from oral culture to digital writing, academics have engaged in researching fan fiction in a variety of ways; it has been explored as a form of literature, a cultural artefact, a sub-genre of engagement with fandom, a symptom of Web 2.0, and a causality of copyright law. These examinations have come from scholars in various fields: law, cultural studies, literary studies, education, anthropology, communication studies, and Internet research. This chapter outlines how media has experienced technological change over time and this has affected consumer and producer practices, and subsequently consumer and producer relationships, thus showing how fan fiction as a practice hinged upon consumption and interaction with media, and has been intimately interlaced with the evolution of media technologies.

This chapter will explore the evolution of media technology and fan-fiction practices in four main areas. I will begin my exploration of the history of fan fiction with an examination of the cultural and technological transformations that have occurred in shifting from an oral to a literate culture. In doing this, I will examine the power and authority associated with storytelling and, consequently, the written word. Moving beyond more general discussions of written and oral cultures, I will then examine scholarly explorations of fan fiction as part of a wider offline fandom culture. Once I have established that fan fiction and fandom have often been innately tied to technological evolution, I will then explore the emergence of the Internet and the
subsequent explosion of fandom online. Finally, I will examine fan fiction as part of remix culture and Web 2.0. In tracking the evolution of fan-fiction practices across these various platforms (writing culture, fan conventions, the Internet, and remix culture), I seek to show that the communication of knowledge, as represented by fan fiction, reflects differences in social and power structures.

**Oral and literate cultures**

Fan fiction, at its core, is a social and literary practice. The transition from orality to literacy and subsequently the digital environment has influenced social, economic and political structures (Ong 2002, p.3). Ethnographic accounts of literacy practices—such as fan fiction practices—require a focus on the ‘power, authority and social differentiation’ (Street 1988, p.60). Understanding the changing power dynamics that emerged with literary practices and the evolution of written culture is therefore essential to understanding the social and power dynamics that emerge from fan-fiction practices today. The emergence of literary cultures from oral ones marked a change in the way that knowledge is received and disseminated.

Goody’s (1968; 1987), Goody and Watt’s (1968) and Ong’s (2002) works are proponents of the ‘great divide’ perspective of literacy. Their works examine the history and consequences of writing and literacy; arguing that the literacy fundamentally has altered the way people think and engage with knowledge. Goody identifies writing and literacy as different, although related, phenomena. Writing is a system of communication, while literacy results in a fundamental change in the way that people organise their thoughts and ideas, and conceive of the world (Goody 70
For Goody (1987, p. xv), literacy is not merely the inscription of words or symbols; literacy results in the creation of complex power relations. Goody asserts that literacy and oral modes of communication have specific traditions and characteristics that define them. Systems of communication influence how individuals make sense of their world in terms of social and cultural organisation. Therefore, changes in the means of communication are linked in direct, as well as indirect ways to changes in the patterns of human organisation and interaction (Goody 1987, p. 3; Ong 2002, p. 26).

Goody (1987) and Ong (2002) both typify oral traditions as constantly changing (dynamic), social, creative and egalitarian. Oral storytelling holds an important place in the nurturing of creativity, the facilitation of social activities and the passing on of knowledge. The dissemination of knowledge within oral traditions requires both a teller and a listener. Once a speech is given nothing remains of it as the act of communication is an event (Ong 2002, p.10, 31). This results in the sharing of knowledge being inherently social. Additionally, Goody (1987, p. 178) characterises oral traditions as being creatively reconstructed, as individuals recreate stories so that they are their own, rather than recall stories verbatim. Goody (1987, p. 174) demonstrates this through his ethnographic research among the LoDagaa in Ghana, showing that in oral cultures there is no one true version of a myth, as no two versions of a story are exactly alike. The validity of a story is typically reliant on the status or the skill of the teller, which results in the notion of a true version of a story being out of place within an oral culture.
Alternatively, Goody (1987, p. 54) characterises written communication as unchanging (static), one-directional and embedded in hierarchical power relations. These power relations emerge due to the more structured nature of literacy. Writing permits the recording and dissemination of cultural knowledge, without face-to-face interaction and without the continual evolution of information that routinely happens with oral knowledge. Verbatim learning then becomes a feature, as a strong emphasis is placed on the reproduction of facts and stories in the exact manner that they were transmitted. This results in literacy giving rise to the notion of original or true versions, often causing myth becoming additional to, and at times eventually replaced by, standardized historical written accounts of the past, as books serve as a store of knowledge to be copied exactly (Goody 1987, p. 158).

Goody and Watt (1968) and Ong (2002) mark the change from oral traditions of knowledge dissemination to written ones, resulting in, and being the product of, changes in power structures within societies. According to Goody and Watt, the spread of writing results in access to knowledge and the creation of knowledge becomes more embedded in a hierarchy of power. Only those who can afford to produce and disseminate written information can have direct influence over knowledge. Additionally, once information is recorded, access to this knowledge is restricted to those able to read, as individuals need to ‘learn to learn’ before they can have access to knowledge (Goody 1987, p. 159).

Critiques of this ‘great divide’ between written and oral cultures come from those that propose a theory of ‘multiple literacies’ (Alexander 2008; Bloome & Enciso 2010;
Golden 1986; Heap 1989; Street 2013; 2004; 1988). The proponents of the multiple literacies approach see the relationship between literacy and orality as being interrelated, rather than a distinct change in modes of communication. Supporters of ‘multiple literacies’ assert that texts must be understood within the social and cultural setting in which they exist (Bloome & Enciso 2006; Street 1988, pp. 62-63). Literacy is then seen as a ‘social action’ (Heap 1989) or a social practice that is highly dependent on the context of the text and reader for the meaning of the writing to be discerned (Street 2013). Literacies are not limited to the reading of a text; rather they incorporate the reading of social situations, interactions and environments, as well as signs and symbols (Bloome & Enciso 2006).

I would suggest that these two notions of literacy are not incompatible with each other. The emergence of written language has resulted in changes to the ways in which some knowledge is stored and organised. How these texts are then read and engaged with, like all social interaction, is then mediated through the reader and their practices, with certain literacies requiring specialized knowledge (Street 1988, p.63). Views of online literacy focus on how particular Web 2.0 platforms such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites use notions of ‘multiple literacies’ (Alexander 2008) and specialized knowledge (Bloome & Enciso 2006). This approach to online literacies will be further engaged with later in this chapter and contextualized through discussions of Web 2.0 platforms such as Flickr and ‘text talk’.
The emergence of literacy

The move from a predominantly oral tradition to a written one, in English, is one that can be seen over time from the medieval period, accelerating with the invention of the printing press, to the present day. Over this period, there was an exponential rise in literacy and access to written material (Cressy 1993). Historically, pre-seventeenth century, the creation of manuscripts and writing was a labour-intensive activity and, therefore, an expensive task. Well-educated individuals produced copies of writing in the form of hand-drawn illuminated manuscripts for those who could afford to pay (Wright 2009). This limited the amount of written works that existed. In conjunction with this, the ability to read and write was a specialized skill restricted to the upper classes. This resulted in limiting the number and distribution of documents. During this time in Britain, written texts existed, but the main form of knowledge distribution for the masses still came through oral traditions (Cressy 1993, p. 314). The cost of production, and the fact that reading and writing were specialized skills, placed the ability to produce written text in the hands of a few—namely, publishing houses.

This began to change as literacy spread during the 1700s (Cressy 1993, p. 314). Literacy spread in conjunction with the rise of urban landscapes, resulting in writing being a condition and a consequence of urbanity (Goody 1987, p. 54). The printing press allowed large quantities of documents to be made quickly and easily, resulting in numerous popular novels, how-to books, cookbooks, textbooks and pamphlets inundating the market by the mid-nineteenth century (Wright 2009). Due to the
increasing ease that written documents could be produced and distributed, publishing houses, and not authors, sought to ensure control over the production of texts (Hartley 2013, p. 29). This was guaranteed with the introduction of copyright statute, with the first, the Statute of Anne, introduced in 1709 (Jamison 2013, p.32; Jaszi 1994, p. 32).  

Copyright and intellectual property laws have been revisited several times since then. Laws in Britain, the United States and Australia have all become increasingly restrictive and enduring, giving long-lasting control over texts to authors, corporations and publishing houses (Lessig 2008; 2004; Tushnet 2011; 2004). These laws resulted in stories becoming the property of those who printed and distributed the texts. Copyright law and intellectual property placed restrictions on how texts could be used and distributed, and by whom, giving the text producer ownership rights that oral storytellers never held over their stories. Copyright and intellectual property laws ensured that writing became highly regulated and, therefore, unable to shift, change and adapt easily with social changes (Goody 1987, p. 54). Western copyright law is both an extension and a creation of the limitations that exist on who can create knowledge.

The limitations placed on who can produce written texts and the ability to widely distribute numerous copies, in conjunction with the unchanging nature of what is written, have resulted in texts being imbued with a sense of power and authority

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29 A more detailed examination of copyright law, the evolution of publishing houses and the emergence of the concept of ‘authorship’ will be examined in Chapter 4: Authority.
(Barton & Papen 2010; Papen 2010). The association of written words with facts and knowledge has been used as a tool of power. This can be seen in how people regard authorised texts, such as pamphlets given to them by a medical practitioner or politician (Goody 1987, p. 55; Papen 2010). Thousands of copies of the same version of facts are produced and distributed widely, resulting in that version being the ‘right’ version.

It is at this juncture—i.e. the authority of written texts, those who create them, and the social creativity of oral traditions—that fan fiction lies. This is evident in the three potential concepts of fan fiction that Abigail Derecho (2006, p. 62) outlines. The first conception situates fan fiction as an oral practice; the second sees it as a community practice within fandom more generally; the third situates it within a literary tradition. The notion of fan fiction as a part of fandom will be discussed later; however, in focusing on Derecho’s two other notions of fan fiction, we can see that she links fan fiction to both oral and textual practices.

The first of Derecho’s conceptions suggests that fan fiction could have existed for several millennia in the form of myths, folk stories and fairy tales that take aspects of their creation from other, older (or co-existing) tales. This would mean that most (if not all) of our literature today could be defined as fan fiction, as all authors make use of genre conventions, character stereotypes or standard settings that have been developed and used by others. This notion of fan fiction, as Derecho points out (2006, p. 62), results in a definition of fan fiction that is far too general to be useable in academic studies. Despite this, Derecho’s history encapsulates the aspects of oral
traditions that are still present in fan fiction. This history acknowledges the creative reconstruction that exists in both oral storytelling and fan-fiction stories, situating the stories as the result of prior works, as well as individual labour and new conceptions, alluding to an evolving, cumulative conception of human creativity.

A subsequent conceptualization of fan fiction that Derecho describes characterises fan fiction as archontic literature. Derecho uses this term to suggest that all literature are like archives in the sense that they are never finished (Derecho 2006). Fan fiction is merely adding to the archive, creating a larger narrative surrounding a particular story. This conceptualization of fan fiction focuses on it as being literary. It acknowledges that fan fiction, as a form of writing, exists within a hierarchy of power. Derecho understands the concept of an archive as a way to deconstruct the hierarchies that usually accompany written texts. Viewing fan fiction as part of a wide body of literature removes some of the judgement and stigma usually attached to fan fiction as inferior copies, or unoriginal (Derecho 2006, pp. 64–65). Most descriptions of fan fiction label it as derivative, appropriated, or even poached (Black 2008; Derecho 2006; Jenkins 1992), all of which have negative connotations. Derecho sees the description of archontic literature as being judgement-neutral, resulting in the canon and the fan fiction being on equal footing.

**Fandom and fan fiction**

Derecho’s (2006) third conception of fan fiction sees it as part of wider fandom. Fan fiction has often been identified as part of broader fandom culture. Initial academic examinations of fan fiction typically occurred through the study of fandoms.
Derecho (2006) suggests that fan fiction came into existence with the rise of fandoms. The birth of fandoms is contested, with two dates often cited for their creation, the latter during the 1950s and 1960s with the popularity of Star Trek\(^{30}\) (1966–1969), and the earlier in the 1930s with the publication of the first fanzine\(^{31}\) (Coppa 2006a, p. 42; Hellekson & Busse 2014, p. 6; Jamison 2013, p. 75). Hugo Gernsback created a series of popular magazines where readers were encouraged to send in letters and commentary. Individuals who wrote to the magazine eventually began to communicate directly with one another, forming clubs and their own publications (Reid 2009, p. 205; Sawyer 2013, pp. 79-80).

The latter date of the origin of fans, during the 1950s and 1960s, was linked with the rise of the Star Trek television series (Derecho 2006, p. 62; Jenkins 1992). The popular television series had a slew of loyal viewers who would organise conventions and other events in order to engage with the show beyond simply viewing the series (Tulloch 1995). Research into fan cultures has examined the interaction between popular culture, media, and viewers or participants in order to locate the everyday interaction people have with popular culture and the media (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington 2007b, pp. 3–11). Conceiving of fan fiction within fan culture situates it within a pre-existing culture that has norms, hierarchies, organisational structures and language uses.

\(^{30}\) Star Trek is a science fiction franchise that premiered in 1966 as a television series. Since then the Star Trek universe has expanded to include numerous films and television series.

\(^{31}\) A fanzine is a fan-created magazine.
Henry Jenkins’s (1992) work on fan culture, *Textual Poachers*, is often referred to as the seminal work on fandoms.³² In it Jenkins explores the physical offline world of the fans that attended fan conventions in the United States during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Jenkins’s work inaugurated many studies dedicated to not only popular culture but also fan cultures and fan fiction. Jenkins identifies fan-fiction practices within the larger science fiction community, describing a community that has rich traditions, practices, personal ties and rituals, and is constantly in flux. Jenkins (1992, p. 3) establishes that fan communities exist in a space between the media, the wider social context, and the communities themselves. His work paints a largely positive picture of science fiction fans, highlighting the creative production that fans engage in.

Jenkins (1998, p. 23) is one of the first to conceive of fans as active consumers and producers of meaning from the texts with which they engage. He styles this active interaction by describing fans as ‘textual poachers’. This description of science fiction fans has become, arguably, one of the most popular descriptions of fandom. In this description, Jenkins conceives of all popular culture as a ‘text’ from which fans take what they desire and leave the rest. However, this analogy of fans as poachers is somewhat flawed. In describing fans as poachers, Jenkins implies that

³² A fandom is a group of people dedicated to a particular person, television show, film or ‘universe’. For example, there is a Doctor Who fandom dedicated to the new series of the television show; a Doctor Who fandom dedicated to the Doctor Who ‘universe’, which incorporates both the old and new shows, as well as the companion novels that have been published; and fandoms dedicated to specific incarnations of ‘The Doctor’, for example Matt Smith as the 11th Doctor Who.
fans are thieves taking property from cultural producers, potentially leaving the producers the poorer for it. Fans do take from the cultural product; however, as Jenkins himself described throughout his text, they also create and give back to popular culture. As fans’ consumption of media and production of new products are premised on the consumption of canon works, their engagement in fandom is often beneficial to the production of canon media.

Constance Penley’s 1997 work examining the intersection of ‘sex, science fiction, and popular culture’ in NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America has also been influential in fan studies. This research (Penley, 1997, p. 3) focuses on the role of women in both science and science fiction, as she examines how America’s space program (NASA) and the fictional television series Star Trek have influenced one another. Penley’s work highlights the influence that science fiction and its fans can have beyond the realm of media and popular culture.

Camille Bacon-Smith’s work, Enterprising Women (1992), positions the role of women within fan communities, and debunks the myth that fan cultures are a masculine space. Bacon-Smith uses ethnographic research methods to research slash writers, situating slash writers and fan fiction as a community into which individuals are socialized. Enterprising Women (Bacon-Smith 1992) has come under some scrutiny and criticism. It has been suggested that Bacon-Smith’s work is too simplistic in its explanations, as much of her data were generalised from a small group of women (Smith 1997, p. 2).
Bacon-Smith’s later work, *Science Fiction Culture* (2000), is widely recognised as an important contribution to understanding fan cultures, as it explores the relationship between consumers and producers. In this work, Bacon-Smith provides a historical account of science fiction culture from the 1920s until the late 1990s pre-Internet era fandom. It focuses on the interactions that sustain the science fiction community, and in doing so shows that the community is a complex series of negotiations between producers and consumers.

A central criticism that fans and academics have of Bacon-Smith’s work is that she establishes herself as an outsider researching fan activities and culture (Smith 1997, p. 2). This criticism has resulted in the emergence of academic fans, also known as ‘acafans’. Matt Hills (2007, p. 27) was one of the first to propose a deconstruction of the apparent binary construction of fans and academics as an essential aspect of inquiry into fandom. In his work, *Fan Cultures* (2002), Hills engages with the association of fans with cults, as well as highlighting the consumption and commodification of texts within fan cultures. Hills suggests that the changing nature of fandom, from offline to online, has resulted in a lack of theorisation in regard to emerging online fandom trends.

As studies of fandom shifted online an increasing number of academics identified themselves as ‘acafans’. As previously stated, many academics have indicated their status as acafans, while many other academics imply their fannish tendencies in their writing. The breaking down of the boundaries between the studied and the studier has resulted in a wide body of meta-literature written by fans themselves. A
website that was active until 2006, *The Fan Fiction Symposium*, featured a variety of essays written by fans. Many of these discussions now occur in various spaces including in a thread on the website *LiveJournal.com* and in the peer-reviewed journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*. The latter was created and run by many of the authors mentioned above.

Newer studies have focused on examining fandom and fan fiction as part of an online phenomenon, as the internet has been acknowledged as having a significant impact on fan fiction (Jamison 2013, p. 113). Hellekson and Busse’s (2006b) edited volume on fan fiction is perhaps one of the more noted of late. They place fan-fiction practices firmly within the scope of new media and the Internet, while acknowledging that the practice existed in larger fannish enterprises before the advent of the Internet (Hellekson & Busse 2006b, p. 13). Hellekson and Busse’s introduction to the edited volume locates the collection of essays as relating to fan fiction’s shift to the online sphere, predominantly to the online platform *LiveJournal*. Additionally, the collection of essays seeks to examine the change in demographics that occurred in fan fiction during the shift from the pre-Internet to the Internet era (Hellekson & Busse 2006b).

Moving further into the Internet era of fandom, Paul Booth’s works (2010; 2015) situate fandom within the ‘digital age’. Booth’s works explore fan practices within ‘new media’ such as wikis, blogs and social network sites. In these spaces Booth (2010) discusses fan practices in relation to augmented/alternative reality gaming. He shows how fans’ interactions online, in spaces such as MySpace and Wikis,
deconstruct the producer/consumer dichotomy that has dominated other fandom studies through reference to a ‘web commons’. The notion of a ‘web commons’ allows for the construction of fans’ digital activities as communal, creative and interactive. The interactive nature of digital fandom is then used to explore the interactions that exist online between the ludic and non-ludic (Booth 2010).

Throughout Booth’s 2010 work he refers to fan activities as embodying a ‘philosophy of play’. This notion of playfulness is then expanded upon in his 2015 text Playing Fans, which engages the notions of the carnivalesque, parody and pastiche. Booth (2015) explores how fans and industry play with texts, notions of fandom and fan experiences to explore the fluidity that exists in relation to fans’ and media industries’ interactions. Booth (2015) focuses on fans’ digital practices such as digital cosplay, GIFs, and practices that have a digital component such as ‘The Doctor Who Experience’.

Stein (2015) and Williams (2015) have also both recently discussed online fan practices. Stein (2015) examines ‘millennial’ fans online engagement with media. Focusing on the television series Glee as well as others, Stein examines fans interaction with media online in both transgressive and industry approved ways. This examination delves into shifting negotiation of power between fans, actors, writers and industry that has emerged with online digital practices.

Williams (2015) also engages with fans online engagement, specifically examining the online website Television without Pity. Like Stein (2015) and Booth (2015),
Williams engages with a variety of fandoms in her work, engaging with a newer phase of fan studies that embraces multi-sited and multi-fandom inquiries into online fandom. Williams focuses on fandoms of television series that have ended, and explores how fans and fandoms continue their engagement with the television series or fandom once the series, fan site has ended, or an actor has left a series; ‘post-object’. Williams (2015, p.200) focuses on these endings as moments of transition and change for fans.

The Internet

Fandoms’ current engagement with the digital appears inevitable when examining the history of digital technology. As outlined by Howard Rheingold (1994, p. 72), fandom and fan communities were present from the birth of the Internet. Star Trek discussion lists were some of the first online conversations to occur that were not directly related to the further development of the Internet (Rheingold 1994, p. 144). Rheingold’s early work, The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier (1994), outlines the emergence of communities on the Internet by early adopters in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Rheingold’s research focused on the online community the WELL (Whole Earth ’Lectronic Link), an early influential online community that was originally based in the San Francisco area of the United States. Rheingold is credited with creating the term ‘virtual community’ as his work showed how meaningful social connections could be, and were, established using the Internet to initiate social interaction. Rheingold’s work, although fascinating, begins to show its age in his descriptions of connecting to the Internet, as he
describes the purpose of a modem, how dial-up connections work, and how the
Internet is transmitted via telephone wiring. This description establishes the
Internet as a foreign land that individuals must make a clear decision to enter, which
is drastically different from many areas of the world today where individuals are
constantly connected to the Internet—never consciously connecting or
disconnecting from it as a space. Online media has permeated our everyday lives,
not only in terms of the written language but also in how we relate to each other and
the world around us.

Research into online social practices often conceptualizes groups of people
interacting online as a ‘community’. Nancy Baym (2008) talks of online communities
as a form of shared language practice; scholars such as Tom Boellstorff (2009),
Bonnie Nardi (2009) and Celia Pearce (2009) explore online bounded gaming and
role-playing ‘communities’; Caroline Haythornthwaite (2008) and Rebecca Black
(Black 2009; 2008; 2006; Lewis, Black & Tomlinson 2009) have explored online
‘educational communities’; while Heather Horst (Horst & Miller 2005) and Daniel
Miller (2000; Miller & Slater 2000) have examined offline communities’ engagement
with online media.

Much of this research into online engagement is positive, highlighting the ways that
individuals use the Internet and technology to better interact with both the digital
and physical world. However, negative aspects of online and technological
engagement have also been explored. The article A Rape in Cyberspace by journalist
Julian Dibbell (1993) is one of the first articles to not only highlight concepts of
virtual selfhood, via the provocation of whether rape can occur in cyberspace, but also describes the ways in which negative experiences online can be community-forming events. The negative or confrontational aspects of online interaction have been further explored in researchers examining ‘trolls’ and ‘flaming’ practices. Although practices such as trolling or flaming online are by their nature confrontational, scholars have also positioned these practices as a part of community building or identity performance. Steven Vrooman (2002) and Cecil Eng Huang Chua (2009) conceptualize ‘flaming’ as a rhetoric function that assists in identity construction. Vrooman identifies precursors to flaming in the practices of Ancient Greek and Roman comics (2002, p. 55), as well as in contemporary African-American culture (2002, p. 56), arguing that ‘flaming’ is not a practice that has developed uniquely with computer-mediated communication (CMC).

Chua (2009, p. 253) states that communication is critical in the creation of a collective online identity. Collective identities both offline and online are formed via the establishment of the group’s cognitive, moral and emotional connections to one another, which result in a feeling of belonging to a group (Chua 2009, p. 251). Collective identities by their nature result in, and require, an ‘in-group’ and an ‘out-group’ (Chua 2009, p. 252), as ‘part of belonging is unbelonging’ (Paech 2012, p. 13). Flaming is intended to be performative enactments of a group or individual identity that are required online when creating or negotiating social order (Vrooman 2002, p. 54). Individuals or groups that establish themselves in an adversarial position within an online setting use silencing speech such as irrelevant posts (labelled
‘noise’) or flames (characterized by offensive posts) (Chua 2009, p. 253). This use of silencing speech can be seen as a disciplinary gaze (Cole 2015). Trolls who use flaming tactics seek to silence dissidents to their perspectives by creating a hostile environment that discourages posting alternative perspectives through making the activity unpleasant (Chua 2009, p. 256). The use of silencing tactics places the identities in opposition to one another (Chua 2009, p. 255), assisting in establishing an ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ identity that individuals can relate to.

**Literacy online**

The change in the medium and technology of writing brings to light new questions in regard to people’s relationships with writing. The Internet and associated Media 2.0 technologies have resulted in an ease with which information can be deleted, manipulated and created (Carrington 2005; Deuze 2007; Gray 2008; Johnston 2008; Jones & Schieffelin 2009; Schiffrin et al. 2010; Williams 2012). The ways in which texts are now consumed has changed with online media, as readers are able to create their own journey through texts. Online texts, such as web pages, do not have a set beginning, middle or end, as readers choose the order in which they consume the texts by clicking on links and moving between ‘pages’ in an unstructured manner (Dicks et al. 2005, p. 4).

David Barton (2010), Uta Papen (2010), Julia Gillen and David Barton (2010), Carmen Lee (2007), Victoria Carrington (2005) and Carol Winkelmann (1995), among others, have undertaken scholarship into digital writing. Although writing remains central to participation online, the emergence of sounds, graphics and non-linear reading
practices have changed how individuals engage with texts (Barton 2010, p. 124).

Gillen and Barton (2010) recognise the importance of non-textual graphics online, and argue that images, sounds and the way that a webpage is constructed all have equal importance in the interpretation of a text, subsequently arguing that visual and audio media can be read as a text, in relation to Media 2.0 artefacts.

Despite the importance of visual and audio media online, the Internet was originally a purely text-based medium, and even today with the growth of online graphics, images and sounds, the primary way that the Internet is navigated and understood is through text. Barton and Lee (2012; 2010) explore the use of multi-lingual writing through the photo-sharing website Flikr. They outline the difference between literacies and vernacular practices, and state that in literacies there are experts and professionals who function as gatekeepers to knowledge, resulting in literacies being uniform and slow, while vernacular practices are creative, evolve quickly and are localised (Barton & Lee 2012, pp. 283, 296; Barton 2010, pp. 110–111). Through an examination of Flikr, Barton (2010) demonstrates how language use online greatly varies depending on the intended audience and the purpose of the writing. Rather than vernacular language being localised, vernacular language becomes both regional and cosmopolitan, as technology connects individuals from different locales (Barton 2010, p. 124). The ways that individuals experience language online can shift their engagement and perspectives.

This insight is further supplemented by an examination of ‘text talk’ (Bryant, Sanders-Jackson & Smallwood 2006; Jones & Schieffelin 2009; Lee 2007). Jones and
Schieffelin (2009) seek to examine wider repercussions of the evolving colloquial written language over several mediums. They begin by examining a series of advertisements titled *My BFF Jill* by the phone company AT&T. These advertisements satirically use ‘text talk’, traditionally only seen in writing, in a conversational manner. The satire seeks to show the generational gap that exists in relation to written and spoken English in America (however, this situation could easily be transplanted to any number of developed nations). Jones and Schieffelin (2009) examine how ‘text talk’ in this advertisement effectively demonstrates the power relations and community inclusiveness that understanding this form of language results in. The authors then examine how consumers appropriate the verbal text talk in these advertisements into everyday language, demonstrating the influence that technological mediums have on our everyday lives, and the permeability that can exist between written and spoken mediums.

The ways that language can affect social interaction and relationships is also demonstrated in Lee’s (2007) examination of language use in instant messaging in Hong Kong. Lee’s research explores bilingual language use, as well as ‘text talk’ usage, among educated adolescents. Lee (2007, pp. 230–231) discovered that many participants switch between Cantonese, English and Mandarin in their spoken language; however, most use Cantonese regularly for informal conversation. This trend was also seen in their informal written conversations; however, the language use in instant messaging also depended on the ease, or technological affordance, in which each language could be used in order to communicate. For instance, some
words were difficult to type in Cantonese, so they were written instead in English (Lee 2007, p. 238). Lee concludes that language use is a marker of identity online, as participants identify with different languages depending upon how they acted while instant messaging (2007, p. 240).

Despite aspects of ‘digital literacy’ and language literacy being universal, being ‘literate’ in any domain is highly context-specific (Horst & Miller 2005; Miller 2000; Miller & Slater 2000). Understanding vernacular, dialects, or context-specific literacy is indicative of an ‘in-group’ position (Jones & Schieffelin 2009, p. 1057). Rebecca Black (2008, p. 24) states that ‘literacy… may carry and transmit a wealth of historical and ideological perspectives that play a part in reproducing social and material contexts’. This is in line with the ‘multiple literacy’ approach to literacy and meaning where literacy is understood as a social action (Heap 1989). Literacy is affected by, and affects the construction of, the social world surrounding it (Street 2013, pp. 53–54). This results in online writing being both created by, and indicative of, the social world in which it takes place. Web 2.0 and online contexts focus on the social connections and content that is produced online (Alexander 2008, p. 151).

**Prosumers and Web 2.0**

The Internet was originally understood as a space to be read; however, since the early 2000s it has become increasingly interactive (Brabazon 2012, p. 3). As previously outlined, an individual’s ability to engage and shape online content is seen as marking a new stage in Internet development, one that scholars have labelled ‘Web 2.0’ (Krieger 2012, p. 422). Web 2.0, also known as Media 2.0, remix
culture and convergence culture, is based on the recognition that the Internet, and other new media, has fundamentally changed the way that people engage with technology (Gauntlett 2011, p. L218).

The term Web 2.0 was popularised by Tim O'Reilly and John Battelle at the 'Web 2.0 Conference' in 2004 (O'Reilly & Battelle 2009, p. 1). Web 2.0 was conceptualized as a new phase of engagement with the Internet, rather than a shift in Internet technology (Gauntlett 2011, p. L184). Engagement with the Internet was seen to shift from individuals passively viewing content to actively engaging in the creation and consumption of media (Gauntlett 2011, p. L218). Web 2.0 software does not simply provide services to consumers; it offers platforms and applications that improve the more people use and engage with them (O'Reilly & Battelle 2009, p. 1). These Web 2.0 applications manage, harness and respond to the user-generated content that is produced (O'Reilly & Battelle 2009, p. 1). Wikipedia, Facebook, MySpace, Tumblr, Instagram and many others are all Web 2.0 platforms where the content that is created by the users of the program benefits and enriches the platform for all users (Krieger 2012, p. 422).

Prior to the ubiquity of the Internet, Stuart Hall's (1990) theory of encoding and decoding media, initially developed in 1973, was influential in positioning audiences as no longer passively consuming media products. Hall put forward his theory as a response to structuralist theory, which presented audiences as cultural dupes (Ang 1990, pp. 242–243; Seaman 1992, p. 301). Hall proposed that media audiences play an active role in decoding and constructing meaning from the content that they are
presented with. This results in not all individuals interpreting the same source text in the same way (Hall 1990, pp. 91–93). Hall presents three ways in which individuals can decode media: hegemonic (or dominant), negotiated and oppositional (1990, pp. 98–100). These three ways of reading media state that the reader will either; interpret the message in the way in which the producer intended (dominant/hegemonic), reject the message that the producer intended (resistant), or partially accept the message (negotiated).

Jenkins's (1992, p. 34) rejection of the notion that media producers determine media messages that are subsequently transmitted and understood by the audience is in line with Hall's conception of audiences as active consumers. The deconstruction of media consumers as passive was furthered in Bacon-Smith’s (1992) work, as she saw that consumers and producers were in a relationship that constantly required negotiation. Active audience theory posits that audiences work to create meaning from the media that they consume, resulting in audiences reading texts in a variety of ways (Booth 2010, p. 55; Coble 1994; Morley 1993; Seaman 1992). Audiences were also seen to be active in a variety of other ways, most notably through offline fan activities such as engaging in fanzines, conventions and cosplay (Bird 2011, p. 503), as discussed earlier.

The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, with multi-user spaces and crowd-developed content, allowed audiences to be active, constantly building upon pre-existing content in increasingly accessible ways (Bird 2011, p. 503). Web 2.0 technologies allow audiences to move beyond being active in the production of
meaning from texts to being active in the production of media items. Web 2.0 relies on the acknowledgement that traditional dichotomies of producers and consumers, receivers and distributors, no longer represent real-world media engagement (Deuze 2007; Gauntlett 2011, p. L.225; Spitulnik 1993). Individuals are increasingly seen as part of collaborative projects that seek to harness collective intelligence and creativity (Gauntlett 2011, p. L.255), using technology as tools to facilitate communication and interaction in unique and individualistic ways.

Audiences are now positioned as ‘prosumers’—both producers and consumers of media items (Bruns 2010). Although technological innovation has highlighted the deconstruction of boundaries between consumers and producers (Deuze 2007, p. 245), not every online media interaction is produsage, and produsage is not limited to an online Western context (Bird 2011). Much like the shift from an oral to a literate culture, media convergence moves beyond the development of new technologies, resulting in a shift in the relationships between technology, industry, markets, genre and audiences; this in turn results in a restructuring of media power, media aesthetics and economics (Jenkins 2004, pp. 34–35).

Scholars have identified co-creation and prosumption as having a significant impact on the way that media creators and audiences are understood in media studies. The rise of prosumption and co-creation has resulted in some scholars focusing on the potential economic impacts and conceptualizations of co-creative labour. Online fan fiction and other online collective endeavours, such as open-source software, have traditionally been understood to exist within a ‘gift economy’ (Bergquist & Ljungberg...
Karen Hellekson (2009, pp. 114–115) argues that for online fan communities ‘gifting is the goal’ as individuals give, receive and reciprocate gifts. As with most social exchanges, gifts within fandom hold value within their context, and are exchanged in order to reinforce social structures (Hellekson 2009, p. 115).

Conceptualizing online fan culture as a gift culture appears to work when the exchange of goods is between individuals or groups of fans. However, once the exchange of commodities or ‘gifts’ begins to occur between media producers, or commercial entities and traditional consumers, the possibility of online engagement being conceptualized as free or exploited labour emerges (Terranova 2000, p. 33). Consumers’ ‘co-creation’ with traditional media producers is understood to add value to media industries (Banks & Humphreys 2008, p. 403; Hong & Chen 2014, p. 293; Terranova 2000, p. 36). Co-creation is typically voluntary, unwaged labour that is often enjoyed by the labourer (Terranova 2000, p. 33). Consumers and audiences increasingly expect co-creation experiences with media products (Banks & Humphreys 2008, p. 403).

Emerging practices by traditional media products, like television series and films, are taking advantage of consumers’ desire to be involved in the creation of media. Reality television programs from The Block 33 (2003–) to Australia’s Got Talent 34

33 The Block is an Australian reality television series that premiered in 2003 on the Nine Network. Four couples compete to make-over an apartment or house. The houses are then valued and auctioned off, with the contestants earning any money over the reserve price.
or even news programs, urge viewers to live tweet with the show, encouraging viewers’ participation and co-creation of the media. The American television series *Glee* (2009–2015) has created a spin-off television series that features fans of the show and gives them the opportunity to act in several episodes of the original series (Stork 2014).

Co-creation is frequently a feature of online gaming with gaming executives often treating consumers as co-developers (Banks & Humphreys 2008, p. 404; Deuze 2007, pp. 248–249; Hong & Chen 2014). Fans are also creating their own trailers for films (Johnston 2008; Williams 2012), making fan art and memes, talking directly to those involved with canon production through social media, and creating fan fiction. When audiences tweet, write fan fiction and blog posts, create and engage with media products, they are giving the media companies free marketing, content and consumer feedback, as well as expanding their audience base. Traditional media producers are gaining ‘free labour’ from their audiences; however, with this engagement, fans and audiences increasingly expect a more interactive media experience (De Kosnik 2013; Galuszka 2014; Hong & Chen 2014; Terranova 2000).

34 *Australia’s Got Talent* is an Australia reality television series that originally aired on the Seven Network in 2007 before moving to the Nine Network in 2013. Contestants perform their unique talent in a competition to earn a monetary prize.

35 *Glee* is an American musical comedy-drama that aired on the Fox network between 2009 and 2015. The series follows the glee club at the fictional William McKinley High School, focusing on social issues as well as the glee club’s participation in a national show-choir competition.
Bertha Chin (2014) argues that fan labour is not necessarily exploited labour as their motivations need to be taken into account—i.e. fans typically do not see their engagement as labour. Chin (2014) argues that fans gain esteem and social status from the labour, rather than monetary compensation, resulting in their labour being gifted to the fan community, and not exploited. Similarly, individuals who create game modifications comment that they receive community approval and a respected reputation from creating quality modifications (Hong & Chen 2014, pp. 298–299).

Media producers often attempt to limit and monitor consumers’ co-production. In regard to gaming, many websites contain software and code that shape the ways individuals understand and produce gaming modifications (Hong & Chen 2014, p. 294). The canon producers of the American television series *Glee* similarly cultivate fan engagement and labour within a carefully managed business model (Stork 2014). Fans of *Glee* are used as a means of spreading, creating and sending information, allowing them to function as producers and distributors of the television series (Stork 2014). The Fox network that produced *Glee* centralized fan spaces, co-opting fan-made videos and creativity to make them economically productive (Stork 2014). *Glee* fans were offered rewards for their engagement with the television series in officially sanctioned arenas, such as sharing and discussing the series on *Facebook* (Stork 2014).

Commentaries and additional paratextual extras included in the sale of film and television series can also serve to direct fan labour. Hills (2012, p. 33) outlines how DVD commentaries ‘... can be considered as a paratextual site aimed at both
disciplining audience knowledge, and responding to the fan audiences’ assumed desire to accumulate detailed information about a text’. The commentaries seek to inform fans of how the media should be read and engaged with. These commentaries can ‘author’ television series and films (Kompare 2010, p. 100). The commentaries allow producers, showrunners or directors, to position themselves as authors by providing them with an avenue to talk the consumer through how scenes, character arcs or storylines were constructed, and so how they should be interpreted (Kompare 2010, p. 103). The paratexts function as an avenue for fan engagement, but one directs fan discussions and engagement via the media producer’s official channels.

**Remix and the law**

While fans can be characterized as prosumers, the act of engaging with and manipulating pre-existing media items is also known as ‘remix culture’, or in the case of music, ‘mash-ups’ (Booth 2012). Remix focuses on audiences’ participation and co-creativity with media products (Lessig 2008, p. 56). Fans’ increasing engagement and appropriation of canon media is part of remix culture as they borrow, manipulate, alter, or ‘remix’ media creatively to build something new (Lessig 2008).

Remix allows for communication and expression that has previously been the purview of big business (Kuhn 2012). Remix culture (Gauntlett 2011; Hetcher 2009; Lessig 2008) or ‘hybrid creativity’ (Tushnet 2004; Tushnet 2011) has proliferated due to the rise of technology such as, the Internet, disk ‘ripping’ software, and movie-
making and editing software, as well as the increase in personal computers (Subbreich, Latonero & Gluck 2009, p. 1242). Technological innovation, in conjunction with an increasingly technologically literate audience, results in remix offering ‘a point of view from someone who does not have the power of a major studio behind her but still wants to talk about what the popular culture surrounding her means’ (Tushnet 2011, p. 2154). This has democratised media creativity. Through these technological mediums, audiences are now able to externalize their reconceptualization of media, which previously could only exist in their mind’s eye (Subbreich, Latonero & Gluck 2009, p. 1246).

Fan-created film trailers, fan fiction, fan art,\(^{36}\) vidding\(^{37}\) and filking\(^{38}\) are all examples of remix culture. Fan-fiction writers take the stories, ideas, characters and concepts from media products in order to re-create them. Fan audiences seek to create new media items from old ones, mixing pre-existing elements of media in order to create a new meaning, focus, narrative or genre (Cover 2013). This results in creating texts that are both old and new (Cover 2013).

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\(^{36}\) Fan art is the creation of images through paint, photography, craft or digital manipulation whose content directly relates to a particular canon.

\(^{37}\) Vidding is the creation of videos through original creation or digital manipulation whose content directly relates to a particular canon.

\(^{38}\) Filking is a musical genre related to science fiction and fantasy fandom. The lyrics to a popular song are rewritten, often with a humorous intent. The song is traditionally created and performed at fan conventions.
Rebecca Tushnet (2011, p. 2134) argues that remix is situated within the concept of reproduction. Reproduction is understood to have two possible meanings. Within the context of copyright, reproduction is usually taken to mean duplication, while in biological reproduction it is the creation of something new from something old (Tushnet 2011, p. 2134). Tushnet identifies human creativity as acting like human biological reproduction, in that it produces something new out of something old (or pre-existing). Biological reproduction is predominantly the arena of women, and Tushnet (2011) highlights that gendered creativity also occurs in remix, which is understood to be produced mostly by women. Mel Stanfill (2015) also sees remix as gendered, viewing fan fiction as transformative ‘women’s work’. In this process of transformation, fan-fiction writers ‘sample’ existing media ‘layering’ meaning and storytelling to creatively produce a new product (Cover 2013; Stanfill 2015).

Kathleen Williams’s (2012) analysis of the creation of fan trailers explores how in the lead-up to the release of some feature films, trailer fans create their own trailers and upload them on to YouTube. The fans take aspects of other films, existing scenes from the official trailers, and music to edit together a film trailer that portrays a specific genre or narrative for the upcoming film. The creation of these fan trailers is a way for fans to ‘talk back’ to the film writers and producers, demonstrating their desire to be an active part of the media they consume. Williams (2012) sees these trailers as an embodiment of fans’ anticipation of not only the feature film but also of the trailers, demonstrating fans’ interaction with new media.
It is important not to conflate ‘pirating’ with remix. Both remix and ‘pirating’ are forms of digital manipulation of professionally produced, copyrighted works (Lessig 2008). The burning of a film onto a disk undergoes little transformation; the product, therefore, becomes a threat to the original creation economically and results in the original creation suffering an economic loss. Remix, however, incorporates a level of transformation into the original product. The level of transformation that occurs in the production of fan fiction and remix media can result in positive or negative consequences for the original creation (Hetcher 2009). The potential impacts that remix have upon canon creations have resulted in remix being examined through the lens of intellectual property and copyright law. File sharing, although popular with the younger generation, is an act that is unarguably illegal (De Kosnik 2010; Lessig 2008; 2004). The ease with which new media is accessed and manipulated has resulted in illegal practices often being seen as easier and more convenient than the legal alternatives (De Kosnik 2010). Although much of the technology that has allowed file-sharing practices to occur has also been essential in the spread of fan fiction, these two practices are not the same.

The problem with many discussions about the legality of fan fiction is not only the conflation of fan fiction with file sharing, but also the lack of distinction between types of fan fiction. Stroude (2010, pp. 194–195) identifies two main types of fan fiction: participatory and referential. Referential works, according to Stroude, are works such as encyclopaedias that seek to catalogue and outline the works that they refer to in a cohesive manner (Stroude 2010, p. 194). Participatory works are those
more traditionally conceived of as fan works. They are stories based on canonical
works, but they are distinct from parodies because, although they transform the text,
their purpose is not to exaggerate or mock the canon but to rewrite, revere, critique
or extend canonical texts (Stroude 2010, pp. 195–197).

Fan fiction, as a form of remix, has been widely debated in regard to American
copyright law. These debates are often orientated around one of two basic premises
that are in opposition to each other. The first premise is one on which Lawrence
Lessig (2008; 2004) bases his arguments. Lessig is perhaps the most well-known
scholar engaged in discussions of the legality of fan fiction specifically and of remix
culture more generally. Lessig writes convincingly using emotive and persuasive
language in *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (2008),
operating from the premise that remix is illegal, but should not be. He argues that
the current hard-line stance that American copyright law takes with appropriation
and ‘remix’ creativity results in many creatively legitimate practices being technically
illegal. From this premise, Lessig discusses how remix is an activity that is
increasingly popular with the current rising generation as a result of the advances in
technology such as personal home computers, video-making software, video-sharing
sites such as *YouTube*, and the digitisation of media and information. From these
two premises, he concludes that copyright laws, as they stand, are criminalizing
current socially accepted practices, resulting in the younger generation also being
criminalized.
The alternative premise is one that is subscribed to by Rebecca Tushnet (2011; 2007; 2004; 1997) and Steven Hetcher (2009). Tushnet and Hetcher base their arguments on the principle that fan fiction is legal. Steven Hetcher (2009) argues that Lessig's argument is flawed, as Lessig does not substantiate his initial premise that remix culture is illegal. Hetcher claims that although Lessig's argument is flawed, many of the claims that he makes about the benefits of remix culture are not. Hetcher sees fan fiction, and by extension remix culture, as essentially legal; however, he acknowledges that it sits in a precarious place within the law. The diversity that exists within remix culture results in many illegal or illegitimate practices being grouped with legal and legitimate practices. Most remix uses varying amounts of unauthorised copyrighted material (Hetcher 2009, p. 1872). The level of transformation that the cultural item undergoes, which is often subjective, is the definitive factor of whether remix items can be classed as legal or illegal, as outlined in the fair-use doctrine used by courts in the United States (Adler 2008). There is a strong argument in favour of classifying remixes, which are clearly transformative, as fair use, therefore signifying that they are acceptable forms of creation. Hetcher agrees with Lessig's claim that remixes are predominately facilitated by technology, and suggests that remixing is likely to increase in popularity and become an increasingly commonplace form of creation (Hetcher 2009, p. 1872).

Unlike Lessig, Hetcher does not view fan fiction's precarious legal position as a cause for concern. Hetcher argues that social norms are often the most effective means of regulation (2009, p. 1873). He believes that norms that exist within the fan-fiction
community such as posting disclaimers at the beginning of stories, not seeking to gain monetary profit from stories, and respecting the wishes of authors who ask that fan fiction is not written about their works, regulate the practice sufficiently, hence negating the need for increased legal regulation.

This argument is also one that has been proposed by Kelty (2004). Kelty terms this as the need to ‘punt to culture’ (p. 552). Kelty believes that cultural practices and norms are an effective way of governing issues of creativity and authorship that are currently unable to be governed by law. However, Hetcher (2009) points out that as more people breach the established social norms, fewer people will be inclined to follow them, resulting in the collapse of the social regulation of remix.

The final notable author that engages with the legalities of fan fiction is Rebecca Tushnet (2011; 2007; 2004; 1997). Tushnet argues that fan fiction is legal, but it is not practically legal, as the organisation of current copyright law disadvantages those that wish to take part in this practice. Tushnet (2011) focuses her analysis of remix culture on the practice of vidding, examining fan fiction within the context of the fair-use doctrine used by American courts. In United States courts there are four main guidelines used to determine whether a text infringes on copyright in relation to fair use: the purpose and character of the use; the nature of the copyrighted work; the amount of the original text used; and finally what effect the text will have on potential market values of the copyrighted text (Adler 2008). Tushnet (1997) argues that because the works produced through remix do not serve the same purpose as the originals, and because they have been transformed, they are then fair use within
United States copyright law. Stroude’s analysis of the legality of fan fiction also highlights the emphasis on transformation within courts in the United States (2010). Stroude argues, like Tushnet, that fan fiction occupies a different commercial space from that of the canon, resulting in the two products (fan fiction and canon) not being in competition with each other, but rather being complementary.

**Conclusion**

As this thesis seeks to explore aspects of the current relationship between media fans and media producers through fan fiction, a historical and contextual understanding of these relationships is essential. Therefore, the chapter has outlined some of the major historical and contextual changes that have occurred to media usage and technologies. The changes in media technology have resulted in changes to the relationships that exist between media consumers and producers, with some current scholars arguing for the deconstruction of these terms.

The shift from oral to literate cultures with the emergence of literacy among the general public during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe resulted in changes to the ways knowledge was stored and transmitted. With the emergence of publishing houses and written works, legal protections in the form of intellectual property law and copyright emerged, constructing limitations on who could create and distribute knowledge and imbuing written texts with a sense of power and authority (Barton & Papen 2010).
Fan interaction with media products existed prior to the Internet through mailing lists, fanzines and conventions (Coppa 2006a, p. 42; Reid 2009, p. 205). Scholars, such as Jenkins (2007; 2004; 1992), Penley (1997) and Bacon-Smith (2000; 1992) began to explore the relationships between fans and media producers offline. These scholars’ examination of fan activities resulted in offline fans’ engagement with media products being understood as active media engagement. With the emergence of the Internet, fan interaction began to occur online (Rheingold 1994), intimately linking online fan activities with these emerging technological shifts. The invention of the Internet, and the emergence of online writing, once again shifted media producers’ and consumers’ relationships with one another. The Internet emerged as a medium through which social interaction occurred and online communities could be built.

Online writing resulted in writing that is more dynamic and accessible than traditional physical written texts. The Internet allowed information to be more easily created, manipulated and deleted (Deuze 2007; Jones & Schieffelin 2009). This has resulted in the removal of some barriers by media consumers in creating and engaging with media. The invention of the Internet and the emergence of online writing shifted media producers’ and consumers’ relationships with one another. The Internet has allowed information to be more easily created, manipulated and deleted (Deuze 2007; Jones & Schieffelin 2009). The ability of individuals to interact with and create media online marked a new era of engagement with the Internet or ‘Web 2.0’ (Krieger 2012, p. 433). Audience interactive engagement with digital
technologies resulted in audiences engaging in the production of media more easily; this led to scholars labelling audiences as ‘prosumers’ (Bruns 2010).

It is at this juncture that this exploration of the relationships that emerge between fan producers and consumers begins. With the emergence of new digital technologies and the increase in visibility of audience engagement, the roles that media audiences and authors occupy can be seen to be at a crossroads, as new technologies disrupt existing interactions. To contextualise this exploration of relationships I will begin with a discussion of authorship.

The next chapter will establish authorship as a central notion among media producers and consumers. Authorship will be established as a concept that social actors associate with authority, legitimacy and therefore power over the field of media production and consumption. Authorship is shown to be a concept that is used to assert not only legal and economic rights over media, but also social capital. Struggles over the right to be an author, or who can be an author, become symbolic for social actors in the field who have rights over media products. The discussion of authorship will begin with an examination of Western notions of ‘the author’, as outlined by Barthes’s (1977) and Foucault’s (1970) deconstructions of the concept. This theoretical understanding of authorship will then be applied to canon producers’ and audiences’ understanding of the function and rights of an author in relation to their fans and creations. The chapter will do this by examining fan-fiction participants’ relationship with authors, their relationship with the concept of authorship, and some canon creators’ perceptions of their role as authors.
Chapter 4: Authorship

Introduction

A close examination of ‘authorship’ will begin our exploration of the struggles that exist in regard to power and control over the media, as it is a key concept in this examination of fan fiction and fan practices. Power, authority and legitimacy are innately tied to, and represented by, authorship for those involved with media. Social actors use authorship as a central notion through which struggles over power in the field are fought. This will be established through an examination of fan writers’ and canon creators’ engagement with the legal, social and economic aspects of authorship. Fans and canon creators alike use their conceptions of ‘authorship’ to either establish or deny individuals and groups power over media production and consumption.

These constructions of the notion and role of the author establish ‘authorship’ as a complex and highly contested concept that plays a key role in media engagement. The relationship between ‘authors’ and audiences is increasingly problematized by the noticeable blurring of boundaries between the sets of social agents that has
occurred with the rise of ‘prosumers’ and remix culture. This blurring of boundaries is both conceptual and physical. There are traditionally published, ‘original’ authors who take part in fan writing, there are some fan writers that make the transition to published writers, and many more fan writers who aim to make the same transition. Along with the physical blurring of the boundaries between fan writers and authors, fans and canon creators alike are conceptualising ‘authorship’ in a variety of social, legal and economic ways depending on the context.

In this chapter we will see how fan writers talk about the authors of their favourite canon as people whom they look up to and aspire to be like. They see their fan writing as ‘practice’ before they transition from being fan writers to ‘real authors’. Fan writers situate their writing as respectful of the canon creators. However, fan writers’ discussion of, and engagement with, canon authors is often fraught with contradictions and tensions, with fan writers’ conceptions of authorship shifting depending on the context. Fan writers’ and canon creators’ engagement in fan writing is, at times, an oppositional one, as both fans and canon creators seek to legitimize their use and engagement with the texts.

This chapter explores the relationship between fan writers, canon creators and the concept of the author from three different perspectives. The first perspective examined is that of canon creators, typically regarded as the authors of the canon works, in relation to fan writing and writers. The second perspective is how fan writers view themselves as authors. The final perspective examines fan writers’
perceptions of two Big Name Fans (BNFs)\textsuperscript{39} who have transitioned from fan writers
to published, ‘original authors’

In order to ascertain canon creators’ perspectives on authorship, six published
authors were questioned about their perceptions of fan fiction and fan-fiction
writers. In addition to the six authors interviewed, a series of statements recorded on
other fictional authors’ websites, or documented online from professional interviews
focused on fan writing, were used. Three themes emerged in most of the authors’
responses and the online statements. The authors’ framed their responses to queries
about fan fiction legally, economically and affectively. These three perspectives each
sought to construct the authors as the legal, economic and social owners of the
canon creation. These responses appeal to both legally codified and socially
constructed forms of legitimacy and power over the canon. This construction of
legitimacy over the canon places the canon creators in a position of power over fan
writers. Once the canon creators’ legal and emotional legitimacy over the canon is
established fan writers can then be perceived as exploiting the published, ‘original’
authors’ labour. This exploitative relationship between fan writers and canon
creators is then framed in one of two ways. Fan writers are illegitimately using the
canon against the canon creators’ wishes, or the canon creators are benevolent
benefactors allowing fan writers to make use of the canon, despite not compensating
the canon creators’ physical and emotional labour.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{39} Big Name Fans or BNFs are fans who have achieved an elevated status among other fans. How BNFs
achieve this status will be further discussed in Chapter 6: Conflict.
\end{flushleft}
The author’s notes displayed at the beginning and end of fan-fiction stories, as well as the responses gathered from the semi-structured interviews, will be used as data to ascertain how fan writers view themselves as authors. In these data, contradictory responses were presented in regard to whether fan-fiction writers considered themselves authors. From the 21 interviews conducted with fan-fiction readers and writers, 12 were current fan writers, 5 had been fan writers but did not currently consider themselves writers, and 4 classified themselves as readers; however, they had all ‘attempted to write something’ in the past. Despite individuals making contradictory statements during the course of the interviews, similarities among interviewees’ responses emerged. Fan writers’ responses typically varied depending on whether they were talking about themselves as authors in relation to ‘original’ published authors, potentially publishing an ‘original’ novel, or in relation to their fan-writing practices and other fan writers.

When discussing their fan-writing practices in relation to published, ‘original’ texts, fan writers typically constructed their fan-fiction writing as ‘practice’ for the ‘original’ works that they hoped someday to write. During the interviews of fan-fiction participants, they would often position themselves as writers who constructed words on the page, rather than creative ‘real’ authors. These types of responses would also occur when interviewees would discuss canon creators. Canon creators were typically referred to as creative authors, while fan-fiction writers occupied a subservient position as writers who ‘played’ with the creative texts that the canon creators had produced. The fan writers interviewed would comment on
how the canon creators legally ‘owned’ the original works, and they were playing with the canon ‘just for fun’. Thus, like the canon creators themselves, the fan writers recognised the physical and emotional labour that canon creators put into the construction of media, and subsequently constructed the published, ‘original’ authors as being the legal and creative owners of the work.

However, the language and opinions surrounding their fan writing changed when discussing the ownership and control that the fan writers expect to hold over the fan works they write. Fan writers then highlight the emotional labour and ‘original components’ that make their way into their fan writing. Taking this into account, fan writers only partially defer to the canon creators, asserting that the canon creators owned ‘elements’ of some of the concepts used in their fan writing but the fan writers owned the ‘original’ ideas and the story as represented by the physical arrangement of the words. This assertion of ownership became more pronounced when discussing other fan writers’ potential uses and engagement with their fan works. When discussing their ownership of the fan works they had written, fan writers would highlight the physical and emotional labour they had put into the creation of the media, and the emotional attachment they have to the work they have written. Like the canon creators, the fan writers linked their ownership of the creative works to the time and labour put into their creation, as well as the emotional attachment they felt to the writing that they had produced.

Finally, an examination of fan writers’ perceptions of two BNFs that had transitioned from fan writer to ‘original’ published author will be examined. The fan-fiction
participants who were interviewed, both readers and writers, were asked about the writings of Cassandra Clare and E.L. James. Fan writers’ responses during interviews, as well as data pulled from a variety of online websites, particularly the fan websites Fandom Wank (hbic_hq 2013) and Fanlore have been examined in regard to these two writers. As I have previously explained, Clare is most well known among fan circles for her writing of Harry Potter fan fiction during the early 2000s and for her ‘original’ published work, The Mortal Instruments series. James achieved notoriety through her adult BDSM series, the Fifty Shades trilogy (2011–2012), which was originally posted as online Twilight fan fiction titled Master of the Universe (Fanlore 2015d).

Despite almost all fan writers interviewed stating that they wished to transition from fan writer to ‘original’ published author, fan writers’ perceptions of James and Clare were overwhelmingly negative. The criticism directed at both Clare and James was with respect to the labour they put into the production of their works. Clare was described as not acknowledging her fan-fiction roots, and accused of plagiarism in both her fan-fiction work and her original work, while James’s Fifty Shades of Grey series was typically described as containing poor prose, repetitive descriptions, stereotypical characters, and incorrect characterisation of the BDSM community, as well as ‘ripping off’ other Twilight fan-fiction stories. Both writers were characterized as undeserving of the success that had come their way. For example, fan-fiction

40 The term ‘BDSM’ is a combination of the abbreviations B/D (Bondage and Discipline), D/s (Dominance and submission), and S/M (Sadism and Masochism).
writer CR stated during an interview that: ‘... there is better stuff on the web for free that you can watch or read’. In denying the originality and quality of Clare’s and James’s work, the fan-fiction participants interviewed were also denying the labour and, therefore, the social and emotional connection that the authors would potentially have with their work.

Despite many fan-fiction writers wishing to replicate Clare’s and James’s transition from fan writer to ‘original’ published author, the stories told, and opinions routinely put forward, about these authors serve as disciplinary tales. Although fan writers such as James and Clare are able to physically transition from fan writer to published author, other fan writers deny them the transition to the symbolic status of ‘author’. Fan writers who transitioned to published writers were constructed as not being 'real authors', and subsequently denied the deference, legitimacy and respect that other published writers were given. The ways that authors and fan writers negotiate the concept of authorship demonstrates that an author is not a self-evident individual, but a constructed social, legal and economic category used to negotiate ideas of ownership, authority and legitimacy regarding media objects.

**Barthes, Foucault and authorship**

Many of the inconsistencies that exist in discussions of authorship in wider society can be seen in discussions of fan authorship (Busse 2013, p. 50). Hence, using fan conceptions of authorship within the scope of online remix culture and Web 2.0 highlights the ways that new technologies are altering the ways that consumers engage and perceive authorship. As previously discussed, media products are
communicative acts. Remix culture and Web 2.0 allow the consumer to become further engaged in the communicative act that media products inspire, allowing consumers to extend the conversation.

Barthes's (1977) discussion of the death of the author and Foucault's (1970) discussion of the existence of the author will be used in this chapter. Barthes's short essay, *Death of the Author* (1977), originally published in 1968, identifies the author as a modern figure and a product of our society. Barthes (1977, p. 145) sees modern conceptions of the author as intertwining the author with the works, so that the author '… exists before it [the text], thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child'. The author is imbued with authority and power over the texts they create, as the texts are born from the author. However, Barthes (1977, p. 146) then seeks to ‘kill’ the author, as he argues that ‘… a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash'. Removing the ‘author’ from a text reopens the text, because consumers no longer engage with the text in order to decipher the author's meaning, as there is no true or ‘correct’ meaning to be gleaned from the writing (Barthes 1977, p. 147). With the ‘death’ of the author comes the birth of the reader, who is then free to interpret meaning from the text rather than search for the authors' intended meaning.

Similarly, Foucault’s conception of authorship removes a single identifiable individual as being the creative genius from which texts are born. Foucault's (1970,
p. 107) response to Barthes’s statement that the ‘author is dead’ was to question what
an author is. Foucault constructs the author as a definitional category used to define
a certain mode of discourse by limiting the meanings that emerge from a text
(Fathallah 2013, p. 30). Foucault (1970, p. 107) sees authorship as a function, with an
author’s name ever present at the margins of a text characterising the where and
how the text fits into discourses that exist within society.

Often, fan-fiction participants take a Barthian perspective of authorship, and identify
the meaning of texts in the words on the page, rather than in an authorial creator of
the work (Barthes 1977, p. 143); however, fans still often defer to the superior
relationship that authors are perceived to have with the works (Fathallah 2016, p.
460). Fans perspectives on authorship are often contradictory. Although fan fiction
is premised upon the denial of complete authorial control, or ‘Author as God’, fans
still place the author in a position of authority and power in relation to the texts they
consume (Fathallah 2016, pp. 460, 464). Fans both reject the author as a figure of
control and authority over the texts they create, while also allowing authors’
comments and perspectives power over their engagement with media products.
Fans have been seen to argue that the author is dead as individuals identified as
authors, such as Joss Whedon and J.K. Rowling, have stated so (Fathallah 2016,
p.465). How fan writers and published, ‘original’ authors negotiate the concept of
authorship in their work is telling of the ways that their relationships with one
another are negotiated. As discussed by Foucault (1970, p. 906) and Barthes (1977),
authorship is inexorably tied to power and meaning; therefore, fan writers and canon

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authors are using the concept of authorship to both establish and deny legitimacy, authority and power.

**Authors believe they are alive**

In 2012, three of my friends discovered that the current author of one of their favourite book series was going to be present at Swancon, a local Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention in Perth, Western Australia. Having just started my research project I was eager to join them at the convention. The panel that my friends had been so eager to attend was a question-and-answer session with Brandon Sanderson.

As mentioned earlier, Sanderson began writing the *Wheel of Time* series after the original author of the series, Robert Jordan, passed away. In the mid-afternoon on Good Friday, at the front of the Pan Pacific Hotel North Ballroom, Sanderson sat with a long table set up in front of him looking out to a mostly filled room of *Wheel of Time* fans.

Sitting in front of a crowd of fans, Sanderson began to tell the room about how he fell in love with the *Wheel of Time* series when he was ten years old. He recounted how he had been looking through books in his local bookstore, and on finding the first book in the *Wheel of Time* series he ‘knew he had found something special’.

Sanderson, who had been invited as an author to speak to fans of the series, decided to tell the story of how he became a fan of the series. He tied his current status as the author of the series to his emotional connection to the series from when he was a fan. In doing this, Sanderson established himself as having an emotional investment in the series and the characters long before he was asked to write them. In his story
Sanderson paid tribute to Robert Jordan, as he told the audience how he was honoured to be asked to complete the stories by Jordan’s wife. Jordan, through his wife, passed on the ‘authorship’ of the series to Sanderson.

At the time, I was struck on hearing this by how this particular situation blurred the boundaries between what is and is not fan fiction. On questioning Sanderson on his unique situation he described his current authorship of the *Wheel of Time* series as ‘a sort of sanctioned fan fiction’. However, now I am struck by how this situation uses ideas of physical and emotional labour to establish legitimacy and authorship. Sanderson established his legitimacy as a suitable replacement for Jordan by telling the crowd about his dedication to the series prior to his appointment as a writer. Sanderson clearly recounted to the crowd his long-term engagement with the series as a dedicated fan, spending hours reading the stories. He outlined how he came to love the characters and became emotionally invested in the stories. Although Sanderson was recounting his affective labour as a fan, his intent was to use this as a way to establish pre-existing legitimacy as an author of the series.

Published, original authors and fan writers alike commonly appeal to emotional and physical labour as a justification of legitimacy and ownership. In outlining their position on fan fiction, published, ‘original’ authors often first establish and emphasise their relationship to the media they have produced. They do this by highlighting their emotional attachment to the characters and the world, the physical labour they have expended in the creation of the media, and through an appeal to popular conceptions of copyright and intellectual property law. These
appeals appear to be the canon creators’ attempts to establish social and legal legitimacy and ownership over the media produced.

Appeals to emotional or familial ownership are common among published, ‘original’ authors. Renowned fantasy author Ursula K. Le Guin\(^{41}\) refers to fan fiction as ‘an invasion, literally – strangers coming in and taking over the county I live in, my heartland’ (Le Guin 2007). Other authors such as George R.R. Martin, author of the series *A Song of Ice and Fire*\(^{42}\) (1996–) refer to their characters as their ‘children’ (Martin 2010). Anne Rice,\(^{43}\) a well-known gothic-fiction author, comments that fan fiction ‘upsets me terribly’ (Rice 2009) and Diana Gabaldon\(^{44}\) states that fan fiction is ‘immoral … it makes me want to barf’ (Gabaldon 2010). In her infamous blog entry, *The Fan Fiction Rant*, science fiction author Robin Hobb\(^{45}\) frequently equated the use of characters from her ‘original’ published works to the manipulation of family photos, placing family members in sexually compromising positions (Hobb 2005).

\(^{41}\) Ursual K. Le Guin is an influential female science fiction and fantasy writer who rose to prominence during the 1960s and 1970s. She is known for her explicit engagement with social issues in her writing, including politics, gender and feminism.

\(^{42}\) *A Song of Ice and Fire* is an epic fantasy series written by George R.R. Martin. First published by Voyager Books, the series begun in 1996, and is still continuing. In 2011 the American television network HBO launched a television series titled *Game of Thrones* based on this series of books.

\(^{43}\) Anne Rice is an American gothic-fiction and erotica author most known for her series *The Vampire Chronicles*, which is ongoing. Knopf published the first novel in the series, *Interview with the Vampire*, in 1976.

\(^{44}\) Diana Gabaldon is most known for her series *Outlander* first published in 1991 by Delacorte Books.

\(^{45}\) Robin Hobb is an epic fantasy fiction author, most known for her books set in the ‘Realm of Elderlings’.
Hobb also equated fan fiction to a form of ‘creative identity theft’, as her name is ‘irrevocably attached to [her] stories and characters’ (Hobb 2005).

These statements seek to highlight the emotional connection that media producers have with the characters and the work they have produced. The focus of these authors often appears to be centred on the characters, rather than the world in which the characters exist, or the storyline itself. This serves to personify and humanize the connection between author and their product. The equivalency of the characters with children or family members associates authors’ connection with works they have produced with the innate connection between parent and child, or other familial relations. The authors are presenting their works as an extension of themselves—much like a family member is part of one’s extended identity.

Roth and Flegel (2014, pp. 903–905) state that authors often personify their works as children, or damsels in distress, in order to imply that their works are something that they are charged with protecting from the wider world. In doing this, Roth and Flegel argue that these descriptions function not only as familial narratives, but as patriarchal familial narratives where the author is the patriarchal protector or owner of the family/creative work. This then allows authors to construct fan works as ‘a personal violation against one’s family’ with the authors valiantly defending their family against violation. In establishing this connection between the author and the media that they produce, the authors are expressing the feeling that the media is innately tied to them, legitimizing their ownership, control and power over the work.
The second way that media creators appear to legitimize their power, control and ownership, as represented by authorship, over the media they have produced is twofold: they appeal to ideas of labour, and to popular conceptions of copyright and intellectual property law. As will be discussed further in Chapter 5: Authority, the evolution of modern conceptions of authorship evolved in an economic climate where writers sought legal protections in order to make a living from their writing. Authors, at the time, emphasised the need for writers to be monetarily compensated for the labour they put into the works they created (Woodmansee 1984, p. 433). By characterising media items as intellectual property, and seeking to treat intellectual property in much the same way as physical property, copyright law tethered the creation of media items to commercial labour. Authors often refer to fan writing as ‘illegal’ (Hobb 2005), or warn fan writers that their lawyers are ‘rubbing their hands together in anticipation of the large sums of money they might extract from you’ (Canavan 2010). Although these objections are typically phrased in terms of ‘violating copyright’ (Hobb 2005; Rice 2009), rather than a purely legal objection, the authors appear to be phrasing their protestation to fan fiction in terms of an exploitation of their labour. Numerous authors refer to the labour that they have put into the creation of their media products as the grounds for their concerns over fan fiction:

‘I put many, many years of hard work into creating and developing my world and characters. The story goes where I want it to. The characters do what I want them to. The idea of fan fiction that adds to the story is appealing, but don’t expect me to like changes or distortions …’ (Canavan 2010)
'I am not a precious sparkly unicorn who is obsessed with the purity of his characters – rather, I am a glittery and avaricious dragon who is jealous of his steaming pile of gold. If you do not steal the dragon's gold, the dragon will leave you alone.' (Stross 2010)

'[Fan] writers who post a ... fan fiction are claiming my groundwork as their own. That is just not right.' (Hobb 2005)

In a more expansive description, George R.R. Martin tells the story of two well-known authors with opposing approaches to copyright and fan use of their published, ‘original’ works: Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.P. Lovecraft. Edgar Rice Burroughs rigorously defended the copyright of his works and died ‘... a millionaire many times over, living on a gigantic ranch’, while H.P. Lovecraft ‘... lived and died in genteel poverty, and some biographers have suggested that a poor diet brought on by poverty may have hastened his death’ (Martin 2010). It seems that authors are appealing to the labour that they have exerted in the creation of their work, as a way of legitimizing their ownership and control. The use of the canon works by fan writers is contextualized as an exploitation of the author’s labour, as the fan writing does not compensate the author, rather it uses the author’s labour, as manifested by the media produced, without consent.

This is in contrast to typical discussions of labour exploitation around fan fiction. Current scholarship, in regard to labour surrounding fan works, typically focuses on the potentiality of the fan writer’s labour to be exploited, rather than the labour of
the published, ‘original’ author. The position that published, ‘original’ authors appear to have taken in their concerns about their labour being exploited mirrors academic concerns about the exploitation of fan labour in the creation of fan works. Published, ‘original’ authors appear to be concerned that their mental and creative labour, as represented by the media that they have produced, is being inadequately compensated and acknowledged when fan writers and readers engage with fan fiction.

Fan scholars such as Kristina Busse (2015), Abigail De Kosnik (2015; 2013; 2009), Alexis Lothian (2015), and Suzanne Scott (2015) have all examined and theorised on the ‘exploitation of fan labour’. Fan labour has been constructed as ‘invisible labour’, a ‘labour of love’ and ‘women’s work’ (Busse 2015). Each of these characterisations has highlighted the labour that fans have put into the production of creative products for seemingly no commercial rewards. Fans are promoting the media that they enjoy, as well as creating associated media and merchandise, all for no, or marginal, monetary compensation (Stein 2010; Turk 2014). The labour that fans are putting into the promotion and production of media works appears to go uncompensated in a monetary-based economy. This has led to fan scholars becoming concerned that fans’ labour is being exploited by media corporations that are increasingly relying on their productive activities to sell and market media items

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Interestingly, the segments from published authors above appear to echo this concern that published authors’ labour is becoming increasingly invisible, as it is being used by fans for their own ends. The labour that the authors are putting into the creation of their media product is being overlooked, as fans take the authors’ products as pre-existing building blocks that they can play with.

Their concerns resemble arguments put forward in regard to media piracy. Media corporations’ concerns regarding media piracy focus on the lack of monetary compensation that those who produce the media are gaining when the public treat media items as ‘a shared resource’ rather than as property. The use of media as a shared resource appeals to more feminist models of familial ties, emphasising the role that media products play in creating ‘culture’ and community (Roth & Flegel 2014). However, with this ‘repurposing’ of the media item, from commercial product to a tool of cultural production, comes a monetary devaluing of the media item, as it is taken out of a commercial sphere and into a social one. Authors’ concern that fans ‘will steal the dragon’s gold’ appears to stem from this transformation. The author created the media item primarily to be exchanged within a commercial economy. Labour, within this economy, is typically compensated monetarily. Hence, this transformation of the media product from commercial product to cultural tool could be seen as devaluation, and therefore, exploitation of the authors’ labour. These emotional and labour-driven arguments, put forth by published, ‘original’ authors, seek to establish the media that they have produced as both family and property.
Thus, authors seek to establish moral and legal legitimacy in regard to their status as owner and author of media products.

Fan writers are, and are not, authors who may, or may not, be dead.

The concern of scholars—that fan labour is being exploited—exists due to the tensions between fandoms’ apparent internal ‘gift culture’ and fandoms’ existence within a wider commercial economy. As Mel Stanfill (2014, p. 131) states, ‘fan work is laborious, but fans are rarely seen as laboring’. Recent discussions have positioned fan labour as being traditionally ‘female’ labour (Busse 2015), as it is essentially ‘invisible labour’ where fan creativity and engagement have served to enhance the media product, yet fans do not receive monetary compensation for their work (Hellekson 2015; Scott 2015).

Female ‘reproductive labours’, or ‘labours of love’, customarily do not secure monetary compensation (Busse 2015, pp. 113–114). More ‘feminine’ economies use ‘shared resources’, with a focus on ‘…friendship, horizontal kinship, play and learning’ (Roth & Flegel 2014, p. 906). This has led to the characterization of fandom, and fan fiction specifically, as existing within a ‘gift economy’ (Chin 2014; De Kosnik 2009; Hellekson 2015; Hellekson 2009; Turk 2014). This gift economy relies upon the exchange of ‘gifts’ in the form of fan-fiction stories, reviews, encouragement, fan art, vids, and other fan products. These ‘gifts’ are then given to the wider ‘fan community’ in a form of ‘circular gift giving’ where gifts are not directly exchanged but embraced by multiple individuals and groups that participate in the fandom.
Fans are understood to labour ‘for the love’ of the product they are engaging with (Stork 2014). Although monetary compensation is generally derided for fan fiction and some other fan exploits, seeking payment for some fan products is acceptable (Scott 2015, p. 147). In instances where fan products are being exchanged in a commercial economy, these pursuits tend to be male dominated, or seen to be more ‘masculine’ pursuits (Busse 2015, p. 114).

Beyond the immediate fan ‘community’, the use of fan participation and fan labour in the enhancement of a media product is increasingly widespread in today’s age of the prosumer (Bird 2011; Bruns 2010; Galuszka 2014). Web 2.0 is often linked with the rise of ‘free labour’, which occurs in all kinds of media engagement (Terranova 2000). In gaming, fans are now frequently able to create and make use of user-generated content, also known as ‘co-creation’ (Banks & Humphreys 2008; Hong & Chen 2014; Kim 2014). Additionally, fans have long remixed music (Lessig 2008), created trailers and participated in vidding (Booth 2012; Lothian 2015; Williams 2012). Corporate entities are increasingly making use of fan labour in the promotion and advertisement of their products. Examples are the Fox network’s creation and use of paratexts in the promotion of the television series Glee (Stork 2014), the ABC Family network’s young adult television series Kyle XY47 (2006–2009) (Stein 2010), the filtering of canon information through fan websites to promote the Lord of the

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47 Kyle XY is an American science fiction drama television series that aired on the American Broadcasting Company between 2006 and 2009. The series follows the exploits of Kyle, a boy who wakes up naked in the forest with no memory of his previous life. Kyle eventually discovers that a shadowy company has created him and has a plan for him.
Rings and Harry Potter films (Murray 2004), and the television series Sherlock on the BBC (Chin 2014; Hills 2012).

The increasing use of fan labour in the co-production of media has highlighted that fandoms’ gift economy, and the wider commercial economy, cannot be separated as two discrete systems. Booth (2010, p. 24) theorises this as a ‘digit-gratis economy’, which sees fandom as occupying an economy that is a mixture of both gifting and economic structures. The ‘field’ of fandoms’ gift economy exists within the wider macrocosm of the commercial economy where media products are produced. Commercial entities’ endeavour to use the labour of fans for monetary returns firmly positions fans activities within a monetary system—thus scholars are concerned that fans are not receiving monetary compensation for their labour in creating fan works and promoting media products (De Kosnik 2009, p. 118). Hence, there has been increasing apprehension that fan-created products are something that could be commoditized without fans receiving compensation for their labour (De Kosnik 2009, p. 119).

Banks and Humphreys (2008, p 402), however, do not regard fan labour as being exploited; rather, they conceptualize fan labour as an evolution of social and monetary economies, where the unpaid labour of fans yields a form of power, albeit different from typical paid labourers. Fans who willingly contribute unpaid labour become co-producers, who can influence and transform producer and consumer practices, gaining social rewards such as social status, legitimacy or authority within fan-production groups, rather than monetary compensation (Banks & Humphreys
However, fans are only willing to contribute unpaid labour to the production and dissemination of media products if it does not ‘feel’ like work (Banks & Humphreys 2008). While engagement is seen as ‘just for fun’, or as ‘play’, fans see their labour as a gift to fandom, and are satisfied with social rewards for what they conceive of as a social engagement (Chin 2014). The ‘play’ emerges due to the author’s emotional connection to the work (Booth 2015, p. 172). Once fans begin to ‘feel’ like their labour is ‘work’, however, social rewards are no longer satisfactory for their inputs (Banks & Humphreys 2008, p. 410).

Despite the possible power transformations of merging social and monetary economies, authorship, as discussed earlier, is currently legally and conceptually linked to the concept of labour. Whether characterized as co-production or exploited labour, the labour that fans put into the production of fan works is clearly evident. The fans’ emotional investment, combined with their obvious intellectual and physical labour in the production of fan works potentially places them in a position of ‘authorship’, and, therefore, ownership over their works. Some published, ‘original’ authors have acknowledged the labour that fans put into the production of fan fiction. Author Stephenie Meyer has commented on the labour that fans put into the creation of their fan works, without explicitly linking their labour to ownership or authorship, as authors do when discussing their own labour. Meyer commented that:

People pour out so much energy and talent into them [fan-fiction stories] … It makes me frustrated. I’m like, go write your own story. Put
them out there and get them published. That's what you should be doing.
You should be working on your own book right now. (Temple 2012)

Meyer’s frustration and confusion appears to arise from a disjunction between how she sees the concepts of authorship, ownership and labour. It seems that Meyer assumes fan writers do not own, or are not the ‘authors’ of the fan works that they create, in a legal or emotional sense. Therefore, Meyer does not understand why fans are working, or putting labour, into works that are not ‘their own’. A sentiment that has also been echoed by fans who assert the power and ‘godlike’ status of authors (Fathallah 2016, p. 465). While Meyer is acknowledging the labour that fans put into the works, she is denying the fan writers the ownership and authority that typically accompanies the input of labour into the creation of a text.

When discussing their fan works in relation to the canon and the canon producer, fan-fiction readers and writers often take the perspective that the canon producer has ownership and control over the media they have produced. As fan-fiction writer A Contradiction commented when interviewed for this research, ‘... they [the canon creators] own the world in which it’s set and the characters. And no fan fiction writer wants to take that away from them.’ Fan writers often highlight the published, ‘original’ author’s ownership specifically over the world, or the characters. For example, when I asked fan writer Lilbit846 if she would stop writing fan fiction if the canon creator requested it, she responded, ‘... the characters do belong to their original creators, and if they - if that creator feels like what I’m doing infringes on their story or their rights then I would stop writing - that character, but I wouldn’t stop in general.’
As will be further explored in Chapter 7: Legitimacy, many fan writers place disclaimers at the beginning of their works stating that they do not own the work. However, those reading fan works often do not see the need for these disclaimers. When interviewed, MB commented, ‘... it doesn’t really need to be said because it’s already sort of - yeah, you know, you don’t think you own it.’ Despite widespread consensus that fan writers do not completely own the fan fiction they produce, fan writers typically do not see what they are doing as harmful or infringing on the rights of the canon producer, as long as money is not made from the production of fan works. For example, fan-fiction reader TJ commented during an interview that, ‘... well, generally I think as long as the person whose writing the fan fiction isn’t making money off of the intellectually sort of - material I’m okay ...’

Fan-fiction participants typically distance themselves from the labour that they put into the creation of their fan works, in order to maintain their understanding of the canon producer’s rights and control over the media. Fan-fiction participants frequently construct their engagement with the canon texts as play. This idea of fan writing as ‘play’ is something that has been expressed by multiple interviewees.

Using the concept of play distances the fan writers’ products from discussions of labour, ownership, legitimacy, and professional engagement with the canon text. Fan writers seek to position their engagement with the canon text as light-hearted or for fun. Booth (2015, p. 41) characterises fans’ digital practices as embodying a ‘philosophy of playfulness’. Booth (2010, p. 70) characterises fan fiction as ‘play’, as it challenges ‘the copyright of a commercial product for non-commercial fun’. Fan
writer **EH** remarked that authors like J.K. Rowling\(^{48}\) are, ‘... the creator - the ultimate creator, whereas people are playing with her things that she has invented’. While **MB** commented that, ‘it should always be acknowledged that it was their [the canon producers] story to begin with, and everyone’s really just playing in their sandbox’.

The concept of play is conceptually removed from the possibility of earning monetary compensation, and the lack of monetary compensation for fan works is often highlighted as a reason for why fan works do not ‘harm’ the canon creators. Fan writer **Lilbit846** commented that fan writers ‘... shouldn’t be able to make a profit off of it [fan fiction] because the characters aren’t really ours’. Similarly, fan writer **KC** commented, ‘I feel like this [fan fiction] is not your intellectual property to make money off’. Fan fiction has also been characterized as play by fan scholars to position fan writing as ‘fair use’ within a legal context (Chander & Madhavi 2007; Hetcher 2009; Lewis, Black & Tomlinson 2009; Stroude 2010). The characterisation of fan fiction as fair use, and, therefore, play, appears to seek to reassure the professional published author that their labour and product is not under threat by fan engagement, as only their engagement with the media is understood as labour to be compensated. In constructing their engagement with fan fiction as ‘play’, fan-fiction writers are downplaying the labour that they put into the creation of their fan

\(^{48}\) Rowling provides an interesting case, as her continuing commentary and engagement with the *Harry Potter* series on social media reasserts her status of 'godlike' author with omnipotent knowledge over the series; for example, her statement that the character Albus Dumbledore is gay, despite Dumbledore’s sexuality never being explicitly engaged with in the original literature.
works, effectively distancing themselves from the labour they put into the fan-works’ production while highlighting the labour of the canon producers.

Fan writers also use the concept of play to distance themselves from the role of ‘author’ of their fan-fiction works. When discussing their works in relation to the canon, some fan-fiction readers and writers who were interviewed did not see the fan works that they were producing as ‘creative’ or ‘original’. Many fan writers downplayed the creative labour that was put into the production of stories. Fan writer *LollyliciousLolly* stated during an interview that she did not see fan writers as authors because ‘... an author is someone who has created something - at the end of the day the idea, at its core was someone else’s, and you’re just writing a fresh take on it, a humorous spin, or like a really lengthy angsty version of what actually happened’. *LollyliciousLolly* recounted a situation where an online fan writer wrote a story that was ‘really, really good’ and the fandom asked the writer: ‘What are you doing here?’ *LollyliciousLolly* went on to say that:

... we were almost acknowledging that what we do isn’t real, and that hers should have been. That’s probably a very loaded statement. I think some of my stuff can be quality, but at the same time, it’s not something that can get me anywhere. It’s a stepping stone to developing my craft that can get me somewhere, but as it is in that state – a borrowed idea. It’s not real. It’s not real.

Similarly, fan writer *SK* characterises fan fiction as ‘... not original ... In general I’d say it’s harder [to write] for novels because it’s all original’. The fan writers and participants interviewed would generally construct fan works as being ‘a different take’, or ‘an exploration’ of the original works, rather than a unique creation in their
own right. This construction of fan works as being subservient to the canon material further distances the fan writers from being ‘authors’ of the works they are producing.

Yet when the fan writers no longer discuss fan fiction in relation to the canon media, they begin to highlight the creative and emotional labour put into the production of the fan texts, and subsequently their construction of themselves as owners and authors of the texts changes. The fan writers interviewed typically expressed that they owned the ‘original’ aspects of the texts they have produced, and therefore feel that they should have a level of ownership or control over the fan works. This is most evident when fan writers discuss the use of their ideas and work by other fan writers. For example, fan-fiction reader KG commented that she thinks fan-fiction stories belong to the person who wrote them because, ‘... if some, some other fan-fiction writer came along and basically used the same ideas as someone else - legally it’s not considered plagiarism but still is morally [considered plagiarism]’. Fan writer CR sees her ownership of her fan works as complicated, as she states:

I feel like I have a certain level of ownership over some of the ideas that are in there. And you know the actual words, like, in that kind of sense. Umm – it - it's kind of like ah - I don't know. What's a good analogy? - I'm failing at coming up with a good analogy. I suppose it's a little bit like maybe renting a house or something. In that, you have a certain - you have a right to live there up to a point. But there's a limit to what you can do to the property.

Similarly, fan writer JD commented:
... [Fan writers] can only have a certain degree of ownership over it. Like pretty much all the fan fiction sites have a specific header that you put in and it includes a disclaimer saying the characters are not my own and all that. But I mean it's still there - if someone went and copied something word for word and published it under their own name that does feel like theft. So - know they kind of don't work together but you do feel ownership even though you know you can't ...

The above excerpts demonstrate that, although fan-fiction participants acknowledge that legally they may not have ownership or control over the fan fiction they produce, they do feel as if they have created, and own, the fan works that they have written. Upon further discussion, fan writers expressed that they felt their fan works were creative, and they considered themselves the ‘authors’ or the creators of the works that they have produced. EH commented that ‘... in terms of fan fiction, I think everybody is the author of their own fan fiction’. In a similar vein, SK explained that ‘... we do borrow, not everything’s ours, but we do create most of it. It’s not like - it’s a review where you just put words on a page. I don’t think that’s writing. But - yeah, I would say fan-fiction authors are authors. We do create our own words.’

This contradictory stance that fan writers take in regard to their authorship and ownership appears to emerge from their attempt to balance the emotional and physical labour that they put into the creation of the fan works, while also acknowledging the physical and emotional labour that the canon producer puts into the production of the original media, as well as the precarious legal position that fan works are seen to occupy. Fan producers seek to distance themselves from the physical and emotional labour that they put into the production of their fan works when discussing them in relation to the canon media. Fan-fiction participants see
copyright law and intellectual property law as existing to protect the labour that the
canon creators have put into the production of the canon media, and the potential
earning potential of the canon media. The stance that many fan-fiction participants
take focuses on the fact that fan fiction is not engaged with for monetary
compensation. In doing this, they privilege the labour that the canon producers put
into canon production, and place fan creators and fan fiction in a deferential
position to canon producers.

Yet the emotional distance that fan producers construct and the devaluation of the
labour that they put into the production of fan fiction are not sustained once the
discussion of fan works no longer occurs in relation to the canon works. Fans'
contradictory position of their own authorship and creativity appears to be tied up in
popular conceptions of intellectual property law and copyright law. Therefore, when
the discussion of fan works is divorced from the production of the canon, fan writers
express the emotional connection, physical labour and creativity put into the
creation of their works, resulting in them seeing themselves as the authors and
owners of their fan works.

The murder of the fan author

Fan writers’ deference to canon authors appears to be due to multiple factors: the
perceived labour that canon creators put into the canon media's production, popular
concepts of authorship, and the legal rights that canon authors are understood to
hold over the works that they produce. As will be discussed in Chapter 5: Authority,
popular conceptions of authorship see authors as producing creative works *ex nihilo,*
(out of nothing) without any external influences. Authors are then seen to be figures that hold power and authority over the media that they create. Fan writers reinforce this conception by highlighting the emotional attachment that authors supposedly have to their works, and the labour that canon authors put into the work's production. The construction of an author that holds legal rights, an emotional connection and authority over the media they have produced appears to be one to which many fan writers aspire. Of the fan writers I interviewed many expressed a desire to one day become a ‘real author’. Fan writers often position fan writing as a learning tool to one day become a professional author (Fathallah 2016, p. 468). Fan writers Redtoes, Lilbit846 and LollyliciousLolly all said that they saw fan writing as a way to ‘practise their craft’ in order to be able to transition to being a published, ‘original’ author.

Many fan writers desire to transition to the status of published, ‘original’ author; yet when instances of fan authors who have transitioned were discussed with interviewees they almost unanimously responded negatively to their transition, as well as to their fan and original works. Interviewees were asked about two fan authors and their fan works: Cassandra Clare and E.L. James. Clare is the author of The Mortal Instruments series, and James is the author of the notorious Fifty Shades of Grey series. Before transitioning to published author, Clare was well known within fan circles as a Big Name Fan (BNF) within the Harry Potter fandom (Jamison 2013, p.233). James had not achieved the same BNF status before transitioning to the status of published author.
Clare’s transition from fan author to the status of published, ‘original’ author is well known among fan-fiction participants. Websites such as Fandom Wank (hbic_hq 2013) and Fanlore (Fanlore 2015b) have sections dedicated to Clare and the associated discussions that surround her transition from fan writer to published author. In June 2001, Cassandra Clare, writing then under her fan-writing name Cassandra Claire, was banned from Fanfiction.net for plagiarism (Jamison 2013, p.234). Clare had used phrases, quotes and some more extended sections of a work by Pamela Dean into her fan fiction (Jamison 2013, p.234).

Since this sequence of events, Clare’s fall from grace has become well known among fan-fiction participants, with many interviewees recounting a version of the story. All the stories told to me in relation to Clare during the interviews had similar elements, yet differed in the specifics and details of what actually occurred. MD, a fan-fiction writer interviewed, recounted a relatively typical version of Clare’s story when talking to me:

Well, Cassandra Clare, she was this big name fan. She wrote this massive Draco story, The Draco Trilogy, that was really popular back in 2000. It’s been taken off her site now, but it was converted into PDFs and people still circulate them. The story is really popular even now. It was meant to be a trilogy but she was starting to get published for her book, City of Bones, and never finished the last one in the trilogy. Anyway, someone was reading part of her Draco series and then they realised that what they were reading was really familiar, not just vaguely familiar, but really familiar. They then realised that they had read this passage before. That what she had written was virtually word for word this passage out of a book by Pamela Dean. Dean isn’t really well known, so Clare had gotten away with it for ages, until someone recognised it. There’s bits like that all through the trilogy,
quotes from Buffy and other shows that she just didn’t bother to recognise. So far no one has been able to find plagiarism in her published works. People joke that is why they [her original works] are so bad, coz she actually wrote them herself.

KG, another fan-fiction participant who was interviewed, also recounted the furore that surrounded Clare:

Apparently, ah, Cassandra Clare was a fan-fiction writer, and was discovered because of her fan-fiction writing and then she got a book - deal - thing. The - I haven’t read the actual fan fiction because it got taken down, so I can’t really say much … Yeah, but apparently - apparently there are similarities between the ‘Harry Potter’ fan fiction she was writing and her ‘Mortal Instruments’ series - and the accusations that she took quotes and plots from other fan-fiction authors and published authors - without like saying anything about that, and also accusations that she got police involved because she claimed to being harassed because of this - So, I never particularly enjoyed those books anyway, so I don’t care about them.

Both of the above descriptions of the controversy that involved Clare focus on the improper use, or reuse, of other pieces of media in her fan work or her ‘original’ work. In the previous section, I outlined how fan-fiction writers feel ownership over the works they produce, as they understand them to be creative. This creativity, in turn, lent legitimacy to the fan writers as being the ‘authors’ of the work and, hence, allowed them to feel they could claim a level of ownership and control over the fan media they produced. The focus of the controversy surrounding Clare is that her work is not creative. The accusations of plagiarism construct Clare as not putting intellectual or creative labour into the construction of her work, which subsequently negates any legitimacy that Clare could claim over her fan works or original works. As seen in MD’s recount of the furore that surrounded Clare, accusations of
plagiarism are not limited to only her fan works but encompass all of her writing. Clare is effectively denied the status of author, as the creative and emotional labour she has put into the production of the media items has been discredited. This, in turn, denies Clare legitimacy as an author, negating any authority or power that Clare could hold over her works.

Much like Clare, James is constructed as not putting sufficient creative labour into the production of her work. Fans’ negative reactions to James’s work have been well documented49. Fan-fiction participants saw James’s work as being repetitive and badly written. Additionally, they suggested that Fifty Shades of Grey ‘ripped off’ other popular BDSM fan-fiction stories in the Twilight fandom, while some fan-fiction participants have commented that ‘everything in her [E.L. James] books is derivative’ (Fanlore 2015d). Most interviewees’ responses to Fifty Shades of Grey is that they were, ‘sure there’s better stuff than that [in the Twilight fandom]’ and that there was ‘a lot better written fan fiction out there than that.’ A few interviewees contextualized their comments by stating that they had only read a small portion of the book series. ID commented that she had ‘... read a tiny bit of it. Ugh - I don’t think that’s a very good place to start, just because it’s so badly written. And there’s just so many things wrong with it.’ Similarly, SK said she ‘hadn’t read much of it’. Despite not having read much, or any of the series, interviewees were quick to point out the flaws in the prose. SK states that her problem with the fan fiction now being published as a for-profit book is that ‘it’s terrible’: ‘Yep, I can see it’s a really badly

49 See Booth 2015, pp. 10–11 for a summary of fans negative reactions to James.
written book, if it was well written I would be like “hey, awesome!” But it is badly written so there’s my problem with it.’ Like Clare, fan-fiction participants discredit the creative labour that James has put into the production of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* series, thus denying her the authority, power and credibility that is associated with an author. This leads to fan-fiction participants painting James as not a ‘real author’ and suggesting that the text does not deserve monetary compensation.

Despite fan writers wishing to transition to ‘real author’ status, their construction of other writers who have made the transition discredits the creative and intellectual labour that the authors put into the production of their work. This places ‘real’ authors and authorship in an essentially unattainable position for fan writers. The creativity of fan writers is understood to exist in relation to other media works. Although their creative labour is considered sufficient when writing fan works, the popular conception of *ex nihilo* authorship does not easily accommodate authors directly inspired by existing media. Fan-fiction participants have seen fan writers draw inspiration from existing media, and craft stories around them. Their creative labour is then questioned when they attempt to transition to being published, ‘original’ authors, as the inspiration they draw from pre-existing media objects has been previously rendered visible, unlike the creative labour of ‘real authors’. Their work is labelled as repetitive, badly written or plagiarised. As their creative labour is questioned, this negates their authority over the media they have produced, and subsequently, their need for compensation for the labour put into its production.

The fan writers who have transitioned to the status of published, ‘original’ author are
then refused the symbolic transition to the status of ‘author’, despite their physical transition.

**The author is dead and alive until you open the box**

As seen in the examples above, the concept of the author in relation to fan writing and published, ‘original’ texts is innately linked to the legal, economic and social relationship an individual has to the media item. On the one hand, canon creators link their creative labour and emotional connection to popular understandings of copyright and intellectual property law in order to assert their authority and ownership over the media they have produced. On the other hand, fan writers espouse the principal position of the canon creators by asserting that they are ‘playing’ with the canon text, downplaying their own creative labour in producing fanworks, a notion that has been also echoed by academics in describing fans’ activities (Booth 2015; Jenkins 1988). Published, ‘original’ authors and fan writers alike use the creative and emotional labour put into the production of media in order to assert the primacy of the author as the creator of the canon, from which fan engagement then flows. The fan writers seek to reassure canon creators that the author ‘is God’ by asserting the power, status and legitimacy that authors are perceived to hold when discussing authorship in a legal and economic context.

Authorial presence, and the authority of the author, is clearly subscribed to in canon creators’ responses to fan fiction. Statements by published, ‘original’ authors tend to include possessive pronouns in regard to the published texts as a whole and to individual elements of the text, such as ‘my work’, ‘my characters’, ‘my children’, ‘my
copyright’, ‘my livelihood’, ‘my heartland’, and ‘my world’. The assertions made by the ‘original’ published authors’ assert control and ownership over the texts economically, emotionally and legally. Canon producers then construct fan writing as an exploitation of the authors’ physical and emotional labour.

The grievance that published, ‘original’ authors appear to take with fan writing is that it is a breach of the expected social, legal and economic contract that media producers expect to have with consumers. Expected media consumption models clearly define the respective roles of the producer and consumer of the media items. Physical and emotional labour is expended on the part of the producer of the media. This labour is then converted into a tangible product that, through copyright and intellectual property law, is attributed to the media producer. From that point, the media product is published and distributed for consumers to purchase and consume. The author, in publishing the work, places limitations upon and closes the writing (Barthes 1977, p. 147). The media item is marketed as a complete finished product. The continued use, reuse and expansion of the media product refuses to acknowledge it as a finished product; it reopens the text. As outlined previously, Barthes (1977, p. 147) states that doing this is ‘to refuse [the author as] God’, as it denies the author’s complete power over the media item.

As will be closely examined in Chapter 5: Authority, authorship in Western enlightenment is typically afforded symbolic status, and rights over a text as authorship is explicitly tied to social standing, legal rights and creativity. Current contemporary understandings of a text clearly use the author and the concept of
authorship to determine ownership. Copyright and intellectual property law rely upon the identification of an ‘authorial’ figure who created the text (Jaszi 1994; Kelty 2004; Towse 2010; Tushnet 2007). Renowned authors such as J.K. Rowling, Roahl Dahl, Shakespeare, Jane Austen or George R.R. Martin are clearly identified and attributed as the locus of creation for the texts ascribed to them. A breach of the traditional consumer and producer relationship, resulting in a denial of power and authorial control over the media item, appears to be the focus of published, ‘original’ authors’ dissatisfaction with fan writers. This dissatisfaction is then articulated in terms of an exploitation of the author’s labour, resulting in comments that fan fiction is ‘immoral’, ‘stealing … gold’, ‘a rip-off’, ‘an attack on my … livelihood’, ‘lazy’, ‘an invasion’, or as Henry Jenkins (via de Certeau) has famously phrased it ‘textual poaching’ (Jenkins 1988; 1992). Simultaneously, published, ‘original’ authors express a desire for fan writers to ‘… pour … [their] energy and talent into … working on … [their] own book…’ where fan writers can create ‘… [their] own original stories with [their] own characters’ (Temple 2012). It appears that in the eyes of canon producers, in purchasing media, consumers are purchasing the right to consume a closed, complete piece of media, and not the right to re-open and creatively engage.

Fan writers’ deference to the canon creators appears to be acknowledgement of their breach of the expected consumer and producer relationship. As previously stated, fan writers clearly assert in the author’s notes that the canon creator owns the canon, and in interviews with fan-fiction participants, they frequently mentioned their respect for the canon creators. Fan writers’ construction of their actions as ‘just
for fun’, or ‘practice’ for their own original writing, acts as an attempt to place their fan writings outside of the consumer and producer relationship. The phrases ‘just for fun’ and ‘practice’ de-emphasise the labour fan writers have put into the production of fan fiction. The fan works are not constructed as final, polished pieces of work, or serious engagements in constructing a text, like the canon would presumably be. In this way, fan writers position themselves as not requiring monetary compensation for the fan works they have created, attempting to negate the perceived breach of expected legal and social interactions between canon producer and consumer by deferring to the canon creators in their fan-writing practices.

Yet engagement with fan fiction is premised upon a denial of complete authorial control. As Barthes (1977, p. 143) has famously advocated, the author can be viewed as a conduit through which writing and texts flow. The meaning of the work is located in the language on the page rather than the individual, negating the impact of authorial control or intention over the works produced. Barthes (1977, pp. 145–143) asserts that ‘it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, though a prerequisite impersonality ... to reach that point where only language acts, “performs”, and not “me ...” because ‘... language knows a “subject”, not a “person”’. Barthes, inasmuch, is not killing the author; rather, he is denying the author control (power) over the text, and in the process negating authorial intent. As individuals can read media in a variety of different ways, Barthes is suggesting that authorial intent cannot be known and it, therefore, cannot affect the decoding of media. The author cannot construct meaning from the text on behalf of the reader, as it is the
reader, during their consumption of the text, who constructs meaning. Therefore, the removal of the author from the text allows for the reassertion of the reader (Barthes 1977, p. 148).

It is with this understanding of decoding media that fan writers explore and engage with a multitude of meanings interpreted from the canon. Fan writing, as a practice, denies authorial intent and control in preference for fans’ ‘playing’ with the text once the creator has finished with its production. Fans are reopening the text and in doing so they are opening up a conversation about the potential meaning and interpretations that could be garnered from the media, thus threatening the author’s power ‘as God’. Scholars have conceptualized this reopening and playing with media as ‘produsage’ (Bird 2011; Deuze 2007; Galuszka 2014; Meese 2010)—that is, the blurring of the boundaries between consumer and producer. As will be further explored in subsequent chapters, this blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers has resulted in a renegotiation of the relationships between industry, traditional media creators and traditional media consumers. However, with this renegotiation comes a reimagining of the place and power of media producers. Fan fiction as a practice rejects authors ‘godlike’ knowledge, authority, and control over the media. The product of the authors’ labour is no longer consumed and appreciated as a whole, as fans add to, change, manipulate and rewrite media. Authors’ labour and the labour of those who consume and engage with media are no longer clearly separated, blurring the concept of authorship.
Despite the practice of fan writing requiring a Barthian approach to authorship, fan writers still conceive of themselves as authors in a more traditional sense when discussing the rights they feel they hold of the fan works they have produced. In spite of the denial of the author as a godlike figure through their engagement in fan fiction, fan writers, in their discussions of canon creators, still position them as holding authority and legitimacy over the media that they produce. Fan writers’ willingness to stop writing fan works around a particular canon, should the canon creator request it, demonstrates their understanding of the creator as the owner of the media. However, fan writers’ feelings of ownership, and the highlighting of the creative and emotional labour put into the creation of the fan works, also constructs fan writers as ‘authors’. The actions of fan-fiction participants suggest that ‘the author’ is dead, yet fan-fiction participants defer to the canon creators, and their assertions about their rights over fan works reasserts the existence of ‘the author’.

**Conclusion**

Canon creators’ and fan writers’ understandings of ‘authorship’ in relation to fan fiction hinge upon the idea that creative and emotional labour is used to create a media product. Therefore, the input of emotional and creative labour is used to justify ownership, and subsequently, legitimacy and authority over the media. Both canon creators and fan-fiction participants use the perception of labour put into the creation of media products to identify the ‘author’ of the media and, therefore, afford them power and authority over the text.
Canon creators highlight the labour that they put into media production in order to legitimize their authority, ownership and power over the works. In order for labour not to be exploited, reimbursement for labour is required. In establishing their creative and emotional labour, canon creators are then able to construct fan works as an exploitation of the labour that they have put into the creation of the canon media. Fan writers both downplay and highlight their labour in creating fan works, depending on the context of their description. In discussing fan works in relation to canon media, fan-fiction participants phrase their production as ‘play’ rather than ‘labour’ in order to construct their engagement with the canon media as not infringing on the perceived legal and intellectual rights of the canon creators.

Fan-fiction participants often negate the creative and emotional labour they put into the production of fan works. This is seen when fan writers discuss their fan works in relation to the canon media, and in discussions of fan writers who have transitioned to published, ‘original’ authors. Fans writers who have transitioned to published, ‘original’ authors, such as Cassandra Clare and E.L. James, are conveyed as plagiarists and unoriginal, which denies them the creative labour that they put into the production of their works. This denial of creative labour refuses Clare and James the symbolic position of ‘author’, despite their physical transition to canon creator. Yet when discussing their fan works as media products in their own right, fan writers then highlight the creative labour that they have put into the production of their fan work, seeking to construct themselves as ‘authors’.
Despite these constructions of authorship, participation in fan fiction is premised upon the denial of authorial authority over the meaning and use of media products. Fan-fiction participants’ actions in engaging with fan fiction deny the authority of the author, yet their deference to canon creators and their assertion of rights over the fan works they produce reasserts the existence of an individual who holds power, authority and ownership over the media that has been produced—in essence, the author. This contradiction is demonstrative of the interplay between fan-fiction participants and canon creators. Fan-fiction participants’ desire to assert ownership over the works they create and to legitimize their practices is often in conflict with cultural conceptions of authorship, ownership and creativity, thus highlighting how the relationship between fan-fiction participants and canon creators is one of constant negotiation. The social actors’ appeals to authorship are used as a tool through which to express power and authority over the field.

As we have seen, this continual negotiation over power between the social agents that exist within the field of media construction and engagement is embedded within the notion of authorship. The next chapter will continue to look at the concept of authorship; however, it will focus specifically on the ways in which media producers express authority and legitimacy within the ‘remix’ and ‘convergence’ cultures that have emerged with the collapse of divisions between consumers and producers with the rise of digital technologies. The emergence of online fan-fiction practices, context producers’ live tweets, and celebrity Facebook pages have resulted in a context collapse between media fans and media producers. Although this
context collapse can be seen as a way for fans to assert their opinions of and power over media, it also allows authors and canon creators to ‘talk back’ to media consumers. The result is a tension between the social agents within the field as they continually negotiate power, as expressed through authority and legitimacy.
Chapter 5: Authority

Introduction

The relationship between social agents within the field of media production and engagement influences how media is consumed. This chapter seeks to explore the ways that authority and legitimacy are negotiated between canon producers and fans within the increasingly digital space that the field of media engagement occupies. Authority and author have similar etymological roots as they both refer to a power and influence that belongs to ‘God’ but can be wielded by others (Hartley 2013, p. 25). Here we will examine the evolution of the concept of ‘author’, and how canon producers have used the authority associated with ‘authorship’ to direct and discipline fans’ engagement with media products—products that are seen as created through the physical and mental labour of the producer. As was established in the previous chapter, authors can be understood as social, legal and economic figures. In this chapter the evolution of authorship and how authors are perceived to hold legal and ‘natural’ rights over the property they produce will be explored. These rights have afforded canon creators power and authority over the media that they create.
With this understanding, the author (or creator) of media is considered to have superior knowledge and control over the media they have created than those who consume it. The author’s understandings, intended meanings and conception of the media are then understood to be the ‘real’ or legitimate interpretation of the text. The author is treated as the omniscient and omnipotent creator of media products—Barthes’s ‘Author-God’. Their power stems from their ability to distribute both their understandings and contemporary Western social constructions of authorship.

Yet with the rise of the Internet, and subsequently remix culture, the power and authority of the author has been seemingly subverted. Remix culture in fandom has resulted in fan fiction, fan art, vidding and numerous fan conversations resulting in fans creating their own meanings from the canon media. The rise of online remix culture has allowed fans to not only produce these alternative interpretations of canon media in the form of fan fiction and other fan works, but also to distribute these interpretations to millions of others around the world. Web 2.0 has allowed for increasing interaction and engagement among fans, and allowed them to distribute their perspectives and fan-made creations to millions of others. The landscape of the Internet seemingly allows any fan to be able to produce and distribute their creation, resulting in fans’ engagement with each other being merit-based, with fans gaining prestige and power through their skill, knowledge and frequency of engagement.

This ability to distribute alternative meanings can be seen as a potential impingement on the ‘natural rights’ of canon creators. As fans creatively engage with the media product, alternative interpretations of the canon media are distributed
and consumed—and the canon creators’ authority to determine how media is used and interpreted is eroded (Booth 2010, pp. 173–174).

The Internet, however, has also allowed canon producers to observe and potentially engage with fannish practices that were previously sequestered from the canon producers’ gaze. Increasingly, canon creators are finding themselves able to engage and observe fannish practices in online fan spaces. Canon producers are still perceived to hold power and knowledge over the canon text that privileges their understandings of the canon media. The power and authority that those associated with canon production are perceived to hold over the media affords them greater power in the form of social capital among fans, thus resulting in their engagement with fan conversations and practices, providing a new avenue to reassert influence over the canon media. In short, the canon producers’ insertion of themselves into fan spaces is allowing them to promote their desired interpretation of the canon.

This chapter will explore how external changes to the field, such as the rise of interactive online media in the form of Web 2.0, provide authors with new avenues through which to exert their authority over the canon media. This technological shift in the field has brought about internal changes to the field, such as the rise of remix and co-production. The interactive nature of Web 2.0 has given canon creators the opportunity to insert themselves into fan conversations and practices, allowing them to engage with the meanings made by fans. Using the television series *Supernatural* and *Arrow* as case studies, this chapter will show that canon producers’
insertion of themselves into fan conversations reaffirms the producers’ authority and control over the media products.

To do this, I will demonstrate how modern conceptions of authorship in Western society afford the creators power and authority over the media that they produce. I will then demonstrate that, despite an awareness of this construction, the conception of the ‘Author-God’, and the associated authority afforded to creators, still exists among creators and fans. Owing to the lingering association of authorship with omniscient knowledge over the creation, content creators are afforded greater social capital in their interactions with fans. Therefore, when canon creators engage in fan practices, such as Stephen Amell’s interaction with fans on Facebook, and the televisions series Supernatural’s acknowledgement of fan activities within the canon, their interpretation and commentary is afforded greater legitimacy. Using Supernatural and Arrow as case studies, I seek to show that canon producers’ insertion of themselves into fan conversations and practices appropriates fan conversations and reasserts canon creators’ control over the media object.

A brief history of media creation, copyright law and the ‘Author-God’

Authorship is not a natural phenomenon; rather it has been constructed by cultural values, legal rulings and economic concerns (Johnson & Gray 2013, pp. 6–7.) As was discussed in the last chapter, Barthes (1977, pp. 142–143) understands the concept of an author as a ‘... modern figure, [and] a product of our society...’ to whom we have attributed knowledge and power over the created texts. This conception of
authorship has developed relatively recently. Although the birth of modern understandings of authorship has been attributed to a variety of periods, it is generally accepted that ‘authorship’, as it is popularly conceived of today, can be traced to the eighteenth century (Busse 2013, p. 50). The convergence of legal, economic and cultural circumstances during the eighteenth century gave rise to the myth of the ‘lone genius’, whose internal creativity and brilliance produced an original piece of work (Busse 2013, p. 50).

Prior to the eighteenth century, the author was typically seen as a craftsman, who mastered the rules and techniques of rhetoric and poetics (Woodmansee 1984, p. 426). Authors were understood to manipulate traditional materials to engage an audience; they did not create something new. In the Judeo-Christian tradition God is understood to be the ‘author’ of all things (Hartley 2013, p. 24). When they made works that were deemed to be ‘original’, or beyond what were typically produced, these authors were seen to be ‘inspired by God’ rather than their internal brilliance (Woodmansee 1984, p. 427). Authors were understood to engage in pre-existing techniques and strategies to produce a story desired by an audience and inspired by God. As a result, the author was not assumed to be the sole creator of the work that was produced. Texts were seen as a vehicle for ideas that already existed in the public domain; therefore, the ideas and writings were also the property of the public (Woodmansee 1984, p. 434).

The production of texts, and replication of documents, prior to the eighteenth century was a highly labour-intensive and expensive task (Wright 2009, p. 60).
Creative works were produced through the patronage of the wealthy upper class (Woodmansee 1984, p. 428). Books were printed one sheet at a time on ‘corkscrew presses’, and then folded, stitched, and bound together by hand (Wright 2009, p. 60). The large amounts of time and expertise required to copy a document typically resulted in documents only being copied for a specific purpose or being collected as a status symbol (Wright 2009, p. 60). This resulted in a limited number of documents and media products being created and disseminated.

The industrial revolution in the early nineteenth century brought the modern printing press and an emerging, more literate, middle class. The greater disposable income of the middle class, coupled with the lower production costs of texts, resulted in an increased demand for printed works (Woodmansee 1984, p. 433). These two factors—better technology and a bigger customer base—revolutionised the way that books were produced (Wright 2009). Publishing houses were able to take advantage of this economic and technological environment to make large profits from selling texts to an increasingly literate public (Woodmansee 1984, p. 441). These profits from these sails went to the publishing houses with the authors of the works often seeing very little of this income (Hartley 2013, p.29).

Publishing houses, however, soon found their profits being attacked by ‘pirate’ publishing houses (Wright 2009). ‘Pirate’ publishing houses would reprint the most popular books without permission from their original publishers and sell them on at a cheaper cost. The ‘pirate’ publishers were able to keep their costs down because
they did not have to pay the author for the original manuscript, or recover losses from less popular manuscripts (Woodmansee 1984, p. 439).

For some time public opinion was on the side of the ‘pirates’, as they saw the ideas and the written word as part of the public domain, and not as private property that could be owned and sold (Woodmansee 1984, p. 443). Regardless of the public’s sympathy for pirate publishers, publishing houses argued for legal protections. They sought to protect their income legally through establishing texts as intellectual property that should be privately owned and controlled. The legal protections requested by the publishing houses were granted, and subsequently built upon.\(^5\)

Content creators’ ownership and control over their products was codified into law, with intellectual property increasingly being treated and understood in the same way as physical property, resulting in very few affordances for individuals to engage with pre-existing media, or to create and distribute their own media products (Falkenberg 2009).

The emergence of a reading public began to entice writers to make a ‘profession’ out of their writing (Busse 2013, p. 51). However, many were still not able to do so as the requisite legal institutions that guaranteed authors monetary compensation for their intellectual labour were not yet in place (Woodmansee 1984, p. 433). Authors saw the wealth of the publishing houses, contrasted to their own position where most authors were unable to make a living from their writing (Woodmansee 1984, p. 441),

and this led them to demand legal protections for the works they produced (Busse 2013, p. 51).

Central to the authors’ argument that they were entitled to compensation for the works that they produced and were the legitimate owners of these works was the idea of the author as a creative genius. Authors such as William Wordsworth insisted that it was the author's creative genius that was integral to the production of texts (Busse 2013, p. 51). This perception first arose during the eighteenth century where the perceived inspiration for the production of texts had begun to be internalised; works were no longer seen to be inspired by muses or God but from the author’s own internal genius (Woodmansee 1984, p. 429). This instigated the perception of authorship and artists that we have today where authors are typically seen to be lone geniuses whose original and creative ideas spring forth from their minds, fully formed and uninfluenced by external factors (Barthes 1977, p. 142). This argument resulted in the idea that texts transcend their physical foundations. They are not merely physical manifestations of pre-existing ideas or concepts but expressions of the author’s intellect (Woodmansee 1984, p. 443).

Although the inspiration for the production of texts was no longer found externally in God, the act of creation was still seen to be godlike in its nature, as the creation of media or art was understood to be like a moment of divine creation (Barthes 1977, p. 146). Media creations came to be seen as part of the author or in terms of a familial relation, cultivating the perception of a deep emotional connection between the author and their product (Roth & Flegel 2014). This shift in conception
inexorably tied authors to their product—much like that of a parent to a child—with the text ‘born from’ the creator (Barthes 1977, p. 145). As we have seen in the previous chapter, the authors’ connection to the text was understood much like a patriarchal model of familial relationships (Roth & Flegel 2014, p. 902). The patriarch of a traditional household was responsible for the members of his family and was entitled to respect from and control over the household, just as authors were seen to have control over their creations (Roth & Flegel 2014, p. 902). This led to the birth of copyright and intellectual property laws, which identified the writer as the ‘author’ of the text. The author was seen as an individual whose intellect, genius and labour were responsible for the creation of the work, and, therefore, the author was legally entitled to seek monetary compensation (Busse 2013, p. 51; Woodmansee 1984, p. 445).

It is this intersection of the legal, social and economic environment that led to the birth of the modern author: a legal, social and economic figure. The author is conceptualized as a masculine, professional genius legally entitled to ownership and monetary compensation over the media they created. Authorship today is still typically ascribed to individuals who are primarily white men (Fathallah 2016, p. 462). The conception of a lone individual genius creating media _ex nihilo_ has become the basis for authorship and copyright law (Hellekson 2015, p. 132). As Barthes states (1977, p. 146), this godlike conception of authors, producers and artists affords them a level of power over the objects they produce. The authors are understood to hold
social capital over the works they produce, as they are seen to have more intimate knowledge of the product.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, authorship places limitations on the uses and interpretations of the text. As the text is born from the authors’ intellect, they are perceived to have complete knowledge and control over it. The author’s understanding of the text is considered the ‘legitimate’ interpretation. These attributes create the conception of an Author-God (Barthes 1977, p. 146)—i.e. an all-knowing, all-powerful creator of media. The conception of the Author-God, coupled with the conception of media as property within a commercial society, has resulted in copyright being developed to protect the emotional, physical and intellectual labour put into the creation of texts via monetary compensation; thus creating the author as a legal, social and economic entity.

Once this conception of an ‘author’ was established, the legal, social and economic rights of the ‘author’ or ‘creator’ have been increasingly codified (Colston 1999; Colston & Galloway 2010; Davison, Monotti & Wiseman 2008; Lessig 2008; Lessig 2004; Tushnet 2007). The texts produced by writers are no longer the property of the public domain; they are the property of the media producer. The mid-nineteenth century saw the introduction of modern mass media such as radio and film. Although there was an influx of media products being created and consumed by the masses, the basic format of mass media production and distribution was essentially the same. Only those with sufficient economic means had the ability to produce and distribute to a widely consuming audience. The power of traditional media lay with
the producers and distributors. As authorship holds significant ‘discursive and material power’, communication occurred in a single direction, from the few to the many (Kompare 2010, p. 96). The line between those who produced and disseminated mass media content and those who consumed it was clear.

Content creators’ and distributors’ increasing preoccupation with the protection of intellectual property rights placed the canon on a pedestal, in many ways treating it like a sacred text. The author, or canon creators, produced and distributed content that was considered ‘legitimate’, ‘professional’, ‘creative’ and ‘original’. This gave those who created, or participated in the creation of, the canon, authority and status in regard to that particular media item. The economic limitations that existed in regard to the distribution of content, in conjunction with legal and cultural understandings of authorship, have resulted in media creators being a site of authority from which meaning, engagement and fan conversations flow. Therefore, the economic, cultural and legal status of authors has resulted in the power over the media lying with those who have the ability to produce and distribute media objects.

Since the original conception of the author as a legal, economic and social figure, audiences have used the concept as a way of classifying and engaging with media texts. Foucault (1970, pp. 107–109) famously saw the author as a way to categorize and sort media through his concept of ‘the author-function’. That status of being ‘an author’ becomes one that is conferred, allowing the audience a way to assess and engage with the media item (Gray 2013). As a figure central to the creation of the media, ‘the author’ is used to denote authority, power and legitimacy over media
items that have been created, as well as being a marker of genre or quality (Foucault 1970, p. 109). In media items that traditionally have a single author identified (e.g. texts), the author as an individual and as a classificatory function can become conflated; the author of a work, however, is not necessarily a single entity responsible for the work’s creation. The use of the author as a classificatory function divorces the concept of authorship from a single individual responsible for the text’s creation. However, the individuals constructed as the authors of the media items are still associated with traditional conceptions of authorship. Although legally they may not own the media item they are deemed to have authored, they are still regarded as holding superior knowledge and emotive connection, because the item produced stems from their creative genius and labour.

In light of this, media items such as films, television series or radio shows that have no clear individual responsible for their creation still have ‘authors’ ascribed to them (Gray 2013; Hills 2012; Kompare 2010). These ‘authors’ of television series are typically understood through the lens of Foucault’s author-function as a way of interpreting the text’s quality and aims (Fathallah 2013, p. 259; Gray 2013, p. 91; Newman & Levine 2012, p. 40). In the case of television series or films, the author is typically a (male) writer, producer, showrunner or director who is constructed as the creative genius responsible for the success or failure of the media product (Kompare 2010, p. 95; Newman & Levine 2012, p.38). The rise of television ‘authors’ has been linked to the legitimation of television as culturally legitimate, as art forms are typically linked to ‘auteurs’ (Newman & Levine 2012, p.38). Auteur theory puts forward the idea of a
singular artistic genius who is behind the creation of the film or television show (Gray 2013, p.90). These television authors (or auteurs) are typically individuals who are involved with the original conception of the series as well as the ongoing production as they are understood to have significant involvement in many aspects of the shows creation (Newman & Levine 2012, p.39).

Although these ‘authors’ of television and film often construct themselves as also being ‘fans’ of the original text or in general, they also wield the economic and established power that comes from being a sanctioned ‘creator’ of a media product (Fathallah 2013, p. 260). Joss Whedon is routinely seen as the creator of the television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel51 (1999–2004), Firefly52 (2002–2003), Dollhouse53 (2009–2010), and the recent films, The Avengers54 (2012) and Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015). Chuck Lorre is consistently associated with being the creative

51 Angel is an American television series. The character Angel first appeared in the television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer, before a spin-off focused on the character of Angel. The series aired on the WB American television network from 1999 to 2004. The series follows the adventures of Angel, a vampire with a soul who becomes a private detective to help the innocent.

52 Firefly is an American television series in the space western genre, which aired for 14 episodes on the Fox network in 2002. Set in the distant future, the series follows the adventures of a misfit group of individuals who are the crew of the space ship ‘Serenity’ as they live on the fringes of society.

53 Dollhouse is an American science fiction television series that aired on the Fox network between 2009 and 2010. The series focuses on Echo, an individual who has various identities downloaded and wiped from her consciousness by an underground establishment known as a ‘Dollhouse’.

54 The recent Avengers films are the cinematic culmination of Marvel’s ongoing film franchise. The 2012 and 2015 films are based on the Marvel Comics superhero team of the same name.
genius that produced *Two and a Half Men*\(^{55}\) (2003–2015) and *The Big Bang Theory*\(^{56}\) (2007–), Peter Jackson is typically understood to be the creator of the film franchise *The Lord of the Rings*\(^{57}\) (2001–2003) (Gray 2013; Murray 2004), and Erik Kripke is understood to be the creator of *Supernatural* (Fathallah 2013, p. 259). The individuals identified serve as a way to denote the genre or quality of the media item (Gray 2013; Hills 2012).

These individuals are all constructed as the ‘authors’ of these texts through paratextual engagement with the media and audience. The ‘authors’, through DVD commentaries, interviews, social media, convention panels and other paratexts, position themselves in a place of superior knowledge and power over the texts that are created (Kompare 2010, p. 102; Newman & Levine 2012, p. 39). Through the use of these paratexts, the ‘authors’ of the texts are able to share previously unknown production knowledge, as well as share ‘hints’ or contextual information about the narrative of the text (Hills 2012). The television author claims authority over the show (Newman & Levine 2012, p. 40). This not only associates them with the

\(^{55}\) *Two and a Half Men* is an American half hour situational comedy that aired on the CBS Network between 2003 and 2015. The show follows the exploits of the brothers Charlie and Alan Harper, and Alan’s son, as they all live together in Charlie’s Malibu home.

\(^{56}\) *The Big Bang Theory* is an American half-hour situational comedy that premiered in 2007 on the CBS network. The show is focused on the physicist roommates Leonard Hofstadter and Sheldon Cooper and their interactions with their aspiring actress neighbour Penny.

\(^{57}\) *Lord of the Rings* is a film franchise of three high-fantasy films based on the book series of the same name by J.R.R. Tolkien. The films are set in the fictional world of Middle Earth where a coalition of dwarfs, elves, humans and hobbits embark on a quest to destroy a mystical ring before the Dark Lord Sauron can reclaim it and destroy the known world.
creation of the text by fans—thereby making them responsible for the success or failure of these media products (Kompare 2010, p. 102)—but it also allows them to influence or direct how consumers of the text ‘should’ be reading the product (Hills 2012, p. 34; Newman & Levine 2012, p. 44).

The release of teaser trailers, the creation of hype and the careful curating of material surrounding media products all encourage fans to ‘... celebrate the story the way it is ...’—i.e. the way that the media producer understands the text to be (Murray 2004, p. 11). The paratexts engaged with by media ‘authors’ reinforce not only the authors’ emotional and creative connection to the item, but also highlight the labour put into the media item’s production. DVD commentaries that highlight the way that scenes were constructed, or foreshadow where the narrative is headed, remind the consumer that the media items were constructed and that the ‘author’ was an essential component in their construction (Hills 2012, p. 35). Although they may not be the sole legal owners of the media products they are recognised as the labouring creative genius behind the item created, and therefore the holder of omnipotent and omniscient knowledge surrounding the media item.

One of the problems with the conception of an Author-God is that modern understandings of audiences have established that a text does not hold a single ‘correct’ message (Barthes 1977, p. 146). As we have seen, engagement with fan fiction is premised upon a rejection of the author as having complete knowledge and control over the media items they have produced. Meanings garnered from a text depend on the creation, distribution and consumption of the text; in other words,
the encoding and decoding of media influences how it is understood and engaged with (Hall 1990). When fans refuse to ‘celebrate the story the way it is’, they are refusing to fix the meaning of a text, and therefore, rejecting the author as omnipotent and omniscient in regard to their creation (Murray 2004). This rejection is ‘... to refuse [the author as] God’ (Barthes 1977, p. 147), as it is denying the unquestionable power that an author is assumed to have over their text. As fans increasingly interact with each other and the canon content online, they are diffusing canon creators’ ability to determine how the media is used, and what meaning fans are gaining from it.

**Equality online? The rise of Web 2.0 and online fan communities**

Fan engagement prior to the ubiquity of the Internet has been well documented (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992). Fan engagement then relied on interpersonal connections that used individual fans’ extensive personal networks (Coppa 2006a, p. 42). Fan conversations were held face-to-face at conventions, in clubs, through fanzines, physical mailing lists or amateur press associations (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p. 13). Fan conversations were limited to those fans that were aware of these physical artefacts or sites of interaction. This placed geographic limitations on fans’ engagement with individuals and artefacts, because fans did not have the same economic resources or extensive networks as publishing houses and big media companies. However, this all changed with the advent of the Internet.
The Internet was never intended to be a social space in which individuals could communicate with each other; yet it developed that way (Rheingold 1994, p. 7). Community boards, email and synchronous direct interaction with others were some of the first features developed by programmers when working on building the Internet (Rheingold 1994, p. 72). Science fiction discussion lists (specifically those relating to Star Trek) and fan fiction were some of the first social interactions to make an appearance online that were not related to the further creation and development of the Internet (Rheingold 1994, p. 144).

The rise of computer-mediated communication was initially seen through a utopian lens as an egalitarian space that could provide economic opportunity and equalise access to knowledge and information (Mariscal 2005, p. 409; Rheingold 1994, p. 116). Information flow was envisioned as unrestricted to and from all corners of the globe. The Internet was a place made by the people for the people, much like written texts were previously considered the property of the public. Developers saw that when an online blackboard was created, everyone became a publisher or broadcaster of text (Rheingold 1994, p. 113). Individuals have always been able to create and express themselves; the Internet, however, allowed individuals to share this creativity with millions of others (Lessig 2004, p. 41).

The collective egalitarian aspects of the Internet were only seen to grow with the rise of Web 2.0 (Bruns 2010, p. 1). As Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites developed and were engaged with by an ever-increasing proportion of those online, the idea of the Internet as a collaborative democratic space took hold. Sites such as
Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube have been acknowledged as contributing to the creation and archiving of content online (Bruns 2010, p. 2). Hosting sites such as YouTube and Vimeo, among others, have given individuals access to platforms to both distribute and consume media products (Kuhn 2012).

With this ease of distribution has come an increasingly prevalent remix culture (Cover 2013; Hetcher 2009; Lessig 2008). Remix, with the help of readily available and easy-to-use digital technologies, has become an avenue for communication and expression that was previously the arena of big traditional media. The ease with which individuals can personally distribute, create or remix content has prompted an increase in conversations surrounding media products (Kuhn 2012). Media production, distribution and engagement no longer follow the traditional unidirectional model flowing from creator to consumer, but exist within an interactive environment where media products are continually altered, critiqued and engaged with, creating dialogues surrounding the media. Fan participation at conventions and the sharing of fan art and fan fiction through physical mail lists and clubs all established fan engagement with media as highly collaborative before its explosion online. In other words, fans engaged in remix culture long before the Internet age, placing fandom in a unique position to take advantage of the Internet as a collaborative space from its very beginning. It appears that what the Internet has facilitated for fan engagement is the extensive distribution of interpretations and engagement with the canon among other fans. The digital online space allows for the presentation of shared beliefs and interpretations (Booth 2010, p. 23). Fans’
increasing presence online is sometimes characterized as a way for fans to exert power over the media product (Williams 2008, p. 3), as this sharing of fan interpretations taps into an ability previously dominated by the creators of the canon media.

Despite the perception of the egalitarian, utopian nature of the Internet, hierarchies still clearly exist. Large media companies that produce television series, films, books, comics, music and radio-like programs unmistakably have an advantage over an average fan. The position of the canon producers, as the creators of the media items (the authors), as well as their access to economic capital and distribution networks, places them in a position of authority and power over the canon. Despite this advantage, the increasing ease with which individuals with few resources are able to alter, sample or remix products is of growing concern to large companies and powerful individuals, because the increasing distribution of remixed objects erodes media creators’ ability to control the uses and meanings of media (Hetcher 2009; Lessig 2008; Lessig 2004; Tushnet 2004; Tushnet 2011).

The rise of Web 2.0 and social media have, however, also allowed canon creators to observe and engage in fan conversations and activities that they previously did not have access to. The explosion of fan activity online has resulted in an ease of access to fan content, for both fans and non-fans alike. This has allowed fan-fiction participants to more easily engage in the creative enterprises that surround canon media, but it has also allowed canon creators’ unprecedented access to sites of fan engagement. This has also subsequently facilitated canon creators’ engagement with
fans in spheres that were previously sequestered from the canon creators’ gaze (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 178). Media producers such as J.J. Abrams, Russell T. Davies and Joss Whedon have all referred to their own online engagement with fan practices (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, pp. 143–144). As discussed, canon creators, or the ‘authors’ of the canon media, are typically afforded power and authority over the texts; therefore, their commentary and engagement with fan activities is privileged. This then gives canon creators the opportunity for greater control over the media they have produced, as they able to privilege or discipline particular types of fan engagement or discourses.

*Supernatural and the rise of the canon creator*

One of the more prevalent canons to explicitly engage in fan conversations is the CW television series *Supernatural*. The writers and actors of *Supernatural* have increasingly engaged in fan conversations surrounding the storylines of the television series, both through the actors’ comments on social media, and within the show itself. The *Supernatural* fandom is home to the Wincest ship. As previously stated, shipping, which will be discussed further in Chapter 6: Conflict, is when fans desire two or more characters to be in a romantic relationship, regardless of whether this relationship is displayed in the canon. The Wincest ship is one of the most written about and engaged with ships in the *Supernatural* fandom. It pairs the Winchester brothers, Sam and Dean, in a romantic relationship. One fan-fiction writer I interviewed, *TJ*, stated that this ‘ship’ has a very passionate fan base. The pairing has not gone unnoticed by the canon creators and actors. Actor Misha
Collins, who plays the angel Castiel in the series, has posed as a crowd member at convention question-and-answer sessions and asked Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles (who play Sam and Dean respectively) ‘what it’s like playing brothers when they are lovers in real life’ (Wilkinson 2010), drawing specific focus to the fan fiction written on this topic. Ackles was also asked about fan fiction at the fan convention Asylum, to which he responded “My favorite is Wincest” (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p.117), clearly acknowledging fan practices that were previously seen as firmly separate from canon creators’ spheres of engagement.

Since then, the series has aired several ‘meta’ episodes that have sought to comment on the relationships within the show, as well as the fans of the series. The episode ‘The Monster at the End of This Book’ introduced the character of Carver Edlund (Chuck), who was the author of a series of books within the television show, based on the fictional Winchester brothers’ lives. On discovering the books within the episode, and that there were fans of the books, the fictional characters Sam and Dean discover ‘Wincest’ fan-fiction stories written about them. Their response to having the details of their lives published and written about is visually negative (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 160). The characters comment specifically on ‘Wincest’ shipping as follows:

‘They do know we are brothers, right?’

‘Doesn’t seem to matter.’

‘Well, that’s just sick …’
The character of Dean also angrily rebuts a fan’s online comment that described the storylines as ‘craptastic’, thus allowing the characters of Sam and Dean, as mouthpieces for the canon creators, to respond to fan criticism (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 161).

In these meta episodes Kripke is writing fans and fan practices into his own stories and ‘outing’ the fans of the television series (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 162). These exchanges could be interpreted as a nod to the fan base or as a disciplinary mechanism (Booth 2015, p. 140). In light of the subsequent descriptions of fans in this episode, and in other meta episodes, I propose that it is both an acknowledgement of the fan base and also a subtle rebuke of what kind of fan practices and fans are ‘good fans’.

A subsequent episode, ‘Sympathy for the Devil’, introduces the fictional character ‘Becky’, a clichéd, heavy-breathing fan who is portrayed as having an unhealthy obsession with the book series. Becky was one of the first fans of the series book and television series that was extensively depicted and engaged with by the television show. During an interview with fan-fiction writer and academic CC, she commented that, ‘Becky was the stereotype [of what people perceive to be fans]’ and ‘... you can see why it [she] got people’s noses out of joint’. Becky was explicitly depicted in the episode as a writer of slash fiction, which the main characters had previously characterized as ‘sick’. In addition to this, Becky was overly emotive and hypersexual in several of her appearances, being portrayed as having an unhealthy emotive response to the object of her fandom (Sam). This portrayal is in line with the
typically derided perception of the overly emotional or emotionally inappropriate fan girl (Zubernus & Larsen 2012, p. 60). Becky was clearly constructed as not just a ‘regular’ fan but also a Big Name Fan (BNF). Becky was portrayed as a highly active fan that runs a website dedicated to the fandom, regularly produces and consumes fan fiction, and participates in the commercial aspects of the canon. She is a fan who could be conceived as having considerable cultural capital and sway within the fandom. Her fannishness is the sole aspect of identity that is depicted, reducing Becky to being a single thing: a fan. In doing this it emphasises the potentially pathological and extreme nature of her fannishness (Booth 2015, p. 100).

Due to Becky’s fannish knowledge she is called upon by Chuck (the author of the books within the television show) to help him. Becky’s encyclopaedic knowledge of her fandom is used to help the Winchesters and ultimately help them save the day in the wider season arc. However, despite, or perhaps because of Becky’s potential status within the fan community, the canon creators go to great lengths to construct Becky in an unappealing light in this episode. Becky is depicted as a stereotypical ‘mad fan’ or ‘hyperfan’, as she is portrayed as being obsessively infatuated with both the in-book character Sam and the ‘real’ Sam who exists with her in the television series (Fathallah 2010). ‘Hyperfan’ portrayals construct fans as ‘miscreants, antisocial loners, or just plan crazed consumers’ (Booth 2015, p. 76). Becky’s dress style, demeanour and countenance all mark Becky as abnormal. Becky’s characteristics closely resemble that of a pathological fan who is both uncomfortably sexual and overly emotional (Booth 2015, pp. 92–93). Like most of the women in the
Supernatural series, Becky is reduced to her worth (or perceived lack thereof) as a romantic interest to the male leads (M. Gray 2010; Flegel & Roth 2010).

Despite this overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Becky, Fathallah (2010) seeks to redeem this derivative portrayal of fans by interpreting Becky as ‘heroic’. This reading of Becky sees her as choosing not to participate in the masculine quest narrative that typifies the Supernatural series. Instead, Fathallah (2010) states that Becky is not a ‘literal’ portrayal of fandom; instead, she is a comedic (feminine) counterpoint to the official (masculine) narrative of Supernatural. Fathallah (2010) states that ‘Becky is the heroine of her own, happily anarchic narrative, which operates according to a different narrative logic...’. However, in order to redeem Becky, Fathallah must essentially redefine the terms of Becky’s engagement with the Supernatural narrative. Fathallah’s construction of Becky as a hero only works when she is considered in opposition to, or external to, the narrative in which she resides.

The fan response to the treatment of ‘Becky’ and other fans in the meta episodes of Supernatural was mixed. Some saw it as an ‘affectionate poke’, while others interpreted it in a negative light (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, pp. 162–163). Regardless of whether the canon producers interpreted their portrayal of fandom overall as ‘affectionate’ or a criticism, the canon creators’ position of power and authority over the work results in these depictions having a disciplinary or supervisory result. The depiction of Becky within the text can be understood as a way to ‘rein in unruly fans who won’t cede control of narratives and characters to their rightful creators’ (Lothian 2015, p. 142). The canon creators are chastising fans—in particular, female
fans—who seek to engage with the *Supernatural* fandom in ways that the canon producers understand as divergent from desired or intended fan practices.

Early portrayals of other fans, such as the character ‘Sara Siege’ in the episode ‘The Monster at the End of This Book’, as well as ‘Demian’ and ‘Barnes’ in the episode ‘The Real Ghostbusters’, were interpreted as somewhat more positive portrayals of fans by viewers (M. Gray 2010). Sara Siege is a fan of the book series *Supernatural* in the television series; however, she also runs a publishing company, and is depicted as expressing her love of the fandom in a commercial, legitimate manner (M. Gray 2010). Sara Seige appears to be a stand-in for Sera Gamble, who has worked as the series executive producer from season 5 onwards. Unlike Kripke, Gamble has never been conceptualized as the ‘author’ of the series; rather, she has been seen as a ‘chief fangirl’ or talentless stand-in for Kripke (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 216), again highlighting the gendered aspect of author or ‘professional’ writing (Fathallah 2013, p. 264), where the power and authority tied to authorship is typically tied to a white male author (Gray 2013, p. 92; Johnson 2013, p. 148).

The characters Demian and Barnes, although portrayed as stereotypical ‘geeks’, prove vital to the episode’s plot and in the end save the day (M. Gray 2010). Only Becky, with her overt fannishness, slash writing and obsessive nature is denied a redemptive arc to counterbalance these qualities. Fans, through the medium of Becky, were being visibly chastised for writing Wincest slash and poaching control of the meaning of the media from the canon creators. According to Booth (2015, p. 6), Becky can be understood as belonging to media producers of: “bad” fandom.
(excessive, transformative, feminine)’ rather than ‘“good” fandom (appreciative, supportive, commercial)’.

This division between ‘good’ fans who participate in fandom in an appropriate manner and ‘bad’ fans whose actions the canon producers seek to discipline can also be seen in the television series Community. In Community the characters of Abed and Troy serve as representations of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ fans (Booth 2015, p. 77). Abed is the ‘hyperfan’, who is constructed as not being a contributing member of society, abnormal and emotionally immature (Booth 2015, p. 76). In contrast, Troy has a productive job and well-developed relationships with others.

Although Supernatural’s first meta episode, ‘The Monster at the End of This Book’, was generally derisive of fans, the episode still sought to acknowledge fans’ conversations. The canon creators’ message and treatment of fans do become more sympathetic over time. Several subsequent episodes, including ‘The French Mistake’ and ‘Fan Fiction’ treated fans with a modicum of respect. This is evident through the introduction of the character ‘Charlie’, whom characterized as ‘... the fandom girl that - umm - that people think they are, whereas Becky was the stereotype’. Charlie was constructed as a pretty, intelligent individual who overcomes her fears to take part in the action of the episodes. Charlie’s fannishness was typically expressed through the purchasing of fandom merchandise or quoting character and plot situations, rather than through remixing or creative enterprises. Charlie’s engagement in fandom was affirmational, rather than transformational. Her fannishness was an aspect of her character, but not the only one. Charlie, who
purchased the merchandise of her fandoms and consumed them in the ways the canon creators intended, was held up and celebrated as a ‘good’ fan, a ‘perfect fan ... a consumer, one who purchases official merchandise’ (Booth 2015, p. 113), and was subsequently rewarded by being featured in several episodes and engaging in her own adventures.

In the episode ‘Fan Fiction’, the characters of Sam and Dean engage with fans again. This time, the fans are school-aged girls who are creating a fan-fiction play based upon the Supernatural book series that exists within the television show. The author of the fan-fiction play in the episode is ‘Marie’, a young, brisk, fairly unlikable girl. Again, like the portrayal of Becky, when the fan endeavour being portrayed is creative and non-commercial (transformational), the fan is portrayed as young, female, socially awkward and generally unappealing. It is through these ‘hyperstylized representations of fans, fan audiences are disciplined into particular identities and behaviors’ via ‘traditional Foucauldian disciplinary power’ (Booth 2015, pp. 76–77).

The other characters in the episode repeatedly critique the play, which is explicitly stated to be fan fiction, and construct the plot as childish and ridiculous. In the end, Dean comments that, although he doesn’t agree with Marie’s interpretation, he appreciates her ‘vision’, thus learning to accept that not everyone who reads the books based on his life will gain the same meaning from them, and even if they do not like or agree with the alternative interpretations they should accept them. Here Sam and Dean appear to be stand-ins for the canon creators, learning to accept the
fact, even if they do not like it, that fans will appropriate the uses and meanings of the media they create. Despite this ‘acceptance’, the over-arching commentary throughout the episode is still a critique of female, non-commercial, creative fan engagement—from the more reasonably portrayed ‘Maggie’, a contemporary of Marie’s who insists that the play should be faithful to the canon, to the repeated commentary on the absurdity of the fan-fiction play by the ‘monster of the week’, the teacher at the school, and other characters. The final commentary on creative fan endeavours and the place of the canon creators comes with the final lines of the episode. Here, Marie asks ‘Chuck’, the author of the book series, what he thinks of her play, and Chuck responds with ‘not bad’ and gives his amused and puzzled approval of the interpretation. Marie’s invitation to the canon author, and her desire for his approval, positions the fan fiction not as a creative endeavour, but as a humorous copy of the original that requires the canon creator’s approval.

The meta episodes and commentary that the Supernatural actors and canon creators engage with insert the canon creators into spaces that have traditionally been sequestered from their gaze. The structures and forces that make up the field of media production and consumption are not static, as ‘there are struggles within the field for the power to impose the dominant vision of the field’ (Bourdieu 2005, p. 36). The canon creators behind the production of Supernatural are shifting the terms of engagement with, and within, the field by inserting themselves into fans’ conversations and activities (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, pp. 143–174). The emergence of these new forms of engagement with fans highlights the ever-shifting power
dynamics that exist between groups of social agents with the field. Booth (2015, p. 144) argues that these transformations give power to the *Supernatural* fans by acknowledging their creative processes and ‘authorizing fans as creators’.

Alternatively, I argue that these actions also allow the canon creators to reassert their power and authority over the works. By inserting themselves into these fan conversations, the *Supernatural* canon creators are deliberately, or accidentally, influencing and directing the fan conversations that are occurring. *Supernatural* both incites and disciplines fan fiction and fan practices (Fathallah 2013, p. 2). The *Supernatural* canon creators are portraying ‘good’ fans and ‘bad’ fans, disciplining fan activities with the canon media while encouraging more passive affirmational engagement with the source text (Booth 2015, p. 99). Although fans can ‘push back’ against these depictions through their responses to the depictions of fan boards, tuning into the series, or writing fan fiction that critiques media producers, the fans are constrained by their lack of legal and authorial legitimacy, authority and power over the canon media. Therefore, the canon producers’ actions reassert their power, influence and authorial control over the canon media.

Barthes’s (1977) conception of the Author-God is explicitly engaged within the *Supernatural* series. The book author of the meta-literature in *Supernatural*, Chuck, also goes by the name Carver Edlund. This is a conjunction of the names of two of the television show’s writers/producers: Jeremy Carver and Ben Edlund (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 159). However, Chuck could also be seen as a stand-in for Eric Kripke, the ‘author’ of the *Supernatural* series (Fathallah 2013, p. 261).
course of the episode, ‘The Monster at the End of This Book’, Chuck states that he ‘must be a god’, and it is confirmed later during the series that the author ‘Chuck’ is actually the Christian deity. These links imply a connection between the producers of the show, writers more generally, and the power associated with God or godlike creatures. As previously established, the conception of the Author-God is one that is typically subscribed to in both popular understandings of creativity and legal discourse, ascribing authors’ power and authority over the texts that they produce (Barthes 1977; Tushnet 2007). The linking of the producers of the canon to an all-powerful, omniscient deity subtly reminds the viewer of the position and power of those in control of the means of the media’s production, while allowing the producers to critique or reward particular types of fan engagement with the canon.

The Supernatural media creators’ insertion of themselves into fan discussions disrupts the egalitarian creation and distribution of meanings among fans. The canon creators’ pre-existing social capital in relation to the media allows their opinions and meanings to be privileged beyond a casual fan, thus preventing the fans from ‘poaching’ meaning and control of the canon media from the content creators. Canon creators’ insertion of themselves into fan discourses allows them to privilege their preferred fan perspectives and practices while marginalizing others. These endorsed fan perspectives are imbued with an authority that alternative interpretations do not have, allowing the fans to promote these perspectives as the legitimate or ‘correct’ interpretation of the media. This, in turn, allows canon
creators to privilege their preferred meanings and uses of the media, reasserting their authorial control through the fans’ own networks.

**Stephen Amell, social media, and *Arrow***

The emergence of social media has also resulted in canon creators taking control of their relationships with fans (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 206). This assertion of authority and control can be seen through Stephen Amell’s engagement with *Arrow* fans through his *Facebook* page. Amell’s interaction with fans online through his *Facebook* page can be seen as a part of the changes that have occurred in the way that fans and canon producers interact (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 150). Stephen Amell plays the titular character, Oliver Queen (aka The Arrow) on the CW network’s television series *Arrow*. *Arrow* is a television show based on the comic-book character Green Arrow, and was first aired on 10 October 2012 in the United States. The television series follows the adventures of Oliver Queen. After being marooned on an island and forced to work for various government agencies Queen returns to his home, the fictional Starling City. There he becomes the vigilante ‘Arrow’ supported by his friends and colleagues, John Diggle and Felicity Smoak, while, at the same time, keeping his vigilante activities a secret from his family and former girlfriend Laurel Lance.

Amell’s *Facebook* page pre-dates his casting as Oliver Queen in *Arrow*. Before the launch of *Arrow* each of Amell’s posts received between 200 and 600 likes; however, since the premier of *Arrow* in October 2013 and his role in the television show, his *Facebook* page has become increasingly popular, with his posts routinely receiving
several thousand likes within a few hours of the post. As of 26 September 2013 Amell’s page had 200,048 likes, rising to over 300,000 just over a month later, on 31 October 2013. From then, it took less than four months for the page to increase to 750,000 likes at the beginning of February 2014, with the number increasing again to 1.75 million likes on 8 May 2014 and then to 4.5 million likes as of December 2015.

Amell’s Facebook page provides a platform through which his perspectives are consumed by millions of his fans. As a celebrity, Amell holds discursive power as a voice that cannot be ignored and is widely disseminated (Driessens 2012). As Amell’s Facebook page ‘likes’ have increased, his ability to engage and communicate with legions of fans has increased dramatically. Amell constructs himself as ‘a real person’ on his Facebook page, allowing him to engage with fans of Arrow on what could be perceived as a level playing field. Amell has used his page, and other social media, to talk directly to fans in a bid to foster a feeling of intimacy and close personal connection (Stein 2013, p. 411). He posts photos of his mother, wife and child, holiday ‘snaps’, question-and-answer videos, and links to charity drives in a bid to humanize himself and connect with his fans. Additionally, Amell has replied to fans’ comments or re-posted fans’ comments and photos. For example, on a post of 15 March 2014 a fan commented on one of Amell’s videos that his son had been born that evening, to which Amell replied ‘Congratulations!’ The use of social media has allowed Amell to ‘author’ himself to his fans (Stein 2013, p. 411).

This construction intimacy between fans and Amell has been effective, with fans commenting on the page that:
'You know why I like this page? Because there is no one between you and the fans.'

‘... I love that Stephen Amell actually interacts with his fans like he’s a real person, not a “celebrity”. It’s part of what makes him amazing.’

‘The genuineness of Stephen and the fact he is a real person and doesn’t act like a celebrity (meaning not afraid to call people out, swear and insert his foot into his mouth sometimes) is a HUGE [sic] reason why I follow this page and a big part of his appeal. The fact that there’s not a buffer makes it even more awesome.’

The perceived close personal connection that Amell has manufactured with fans through his Facebook page has also gained the attention of others within the media industry, with Amell insinuating on 29 September 2014 that his interaction with fans was at times not well received by other ‘professionals’:

... professional people ... seem legitimately threatened that they’re no longer the conduit between “celebrity” and “fan”. (I need to put “celebrity” in quotation marks or I’ll get a cavity.) Does it make them feel obsolete? Gassy? There’s really no way to tell. In any event ... there have been a few land mines to navigate. Nothing I can’t handle, just something I’m more aware of.

Amell curates intimacy between himself and fans, constructing himself as a relatable, everyday person or ‘fan’, much like those that engage with his page. However, Amell also holds the privileged position of being engaged in the creation of the canon. Despite presenting himself as another fan of Arrow, Amell undoubtedly has access to information beyond that of other fans of the series. Amell receives scripts and information about each episode well in advance of fans viewing
the finished product. He also has direct and consistent access to the writers and producers of the series.

This negotiation of dual identities is not unique to Amell’s situation and can be seen elsewhere. For example, Misha Collins who plays the angel Castiel on *Supernatural* has used *Twitter* and other digital tools to foster intimacy between himself and his fans (Stein 2013, p. 404). Travis Richely plays the fictional titular of the fictional *Inspector Spacetime* show, which exists within the television series *Community*58 (2009–2015). Richely is an active member of the online *Inspector Spacetime* community and positions himself as both a fan and a producer of the character and show (Booth 2015, pp. 68–69). Richely engaged with fans online correcting their spelling of characters’ names and naming objects (Booth 2015, p. 69).

Actor James Marsters, who plays Spike on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* (Hills & Williams 2005, p. 350) has also constructed intimacy between himself and fans by referring to himself as a ‘freak’ or ‘nerdy’ in extra-textual material (Hills & Williams 2005, p. 350). Simultaneously, Marsters has also outlined the ways in which he has ‘authored’ the character of Spike by discussing his reading of the character, his acting decisions and his interpretation of the characters motivations and feelings (Hills & Williams 2005, p.355). Specifically, Marsters has stated that he played Spike as having a sexual attraction to Buffy from the first scene he featured in (Hills & Williams 2005, p.355).

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58 *Community* is a comedy television series that aired from 2009 till 2015 on America’s National Broadcasting Company (NBC). The show features a bunch of ‘misfits’ who are all taking classes at a community college.
Williams 2005, p. 354), thus giving legitimacy to Spike/Buffy shippers. This simultaneously positions Marsters in a dual role of fan and author/ity.

This is also similar to the ways in which the BBC’s Sherlock ‘authors’, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, construct themselves as both fans and ‘authors’ of the series. Hills (2012) outlines how in DVD commentaries Moffat and Gatiss construct themselves not only as fans of the wider Sherlock canon but also as authors of the BBC version of Sherlock. Moffat and Gatiss display their fannish knowledge, share personal information and describe themselves as 'long time fans' (Hills 2012, p. 34). However, they also explain their authorial decisions, which asserts the creativity and labour put into the construction of the text (Hills 2012, p. 35). In doing this, Moffat and Gatiss are establishing their legitimacy to engage with the canon through their construction as fans, while establishing their authority and power over the BBC television series as authors.

As previously discussed, the authorship of television series is typically associated with the showrunners, directors and producers as they position themselves in a place of superior knowledge and power through the sharing of paratexts—i.e. supplementary information about the series (Kompare 2010, p. 102). This results in the authors holding discursive power (Kompare 2010, p. 96). Actors also engage in the creation of, and engagement with, paratexts. Both actors and authors attend and take part in numerous panel discussions at fan conventions; additionally, journalists frequently question actors about the motivations, perspectives or histories of the characters they play in order to gain insight into the canon (Busse 2013, p. 54).
Actors like Amell are typically not producers or writers of the series. Yet as an actor Amell is embedded in the production of the canonical text. Amell’s engagement with the producers, writers and directors places him in a position of knowledge over the media created. Although Amell is not an ‘author’ of the series, he is an author of the portrayal of Oliver Queen in *Arrow*, as he is a source of knowledge and insight into the character he plays. His interpretation and portrayal of the titular character in the series are considered essential elements of the canon. In light of this, Amell’s interpretations and engagement with the canon are given weight in regard to interpreting the legitimate meaning of the text, resulting in his comments holding more authority than a typical consumer of the media.

Beyond commenting on his own personal life and the personal life of his fans, and launching charity fundraisers, Amell has also inserted himself into fan discussions. Fan interactions initiated by Amell include ‘Fan Art Friday’, ‘Meme Monday’ and ‘Lightsaber Saturday’. As his *Facebook* page rose in popularity, increasing numbers of fans would post memes or fan art below posts made by Amell or to the page, in the hope that Amell would see and engage with their work. Amell first began compiling fan art and memes into albums on his page in late 2014. On a semi-regular basis, Amell posts requests on his page for memes or fan art on appropriate days. As of 12 August 2015, there were 526 photos in Amell’s ‘Meme Monday’ album and 488 in his ‘Fan Art Friday’ album. Amell then placed the images that have received the most ‘likes’, and the images that he has chosen in his curated albums, inadvertently privileging some fan art while marginalizing others. Amell is appropriating the
affective non-commoditized work of fans in order to construct his own identity as both fan and authority figure (Booth 2015, p. 112). He is inserting himself into the seemingly egalitarian nature of online fan engagement while still holding the position of ‘author’ in the creation of the canon, with the associated cultural capital that goes with being an ‘author’; this results in Amell holding a position of power and privilege in his fannish engagement.

From this position Amell has inserted himself into shipping debates in Arrow. The two main ships in Arrow are Lauriver, the pairing of Oliver Queen and Laurel Lance, and Olicity, the pairing of Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak. In numerous interviews, both online and at conventions throughout 2013 and 2014, before the Olicity ship was explicitly engaged with in the canon, Amell implied that he was aware of the Olicity ship and was in favour of it. For example, in his 27 February 2014 Facebook page video featuring Emily Bett Rickards, who plays Felicity Smoak in the television series, Amell comments: ‘I’m gonna apologise to Bandon [Routh, who plays Ray Palmer], although not that much after last night’s episode’. The episode that Amell is referring to is where Felicity Smoak and Ray Palmer kiss, and Oliver Queen sees this interaction. Amell’s comment adds credence to the idea that he ‘ships’ Olicity, and was disappointed with this emerging romance in the series between Felicity Smoak and Ray Palmer. Such comments have led to fans compiling evidence that Amell ships Olicity (Ray n.d.) and subsequently dubbing him the ‘Captain’ of the Olicity ship. In response to this, during 2013 Amell changed his page description to include the adjective ‘Captain’. Amell’s perceived approval of the romantic pairing has lent
his authority to this ship, resulting in Amell’s comments about the ship legitimizing this interpretation of the canon while marginalizing other potential interpretations. Fans of Olicity, during arguments and conflict with fans of alternative ships, have referenced Amell’s perceived approval of the ship. This authorial allusion to the legitimacy of this interpretative framework validates this particular reading of text to fans, while also validating those fans as being ‘real fans’ (Johnson 2007, p. 291).

In Amell’s case, his insertion into fan narratives appears to be mostly benign, as his practices appear to seek to promote himself as an actor in order to assist in the longevity of his career. However, canon creators’ insertion of themselves into fan discussions and narratives still disrupt the seemingly egalitarian nature of online fandom. This insertion allows canon creators to privilege or discredit fan interpretations of the canon. Canon creators’ insertion into fan spaces allows them to comment on, privilege, or disregard fan-created meanings from the text, reasserting the canon creators’ godlike knowledge, influence and power over the text and limiting the creative engagement fans have with the media.

**Conclusion**

Within a Western context, the concept of the author or creator of media as a lone genius who creates media *ex nihilo* is a powerful one. It has permeated the way in which we talk about media products, and is codified in copyright and intellectual property law. The author is thought to have power and knowledge over what they produce. They are, in effect, ‘author-gods’ (Barthes 1977, p. 143). Yet this conception
of an omnipotent and omniscient media creator ignores and marginalizes the potential meanings that consumers can draw from the text.

It has become widely accepted that media products do not have a single meaning or interpretation that can be garnered from them (Hall 1990). Fan production is premised upon fans’ engagement with media product, and their manipulation of it to create new meanings, or highlight existing ones. The Internet has allowed fans to share, disseminate, and engage with the production of fan texts to millions of people around the world with increasing ease (Lessig 2004, p. 41). The concept of the ‘prosumer’ and ‘produsage’ in the digital age has become a powerful one (Bruns 2010), which in many ways speaks to the original idea of the Internet as a democratised collaborative space (Wellman 2008, p. 373). Fan spaces online have embodied this democratic, collaborative notion of the Internet, as fans’ voices are able to communicate and engage with other fans online. Online fan engagement has seen the proliferation of fan-made remix and ‘prosumption’ as fan art, music and stories are all collaboratively produced (Cover 2013; Lessig 2008, p. 1). In a field that is undergoing significant change to both its internal and external infrastructure, the Internet has allowed fans to ‘poach’ from the canon creators’ authorial power over the meanings made and uses of the media. This collaborative production and fan engagement has put fans in control of fan conversations, seemingly democratising the interpretation and decoding of media.

However, with the rise of canon content and creators (such as producers, directors, authors, and actors on social media) has come canon creators’ reassertion of
authorial control over interpretations of and engagement with the canon media. 

*Supernatural’s* insertion of fan characters such as ‘Becky’ can be understood as a way of reminding fans of the appropriate way of engaging with the canon media, and to reprimand fans who sought to interpret the source material in ways not intended by the canon creators. The character of ‘Chuck’, an embodiment of the producers of the television show, is explicitly portrayed as an omnipotent author, who is the Christian God, reminding the audience of the power of content creators.

Canon creators’ engagement with fan conversations becomes even more direct when celebrities and content creators interact with fans on social media, such as *Facebook*. There, canon creators are engaging with fan practices online and directly inserting themselves into a space that was traditionally sequestered from their gaze and control. Stephen Amell’s *Facebook* page and his initiatives ‘Fan Art Friday’ and ‘Meme Monday’ show how celebrities’ and content producers’ participation in these spaces places them as sites of authority and knowledge over the canon content. Those associated with the production of canon content hold pre-existing social capital, which they bring to fan spaces and discussions. This associated power over the canon gives their perspectives more weight than other fans, allowing canon creators to privilege, direct or stifle particular interpretations or uses of the canon. The fans are acting in a transformational way, shifting the terms of their engagement and their authority, while the content creators are attempting to assert authority and control to conserve the social hierarchies and power distribution within the field (Bourdieu 2005, p. 30). Thus, despite the Internet allowing fans to engage more
easily with the canon and to distribute fan productions to a wider audience, it has also allowed canon creators to engage more easily with fan content. Canon creators’ presumed power and knowledge over their created content privileges their perspectives and engagement; therefore, they attempt to reassert some control over the media product by appropriating fan conversations and spaces, and censuring fans’ potential creative engagement.

The conflict that exists among the social agents is symptomatic of the social agents’ desire to assert their vision of the field, and therefore assert their power over the other agents within the field. This conflict over the authority to interpret and engage with the canon does not only occur between canon creators (authors) and fans, but also among groups of fans. Chapter 6: Conflict moves beyond the power relationships between canon creators and fans to focus on the conflict that can arise between fans. The chapter uses the practice of shipping to examine the arguments and antagonisms that arise between different interpretations of the canon as fans seek to assert a dominant vision of the field. Fans question each other’s authority to interpret and engage with the canon, and so question the legitimacy of their readings when interpretations of the text do not align with one another. An examination of this conflict illuminates the struggles that exist among social actors that have little external legal or economic validation to determine the field. The chapter highlights the way in which fans negotiate concepts of legitimacy and authority over the canon through their relationships with one another.
Chapter 6: Conflict

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the ways that canon creators are constructed as authorities over canon media, and how some canon creators utilize that power. This chapter examines the ways that fans negotiate relationships of power among themselves. Conflict online is well documented and online fandom is no stranger to this aspect of human behaviour (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 118). Although fans of a single canon share a love of the media their interactions are not necessarily conflict-free (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p.20). To examine conflict in fandom, this chapter considers the fan practice of shipping generally and the study of two ships in the Arrow fandom specifically. Examining the ways fans legitimize their engagement with the canon through shipping highlights how fans claim authority and power over the canon. The focus of this chapter is not on why people engage in shipping, nor on the social themes that can arise from an examination of shipping, but rather on the conflict that arises among social actors through the social practice of shipping
and how this illuminates relationships of power, authority and legitimacy among social actors.\textsuperscript{59}

I propose that allegiance to different ships can be viewed as a manifestation of fans differing readings of the canon. Depending on the individual, fans read scenes, relationships and storylines differently. The various ways in which fans of media decode media messages and the intention of the canon text can result in different, and often conflicting, interpretations of the canon. The conflict that arises among fans can be conceptualized as fans attempting to secure alternative discourses, or interpretations, within their own preferred reading (McHoul \& Grace 1993, p. 23) in order to assert the ‘discursive dominance’ of their interpretation (Johnson 2007, p. 286). When individuals, or groups of fans, assert the legitimacy of their readings of the text through posts on social media, or the construction of fan-fiction stories, this results in competition between fans over which interpretation should be considered legitimate or hegemonic. Fans’ assertions that their interpretations of the canon are correct can then be understood as an imposition of their view of the field.

The conflict that occurs in regard to shipping in the Arrow fandom will be situated within the online conflict (e.g. flaming and trolling) that occurs in wider online textual environments. Flames, trolls, and hate speech are common manifestations in online social engagement (Abraham 2014, p. 48). It was previously assumed that,

when unable to physically see or hear users in text-based forums, individuals would default to an open and socially inclusive mindset (Rheingold 1994, p. 53). However, despite online technology often being purported to be a great equaliser, conflict is rife across the Internet. The literature on trolling and flaming shows online conflict is based on identity construction, social capital and power. Like that of trolling and flaming, I will show that ‘shipping’ conflict in fandom serves as a point from which identities are constructed, and power over other fans and the canon media is asserted.

This chapter utilizes active audience theory and conflict theory in order to argue that conflict, which arises in regard to ships in fandoms, occurs due to competition within the fandom for a particular fan’s interpretation of the canon to be considered the hegemonic or dominant interpretation. Basic conflict theory states that conflict arises from competition over limited resources (Menkel-Meadow 2008). As some fans assert that their interpretation of the canon is the hegemonic or ‘correct’ way to interpret the text, the canon then becomes a limited resource. Conflict then arises over what the correct way to understand the media is. Fans seek to legitimize their own interpretations of the text by gathering evidence that both supports their ship and discredits alternative interpretations.

Fan studies have challenged the idea of dominant readings of texts (Sandvoss 2007, p. 27). Fans read texts in line with their own understanding of reality (Sandvoss 2007, p. 28). I will argue that fans engage in discourses that legitimate their interpretation of the texts. I will show that some members of the fanbase promote
their interpretation as ‘correct’ through their fan fiction and Tumblr posts by utilizing evidence they have accumulated from the canon and other associated media. This is done in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of their interpretation, as discourses are not only representative of worldviews but can also be used to construct them (McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 35). The competition over interpretative legitimacy is then further demonstrated via fans’ attempts to discredit alternative interpretations by disputing other fans’ interpretations of the canon and their status as ‘real fans’. These practices legitimize their own interpretation of the canon and construct themselves as ‘real fans’, legitimising authority over the text.

**Shipping in fan fiction**

As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, shipping is the romantic pairing of two or more characters in a romantic relationship. The term ship first evolved in X-Files (1993–2002) fandom where fans could ship (verb) a romantic pairing, whose relationship would be known as a ship (noun) (Jamison 2013, p.118). Shipping can be canon compliant, meaning that the relationship is one that is shown in the original media. Alternatively, shipping can be non-canon compliant, meaning that the relationship is not one that is represent in the original media, but it may be hinted at in subtext. Shipping is a significant component of fandoms and fan fiction. From the 21 interviews with fan-fiction readers and writers that I conducted as part of this research, a clear majority stated that they had shipping preferences, or shipped particular couples. MB, the sole male fan-fiction participant interviewed, was the only interviewee to clearly state that he did not read any stories for the ships,
although he also stated that he would not read some stories because of specific ships that were represented in the story. KG, another interviewee, also commented that she would not read stories of ships she did not like, for example, she ‘would not read anything ‘Snack’.  

Shipping is typically something that has a strong emotional investment by fans (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 132). Many fans are passionate about the ships that they enjoy, referring to them as ‘their ships’. One interviewee, JA, stated that she has been ‘so hooked on a ship’ that she read ‘everything good’ written about the ship and then ‘... in desperation had to start reading the bad stuff’. JA’s friend, MC, jokingly commented in the same interview that ‘... if fandom jumped off a bridge it would be onto a ship’, suggesting that the motivation for the illogical actions and opinions by many people in a fandom is caused by shipping. CR, who has been a participant in fan fiction for what she calls as ‘a long time’, commented during her interview that:

‘Shipping wars have always been a big part of fandom from waaaaaayyy back in the day. The amount of drama people can get into about umm - sort of - they’re shipping a pairing the wrong way, even though it’s the right pairing. Or you’re shipping the wrong pairing. Or which non-canon ship has more canon support, or - or all that kind of stuff. People can get very excited about it.’

Most individuals interviewed recounted instances of disagreements, arguments, conflict or ‘drama’ that occurred within a fandom. TJ even commented that one of

60 ‘Snack’ is the portmanteau name of Professor Severus Snape and Sirius Black from the Harry Potter series.
the reasons she left the *Supernatural* fandom was because of the arguments that emerged over shipping. *TI* described how some fans carried their ship ‘... over to the real-life actors, which [she] found really off-putting. [When] Sam or Dean’s actor [Jared Padalecki or Jensen Ackles] had children with their wives, some of the fandom got really angry because they were having heterosexual relationships in real life ...’ The actors’ engagement in heterosexual relationships was seen by some fans to contradict the narrative of the Wincest\(^6\) relationship that much of the *Supernatural* fandom ships. This has resulted in angering some sections of the fandom, because these ‘real-life’ relationships challenge the narrative the fandom has constructed around the actors.

When interviewed, *A_Contradiction* recounted a time when she was literally caught in the middle of a fandom argument between two friends:

> I was sitting in the middle, and then I had two friends on either side, both completely *Doctor Who* obsessed, with two different opinions on the subject and they were leaning over me to argue.

While *A_Contradiction* found the argument between her friends somewhat uncomfortable, *CR* finds the conflict and arguments over interpretations of the canon entertaining, commenting during her interview that:

\[^6\] As stated in ‘Chapter 4: Authority’, ‘Wincest’ is the ship name of Dean and Same Winchester. The name is derived from their last name, Winchester, and the fact that their romantic relationship would be incest as the characters are brothers.
You will get people getting very caught up - to the degree that you get these people with a vision of this character who - which doesn't necessarily mesh very well with canon, doesn't necessarily mesh very well with what you like about the characters ... Just the levels of argument and debate; it's quite glorious.'

Shipping is also evident in the structure of online fan fiction storage and organisation. Works posted on both AO3 and Fanfiction.net are organised so that there is an option to sort and filter stories based on romantic pairings. On AO3, there is a separate tagging section for writers to tag a relationship in order for readers to be able to search for their preferred ship more easily. The tagging of ships on AO3 and on Tumblr can appear in two ways. One way to tag is fairly standard—the couple’s first and last names are separated by a forward slash, for example Oliver Queen/Felicity Smoak, which is searchable on both AO3 and fanfic.net.

The other way to tag ships on AO3 and Tumblr is to use portmanteau names. Most ships have a portmanteau name that is a combination of names of the individuals in the ship, for example Olicity. The ship name is typically created by combining the couple’s names, alias or descriptor. Olicity is the combining of Oliver and Felicity. Smoaking Canarrow is a three-way combination of Felicity Smoak, the Canary (alias of Sara Lance), and Arrow (alias of Oliver Queen). These couple names appear in most, if not all fandoms; for instance, Outlaw Queen is the combination of the Evil Queen (alias of Regina) and Robin Hood from the television series Once Upon a
Couple names are regularly tagged on AO3 and Tumblr, with tags such as #Olicity and #Lauriver, or Oliver Queen/Felicity Smoak and Oliver Queen/Laurel Lance, making a regular appearance in posts that feature Arrow.

**Shipping in Arrow**

The two ships within the Arrow fandom that are the focus of this chapter are Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak (Olicity), and Laurel Lance and Oliver Queen (Lauriver). Both ships pair the male lead character, Oliver Queen, with one of the main female characters on the show. The first fan fiction based on Arrow was posted on 11 October 2012 on AO3 and 12 October 2012 on fanfic.net. The fan-fiction engagement with Arrow was initially slow, with only 60 stories written under the ‘Arrow (TV 2012)’ tag on AO3 in 2012, and 58 stories written on fanfic.net during the same 81-day period. However, as the show has gained popularity the number of fan-fiction stories engaging with it has grown, with 1306 Arrow stories written on AO3 and 803 Arrow stories written on fanfic.net during the 79-day period between 1 of January and 20 March 2015.

The television series Arrow is an interesting case study as it is based on the DC comic Green Arrow. The comic-book ‘canon’ has clearly inspired storylines and aspects of the television series. As the television show has drawn inspiration from

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Once Upon a Time is an American fairy tale dramatic television series that premiered in 2013 on the American Broadcasting Channel. The series takes place in the fictional town of Storybrooke whose residents are characters from various fairy tales.
storylines and characters from the *Green Arrow* comic-book character, it, arguably, could have two canons: the television show and the comic-book series. Booth (2010, p. 58) argues that individual episodes of a television show could be considered complete narratives. However, entire series can also be considered part of a single narrative (Booth 2010, pp. 58–59). This theory could also be applied to wider paratexts that surround television series. The television series could be considered a single narrative in and of itself. Or both the comic-book series and the television series could be considered to be part of a wider DC universe narrative (which could potentially include the upcoming and evolving DC cinematic universe). Depending on whether fans accept both the comic books and the television series as part of a wider canon of the DC universe, or consider them as separate canons, inter- or intra-textual links between the television series and the comic-book series result (Booth 2010, p. 58). As not all fans have consumed the same paratexts that surround the television series, they bring different knowledge to their reading of the television series (Booth 2010, p.56).

Throughout the comic-book canon, Oliver Queen and Laurel Lance are in a canonical romantic relationship, while in the television series Oliver Queen and Laurel Lance were previously in a relationship before the start of the series. This results in the Lauriver relationship being canon compliant across both mediums. Alternatively, the character Felicity Smoak on the television series holds only a passing resemblance to the minor character of the same name in the comic-book series. Yet, in the television series, Felicity Smoak is in a canonical romantic
relationship with Oliver Queen, resulting in Olicity being canon compliant in the television series from the beginning of Season 3. Thus, both ships have some external sources of legitimacy for their interpretation.  

Shipping in literature

Shipping, often with a focus on slash shipping, has been the focus of some academic inquiry, particularly with gendered social themes. Other inquiries into shipping have focused on how shipping can be a resistant reading of a text (Scodari & Felder 2000); it can mark the divide between shippers and non-shippers within the fandom (Hadas 2013); it can act as a site for identity construction (Williams 2011); and it can offer an insight into celebrity and fan relationships (Dare-Edwards 2014).

Christine Scodari and Jenna Felder’s (2000) article outlines the position of the Mulder and Scully shippers and the ‘NoRomos’ (short for ‘No Romancers’), who did not engage in romantic readings of the television show *The X-Files* (Scodari & Felder 2000, p. 240). Shipping wars first emerged in *The X-Files* fandom (Jamison 2013, p. 119). The predominant NoRomos saw *The X-Files* as not fitting within the romance genre, and that the predominantly female shippers were viewing the series as a soap opera (Scodari & Felder 2000, p. 242). Scodari and Felder (2000, p. 239) state that shippers in the *X-Files* fandom were engaging in a counter-hegemonic, but invited,  

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*Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to note that neither of the main ships for the series are ‘slash’. The fan fiction written in regard to the heterosexual ships far outweigh those written for slash ships in *Arrow*, which is unusual for a popular fandom.*
reading of the text. They outline how some fans of *The X-Files* seek to discredit shipping readings of the text by claiming that shippers are not ‘real’ fans of the series (Scodari & Felder 2000, p. 241). NoRomos use allusions to the producers’ authorial intent to claim that the relationship between Mulder and Scully is not romantic and that shippers are not reading the series correctly (Scodari & Felder 2000, pp. 242–243). Despite producers of the series repeatedly stating that a romance between Mulder and Scully would not occur during the series ‘shippers still want the MSR [Mulder Scully Romance] and, consequently, their loyalty and legitimacy, to be recognised ...’ (Scodari & Felder 2000, p. 249). Acknowledgment of the shipper’s reading of the text is tied to their legitimacy as a ‘real fan’ that has the authority to interpret the text.

Rebecca Williams (2011, p. 279), through examining Josh/Donna shippers in the *West Wing* (1999–2006) fandom, asserts that identification with a specific ship gives fans a specific subcultural identity within the fandom. Williams (2011, p. 271) examines shipper and non-shipper clashes over their opposing readings and interpretations of the text, stating that shipping within the *West Wing* fandom has created ‘debates over the “appropriate” and “proper” ways to appreciate and discuss a quality television text which focused on political issues’. Shipping is seen to be primarily performed by women who transcend the ‘appropriate’ genre for the text by reading the series as a ‘soap’ or ‘drama’ (Jenkins 1988, p. 98). Shipping was presented by anti-shippers as not a ‘proper’ way to view the *West Wing*, drawing on evidence
from episodes, other fans, and producers as support to ‘...enforce the dominance of their fan interpretation ...’ as fans battle for textual authority (Williams 2011, p. 285).

Similarly, Leora Hadas (2013) examines the challenges for viewers of the new Doctor Who (2005–) series, as the series embraces a more genre-hybrid identity. Here, animosity within the fandom is examined between shippers and ‘anoraks’ (non-shippers). Hadas recounts how both anoraks and shippers are constructed as ‘not true fans’ as their reading of the canon is constructed as flawed (Hadas 2013, pp. 336–337). Anoraks are constructed as ‘... socially incompetent, sexually frustrated ... their resistance to sex and romance in the show is seen as a product of prudishness and immaturity...’ (Hadas 2013, p. 336). Likewise, shippers are denigrated for ‘... being unable to tell the essential apart from the trivial ...’ in their reading of the canon (Hadas 2013, p. 337). The denigration of both parties seeks to reduce their authority and their subsequent readings of the text. The criticism of the anoraks and the shippers as not being real fans, as well as the construction of their characters as being flawed, attempts to place those fans in a subservient position to other ‘real’ fans—a criticism that was echoed by X-Files fans (Hadas 2013), West Wing fans (Williams 2011), Buffy fans (Johnson 2007), and currently Arrow fans. In making these criticisms, fans are disciplining each other for their ‘abnormal’ or negative stereotypical fannish actions, which are typically along gendered lines (Booth 2015, p. 78), seeking to assert the ‘truth’ of their interpretation and evaluation of the text (Johnson 2007, p. 286).
Fans’ battles for textual authority can also be seen in Helena Louise Dare-Edwards’s (2014) paper on real person slash (RPS) shippers, who ship Louis Tomlinson and Harry Styles from the band *One Direction*. The paper recounts how tweets exchanged between Tomlinson and Styles at the beginning of the band’s success were interpreted as flirty by fans. Fans then used the tweets as evidence to inform their reading of a romantic relationship between Styles and Tomlinson. Later, Tomlinson tweeted a series of statements denying ‘Larry’ existed. Dare-Edwards (2014, p. 521) shows how fans interpreted the tweets sent out by Louis Tomlinson as ‘inauthentic’—i.e. that he had not sent them. Fans exclude elements of the narrative that oppose their reading (Sandvoss 2007, p. 28). In this way, fans were able to disregard the tweets as counter-evidence to their ship in an attempt to maintain the legitimacy of their interpretive framework of past tweets.

**Authority, legitimacy and Big Name Fans (BNFs)**

As was discussed in the previous chapter, those that come from a position of authority and influence have the ability to affect how texts are read. However, this is not limited to canon creators or ‘authors’ of media texts. Critics, as a site of external authority from the creation of the canon media and a site of insider information, have the ability to influence how audiences are positioned to read media (J. Gray 2010, p. 115). J. Gray (2010) suggests that critics, in producing widely distributed authoritative paratexts, are ‘co-authoring’ media objects by advising interpretative

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64 *Larry Stylinson* is the portmanteau name of the Harry Styles/Louis Tomlinson ship.
frameworks in-between the encoding and decoding of the media object. Critics offer ‘interpretive decoders’, categorising television shows via genre, or association with other programs in order to propose ways in which audiences should consume the media (J. Gray 2010, p. 116).

Fans can also gain legitimacy and authority to influence how texts are read and engaged with by other fans. Unlike the perceived innate, or external power and authority, that canon producers and critics are assumed to hold over their media items, the legitimacy, influence and power of online fans are typically gained through engagement with other fans and having intimate knowledge of the canon (Williams 2008, p. 3; Foster 2004, p. 286). As fans accrue knowledge, access or a personal relationship with the object of the fandom, they gain cultural capital, which establishes them as a site authority (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 30). Those fans whose posting habits and cultural capital gain them a standing among other fans are known as Big Name Fans (BNFs) (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p. 11). BNFs earn authority through their engagement with fan practices, as well as their extensive knowledge of social norms and canon content (Booth 2010, p. 36), thus becoming leaders in the fandom. Their posts are regarded as more credible, and therefore of higher quality, than other posters.

In line with original conceptions of the Internet as a utopian and egalitarian space (Mariscal 2005, p. 409; Rheingold 1994, p. 116), fans are understood to have an equal opportunity to rise to the status of a BNF, as fans typically do not hold external social capital in regard to a particular canon or fandom. Many fans find their rise to
BNF status as sudden and unexpected. *Redtoes* stated when interviewed that she had always wanted to be a ‘big name ficer [fan fiction writer]’, but in the past had typically only ‘lurked’. After a period of prolific posting during 2013, *Redtoes* found her status as a ‘big name ficer’ in the *Arrow* fandom as a surprise. Additionally, *Lollyliciouslolly* stated that in the past her stories and postings had gained her fame among other fans to the point that she ‘has fans herself’. Although these individuals’ rise to prominence was ‘swift’ and unexpected within their fandoms, their fall was often equally as sudden. As their postings become more infrequent, or new stories arose, they found their BNF status usurped by other fan writers.

Acafans (Hills 2007; Hills 2002), in many ways, are the exception to the organic evolution of fan authority and legitimacy. By establishing themselves as both fans and scholars, acafans are able to appeal to external sites of authority in order to legitimate their perspectives and engagement with fans. This external appeal to authority situates academics as authority figures in regard to fandom and fans. Similarly, fans that are involved in the creation of media products external to fandoms are able to utilize that cultural capital as a way of establishing influence among fans. For example, *astolat* has established herself as a BNF through her engagement with the fans; it is an open secret, however, among fans online that she is also an established published author (Jamison 2013, p.33). It could be suggested that her legitimacy as a ‘real’ author assisted in establishing her as a site of knowledge around engagement with canon texts, bolstering her status and prestige.
among other fan writers and imbuing her comments and perspectives with more power than a fan without an external appeal to legitimacy.

**Conflict, trolls, flames and Internet hate**

The debates and conflicts that have emerged over ships within fandoms can be understood within the wider Internet phenomena of trolling and flaming. Animosity and conflict on the Internet have been well documented (Abraham 2014; Chua 2009; Haythornthwaite 2008; Paech 2012), with ‘flaming’, ‘trolling’, and ‘hate speech’ all common occurrences in online interaction. As most online forums are text based, these conflicts often play out through negative or hostile comments (Abraham 2014; Chua 2009; Haythornthwaite 2008). These text-based interactions leave out a range of identifiable data for individuals, as individuals are only identifiable by their online name or the information they present (Haythornthwaite 2008, p. 1036). Instead of the lack of a visual basis for discrimination reducing conflict and animosity, Haythornthwaite (2008, p. 1036) found that the lack of identifiable data resulted in a level of anonymity, which dehumanized individuals online. Individuals do not perceive the online interaction as occurring between human beings. The anonymity online leads to a depersonalization of others online and allows individuals to not be physically confronted with the negative consequences of their interaction (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p. 120). The anonymity that occurs in online interaction is then seen to encourage breaches of acceptable behaviour online such as trolling or flaming (Haythornthwaite 2008, p. 1037).
‘Flames’ and ‘trolls’ online are some of the most visible forms of conflict and confrontation that occur in the predominantly textual online environment (Vrooman 2002). Trolls are typically understood to be individuals, or groups of individuals, who act with the intent of disrupting, redirecting, or creating conflict within an online discourse in a community for ‘amusement’ (Cole 2015; Ganzer 2015; Phillips 2015). Alternatively, the act of flaming refers to the argumentative or aggressive comments themselves, rather than the individuals who make them (Rheingold 1994, p. 137). Flaming can be ritualised, strategic, or even game-like, as individuals seek to insult each other, the content, or other perspectives in order to ‘win’ arguments, or score social capital (Vrooman 2002, p. 51). The ‘winning’ of an interaction results in the individual gaining prestige via social capital over others. Thus, the individual who ‘wins’ the interaction is gaining power and legitimacy within the group.

Despite ‘flaming’ and ‘trolls’ being seen, typically, as a negative aspect of social engagement on the Internet, such actions can also be seen as an act of identity construction (Vrooman 2002, pp. 51–53), or as an embedded aspect of the values that exist in the dominant culture (Phillips 2015, p. 11). The antagonistic and inflammatory comments seek to construct the individual’s identity while challenging the values and interpretative frameworks of the discourse with which they are engaging. These ‘trolling’ and ‘flaming’ practices have been documented in regard to men from men’s rights groups inserting themselves into online feminist discourses (Cole 2015; Ganzer 2015). These activists insert themselves into feminist discourses in order to disrupt
the conversations through violent, derogatory and antagonistic comments that attempt to discipline women for participating in public as feminists (Cole 2015).

I would assert that in commenting online, men’s rights groups are asserting power and dominance over the feminist discourses and women as a form of identity construction. The men’s rights groups are attempting to construct themselves as a site of authority in an attempt to control the hegemonic or dominant discourse. The conflict that emerges, as individuals construct themselves as sites of authority, works to repeatedly dominate and direct discourses. This results in these sites of conflict creating and lending legitimacy to their own interpretative framework. As this literature indicates, trolling and flaming are not just about disagreement. They represent a struggle over power, legitimacy and authority, a struggle that is present within online fan environments.

With ‘flames’ and ‘trolls’ a pervasive part of Internet culture, it is not surprising to see these practices and kinds of conflict in online fandom. The way that conflict over shipping emerges on fan sites has many similarities with the flaming and trolling described above. The conflict over ships becomes conflict over authenticity, authority and power over the canon text. Some dismiss readings of the text that are different from their own, insinuating that their own reading is the ‘correct’ way to interpret the text. This suggests that one explanation for conflict in fandom is the struggle for discursive dominance. Although hegemonic discourses change and evolve like the relationships between social agents within the field, at any point in time only one reading can be the ‘correct’ or dominant reading of the media. This
results in a struggle between groups of social agents for their reading to be considered the hegemonic reading, thus causing conflict.

**Reading Olicity and Lauriver**

As previously stated the two main ships in the television show *Arrow* are those between the main character, Oliver Queen, and either Laurel Lance or Felicity Smoak. The pairing of Oliver Queen and Laurel Lance is canon compliant, as within the television show *Arrow* Oliver Queen and Laurel Lance have had an on-again, off-again relationship. This is consistent with the DC comic-book character Green Arrow, where Oliver Queen eventually marries Dinah Laurel Lance. Alternatively, the pairing between Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak was not initially canon compliant. Although the scenes and writing in the first two seasons of the television series hint at a romantic pairing of the two characters, there were no explicit romantic interactions. As evidenced from the number of fan-fiction stories written about Olicity, despite not initially being canon compliant there was an increasingly large fan following that shipped Olicity from the outset.

Despite Olicity initially being non-canon compliant in seasons one and two of *Arrow*, the ship is the more popular one among *Arrow* fans. On AO3, there were 5961 Oliver Queen/Felicity Smoak stories, compared with 177 Oliver Queen/Laurel Lance stories as of 23 October 2015. Additionally, on Fanfiction.net, there were approximately 3500 stories that feature Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak compared with 306 stories that feature Oliver Queen and Laurel Lance, as of 23 October 2015. Many of the Oliver Queen/Laurel Lance fan-fiction stories featured a relationship
between Oliver and Laurel as a foil to an Olicity endgame\textsuperscript{65}, rather than being the focus of the story.

Fan-fiction participants’ engagement with their ship goes beyond the stories written on both AO3 and Fanfiction.net, with fan fiction readers and writers posting about their favourite ships on Tumblr. After each episode of Arrow a stream of text posts, drawings, YouTube videos and GIFs appear on Tumblr. This content highlights and dissects what happened during the episode, showing the fans’ favourite moments, as well as positing ideas for future episodes and some fan fiction (Booth 2015, p. 31). The combination of the images and text create a small narrative in which fans demonstrate their interpretation of a particular moment or a wider storyline (Booth 2015, pp. 31-35). The posts draw on the original text while transforming the potential meaning drawn from them, resulting in them occupying a space between fans’ appreciation and transformation of the text (Booth 2015, p. 42). Many of these posts relate directly to what the individuals ships, or show an appreciation for a particular character.

As each new episode of Arrow is aired in the United States new evidence is gathered from the scenes and dialogue of the episode to lend credence to the legitimacy of one interpretation (ship) over another. The text and image posts, and fan fiction, promote fans’ particular reading of the media. The posts break each episode down, focusing on aspects of the narrative that reinforce their reading of the text while

\textsuperscript{65}‘Endgame’ refers to a ship that is together at the end of a series.
marginalizing other aspects of the episode that may counter their preferred narrative. Select images from the episodes are turned into GIF sets with accompanying text. The audio of the images is removed and any speech is replaced by text that appears on the image. However, the *Tumbler* user generally adds interpretative text in the form of a heading, caption, or an addition underneath the GIF set. This additional text breaks down the scene to interpret it within the frame of a specific ship. For example, in the episode 'Time of Death', Oliver confronts Laurel Lance, and has an argument with her stating, ‘I have loved you for half my life, but I’m done running after you.’ Laurivier fans interpreted this scene as evidence of Oliver’s continuing love and affection for Laurel Lance, while Olicity fans saw this scene as Oliver standing up to Laurel, and beginning to let go of their past relationship.

The interpretation of scenes and interactions through a particular ship also occurs through fan-fiction stories written using particular scenes or episodes as a launching point. This was done extensively for the episode ‘Keep Your Enemies Closer’. During this episode Oliver tells Felicity that he ‘... just think[s] it’s better to not be with someone I could really care about.’ Lauriver fans did not interpret this scene as Oliver referring to Felicity as the ‘someone he could really care about’, while Olicity fans assumed that Oliver was referring to Felicity. Olicity fans have written numerous fan-fiction stories based on this scene to explore the inner thoughts of the characters and their motivations, and in some cases to rewrite the scene to make it more explicitly ‘Olicity’. These fan-fiction writers seek to paint their interpretation of
the scene as self-evident and a logical outcome of the interaction between the characters, lending credence to the fans’ interpretation of the interactions between the characters. In promoting their interpretation of the narrative, the shipping fans are seeking to legitimize their reading of the text as the ‘correct’ reading, which subsequently legitimizes them as ‘real fans’ and gives them further authority in their engagement with the narrative.

**Power, hegemony and conflict**

Fandom has been constructed as a site of active consumption by audiences (Ford et al. 2006; Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington 2007a, p. 7), resulting in a canon text that can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The active consumption and engagement of media products creates the possibility for different and competing interpretations of the canon text. As previously stated in Chapter 3: A History of Fan Fiction, ‘active’ readings of texts, or active audience theory, was notably put forward in Stuart Hall’s (1990) theory of encoding and decoding as part of a rise in audience reception analysis. Hall’s (1990, pp. 98-100) theory states that audiences can read the text in a dominant (hegemonic), negotiated, or oppositional way.

Critics of active audience theory put forward two main criticisms of the theoretical stance. Firstly, critics see active audience theory as negating the construction of the text, denying the power and authorial intent of the media creators (Morley 1993; Seaman 1992, p. 23). Active audience theory, however, does not deny a power differentiation between media consumers and producers. The apparent denial of authorial intent, or the power over the way that the media is constructed, appears to
be a false equivalency of activity with power. Audiences are able to utilize the text in a variety of ways beyond the message, or authorial intent of the original content of the works (Radway 1991, p. 7). Therefore, while the power that media producers have over how the text is constructed is still recognised, the activity of media audiences in reading a text is also recognised (Morley 1993, p. 14).

The second main critique of active audience theory is that it focuses on isolated studies that concentrate on how specific groups produce meanings and pleasure from a text (Morris 1988, p. 23; Morley 1993; Seaman 1992). It is argued that the focus on specific case studies and examples results in limited analysis, and little application beyond the initial analysis (Morris 1988; Seaman 1992, p. 303). Although Morley (1993) sees the danger of all analyses being micro-ethnographic, he states that ‘... macrostructures can be reproduced only through microprocesses’ (Morley 1993, p. 17).

Active audience theory is useful not only because it recognises that consumers read media in a variety of ways, but also because it engages with the idea of a hegemonic reading of a text. The hegemonic reading of a text is the dominant or prevailing interpretation of a text. Typically, the professional creator, or canon producer's intent, is positioned as hegemonic, while the fan occupies a resistant position (Booth 2015, p. 13). Hegemony, however, does not reflect a static set of concepts or ideas. Rather, hegemony is negotiated and constantly in flux because it represents the prevailing meanings as presented by a dominant group (Ang 1990, p. 245)—a reading is considered hegemonic if it is widely accepted by consumers of the media. The
hegemonic reading of a text, therefore, is not necessarily the meaning the producer intended (although it often is), but the preferred meaning that is the most common reading of the text. This ‘common’ reading generally arises out of existing social, economic and political power relationships (Ang 1990, p. 245). Applying the concept of hegemony to a reading of a text then means that the hegemonic reading of a text is constantly in flux depending on social, political and economic power relationships at the time, with the hegemonic reading reflecting the dominant power relationships in the field at that time.

Social conflict typically involves the perception among individuals or groups that they have incompatible preferences. Therefore, social conflict occurs when different groups want the same thing, or they may want different things, but are required to have the same as others (Brown 1957, p. 135; Carnevale & Probst 1997, p. 234). Continual disagreements over the reading or meaning of a text can then be understood as competition over who has the power and legitimacy to determine the ‘discursive dominance’ in the field (Johnson 2007, p. 286).

In the case of media consumption, a hegemonic reading of the text represents the dominant discourse. This ‘discursive dominance’ is used as a basis for fans’ authority, legitimacy and power to make claims over the correct way to be a fan and the ‘truth’ of a particular fannish interpretation (Johnson 2007, p. 290). In regard to fan interpretations of the media, fans compete for their reading of the text to be considered the ‘correct’ reading of the text, thus legitimizing their status as ‘real fans’
of the canon. This then constructs those who have alternative readings of the text as ‘not real fans’ (Hadas 2013, pp. 336–337).

Fans’ disagreements over particular ships, or readings of the canon, can be understood as a struggle to assert discursive dominance (Johnson 2007, p. 286). Although the ‘shipping’ of two or more characters in a romantic relationship constitutes only part of the meaning read from a text, shipping functions as a microcosm of wider conflicts over meaning, authority, legitimacy and power within a fandom. Fans’ advocacy for their ship, and rejection of the evidence that fans of alternative ships have accumulated, seeks to legitimize their interpretation of the canon as the correct interpretation (Johnson 2007, p. 290). This subsequently turns the canon from a site of infinite possibility to a limited resource that opposing groups fight to be used in the ‘right’ or ‘correct’ way.

**Olicity v Lauriver**

Fans of both Olicity and Lauriver require Oliver Queen to be in a romantic relationship with their female character of choice, to the exclusion of the other romantic relationships. Individuals who ship either Olicity or Lauriver deny alternative readings of the canon, as two ships cannot exist concurrently. This results in the fans of the ships advocating, often aggressively and confrontationally, that their interpretation of the source text is the correct interpretation. This competition over the ‘correct’ reading of the text manifests in a level of animosity between these two ships. Such animosity can be clearly seen through examining several posts on *Tumblr*. Posts that are aggressive or negative towards the character that is not part of
the fans’ ship are not uncommon (Larsen & Zubernis 2012, p.134). Below are several examples of Lauriver fans and Olicity fans demonstrating their allegiance to their respective ships, and evidence to legitimize their reading of the canon text.

‘Wow, I just lost 4 followers for shipping Laurel/Oliver. Everyone who doesn’t like Laurel can unfollow me rn [right now] #lauriver, #arrow, #laurel lance #laurel x oliver’ (Emerald Rider 31 March 2014)

‘Laurel haters can seriously gtfo [get the fuck out] after this episode's ending. She’s [Laurel’s] gonna be part of Team Arrow and nothing you can say or do can change that. And she’s [Laurel’s] gonna be more important than felicity [sic], just like she always has been.’ (You Have Failed This City, 2 April 2014).

‘Is it just me or is Laurel getting bitchier and bitchier. Calm it lady. #anti laurel #anti lauriver #can’t stand laurel #anti ship #arrow #arrow season 2’ (star city bow, 2 April 2014).

‘My entire dash is Olicity….then there’s that one Lauriver fan #olicity #anti lauriver’ (ifeelsafewithyou, 2 April 2014).

This animosity can also be seen in the tags used by individuals; for example, ‘nolicity’ is a tag that is commonly used to post anti-Oliver/Felicity sentiments, while ‘anti-lauriver’ is used to post comments against the Oliver Queen/Laurel Lance ship. The animosity expressed through these tags is not just directed at the fictional characters, but also at the actors who play the characters, the writers of the television series, and the fans that are invested in each ship. Katie Cassidy, the actress who plays Laurel Lance has received angry, and at times hateful, messages on social media from Olicity fans resulting in her tweeting on 28 April 2014, 'haters are
just jealous, insecure, sad lonely people’. Actors ‘real life’ relationships can also be
seen to contradict the narrative of some fans’ ships. Fans then express their dislike of
actors ‘real life’ partners. This can be seen in the Supernatural fandom from fans’
reactions to the now wives of actors Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles (Zubernis &

Both the Olicity and Lauriver fans are watching the same scenes of the television
show, but interpreting or decoding the scenes and dialogue in different ways to suit
their ships. Conflict then arises between alternative ships, because both readings of
the text cannot simultaneously be the ‘correct’ reading of the canon. The correct
reading of Oliver Queen and his relationships becomes a limited resource over
which fans come into conflict. These differences in interpretation have the effect of
creating conflicting and at times competing sub-fandoms within the television
series, as fans compete to influence the hegemonic discourses that exist around the
media.

**Conclusion**

Examining shipping through Arrow provides a localized case study through which to
examine conflict within fandoms. Articles by Hadas (2013), Scodari & Felder (2000),
Williams (2011) and Dare-Edwards (2014) all show how shipping is a significant
component of a variety of fandoms. Additionally, most of the individuals interviewed
for this research stated that they had shipping preferences, with fan-fiction
participants avoiding or seeking out fiction focusing on specific ships. Arrow, as a
television series based on a comic-book character, provides an interesting case
study, as it can be understood as having multiple canonical sources. The ships of Lauriver and Olicity in *Arrow* provide an example of two opposing readings of the canon in regard to the romantic relationships portrayed.

Active audience theory allows for audiences to view media in various ways. Active audience theory does not seek to deny the power that media producers have over the construction of the texts; rather, it allows for the activity of media consumers in their reading of the media items, and the power they have in shaping their reading (Morley 1993, p. 14). The hegemonic reading of the text is the prevailing meaning of a text as presented by a dominant group. It is determined by the social, economic and political power relationships that exist at the time (Ang 1990, p. 245). Fans promote their ships while seeking to marginalize alternative interpretations of the text, as discourses not only reflect reality but also produce it (McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 35). Conflict over the readings of a text can be understood as conflict over discursive dominance and therefore the authority to influence the hegemonic readings of a text, as fans seek to confine alternative interpretations, while celebrating their own (McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 23). This conflict over the hegemonic reading of the text can then be seen to be conflict over fans’ authority to assert a dominant vision of the field of media engagement and consumption. As each episode of *Arrow* airs, shippers post tweets, GIFs, and fan fiction stories about their ship. This promotes their reading of the text as the ‘legitimate’ or ‘correct’ reading, in order to construct themselves as ‘real fans’ of the canon.
A precedent for online animosity as a site of identity construction and conflict over power and legitimacy can be seen in the practice of flaming and trolling (Vrooman 2002, pp. 51–53). The antagonistic and argumentative comments challenge other online participants’ interpretative frameworks. In challenging and disrupting online discourses, trolls and flames seek to assert their power over the social interaction that is occurring, constructing themselves as a site of authority. Online conflict then becomes a struggle over power, legitimacy and authority within the field. As fans compete over their view of the canon, they are also in conflict over the role of fans and ways in which the media should be engaged with. The roles of the social agents within the field are being contested, not only among media producers and consumers, but also among differing groups of fans.

Now that the ways in which fans create themselves and their interpretations of canon media as legitimate have been explored, the next chapter will explore companies’ attempts to legitimize themselves as sites of fan engagement. The following chapter explores the online platform Kindle Worlds, a subsidiary of Amazon, which seeks to engage, and ultimately exert control over, fan fiction and fan practices. Amazon’s Kindle Worlds represents a variation on the social actors that we have examined in the field so far. The Kindle Worlds platform is attempting to enter into the field of media production and consumption in a new role. Kindle Worlds, rather than a site of production for canons, exists as a site of commercial creation of fan literature. This places Amazon outside of the traditional producer/consumer paradigm.
Through an exploration of *Kindle Worlds*, the concept of legitimacy will be further explored. We will examine the attempts of *Kindle Worlds* to market itself as a socially and legally 'legitimate' form of fan fiction, noting that the platform overlooks how legitimacy is currently attained among social agents within the field of media production and consumption. The platform appeals to legal and economic forms of legitimacy in order to establish itself as a social agent with the power to shape the actions of others within the field. However, by overlooking the socially constructed norms and practices that already exist within the field, Amazon has failed to establish the platform as a viable way to engage with fan fiction among existing fan-fiction participants. The case study demonstrates how in attempting to establish commercial authority and legitimacy, *Kindle Worlds* has failed to understand how legitimacy, and subsequently power, is negotiated among its target market: fan-fiction participants.
Chapter 7: Legitimacy

Introduction

In previous chapters we have seen how the production and active consumption of media products can both be used as mediums to gain social capital and therefore authority within the field of media production and consumption. This chapter explores Amazon’s entry into the field. Amazon’s launch of the Kindle Worlds platform marks a move by Amazon to exert authority over fan and canon texts. Amazon is seeking to exert authority over the field by offering fans legal and economic legitimacy in their engagement with media. In doing this Amazon seeks to transform the field to orient it in a more commercial and economic manner.

Fan fiction’s relationship with commercial media is complex. Fan fiction is based on commercial products; however, it exists outside a monetary environment. Fan fiction’s existence as a non-commercial practice has been well documented. As I have previously outlined Hellekson (2015; 2009) argues that fan fiction exists within a ‘gift economy’, while Lessig (2008; 2004), Hetcher (2009), Stroude (2010), Kelty (2004), Tushnet (2011; 2004) have all discussed fan fiction’s legal position in a
capitalist society and Booth (2010, pp. 27, 131) characterises the online fan economy as a ‘digi-gratis’ economy: an online economy that is a ‘mash-up’ of both the market and gift economy. This mash-up of a gift economy and a monetary system relies upon both economic systems existing, as fans produce ‘gifts’ from the products they create and also consume products they have purchased in a market system (Booth 2010, p. 131). This system requires both the gift economy and the market system to be present and function, because fandom and the media industry require one another to exist (Booth 2015, p. 172).

Despite this delicate positioning, ‘outsiders’ and big businesses have sought to marginalize the gift economy aspect of fans’ interaction by further commercialising fan fiction, or fan-fiction-like practices. Websites such as Scribd, Smashwords, Booksie and Wattpad have all made it possible for fan-fiction writers to gain some monetary compensation for their writing (Hellekson 2015, p. 128). Each of these endeavours has focused on the commercial aspects of fan fiction, hoping to entice fan-fiction participants away from the typically socially orientated practice of fan fiction to a ‘legitimate’, ‘professional’ and commercially viable fan-fiction platform.

Amazon’s Kindle Worlds, established in May 2013 (Amazon 2013), is the most recent online project seeking to commercialize fan fiction. Amazon has sought to establish the legitimacy of Kindle Worlds by presenting the platform, and the stories produced on the platform, as legal, traditionally creative, professional and commercial (i.e. masculine), much like popular conceptions of authorship. This is opposed to everyday fan-fiction practices, which are often seen as illegal, derivative, unoriginal
and non-commercial (i.e. feminine). Despite Amazon's marketing of Kindle Worlds as a legal, professional, commercial and therefore 'legitimate' form of fan-fiction writing, it has achieved limited success to date.

As we have examined in the previous chapters, social agents often conceptualize legitimacy, authority and power in the field of media production and consumption through the notion of authorship. In this chapter we examine the ways that the publishing industry, as represented by Amazon, has attempted to legitimize their commercial engagement with fan fiction to both fans, and the wider publishing industry through appealing to the kind of authority and legitimacy that canon creators and fans usually ascribe to authors.

The opposition of commercial and legitimate 'fan fiction' versus non-commercial and illegitimate 'fan fiction' engages with conceptions of professionalism and women's work. Fan fiction is typically constructed as a feminine space, due to its social interaction, non-commercial nature and the existence of unpaid labour; while traditional publishing and the realm of authors, with their monetary compensation and status of 'professional', are typically understood as 'masculine'. The legitimizing narratives that Kindle Worlds has used have tapped into these 'masculine' narratives of legitimacy and authorship while neglecting the 'feminine' social norms that exist among many fan-fiction participants.

66 As stated in Chapter 1, the term 'industry' is being used in the way Booth (2015, p. 5) defined the term: the general commercial interests that shape the creation of and engagement with media.
*Kindle Worlds* association with Amazon, as an established commercial entity, and its engagement with consumers and producers will be shown to reflect traditional publishing structures that tap into narratives of ‘authorship’ and authority. This is done to establish the enterprise as a commercial, definitively legal, and therefore morally and cognitively ‘legitimate’ form of fan fiction. This structure, however, deemphasises the social interaction that is a key component in current popular fan-fiction practices. In focusing on commercial and legal legitimacy, the *Kindle Worlds* platform has neglected to establish its legitimacy and authority among its target audience: fan-fiction participants. The structure of the *Kindle Worlds* website, the terms and conditions story writers are required to abide by, and the lack of space for social production of the stories, all appear to be directed towards establishing *Kindle Worlds* as a legitimate commercial enterprise that reflects ‘traditional’ divisions of author (producer) and reader (consumer), while neglecting the cultural norms of fan-fiction participants.

To begin with, the concept of legitimacy will be defined and expanded upon. Both organisational and theoretical concepts of legitimacy will be used to show how legitimacy is innately tied to power and authority. I will then discuss how fan fiction lacks legal and moral legitimacy, as it is often perceived to be illegal by those viewing the practice and participating in it. What *Kindle Worlds* is, and how its structure is constructed as commercially and legally legitimate will then be explored. Moving on from this, I will then illustrate how the commercial and legal legitimacy appealed to by *Kindle Worlds* is not valued by fan-fiction participants who have already been
socialized into fan-fiction practices on ‘traditional’ fan-fiction platforms like AO3 and fanfic.net, thus demonstrating how online fan-fiction platforms such as AO3 and fanfic.net prioritize socialization and non-monetary forms of exchange.

Finally, I will outline how the Kindle Worlds platform does not prioritize the social aspects of fan fiction. It aims to replicate the product of fan fiction, using more ‘traditional’ structures of writing, publishing and authorship in order to establish legal and moral legitimacy, while neglecting the social processes that are essential in the creation of fan fiction. The platform appeals to the same sources of power and authority for its legal and commercial legitimacy that have been identified as sources of authors’ power in past chapters. However, Kindle Worlds does not have the same source of social and creative legitimacy that is often appealed to in regard to authorship. Therefore, in prioritising and establishing legal and commercial legitimacy, Kindle Worlds neglects the underlying and constitutive dialogues that exist during the creation of fan fiction which are as important as the products for many writers, resulting in Kindle Worlds not being engaged with by fan-fiction participants as a ‘legitimate’ platform in which to participate in fan fiction. The structure of Kindle Worlds ignores the inherent social legitimacy of fan fiction and authors, making it unlikely that fan-fiction writers will adopt the Kindle Worlds platform, or any commercial platform that does not accommodate the social processes involved in creating fan fiction.
Legitimacy

The concept of legitimacy has been used often throughout this thesis; however, it has not yet been explored in depth. Legitimacy is intimately tied to discussions of power relations and authority (Suchman 1995, p. 571), and can be understood as rightful power or authority (Badie, Berg-Schlosser & Morlino 2011, p. 3). Legitimacy is essential for the durability of a power system because the belief that a power is ‘legitimate’ results in individuals complying willingly. Their acceptance of the moral authority of the power reduces the need for coercion on the part of the power, and the chances of disobedience or subversion from participants (Badie, Berg-Schlosser & Morlino 2011, p. 4). For example, if subjects believe in the legitimacy of a law they are less likely to break it, and those in power will be called upon less frequently to punish lawbreakers.

Weber’s (1947) discussion of legitimacy and authority is, arguably, the building blocks upon which discussions of legitimacy stem. Weber defines four kinds of legitimacy that exist in everyday interaction (Spencer 1970, pp. 123–124, 126).

Legitimacy may be ascribed to an order by those acting subject to it in the following ways:

(a) By tradition; a belief in the legitimacy of what has always existed; (b) by virtue of affectual attitudes, especially emotional, legitimizing the validity of what is newly revealed or a model to imitate; (c) by virtue of an absolute and final commitment; (d) because it has been established in a manner which is recognized to be legal. This legality may be treated as legitimate in either of two ways: on the one hand, it may derive from a voluntary agreement of the interested parties on the relevant terms. On the other hand, it may be imposed on the basis of what is held to be a legitimate
authority over the relevant persons and a corresponding claim to their obedience. (Weber 1947, p. 130) [italics in original]

Each of these definitions of legitimacy have been discussed in previous chapters on authors and authorship. In Chapter 4: Authorship, we saw how authors not only appealed to their legal standing for authority, but also affectual attitudes in their claims to power over the texts they produced, describing their works as family members or their children. Chapter 5: Authority demonstrated how the historical root of authorship has imbued the notion with legitimacy and power. It was then demonstrated how today canon creators and actors play upon perceptions of legality and social capital to establish themselves as sites of authority for and power over media products. Chapter 6: Conflict revealed some of the ways that legitimacy is struggled over by fans in striving to promote their perception of the field.

The legitimacies outlined by Weber are all tied to the notion of authority, or a social norm (Hybels 1995, p. 241; Spencer 1970, p. 124). Culture, social norms and beliefs are integral aspects of legitimacy. Suchman (1995, p. 574) defines legitimacy as ‘... a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions’. Social norms are rules of conduct that individuals orientate their actions around (Spencer 1970, p. 124), which can result in perceptions, traditions or actions among a group of people that seem like the ‘natural’ way to view, or engage with, the world. It is through social norms and processes that authority and legitimacy maintain and create their power. Legitimacy is both constructed and maintained through social interaction and as a product of social
interaction (Hybels 1995, p. 243). While authority can legitimize perceptions of the
world and actions, authority is also legitimized (Spencer 1970, p. 126). Once achieved
legitimacy is not a constant; it can be fleeting and requires constant reproduction

The concept of legitimacy has been used beyond its more theoretical roots in
business and organisational settings. I will briefly engage in that literature here
because Amazon, and therefore its Kindle Worlds platform, is intended to be a
commercially viable business. Legitimacy, within the setting of a business or
corporation, is sought as an essential aspect of engaging with the market. There are
three potential audiences that claims for legitimacy could be speaking to: the ‘key
power holders’, the enforcement and administrative agents, and the wider
population (Badie, Berg-Schlosser & Morlino 2011, p. 4). In looking at the
relationship between Kindle Worlds and fan-fiction participants, I would argue that
there are multiple interest groups within these broader three criteria. The ‘key power
holders’ in this situation would comprise Kindle Worlds and the publishing industry
specifically, and more generally the authors who license their works to be used on
the platform. The enforcement and administrative agents would encompass the legal
framework in which Kindle Worlds operates, including copyright law and publishing
contracts. Finally, the wider population could be divided into two groups: the wider
population of fan-fiction participants and the general public. As has been outlined
previously, all of these groups make up the field of media production and
consumption. The socially accepted norms and culture of each of these groups are
varied, resulting in different prerequisites for how Kindle Worlds could be seen as legitimate to each of these audiences.

In using a variety of legitimizing strategies, Kindle Worlds appeals to moral, traditional and legal forms of legitimacy. As was discussed in Chapter 4: Authorship, authors refer to each of these sources of legitimacy in establishing their authority over the canon works they produce. By appealing to these forms of legitimacy the platform is marketed as a definitively legal and, therefore, moral way for fans to write creative works using aspects of canon media. Through licencing various canons, Kindle Worlds can be constructed as a definitively legal form of fan engagement, not only establishing the platform’s legal legitimacy, but also appealing to the moral rights of canon creators. Additionally, the platform places an emphasis on the traditional role of consumers and producers in creating and engaging with content on the website, aligning the practices on Kindle Worlds more closely with that of authors, rather than media consumers. Individuals who submit to the platform are constructed as ‘authors’, establishing a separation between them and readers. This structure is reminiscent of ‘traditional’ offline publishing, positioning submitters to Kindle Worlds as professional authors. Finally, its association with Amazon allows Kindle Worlds to ‘borrow’ Amazon’s established legitimacy. In appealing to traditional forms of legitimacy, Kindle Worlds aligns itself with established forms of authority and power in the field of media production and consumption. In light of this, Kindle Worlds functions as a conservational social agent, attempting to deny the transformational effects that remix and convergence
culture has had upon the field. However, shifts to the field have already occurred, and the social norms that the platform is appealing to are not the dominant norms of their intended audience. The rest of this chapter will show how, in establishing its moral and legal legitimacy, *Kindle Worlds* has neglected aspects of fan-fiction engagement that participants already socialized on fan-fiction sites, such as AO3 and *fanfic.net*, value as integral aspects of fan fiction. This reduces the legitimacy of the site as a fan-fiction platform among already socialized fan-fiction participants.

**The legitimacy of fan fiction**

As detailed earlier, the most straightforward understanding of fan fiction is that it is ‘... simply the practice of writing fiction based on other people's work’ (Schaffner 2009). Fan-fiction writers take aspects of pre-existing stories, from books, films or television shows, and write their own works of fiction based upon one or more aspects of the original. Yet fan fiction, at its core, is more than just the story that is created. The underlying dialogues that these stories engage in with other fans, through reviews or comments, and wider society through the focus of the stories, are fundamental aspects of what fan fiction is (De Kosnik 2015). Without the variety, freedom and social scaffolding that surround the creation of fan fiction the stories lose their authenticity as fan-created products. Fan-fiction writers are not only writing fiction based on a canon text, they are also writing fiction for a fandom (Booth 2010, p. 46). Legitimacy in regard to fan fiction is constructed by both appeals to affectual attitudes and traditions in the form of social norms that have evolved. Fan fiction’s legitimacy among fans is derived from the way that the authors,
readers, stories and tropes engage with one another, as well as with the wider society, resulting in fan fiction being a social product.

Although all media products are communicative acts, traditional media sees the transmission of a media product, and its subsequent consumption, as the completion of the communicative act. As has been detailed, the rise of Web 2.0, remix culture, prosumers and fan engagement with media sees the extension of this communicative act beyond the consumption of original media product (Bird 2011; Cover 2013; Deuze 2007). The highly collaborative and interactive nature of online media, like fan fiction, is an example of the intensification of remix culture that has resulted in the erosion of the distinct roles of producer, distributor and consumer (Bruns 2010, p. 2).

When writing fan-fiction stories, writers set out with the deliberate intent of not exactly re-creating the story that they know well, but to retell it in a way that emphasises a particular aspect of the story, with a new message, or a way that gives an alternative perspective. Interviewees JA and MC both stated that fan fiction is about exploring the ‘what if’ of a story, among people who understand and appreciate the original version of the story as much as they do. Thus, constructing fan fiction is a social enterprise. Fans make use of the social and communicative aspects of the Internet (Booth 2010, p. 23). Fan fiction then is not about reading a complete written story but engaging with the canon text with other fans. Fan-fiction authors often rewrite episodes and develop characters, relationships and story arcs. These stories could be the continuation of a series once it has finished—for example,
the telling of another adventure that Harry, Ron and Hermione have after the conclusion of the *Harry Potter* book series. Or the fan-fiction writer could re-write part of the story to take the narrative in a different direction, give it a different focus, or explore a social issue by changing the gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation of a main character—for example, turning Harry Potter into Harriet Potter.

When interviewee SK described a *Lord of the Rings*\(^{67}\) (1954–1955) fan-fiction story that she enjoyed reading, she situated the story expanding the text beyond the limitations of Tolkien’s original work, as the canon is ‘a bit white cis\(^{68}\) het\(^{69}\) centric’. SK commented that the fan fiction:

... introduced a lot of new characters, it took female characters from the original series and gave them a much bigger role. Like people who were mentioned briefly, they were used. It introduced a few original female characters who were very well written. It had some - it had a lot of queer characters, it had a couple of characters of colour - and - a trans character, and it was just really, really good. As a queer woman of colour myself, it spoke a lot to me.

Many of the stories are character driven, focusing on one or more characters from the canon, putting them in new or slightly altered situations. Posted stories range from those having little resemblance to the canon to those that are essentially the

\(^{67}\) *Lord of the Rings* is a high-fantasy book series written by J.R.R. Tolkien and published between 1954 and 1955 by George Allen & Unwin. The series follows the adventures of Frodo Baggins as he journeys through Middle Earth to prevent the return of the evil Sauron.

\(^{68}\) ’Cis’ is an abbreviation of cis gender and refers to someone whose gender aligns with their birth sex.

\(^{69}\) ’Het’ is an abbreviation of heterosexual.
same except for one or two key differences. ‘Alternative universe’ stories (AU) often have little resemblance to the canon, merely borrowing the characters or using an aspect of the story as a ‘launching pad’ for the fan author’s own story. AU stories are where characters from the original story are written into a new world or setting. For example, the adult BDSM series *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James was originally written as *Twilight* 70 (2005–2008) fan fiction titled *Master of the Universe* (Jamison 2013, pp. 224-231). In *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the characters of Edward Cullen (renamed Christian Grey in *50 Shades*) and Bella Swan (renamed Anastasia Steele in *50 Shades*) are put into a world without vampires and werewolves in order to explore their relationship in a different context. ‘Alternative history’ (AH) stories give one or more of the characters different histories. Some of the more common versions of these stories take the form of ‘what if these characters met when they were younger?’, or ‘what if a character had different parents?’, or ‘what if the character came from a different socio-economic background?’

As was discussed in the previous chapter, shipping is a common way that fan-fiction stories are organised. Many of these ‘shipping’ fictions are slash fictions, which pair two male characters in a romantic relationship. One of the more famous ‘slash’ relationships is between Kirk and Spock from the original *Star Trek* series (Booth 2014). ‘Crossovers’ use more than one canon, using characters, settings or plot points

70 *Twilight* is a romance fantasy young adult book series by Stephanie Meyer. First published from 2005 till 2008 by Little, Brown and Company the series follows the romantic relationship of Bella Swan (a human) and Edward Cullen (a vampire).
from multiple stories to create a new story. Fan-fiction stories vary in length, as they can be a ‘one shot’, which is a story that is a single chapter with no subsequent chapters, or ‘multi-chapter fics’, that can often end up being tens of thousands of words long. Aside from the categories of fan-fiction stories mentioned, there are numerous other labels that fan authors use to categorize their stories. All of these fan stories seek to engage with the canon text and explore either an aspect of the canon or an aspect of wider society through the writing. The kinds of stories written by fan authors are only limited by the imagination of the writers.

The dynamic nature of online writing allows fan-fiction stories to constantly change and evolve. Fan-written stories are typically posted online on fan-fiction websites such as AO3 and fanfic.net, one ‘chapter’ at a time. Each chapter is subject to

71 Some of the other commonly included categories include: ‘Angst’, a story mostly comprising one or more characters in emotional turmoil; ‘Draible’, a complete story of approximately 500 words; Every You, Every Me, a series of drabble one-shots that depict a variety of AU ‘meet cute’ where Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak meet for the first time; ‘Fluff’, a story that shows a couple in a romantic happy moment with little or no plot; ‘PWP’ ('porn without plot', or 'plot? what plot?'), a story depicting characters in a sexually explicit situation with little character development or plot; ‘Kink’ is similar to ‘PWP’ as it again depicts characters in a sexually explicit situation with little plot; ‘Song fics’ incorporate aspects of songs into the story in some way; ‘Five things’ or ‘five times’ stories take the form of five chapters, or scenes, that recount the five times a character did something, or found themselves in a particular situation—for example The One with the Harry Potter Pick-Up Lines is a story in the Arrow fandom that tells the story of the character Felicity Smoak using a Harry Potter style pick-up line on Oliver Queen in five separate situations; Hurt/comfort stories have one character experience physical or emotional pain, while another character takes care of them; Highschool AU stories use a high school as the setting for the story and make the majority of the characters high-school students—for example Crazy for You is an Olicity story set around a high-school swim team.
comments and reviews by readers as it is posted. Many fan authors write each chapter, usually ranging from between 500 and 5000 words, as they go, allowing others to read the story as they write it. Often fan-fiction writers plan the plot of each chapter, character development or scene, as they are writing it. Once writers have published their story they still have the ability to change, edit, remove, expand or even completely delete their story on fan fiction websites anytime they wish.

As online fan fiction is posted chapter by chapter, many authors take advantage of this by writing author's notes at the beginning and end of each chapter that they write. These notes engage with the reader outside of the story and usually divulge the writer's personal thoughts on a topic, lament about their personal life, offer an apology for not updating sooner, or even ask the readers a question. This marks a shift from traditional published stories as it provides the writer with a direct, immediate and ongoing way to engage with their readers (Booth 2010, p. 67).

Additionally, the readers of the fiction directly engage with both each other and the author by leaving comments and 'reviews' on stories after each chapter. These comments range from constructive criticism to focused critiques, speculation and gushing praise (Black 2008, p. 107). The comment section on AO3 allows readers and writers to leave comments that reply directly to each other, at times resulting in a conversation attached to a chapter that has been posted. At times these comments can even become the focus of the fan-fiction participants, with the story becoming the reason for why the commentary emerges and not the single focus of the online engagement (Booth 2010, p. 62). The comments that emerge become part of the
fiction that is being written, while also functioning as a commentary on the story (Booth 2010, p. 64). The comments can directly affect the direction of a story. As the author gains feedback about their work, the canon takes the narrative in a particular direction, or as external factors influence the author’s narrative, the author will alter or edit their story in response, resulting in the comments being both apart from the story, as well as co-constructing the narrative (Booth 201, p. 64).

Some fan-fiction stories do not end up being finished; instead, they fade out as those writing and reading it lose interest. Conversely, some fan stories are continued at the prompting of readers after the writer thought they were finished. During her interview, fan-fiction writer *LollyliciousLolly* stated that she did not plan out her stories beyond the immediate chapter she was writing. Thus, reviewers’ speculation and suggestions directly influence the direction her narratives take. Some stories’ continuation is the direct result of reader feedback, as the stories are only continued at the prompting of readers after the writer thinks they are finished. For example, *Lilbit846* has often continued writing her fan-fiction stories at the urging of readers and reviewers:

... like a lot of times I can be talked into continuing a story, that was only ever meant to be one chapter. Umm - because I love, I love writing and I write for me. Because you know, it’s something that I want to do, and something that I want to see, but if people, if other people are enjoying that, and they want to spend the time to continue reading it, then - sure I’ll continue writing it, you know. I mean it’s making me happy. I like writing this, and if you like reading it, then sure I can continue.
Lilbit846 originally intended her stories ‘We Might Be Hollow’ and ‘Little Talks’ to be one-shots—i.e. a fan fiction that is a single chapter in length. Yet, at readers’ urgings, she decided to continue the stories, extending them beyond what she originally intended.

I came up with the very first chapter [of We Might Be Hollow], and that’s all I wanted it to be—that very first chapter. And that’s the only scene I had in mind, that one. And I wrote it, and then I had a couple of people ask me to continue it. So I did. But of course, I didn’t think past that first scene, coz that’s all it was supposed to be.

My very first Arrow story actually, umm ... Little Talks that’s exactly how that one went. I wrote the first scene, and I had people who were like, ‘Oh continue it!’ so I did. That’s all the thought that went into that one.

This social interaction not only affects the narrative construction of the fan-fiction stories, but is also used by fan-fiction participants to create friendships and relationships with other fan-fiction participants. When interviewed, fan-fiction writer Redtoes said she has struck up online friendships with others in the Arrow fandom. LolliliciousLolly also commented, when being interviewed, that she has made several close friendships through fan fiction, even visiting and staying with her fan-fiction friends when she visited the USA.

These friendships and interactions can result in fan-fiction stories being written as ‘gifts’. When writing a gift story, the writer will write a story that they know a friend would like to read or a story that they would like them to read. On AO3, there is a function that allows writers to ‘gift’ the story to a person if they also have a profile on the website. poisonandwine wrote in the author’s note at the beginning of her story
on fanfiction.net: ‘This is a birthday gift for the lovely (don’t tell her I said that) Caryn, aka caromyqueen on tumblr’. The general public can read the ‘gifted’ story and the author will occasionally explain this gift in the author’s notes, giving general fan-fiction readers an insight into why the story has been gifted.

The interactions and friendships that are forged between fan-fiction writers can result in them creating stories together. For example, four fan-fiction writers have written a round-robin style story ‘Meryl vs. Queen: Prank War’ on AO3, based on the television series Arrow. Here, each of the writers wrote one chapter before passing the story on to the next writer, resulting in four different chapters being written by four different writers. Prompts are another way that fan-fiction writers collaboratively create fan-fiction stories. Prompts are particularly common during the northern hemisphere summer hiatus of television shows—from July to early October. On Tumblr and other fandom forums, some fans will give weekly or daily story prompts for writers to attempt. Sometimes these prompts will be attached to the requirement that they should be ‘flash fiction’, meaning that they should be written, edited and posted in one hour or less. During 2014 examples of these challenges were the ‘Olicity Hiatus Project’ and ‘Olicity Flash Fiction’ challenges by IT_Queen on Tumblr.

The numerous kinds of fan-fiction stories that exist all seek to engage in a conversation with and about the canon by using aspects of it as a launching point. By engaging in fan fiction, fans are seeking to demonstrate their interpretations of the source text, critique the storyline, or even use fan fiction as a vehicle for social
commentary. The texts become the locus of ‘intra-textuality’ as further meaning-making occurs within the fan fiction that is produced with the addition of further commentary or chapters (Booth 2010, pp. 44–46). The fans are extending the communicative act of the canon beyond the source media. The canon is no longer the communicative endpoint; rather, it becomes the impetus for further engagement. Fans do not want to merely consume texts and media products—they wish to engage with them. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, ‘Conflict’, texts written as fan fiction and posted on online fan-fiction sites are done so with the intent of conveying a perspective or reading of the canon, as well as conversing with the canon and other fans (Jamison 2013, p. 231).

Fan-fiction stories allow fans to engage with each other, and the canon in an open-ended manner, often resulting in the focus of the stories not being on the finished product, but on the process of creating and engaging. This can be seen in the ways that AO3 and fanfiction.net display fan-fiction stories that are uploaded to the websites. The default ordering of the stories posted on both AO3 and fanfic.net is by date and time. The most recent stories are posted at the top of the first page. Older stories, or complete stories that are no longer being updated, are progressively pushed further and further back in the list of stories. This results in stories that are no longer updated being buried underneath the plethora of new stories that are posted on a daily basis. As older stories’ visibility diminishes, traffic and interaction with these stories also drops, resulting in authors and their stories being most popular when they are in the process of being written and updated. For example, the
height of fan author Cassandra Clare's *Harry Potter* fan fiction was during the period that Clare was writing and posting the stories.

I also saw this in my own experience of writing fan fiction. My fan-fiction story ‘The Hunting Competition’ based on the BBC television series *Merlin* (2008–2012) was viewed 38 times during April 2015. In May 2013 when I posted the final chapter of this story it was viewed 1419 times. The following month, when I was no longer posting new content, engagement with the story immediately dropped off to 171 views. This demonstrates that fan-fiction stories lose popularity and relevance once the writers, readers or other fans are no longer engaging with them. However, the purpose of these stories was to explore with other fans of the original work an idea that the writer had, not to produce a polished final product entirely congruent with the canon.

Due to the vibrant sociality that surrounds the creation of fan works, fans refer to fan works that have had all traces of their fan origins removed before being published as having had their serial numbers filed off; in other words, the texts are stripped of their history (De Kosnik 2015, p. 121; Jamison 2013, p.44). Fan authors, generally, do not seek monetary compensation for the product that they produce and the labour they put into the creation of these works. Yet it is not unheard of for fan works to be sold. Historically fans of Sherlock Holmes have revised fan works and published them as ‘original’ works (Jamison 2013, p. 44). As previously stated,

72 *Merlin* is a British fantasy adventure television series that aired from 2008 until 2012 on the BBC. The series follows the adventures of the mythical wizard Merlin, reimagined as a young man.
*Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James was originally written as *Twilight* fan fiction. As it was AU/AH fan fiction, the characters, world and content were sufficiently different from the original canon for the work to only require minor alterations for it then to be marketed and sold commercially as a novel, and later, as a Hollywood film.

A lesser-known example is that by Cassandra Clare. As introduced in Chapter 4: Authorship, Clare was a well-known *Harry Potter* fan-fiction author, writing under the name Cassandra Claire. In 2004, Clare wrote a fan-fiction story titled ‘Mortal Instruments’. Some fan fiction participants have claimed that the fan works ‘Mortal Instruments’ was plagiarised (Fathallah 2016, p. 269). Since then Clare has gone on to write the ‘original’ series *The Mortal Instruments* 73 (2007–2014), which includes some aspects of the plot and character development from her fan fiction (Fanlore 2015a). The published works that were produced have had their fannish roots removed. The book series has been commercially popular among the general public with the first book in the *Mortal Instruments* series, *City of Bones* (2007), turned into a feature-length Hollywood film in 2013 (IMDb 2013) and a Netflix series.

**Commercialization and fan fiction**

Resistance to commercialization appears to be a core value of those that participate in fan fiction. The emergence of the fan-fiction website *Archive of Our Own* was in

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73 *The Mortal Instruments* is a young adult, urban fantasy book series written by Cassandra Clare between 2007 and 2012 published by Margaret K. McElderry Books. It follows the adventures of Clary who discovered she is a ‘shadowhunter’, and must help battle demons and other supernatural creatures to keep the world safe.
direct response to the emergence of FanLib, an enterprise that sought to commercialize fan fiction launched in 2007 (Jenkins 2007). CR was a fan-fiction participant then and remembers the furore that occurred when FanLib was first created. CR commented that FanLib:

... was very commercially driven. It was umm - driven by people who didn’t really understand the subculture. But they’d seen people doing all this stuff and sort of thought, how can ... how can we get involved with this? And they had - ah - a fair bit of spin and jargon about how it was the new shiny thing. They had these incredible, sort of, copybook ads - one which was particularly memorable, which was a couple of like pictures of a guy, and there was this weakling scrawny looking guy and it was like 'life without fandom', and then there was this big tough muscular looking guy 'life with fandom', and it was - ah - what demographic are you even trying to market to here? Fan fic is not a manly thing you know. It was like they’d taken a generic ad template and just pasted their text on it. It was just utterly bizarre ... and there was massive ... push back from everyone that was actually in the community about these outsiders coming in and trying to monetise us, by giving us a product we didn’t want or need.’

When FanLib was first proposed, astolat, a BNF, wrote the following about the project on her LiveJournal account:

... the people behind fanlib ... don’t actually care about fanfic, the fanfic community, or anything except making money off content created entirely by other people ... They don’t have a single fanfic reader or writer on their board; they don’t even have a single woman on their board. They’re creating a lawsuit-bait site while being bad potential defendants, and they deserve to be chased out being pelted with rocks ... (astolat 2007).

In seeking to highlight the problems with FabLib, astolat’s post outlines several of the social norms and values of those who participate in fan fiction—namely, that fan
fiction is primarily a nonprofessional women’s space, that fan fiction is the intellectual property of those that write the fiction, that fan fiction should be engaged with among a group of like-minded people, and that it is not primarily financially motivated. The conceptualization of fan fiction as a space for women is also acknowledged in academic literature (De Kosnik 2015; Scott 2015; Stanfill 2015).

Fan fiction is seen as ‘women’s work’—derivative, amateur, unseen and unpaid (Stanfill 2015, p. 136).

The characterisation of fan fiction as non-professional, amateur and non-commercial is then embraced by astolat in her suggestion for a new website for fan fiction. astolat proposes that fan-fiction writers have a space of their own, where the values, norms and beliefs of those that participate in fan fiction can be promoted:

“We need a central archive of our own ... Something that would NOT hide from google [sic] or any public mention, and would clearly state our case for the legality of our hobby up front, while not trying to make a profit off other people’s IP [intellectual property] and instead only making it easier for us to celebrate it, together, and create a welcoming space for new fans that has a sense of our history and our community behind it.’ (astolat 2007)

astolat then goes on to outline several ‘necessary features’ that a fan site should have, further detailing the culture of fan fiction. These necessary features include the site being:

‘... run BY fanfic readers FOR fanfic readers’

‘... allowing ANYTHING – het, slash, RPF, chan, kink, highly adult …’
‘... giving explicit credit to the original creators while clearly disclaiming any official status’

‘... allowing the poster to control her stories (i.e. upload, delete, edit, tagging)’

‘... allowing users to leave comments’ (astolat 2007)

Finally, amongst astolat’s ‘dream features’ for the site is ‘mentoring: collect up writing advice, fannish history, acafandom, and create a simple FAQ’ (astolat 2007). astolat’s requirements for the fan-fiction site outlines the ‘natural’ way that fan fiction is typically engaged with by fan-fiction participants, while emphasising the values of those who participate in fan fiction.

Interviewee CC explained that, following on from astolat’s call for ‘an archive of our own’, astolat put out a call for volunteers to be on the first board of directors to assist in the creation of the website. CC volunteered and was picked as a ‘token non-American’ on the board, assisting in the initial creation of Archive of Our Own. This resulted in the fan-fiction website AO3 being built as a direct response to astolat’s call for ‘an archive of our own’ after FanLib attempted to commercialize fan fiction. The BNF status of astolat, as well as the contributions of those that participate in fan fiction, worked to lend the creators legitimacy for the website when it was created. Finally, the construction of the website conforms to the social and cultural norms of fan-fiction participants, legitimizing AO3 as a site of fan interaction. This call by astolat (for a fan-fiction website that interacts with authors through mentoring, FAQs and commenting) positions fan fiction as a socially constructed
product created through a series of communicative acts, resulting in social interaction being a necessary component in its production.

**The morality and legality of fan fiction**

In her blog post ‘An Archive of One’s Own’, astolat was responding to the prevailing belief among fan-fiction participants that fan fiction is not legal. The market for corporations to monetise fan fiction exists because fan fiction has traditionally lacked legal and moral legitimacy. The legal standing of fan fiction, and its relationship to intellectual copyright law, has been examined by authors such as Rebecca Tushnet (2011; 2007; 2004; 1997), Lawrence Lessig (2008; 2004), Abigail De Kosnik (2009), Kai Falkenberg (2009), Lee Goldberg (2006), Christopher Kelty (2004) and Peter Jaszi (1994). As was discussed in Chapter 5: Authority, copyright law is perceived to protect the labour that individuals have put into their creations (Davison, Monotti & Wiseman 2008, p. 1). Once created, objects do not need to be registered to be protected by copyright law, as this law is automatically applied to material once it is produced in a physical form (Davison, Monotti & Wiseman 2008, p. 178). This is intended to encourage further creation in the creative and intellectual industries, as ownership is understood as an incentive for intellectual property to be produced (Davison, Monotti & Wiseman 2008, p. 2). This allows individuals who hold rights over the creative works that they produce to gain monetary compensation for the labour that was put into their creation.

Regardless of fan fiction’s legal standing, there is a perception among fan-fiction writers that the production of fan fiction sits within a legal grey area. As we have
seen in Chapter 4: Authorship many canon authors typically see fan fiction as a violation of copyright law and an infringement on their intellectual property. Fan writers believe that canon (original) authors do not prosecute fan-fiction readers and writers as long as a profit is not made (Lessig 2004, p. 161). Additionally, some fan-fiction participants ascribe moral and legal rights to canon creators over the works that fan-fiction writers create. The legal disclaimers that are at the beginning of many fan-fiction stories indicate fan-fiction participants’ belief in the potential illegality of their actions.

Many of these legal disclaimers take a standardized format, with writers stating that the characters, world or setting belong to the television station that produces the show, the auteur of the television series, or the author of the novel. Some writers will also point out in the disclaimers what they believe belongs to them. Fan-fiction writer A_Contradiction writes at the beginning of her story Silver Arrow ‘Obligatory Disclaimer: I own nothing here, ’cept [sic] Nixie and Lucy [the writer’s original characters] who are all MINE’. At times, these relatively standard disclaimers are personalised; for example, grizzlyless wrote at the beginning of one fan-fiction story: ‘Disclaimer: I disclaim any and all right to the Vampire Diaries franchise. I’d welcome stock options though’.

Many fan-fiction writers acknowledge that they don’t believe that these disclaimers have any legal bearing on the status of their stories. Fan-fiction reader MB states ‘Everyone knows they don’t own it [the canon world]’ but, as fan-fiction writer SK pointed out when interviewed, the disclaimers are ‘... done out of respect ... we’re
[fan-fiction authors] not trying to steal all of these characters - we are borrowing them out of love for them, and just playing with them. So yeah, we [fan-fiction authors] do it out of respect …’ The disclaimers position the canon creators as the rightful legal and moral owners of the canon media that fan-fiction participants are ‘borrowing’ or ‘playing with’. SK’s statement that the disclaimers are done out of ‘respect’ appears to imply that the fan-fiction writers are trying to acknowledge the moral and legal rights they perceive the canon creators hold over the original canon works. The disclaimers, in some ways, are an acknowledgement that fan fiction could be interpreted as unlawful and disrespectful, or immoral, by those not socialized into fan-fiction practices. The disclaimers also demonstrate that fan-fiction participants doubt the legal and moral legitimacy of fan fiction. In light of these doubts, what commercial enterprises such as Kindle Worlds can offer fan-fiction participants is a platform that allows fans to engage in a legally and morally legitimate form of fan fiction.

The legal and traditional legitimacy of Kindle Worlds

The Kindle Worlds website is structured as a site of professional writing, orientated towards a consuming public. It describes itself as:
... a publication submission platform where you choose a licensed World, read the Content Guidelines ... write your story, upload ... and accept a publishing contract with Amazon Publishing. (Amazon 2013)

The language used, and the steps outlined in the description above, appear to formalise the process of fan writing. The description of Kindle Worlds as a ‘publication submission platform’—in addition to stating that fan writers ‘accept a publishing contract with Amazon publishing’—professionalizes the writing that participants submit to the platform. Those who submit works to Kindle Worlds become published writers with publishing contracts.

The structure of Kindle Worlds results in the platform being a unidirectional form of communication. The platform removes the fan author from a collective of readers and writers, bestowing a different status from the readers. This re-creates the separation that traditionally exists between readers and writers in published texts (Bruns 2010, p. 2). Kindle Worlds direct writers to submit a finished and polished product to Amazon. Before the stories are published on the Kindle Worlds platform they are read and reviewed by editors at Kindle Worlds (Amazon 2015a). Once approved for publication, the stories are promoted and sold through Kindle Worlds, packaged with cover art and icons reminiscent of physical books (Amazon 2015b).

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74 As stated earlier, a ‘licenced world’ refers to the canon that Kindle Worlds has negotiated legal rights for. For example, Hugh Howey’s Silo series would be a licenced world, as would the fictional universe that the characters from The Vampire Diaries exist within. The legal licence only extends to the media products that Kindle Worlds has negotiated use over, and not all media products that potentially exist within the wider canon.
The fan authors submit works as complete stories, rather than collaboratively created pieces of work.

As Kindle Worlds is a part of Amazon’s wider business model, the stories submitted are intended to be commercially viable products that can be sold. In light of this, Amazon states that they ‘... reserve the right to take down any work ... if we become aware of infractions [to their rules]’, and that this is done ‘... to reduce anything that may result in a poor reading experience ...’ for consumers (Amazon 2015a). Once a story is submitted to the platform Amazon reserves the right to decide when and if they publish the story (Amazon 2015a). This resembles traditional publishing models, as it leaves no space for readers to have input before the story is finished, effectively removing the social aspect of creating and engaging with fan fiction.

The overall format of Kindle Worlds, and its traditional publishing structure, repeatedly re-establishes the separation of consumers and producers. This is perhaps most evident in readers’ ability to interact with the writers of the stories. Readers are able to write reviews of Kindle Worlds stories on the Amazon website as an indication of their enjoyment of the text as a whole, and as a way for others to judge the product. However, the review process on Kindle Worlds is titled ‘Customer Reviews’, emphasising that readers are not co-producers, but customers purchasing a product. The reviews are meant to be for consumers, rather than a form of direct communication with the author. For example, a review of the work Silo 49: Dark Till Dawn on Kindle Worlds reads: ‘Ann has done it again. As the third part of the "Silo 49" trilogy, Dark Till Dawn was a real treat ... I highly recommend Dark Till Dawn ...’
(Christy, n.d.). This kind of review does not invite, or allow, a response from the author or other readers, thus limiting the interaction that readers and writers can have.

Establishing businesses can align themselves with established practices that are seen as legitimate by their target audience (Suchman 1995, p. 588). The focus on the consumer, the editorial and publishing process, as well as the marketing of a polished, authored, professional piece of work for commercial consumption all construct Kindle Worlds as a division of the publishing industry. Aligning emerging business with established practices allows new industries to build legitimacy by integrating themselves with pre-existing taken-for-granted activities (Suchman 1995, pp. 586–587). The focus on replicating traditional publishing formats through Kindle Worlds appears to be done to lend credibility to the stories published there. Often fan fiction is derided as being derivative and unoriginal, and therefore not a ‘legitimate’ form of writing. The attempt by Kindle Worlds to establish stories distributed through the platform as polished and professional, and visually reminiscent of physical publishing works, attempts to integrate Kindle Worlds as a new platform under the umbrella of the publishing industry whose legitimacy is pre-existing and taken for granted. This ‘associated legitimacy’ is further established as Kindle Worlds is a subdivision of Amazon, a large, international, reputable business that primarily sells published original works. Thus, Kindle Worlds taps into the legitimacy that both the traditional publishing industry and Amazon, as its parent company, hold.
The moral legitimacy of Kindle Worlds

The *Kindle Worlds* platform places a strong emphasis on licensing ‘worlds’ for participants on the platform to use. On *Kindle Worlds*, several ‘worlds’ are advertised that can be written in. These ‘worlds’ have had legal permission gained from the ‘world creators’, or the legal owners of the canon, for fan writers to create stories within that world, as long as they subscribe to the rules set by both Amazon and the world creator (Amazon 2015a). The concept of a creator holding ‘natural rights’ over their creations developed in relation to copyright law (Davison, Monotti & Wiseman 2008, p. 3). As discussed in Chapter 5: Authority, it has been argued that creative material, such as literary and artistic works, are an extension of the creator, and therefore, the creator should have influence over how the property is used (Davison, Monotti & Wiseman 2008, p. 3). This concept of natural rights has resulted in creators gaining moral rights and authority over the works that they produce (Davison, Monotti & Wiseman 2008, p. 8).

The fact that the ‘world creators’ have had input into the use of their product on *Kindle Worlds* speaks to the ‘natural rights’ that creators are perceived to hold over their works. The engagement with the ‘world creators’ appears to let them set limitations on what can and cannot be done to the characters and world, of which they are the creator, fulfilling the moral rights the canon creator is understood to have over their works. According to Hugh Howey, an author who has licensed his *Silo* series (2011–2013) through *Kindle Worlds*, what makes *Kindle Worlds* different from previous attempts to commercialize fan fiction is that:
... the license holders are the ones making their worlds available to fan fiction authors. It’s consensual. Fan fiction is being celebrated and legitimized. And because it’s Amazon, the link between an author’s fan fiction and their own work is very strong. ... I see this as a way for readers to transition into authors. (personal communication)

Howey’s statement makes a clear distinction between ‘readers’ and ‘authors’, implying that fan-fiction writers are not ‘authors’ or creators; they are still readers and consumers of products. However, Kindle Worlds is an avenue to legitimize fan-fiction writers, providing a gateway to transition from writing stories to being ‘authors’.

The conception that fan writers are not ‘real authors’ constructs fan writers as needing to transition into ‘legitimate’ authors or one day write ‘original’ works. Many fan-fiction writers have also articulated this distinction between fan-fiction writers and ‘real authors’. Several fan-fiction writers interviewed for this research commented that they would like to write their own ‘original’ work, or are writing an ‘original’ story. A Contradiction, LoliliciousLolly and Lilbit846 all have the goal of one day writing and distributing original works through a publishing company. The distinction uses the concept that many fan authors have—that writing fan fiction is ‘just for fun’. Kindle Worlds focuses on marketing fan fiction like original works. It links the fan fiction writer to the canon author. This places them in the category of ‘author’ like the canon creator, instead of the fan-fiction writer being more closely associated with those that consume fan fiction: the reader. The contractual obligations of the fan writer and the limitations placed upon their writing result in Kindle Worlds being a conclusively legal and moral space where fan-written stories
can be written. This allows Kindle Worlds to operate in a space that—to ‘world creators’, the publishing industry, and the general public—is morally and legally legitimate.

**Conclusion**

Kindle World’s legitimacy stems from its construction as a legal, professional and moral form of fan engagement. This allows Kindle Worlds to ‘borrow’ existing legitimacies that exist in the wider society, presenting the platform as a ‘legitimate’ form of fan engagement to the general public and canon producers. Its focus on a customer experience and the creation of a polished, sellable product, as well as its format and organisation, prioritizes the creation of polished, finished products. These products could be conceived of as more ‘professional’ and, therefore, more ‘legitimate’ to the general public than the collaborative, social aspects of creating fan fiction. This then allows Kindle Worlds to ‘borrow’ legal, moral and traditional legitimacy from the established publishing industry. However, to those socialized into current online fan-fiction practices, Kindle Worlds and the replication of ‘traditional’ publishing formats do not align with their social norms.

Legitimacy is the belief that actions are proper within socially constructed norms, values and belief (Suchman 1995, p. 574). The lack of engagement with the social norms and values of ‘typical’ online fan fiction on Kindle Worlds has resulted in the platform lacking legitimacy among those already socialized into online fan-fiction practices. Engaging with fan fiction is an inherently social act. Although all media products are communicative acts, traditional media sees the transmission of a media
product, and its subsequent consumption, as the completion of the communicative act. *Kindle Worlds* replicates this structure of production and consumption of media products through its story submission and publication process. However, the decidedly interactive nature of fan fiction falls into the tradition of ‘remix culture’, which sees the extension of communicative acts beyond the initial piece of media (Bird 2011; Cover 2013; Deuze 2007).

The commercial and legal legitimacy gained by *Kindle Worlds* stems from a focus on traditional categories such as individuals as creators and stories as commercial products. Legitimacy, however, is gained from being in line with beliefs, social norms and practices. In contrast to the polished, complete and publishable format that *Kindle Worlds* expects from the stories uploaded to its website, fan-fiction stories posted on commonly used fan-fiction sites such as AO3 and *fanfic.net* are dynamic, constantly evolving sites of communicative and social acts. *Kindle Worlds* has not taken the social norms of ‘typical’ online fan fiction into consideration when establishing their legitimacy as a platform for fan engagement. The lack of social interaction through *Kindle Worlds* discourages those already socialized into fan-fiction writing through such mediums as *fanfic.net* and AO3. The lack of writers posting stories on *Kindle Worlds* suggests that, although *Kindle Worlds* may appear more legitimate to the general public, its legitimacy does not extend to those already socialized into ‘typical’ online fan fiction.

Fan fiction’s resistance to commercialization, despite the legitimizing effects ‘professionalising’ fan fiction has, demonstrates the limitations of corporations’
power over fans activities. Fan-fiction writers’ limited engagement with the Kindle Worlds platform is an assertion of their power in the field. By rejecting commercialization and legal legitimacy they are prioritising the social norms that exist in the field of media production and consumption among fan consumers. Without an understanding of the social norms and processes of ‘typical’ online fan fiction, the commercialising focus of corporations neglects what makes ‘legitimate’ fan fiction. This, therefore, is possibly why fan-fiction writers have not overwhelmingly adopted Kindle Worlds, or other attempts to commercialize fan fiction.
Chapter 8: Summary and review

Each of the chapters has examined some of the ways that social agents such as fans, canon producers and industry (e.g. Amazon) have sought to express their power, legitimacy and authority over the field of media production and consumption. Authorship has been used by all of the social agents outlined as a concept that embodies power, authority and legitimacy within the field. Fans, canon producers and industry have all appealed to the notion of ‘authorship’ in order to exert power within a field that is constantly evolving.

This thesis has focused on the shifting relations and conceptions of authorship that exist between social agents within the field of media production and consumption. As online fan fiction, fandom and its associated practices are firmly entrenched in Web 2.0 and remix culture. They have provided an engaging avenue in which to examine these shifting dynamics. Focusing specifically on the Arrow fandom, but also using other canons, I have outlined some of the relationships that exist between consumers, producers and industry. This thesis has broken down current understandings of authorship within the realm of Web 2.0 practices and
technologies, and highlight how the notion of authorship still plays a central role in how consumers and producers conceptualize engagement with media. In examining these relationships between canon producers, media corporations and fans, through the lens of fan fiction and fan-associated practices, I have shown that each of these groups exist within a series of complex relationships with one another, where a struggle emerges for control over the ways in which the media are interpreted, used and consumed.

The thesis argues that, although media producers and consumers are aware of the changing practices that have emerged with social media and digital remix culture, traditional understandings of authorship, production and audience remain central to consumers’ and producers’ understandings of their rights and identity. Owing to the disparity between social practices and understandings of engagement with media, the relationships between media producers, consumers and industry are in constant negotiation, thus resulting in a media landscape that is in a state of flux. With this shifting landscape in mind, the roles of consumers and producers were examined through the negotiation of relations that occur during sites of interaction between media producers, consumers and industry via the themes of authority, conflict, legitimacy and authorship.

These relationships were initially examined by exploring the evolution of written media and fan fiction as a result of the technological and social changes that have occurred. It was shown that traditional conceptions of authorship, production, and consumption emerged in relation to these changes. In showing the development of
these ‘traditional’ notions, I aimed to demonstrate that these categories are not innate. This allowed for the illumination of subjected knowledges (Foucault 1980, p. 81) that challenges accepted perceptions of ownership, authorship, consumption and production of media as being inherent. I then outlined how Web 2.0, like the invention of the printing press and the spread of literacy, has been conceptualized as a new chapter in technology, where audiences can more easily participate in the active consumption and creation of media content (Gauntlett 2011, p. L.218).

Chapter 4: Authorship explicitly explored how canon creations and consumers understand the role and significance of authorship. Fan and canon creators both use the concept of the ‘author’ to signify legitimacy, authority, power and ownership over media items. The chapter demonstrates that both fans and canon creators stress concepts such as emotional, creative and intellectual labour in determining ownership and authority over the fan works. This authority, in turn, legitimizes their engagement with canon media. Canon creators construct fan works as an exploitation of the emotional and economic labour that they have put into the construction of the canon, thus constructing fan fiction as a violation of authors’ rights. Alternatively, fan creators construct their engagement with fan works differently depending on the context. When discussing their creation of fan works in relation to canon creators, fans are often quick to downplay their labour as ‘play’ and stress canon creators’ ownership over the canon works. However, when discussing their fan works independently of canon creators, fans often highlight the emotional,
creative and intellectual labour that is put into their creation, in order to construct themselves as the ‘authors’ of the fan works.

Chapter 5: Authority examined media producers’ exertion of authority through an analysis of Stephen Amell’s Facebook page and the television series Supernatural. The chapter outlined the emergence of modern conceptions of author and authorship, showing how authorship is an identity imbued with authority and legitimacy. The chapter then demonstrated how the emergence of Web 2.0 has not only allowed fans to more easily create and distribute their own content and interpretations of the media to a consuming public, but also allowed content creators to ‘talk back’ to fans. The series Supernatural has aired several episodes that directly engaged with fans and fan fiction, reprimanding particular types of fan engagement with the text. Additionally, Stephen Amell’s Facebook page has allowed him to present himself as a source of discursive power and authority over the series in which he plays a starring role. It was argued that both the producers of the series Supernatural and Stephen Amell’s comments on his Facebook page hold pre-existing social capital that lend their opinions and perspectives authority over an average fan, thus allowing canon creators, and those associated with canon production, an avenue through which to talk back to fans in order to exert their authority over the media.

Chapter 6: Conflict then explored the way that conflict over shipping in fandoms can be viewed as conflict over the authority to influence the hegemonic reading of a text. The chapter used the conflict that occurs over shipping in the Arrow fandom as a
case study. Online conflicts that occur through trolling or flaming were argued to challenge individuals’ interpretative frameworks. It was shown that in disrupting online discourses, dissenting posters strive to disrupt the authority of the original poster, seeking to assert their own power over the social interaction that is occurring. By disputing the way that groups read the text, as represented by the subscription to or rejection of a ship, the individuals instigating the conflict are exerting their power by disrupting the discourse that seeks to legitimize and lend authority to that interpretation of the text. Conflict over ships can then be seen as a struggle for power and authority over the ways that media products are read.

Chapter 7: Legitimacy demonstrates how legitimacy depends on the social and cultural context. This chapter shows that the online platform *Kindle Worlds* sought to commercialize fan fiction and establish itself as a legitimate site of fan-fiction engagement by ‘borrowing’ existing legal, economic and social legitimacies. However, the legitimacy that *Kindle Worlds* sought to highlight was based upon the authority and values of the general public and the publishing industry, rather than its target audience. In misreading the values subscribed to, and the social structure of, online fan fiction, *Kindle Worlds* highlighted aspects of its platform that were not valued by ‘typical’ fan-fiction participants. The commercial publishing site’s associated social capital, as a part of the wider publishing industry, did not translate into being a site of authority or legitimacy among online fan-fiction participants. Fan-fiction participants’ lack of engagement with *Kindle Worlds*, and their rejection
of previous online attempts to commercialize fan fiction, indicate a rejection of the legitimacy of these websites.

**Intersections**

The notions of authority, conflict and legitimacy have all been focused on in separate chapters throughout this thesis. Each of these themes sought to build upon and deconstruct current understandings of authorship in order to present authors and authorship as a socially constructed notion that is affected by technological, social and economic factors. Moving beyond the notion of authorship these themes also speak to a wider conceptualization of how power affects, and is exerted by, those engaged in the consumption and production of media products. Each of these themes—authority, conflict and legitimacy—can be understood as a way that power is negotiated, reinforced or undermined.

Foucault conceptualizes power as materialising through commonplace relations, rather than something that is wielded or imposed upon individuals. This results in individuals being constantly subjected to, and employing, power in their everyday practices (Foucault 1980, p. 98; McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 89). The consequence of this is that power is constantly negotiated through the interactions between individuals and groups. The ways that media producers, consumers and industry seek to reinforce their authority, legitimacy and consequently authorship can then be seen as the ways that these parties are affected by, or seek to exert, power.
Conceptualising mass media as a field in the Bourdieusian sense, in terms of a microcosm or social universe (Bourdieu 2005, p. 33) further reinforces this conception of consumers, producers and industries’ actions as a negotiation of power. Bourdieu (2005, p. 36) states that: ‘One of the general properties of fields is that there are struggles within fields for the power to impose the dominant vision of the field ...’. The conflicts that emerge between consumers and producers can, therefore, be conceptualized as conflict over the power to determine the groups’ terms of engagement with one another in order to define the ‘dominant vision of the field’. When media producers such as Stephen Amell, or the producers of the television series *Supernatural*, use their cultural capital to reward or discipline fan approaches to their media, they are seeking to determine the accepted terms of engagement with media. As fans erupt into conflict over ships, they are struggling over the ways that media is engaged with in a bid to impose a particular vision of the media or ‘field’. When companies such as Amazon, through initiatives like *Kindle Worlds*, seek to promote their company as the appropriate way to engage with media, they are again seeking to determine the way in which individuals engage with the ‘field’. Finally, as both canon creators and fan writers contest the notion of authorship, they are striving to define who has the authority, legitimacy and power to determine how texts can be used in a bid to determine the way that media should be engaged with.

In focusing on the relationships between those that engage with the creation, consumption and distribution of media products, it can be seen that power was both
exerted by, and affected, all parties in various ways. Although the power that is exerted by consumers, producers and industry is not done with the explicit purpose of imposing their perspectives on the field, the groups’ and individuals’ everyday interactions with one another inadvertently reinforce their own vision of the field, while questioning, or undermining, alternative perspectives.

**The bigger picture**

Using fan creativity and fan fiction online as a vehicle to explore online consumer and producer relationships has provided a window into seeing how new technologies have affected consumers’ relationships with media producers, other fans and industry. In doing this, this thesis has touched upon a range of wider issues that have potential legal, economic and social ramifications in regard to how media is created, engaged with, and distributed. New media, such as Web 2.0, have opened up the ways that media consumers and producers can interact with one another. Web 2.0 and remix culture have again, like past technological developments, brought the terms of engagement with media into question. As media corporations change the ways that they involve audiences in consuming products, this is also changing audiences’ expectations in regard to their rights and influence over the creation of media.

As we have discussed many early conversations around the use of the Internet focused on how the space was to be egalitarian, provide economic opportunity, and equalize access to knowledge and information (Mariscal 2005, p. 409). Although the structures of the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies equally allow engagement and
distribution to all who have the ability to access and engage, offline social and cultural structures are still relevant online. The negotiations of power relations that are visible online are a result of the tensions that arise with the emergence of new technologies, and the way that they are used with the pre-existing social and cultural structures.

The explosion of online remix has resulted in media producers and their lawyers questioning the legality of consumers’ use of their media products (Hetcher 2009; Lessig 2008; Lessig 2004; Tushnet 2007; Tushnet 2004). Although the technology online allows individuals to remix content with ease, content creators are often only happy to allow audience participation on their own terms. Much of online remix can be characterized as ‘fair use’ (Tushnet 2011, p. 2134); however, corporations and media producers typically encourage the perception of the illegality of remixes. While some media creators have policed the use of their media products by consumers, others have encouraged audiences to engage with the media. As I have previously stated, reality television shows are increasingly relying on audience participation to ‘vote out’ individuals, while television series such as *Glee*, *Sherlock*, and *Kyle XY* have all used various online platforms and social media campaigns to encourage fans to engage with one another, as well as the television series (Hills 2012; Stein 2010; Stork 2014). Online gaming platforms have also opened up the opportunity for players to create ‘mods’ (modifications), allowing users to customize their game places, and contribute to the wider gaming community (Kim 2014; Stald
These forms of co-production allow fans and general audiences alike to be active consumers of the media.

Traditional media producers are gaining ‘free labour’ from their audiences (De Kosnik 2013; Hong & Chen 2014). Audiences tweet, write fan fiction and blog posts. They create and engage with the media products, giving the media companies free marketing, consumer feedback and expanding their audience base. However, with this influence, audiences and fans are, at times, able to assert power over the narrative. They campaign to have characters returned or removed from television shows, bring television series back from cancellation, or determine the way that the narrative is read by audiences at large (Booth 2010, p. 3). For example, the character ‘Derpy Hooves’ in My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic75 was named by fans and increasingly included in the series due to fan engagement with the character (Johnson 2013, p. 142). Audiences increasingly see media engagement as their right, while media corporations and canon creators are often happy to allow audiences to play with media, but only on their own terms.

These technological and social changes are influenced by ‘traditional’ understandings of consumers’ and producers’ legal, social and economic relationships. As new interactions and relationships emerge between media

75 My Little Pony is a toy franchise by Hasbro. Several television series have been developed based on this toy line: My Little Pony 1986 - 1987, My Little Pony Tales 1992, and My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic 2010 - present. The series and toys are aimed at pre-teen girls, but have a large following of ‘bronies’. Bronies are adult male fans of the toys and series.
producers, consumers and industry, the social, economic and legal landscape will, and is, changing. Understanding the shifting relations between media producers, consumers and industry is essential knowledge when thinking about the ways that models of media production can be both financially and socially successful. Additionally, understanding the relationships between consumers, producers and industry is essential to understanding how copyright and intellectual property law have real-world ramifications, and how changes to these laws could potentially affect a consuming public.

**Conclusion**

This thesis sought to expand the existing body of scholarship that exists in regard to fan fiction by examining fan fiction and fan-related practices from the perspective of authorship and power relations. Building upon the concepts of produsage, remix culture and convergence culture, which have emerged from Web 2.0 practices, I sought to show how engagement with, and the creation of media products, exists within a series of relationships between media creators, consumers and industry.

In examining media consumption, as represented by fan fiction and fandom, it can be seen that power exists within an intricate series of relationships with consumers, industry and media producers. The emergence of Web 2.0 and its associated technologies has resulted in a shift in consumer and producer relationships resulting in an explosion of co-production. In examining the themes of authority, legitimacy, conflict and authorship through new media I sought to illuminate the constant
negotiations and exchanges between consumers, producers and industry, and to show how these relationships are multifaceted.

The current landscape of production, distribution and engagement with media is undergoing significant changes with the emergence of technologies that allow both audiences and producers to create and distribute creative products. These changes are not only relevant to fans, as a highly active subset of media consumers, but also the general populace. We all engage in the process of media production, consumption and distribution in our everyday lives, whether it is through tweeting about a television show, the uploading of photos on Instagram, or sharing a news article on Facebook. The ways in which the general public, corporations and traditional media producers conceptualize our ownership, rights and authority over the media we engage with can have significant legal, economic and social effects. Therefore, understanding the ways that power is both exerted and felt through our engagement with media is essential in our increasingly digital world.
# Glossary of common fan terms and abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acafan</td>
<td>An academic scholar that identifies as both fan and academic—the merging of the two labels shows that neither identity holds priority over the other.</td>
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<td>Author’s note (A/N)</td>
<td>Used by writers before, during, and after their stories to introduce the text, add comments or explanations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative Universe (A/U)</td>
<td>When characters from a canon are placed in a scenario, or ‘universe’, where they are not originally from.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Archive of Our Own (AO3)</td>
<td>An online fan-fiction website run and created by a panel of fan-fiction readers and writers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beta reader</td>
<td>Much like the editor of traditionally published works, beta readers read over fan-fiction texts looking to correct spelling and grammar mistakes as well as plot or character flaws. Often a fan-fiction author will have beta readers that regularly read their work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canon</td>
<td>Original published works, such as <em>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</em>.</td>
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<td>CMC</td>
<td>Computer-mediated content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cosplay</td>
<td>An abbreviation of ‘costume play’. It is the act of creating and wearing a costume based on a particular character from canon media, and is usually seen at science fiction and fantasy conventions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drabble</td>
<td>A fan fiction that is exactly 100-words long. The term is also used more generally to refer to short fan fiction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fan art</td>
<td>The creation of images through paint, photography, craft or digital manipulation whose content directly relates to a particular canon.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fan fiction (fanfic)</strong></td>
<td>Images, music, poetry, clips, movies or stories written by fans based on original published works.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fanfiction.net (fanfic.net; ff.net)</strong></td>
<td>A commonly used website that houses online fan fiction.</td>
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<td><strong>Fanon</strong></td>
<td>An interpretation of the canon that is so widely accepted by fans that it is generally accepted as canon.</td>
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<td><strong>Fandom</strong></td>
<td>Refers to the group of individuals who are fans of a particular individual, media item or sport.</td>
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<td><strong>Fanzine</strong></td>
<td>A fan-based and produced magazine devoted to a particular genre or specific canon.</td>
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<td><strong>Filking</strong></td>
<td>A musical genre related to science fiction and fantasy fandom. The lyrics to a popular song are rewritten, often with a humorous intent. The song is traditionally created and performed at fan conventions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Five Things or Five Times</strong></td>
<td>A fan-fiction story genre in which the author details five things or five instances along a particular theme to construct a story—for example, ‘The five times Felicity used Harry Potter pick-up lines’. The genre began as a specific fan-fiction community challenge, but has now evolved into a format in its own right.</td>
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<td><strong>Femslash</strong></td>
<td>A style of fan fiction where female characters are written to be in a romantic or sexual relationship. The characters usually take part in explicit sexual relations that are described in detail.</td>
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<td><strong>Flame</strong></td>
<td>A hostile complaint or tirade that is posted.</td>
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<td><strong>Fluff</strong></td>
<td>A story written about a specific couple, full of happy romance with little plot.</td>
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<td><strong>Headcanon</strong></td>
<td>A fan’s or writer's own understanding of the canon or background events that are not shown in the canon.</td>
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<td><strong>Hurt Comfort (H/C)</strong></td>
<td>A genre of fan-fiction writing in which a character is physically or emotionally hurt and another character takes care of them.</td>
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<td><strong>Live Action Role Playing (LARPing)</strong></td>
<td>When fans dress up as characters from a canon and act out a scenario, scene or game as those</td>
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<td><strong>One-shot</strong></td>
<td>A story that is completed in one chapter</td>
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<td><strong>One True Pairing (OTP)</strong></td>
<td>A type of shipping that focuses on an individual’s favourite couple—a couple the individual believes ‘belongs together’. The individual will ship these characters being together above all others characters.</td>
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<td><strong>Original Character (OC)</strong></td>
<td>When a fan writer introduces a new character (one that does not exist in the canon).</td>
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<td><strong>OT3</strong></td>
<td>A version of OTP that involves three characters. The individual believes that the three characters are most suited to be in a romantic relationship with each other.</td>
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<td><strong>Organisation of Transformative Works and Cultures (OTW)</strong></td>
<td>A non-profit organisation run by both fans and acafans alike, the OTW’s goal is to ‘preserve the history of fan works and fan cultures’. The OTW runs the online open-source peer-reviewed journal <em>Transformative Works and Cultures</em>, the online website <em>Fanlore</em> and the fan-fiction archive <em>AO3</em>, and conducts legal advocacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Read &amp; Review (R&amp;R)</strong></td>
<td>A request by the author for constructive criticism from their readers.</td>
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<td><strong>Real Person Fiction (RPF)</strong></td>
<td>A kind of fan fiction that revolves around the creators and/or actors involved in the creation of the canon. For example, an RPS written about the <em>Harry Potter</em> movies would involve stories written about Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson, rather than the characters Harry Potter and Hermione Granger.</td>
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<td><strong>Reddit</strong></td>
<td>A micro-blogging site where individuals pose a question or inquiry and then other ‘Redditors’ (users of the site) respond in a conversational-like forum.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shipping</strong></td>
<td>Short for ‘relationship’, shipping is the desire for two or more individuals to be in a romantic relationship. OTPs and OT3s are a type of shipping.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Song fiction (songfic)</strong></td>
<td>A story based on the lyrics of a song.</td>
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<td><strong>Slash</strong></td>
<td>A genre of fan fiction in which two or more male characters are written in a romantic or sexual relationship. The characters are usually...</td>
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<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>ToS</td>
<td>Short for Terms of Service; the site rules.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Troll</td>
<td>Someone who posts comments and stories intended to anger, aggravate or create conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trollfic</td>
<td>A fan-fiction story that is written with the deliberate intent to aggravate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidding</td>
<td>The creation of videos through original creation or manipulation where the content directly relates to a particular canon.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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Reference List of Television Series, Films and Fictional Books

Fictional Books

Baum, L. F, 1900, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, George M. Hill Company, Chicago.


Films/Musicals

The Avengers, 2012, Film, Marvel Studios.

Avengers: Age of Ultron, 2015, Film, Marvel Studios.


Star Wars Series, 1977–, Film Series, 20th Century Fox.

The Twilight Saga, 2008–2012, Film Series, Summit Entertainment.


The Wizard of Oz, 1939, Film, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Television Series


Australia’s Got Talent, 2007–, Television Series, 7 Network (until 2007) and Nine Network Australia (2008–).

The Big Bang Theory, 2007–, Television Series, Columbia Broadcasting System.

The Block, 2003–, Television Series, Nine Network Australia.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, 1997–2003, Television Series, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.


My Little Pony Tales, 1992, Television Series, The Disney Channel.


Once Upon a Time, 2011–, Television Series, American Broadcasting Company.
Shadowhunters, 2016–, Television Series, Freeform.

Sherlock, 2010–, Television Series, BBC Worldwide.


Appendix 1—Interview Schedule

Please note that due to the nature of semi-structured interviews the interview schedule provided below may not represent the exact structure, wording or questions that were asked of every participant interviewed. The participants’ responses were used to steer the interviews that were conducted and the questions outlined below served as guide to ensure particular topics were engaged with.

Establishing Questions

- Can you tell me about how you were first introduced to fan fiction?
- How long have you been reading and/or writing fan fiction?
- What fandoms are you involved with now, and in the past? Has this changed over time?
- What fan sites do you use? Have the sites you use changed over time?
- Do you only use sites designed for fans and fan fiction, or do you use other sites as well?
- What kinds of fan fiction do you read?
- What kind of fan fiction story do you look for?
- How do you pick the fan-fiction stories that you read?
- Do you write? If so what is your writing schedule like? How do you pick what you write?
- What do you like/enjoy about fan fiction, or the fan fiction sites that you use?
- Is there anything about fan fiction or the fan fiction sites you use that annoy you or you don’t like?
- How often do you engage with fan fiction?
Community/Interaction Questions

- Have you made friends through fan fiction? How much do you interact with other people involved with fan fiction?
- Do you have friends that you knew beforehand that are involved with fan fiction? Do you interact online with them?
- How often would you talk to/communicate with other fan-fiction writers?
- Do you participate in any of the forums, or activities (e.g. Yuletide) that are organised for fan fiction?
- How often to you comment, leave kudos, or interact with a story that you read?
- What aspects of online fan fiction do you think are the most important for being an active community member?
- What different kinds of people do you think are involved in fan fiction? If so could you describe them?
- What makes an active fan?
- What makes an active fan-fiction participant?

Copyright Questions

- What are your thoughts about fan fiction and copyright?
- How do you understand copyright requirements/laws/rights in relation to fan fiction?
- Many writers place disclaimers at the beginning of their stories stating what they do and do not own in regards to the following story. Why do you think people do this?
- In regards to a book these disclaimers clearly state that the author is the owner of the works. In reference to a television show, how do people pick the individual that they claim the show to belong to?
**Canon/Authorship/Writing Questions**

- Do you write fan fiction? If so, do you see yourself as the author of fan fiction or as the writer of fan fiction?
- If someone else took your fan fiction and claimed it as their own how would you feel?
- If a canon author requested you so stop writing fan fiction about their work would you? Why/why not?
- Who do you think writes fan fiction? (i.e. old, young, male, female, education, full-time workers, unemployed etc.)
- How do you feel when canon creators reference, give a nod to, recognise explicit things from the fandom? Do you appreciate it, find it insulting, or don’t really mind?
- What do you think the difference between a novel and fan fiction is?
- How do you feel about people making money from fan fiction?
- Have you heard of *Kindle Worlds*? What do you think of it?