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**LGBTQ+ FANFICTION OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE:
A GLOBAL PHENOMENON AND ITS IMPACTS ON
REPRESENTATIVITY**

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LGBTQ+ Fanfiction of the Marvel Universe:

A global phenomenon and its impacts on representativity

Trabalho de Graduação Integrado (TGI) apresentado ao Departamento de Letras Modernas da Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, da Universidade de São Paulo, como parte dos requisitos para obtenção do título de Bacharel em Letras.

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À Márcia.

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“Fanfiction is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk.¹”
(JENKINS, Henry - 1997)

¹ In TV's Dull Summer Days, Plots Take Wing on the Net. Available in <<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/18/business/in-tv-s-dull-summer-days-plots-take-wing-on-the-net.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>> Viewed on 20th, March of 2020.

ABSTRACT

FRANÇA LEME, J. **LGBTQ+ Fanfiction of the Marvel Universe: A global phenomenon and its impacts on media representativity.** Trabalho de Graduação Integrado (TGI) – Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2020. 102 p.

This TGI is the result of a qualitative and interpretative research and the method used for data collection was virtual ethnography. This research aims to analyze why the literature created by fans in virtual spaces has become a way of seeking LGBTQ+ representativity in a specific media universe in which this community has never been accepted. The purpose is not only to analyze this practice as a way of seeking representativity, but also to create virtual communities through an exchange of meanings between people with the same worldview. The goal of this research is to nourish the academia with what has been happening behind the curtains of cyber culture in the past decades, as well as to legitimize this practice that has been marginalized by a culture that devalues the diversity of interpretations found in the most diverse contexts. Taking these matters into consideration, we will reflect not only on cultural aspects, but also on social, discursive and ideological aspects that constitute LGBTQ+ representativeness through a literature that does not appropriate, but creates, from a canonical universe. To this end, we use discursive, cultural and queer theory to understand and apply them in the contexts of all the participants that were interviewed, as well as in the fanfiction and comments found in each of the selected stories. The participants, composed of both writers and readers of fanfiction, answered a questionnaire in which they were asked to reflect and give their opinions on this famous practice. Throughout the five chapters of TGI, the theories that support the construction of this analysis were presented, contextualized and sewn with the data.

Keywords: Fanfiction. Representativity. LGBTQ+. Meaning. Culture.

RESUMO

FRANÇA LEME, J. **Fanfiction LGBTQ+ do Universo Marvel**: Um fenômeno global e seus impactos na representatividade na mídia. Trabalho de Graduação Integrado (TGI) – Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2020. 102 f.

O presente TGI é resultado de uma pesquisa qualitativa e interpretativa e o método utilizado para coleta de dados foi etnografia virtual. Essa pesquisa tem como intuito analisar o motivo pelo qual a literatura criada pelos fãs em espaços virtuais tem se tornado uma forma de buscar representatividade LGBTQ+ em um específico universo midiático no qual essa comunidade nunca foi aceita. O propósito não é apenas analisar essa prática como uma forma de buscar representatividade, mas também de criar comunidades virtuais através de uma troca de sentidos e significados de pessoas com a mesma visão de mundo. Os objetivos dessa pesquisa é nutrir o meio acadêmico com o que vem acontecendo por trás das cortinas dentro da cultura cibernética nas últimas décadas, assim como legitimar essa prática que foi tão marginalizada pela cultura que desvaloriza as diversas interpretações encontradas nos mais diversos contextos. A partir dessas questões refletimos não somente sobre aspectos culturais, mas também sociais, discursivos e ideológicos que constituem a representatividade LGBTQ+ através de uma literatura que não se apropria, mas cria, a partir de um universo canônico. Para tal fim, utilizamos, ensinamentos discursivos, culturais e de teoria queer para entender e aplicar nos contextos dos participantes entrevistados e assim como nas histórias e comentários selecionados. As participantes, composto tanto por escritoras e leitoras de fanfiction, responderam a um questionário no qual as colocou para refletirem e opinarem sobre essa prática tão famosa. Ao longo dos cinco capítulos do TGI, as teorias que sustentam a construção dessa análise apresentadas, contextualizadas e costuradas com os dados.

Palavras-chave: Fanfiction. Representatividade. LGBTQ+. Significado. Cultura.

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1. Introduction

One thing I have noticed from the past nine years as a fanfiction reader is the tendency that is growing even more inside media spaces: LGBTQ+ pairings in fanfiction. Not only LGBTQ+ characters, but cis straight characters that are being described by fanfiction writers as a part of the LGBTQ+ community and in some cases, this vision has grown so powerful, that producers and directors are indirectly forced to explain the lack of representivity in their movies, TV shows, novels, etc. After being part of the community for so long and seen as it has grown so much, I have begun to wonder: Are the fanfiction writers wrong? Are their visions getting a little bit too far and are they letting their own identity struggles on a daily basis get in the way of ancient and known stories that should not be altered? Or is it possible that maybe this movement has been growing for so long that entertainment enterprises cannot hold the wave of change for so long anymore? Is the LGBTQ+ representation in fanfictions of mainly cis straight fandoms² a cry for help, a scream of anger, of fans that have been oppressed for too long and cannot handle one more day of going unrepresented by their most appreciated works anymore? In this research, we will see how fanfiction helped the LGBT community feel included in spaces they never were before ("geek" community, for example) and if LGBT fanfiction is a consequence of years of silence and desire for inclusion in spaces it has never been allowed to until nowadays. One thing we have to understand foremost is that this is not a practice that was born out of anger and revolt. These people do not despise mainstream media provided that if they did, they would never put so much effort in writing a heavily thought piece of work and publish it online. Fan fic writers are people that feel admiration for and inspiration from movies, characters or huge celebrities so much that they feel the need to give their interpretation of what they think that sometimes fit more in their lives.

One of the biggest websites of fanfiction is the *Archive of Our Own (Ao3)*. There have been many others, but Ao3, that was created 11 years ago, has its community very well established with over 2 million users, without counting the people who access the website without having an official account. Over 5.5 million fanfictions have been published out of 35 thousand different fandoms. There are stats calculated annually by aO3 (*Archive of Our Own*) that indicate which “ships” had more fictions written about them. *Ship* is an expression derived from

² *Fandom* is a group of fans of someone or something, especially very enthusiastic ones. Available in <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fandom>> Visited in September, 9th of 2020.

the word “relationship” and consists in a pairing that fans want desperately to be together in a romantic relationship, sometimes the names of the two characters that compose the *ship* are mixed together in one word. According to the stats calculated³ by the website of the TOP 100 fictional pairings between 2017 and 2019, 71 of them are LGBT: 66 stories of gay couples and 5 about lesbian couples. The sixth place of the list belongs to one of the biggest and most important characters of the Marvel Universe⁴, either Cinematic or in the *Comicverse* (term used when referring to the Comic Books Universe), Steve Rogers and Tony Stark, they are respectively Captain America and Iron Man. In this monograph I will analyze why both cis straight male characters, portrayed as nothing less than the upmost “macho” persona there is and ever was, are seen by millions of fans as a good fit and what does that represent for the LGBTQ+ fight over representativity and equality.

The fictional pairing between Captain America and Iron Man, called by the fandom “*Stevetony*”, has been famous for many years and we will understand how these two famous male characters created by extremely sexist and misogynist creators and by fans who have done justice to the creator’s point of view, have been helping millions of LGBTQ+ and female fans to feel included and to also feel encouraged to love such characters where in 10 years ago, they would be frowned upon to even talk about it. We will also see if it was fanfiction and the inspiration to have a cyberspace to express their identity that have helped them to feel included and to feel inspired to have a voice, or if this phenomenon of gay fanfiction about the Marvel Universe is a consequence of years and years of silence and oppression imposed by the cis straight fandom upon others that resulted in a cry for help and resistance by the LGBT community to the world; or even if the LGBT fanfiction in the Marvel Universe is the fanbase saying to the world that they are tired of not being represented in big and important social and culture media spaces.

1.1. Rationale

I am conducting this research because in my point of view, it is always very valuable to understand the fight before getting into it. When you find your goal, which in this case is to be

³ AO3 Ship Stats 2017-2019. Available in <<https://archiveofourown.org/works/19963579/chapters/47258407>> Visited in January, 9th of 2020.

⁴ Marvel Comics, American media and entertainment company that was widely regarded as one of the “big two” publishers in the comic industry. Its parent company, Marvel Entertainment, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Disney Company. Available in <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Marvel-Comics>> Visited in January, 9th of 2020.

included, to be seen and accepted as a human being and not a perversion, the fight to get there will be more objective. To have a goal is to understand what are your obstacles are and why they are there; having a goal is knowing you have to get somewhere, but there might be bumps along the road. With all the metaphors apart, LGBTQ+ fans have always been put in the shadow. When you are watching a movie or reading a book, if a male or female character does not talk about their sexuality, the receptor will always assume that character is straight, because it is the “normal” thing to be in the world we live in. Fanfiction is opening interpretation and discarding this basic view of things: “What if this character is gay?” Fanfiction is creating a new space free of straight centered point of views and it is important for all the LGBTQ+ community to see that there is a resistance somewhere and this resistance is growing even more. This is also important for LGBTQ+ fans to know that they are seen and they are not alone. If they want Captain America to be gay, that is okay, because Captain America or Iron Man would not be seen less as heroes just because of their sexualities, which means that if they are not less, then they [fans] would not be less as well, this could be a push they needed to find acceptance inside their hearts, because sometimes, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders need to accept themselves so the entrance in a world full of prejudice won’t affect their lives as much.

This is not only important to the LGBTQ+ fans, but to cisgender heterosexual fans as well. These fans must stop stereotyping characters in general and accept that their so beloved childhood heroes’ sexuality is open to interpretation and there is nothing they can do about it, even more than that, this factor will not change the plots. Most importantly, this monograph will show how important it is to include LGBTQ+ characters in whatever fandoms. In cis heterosexual male dominated environments, the representation becomes even more important because of the subversion behind of it, and a lot of the LGBTQ+ identity subverted to the environment. And like it or not, to write LGBTQ+ fanfiction in those kinds of fandoms is a political act because when you take characters that are not meant to be LGBTQ+ by the creators, or who are consistently made for a purpose to not “look” LGBTQ+ at all, you are making/creating your own space/identity scene in an non-accepting environment whether it is accepted and well seen or not. Due to oppression, LGBTQ+ community is silenced all the time, their very existence is put into question and cisgenders are always putting in debate LGBTQ+ works. When LGBTQ+ people are able to put their reality and their voices in something as “simple” as fanfiction, the same oppressive people will feel attacked. It is an establishment that the fandom the cis heterosexual people appropriated as theirs is not only their own, it’s the world’s, it’s part of the LGBTQ+ culture as well.

1.2. Methodology

This TGI is the result of a qualitative and interpretative research and the method used for data collection was virtual ethnography, due to the geographic distance between myself and most of the target community. Most of the community is found on social medias and the fact that fanfiction is mandatorily posted online, has decreased the chances that this community could grow to be a local group. According to Hine (2008), one of the things we must understand and admit primarily before reading a survey that contains virtual content is that the Internet experience is not separated from reality, especially today that people carry their mobile phones in their pockets as a mandatory accessory. Perhaps a few years ago where the main and sometimes only way to communicate online was via e-mail, virtual ethnography could be seen as disqualified and not as in-depth. However, with social networks, which are easy and free to access, one can no longer think the same way.

I have been part of the Marvel fandom for almost a decade now and this research came from a personal epiphany. Although I had thought of doing some research on this topic that had made me very curious on my own, I knew there were a lot of people out there that had the same views upon this matter as I did. Even though the fanfictions were conglomerated into specific sites, such as Ao3, fanfiction.net, etc., the community of readers and writers spread to several other social networks where communication was easier, such as Tumblr and Twitter. On these sites people can talk to each other, exchange ideas about new stories, post fanfic-inspired artworks, and so on. There are no location restrictions, only language related ones. People from all over the world enter these sites and English is the standard language. Because I learned English from the fanfics from an early age, I was able to take advantage of these communication sites to meet several readers.

I have an active Twitter account focused only on Marvel since 2015, meaning that it is not personal, but a "fan account", not talking about my personal life or my tasks. The only focus is to talk about things related to fandom. Anyway, as I have had this account active for a long time and already have over 900 followers, I took the opportunity to conduct a survey with other writers and readers, as I knew that many of them were following me just as I was following them back. In March 2019, I posted a tweet⁵ explaining that I would do a survey based on

⁵ Tweet: a post made on the Twitter online message service. Available in < <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tweet>>. Viewed in September, 30th of 2020.

LGBTQ+ representation through fanfics, and I couldn't leave aside that these fanfics would be about stevetony, because most of my followers and the people I followed belonged to this same community we created online without realizing it, it was naturally born and is there to this day.

I knew that talking about it would attract a lot more people and I achieved my goal, more than 20 people offered to be interviewed via Twitter chat. Since the beginning of this survey I have been interested in conducting a virtual ethnographic survey, as I feel that in addition to being able to talk to people from all over the world to understand different perspectives on the same subject, I can also enjoy the fact that I am interacting with a community that I already know deeply. According to Catherine Driscoll and Melissa Gregg from the University of Sidney, “online culture is not partial, we must participate as fully as possible in order to understand it.” (2019, p. 16). Without realizing it, for years of interaction with the community, I have been conducting an ethnography, perhaps that is why I have come to the point of developing this monography's theme. I couldn't help but use my knowledge acquired in college such as discourse studies and especially culture aside even when I was practicing one of my favorite hobbies, reading fanfic.

In *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*, Christine Hine, head of the Sociology Department of the University of Surrey and one of the pioneers on how important and relevant virtual ethnography is, acknowledges that “Ethnography has become embedded in academic culture as an appropriate way to explore how people make sense of the possibilities that the Internet offers them” (HINE, 2008, p. 260). The study of online communities as “cultures” has been framed by some conflicting and at times very unclear terms, including “media ethnography”, “cyberethnography”, “network ethnography” and “virtual ethnography” (see CARTER, 2005; WILSON, 2002; WILSON, 2006). Sometimes these appear as groundbreaking new approaches (see MARKHAM, 2004; MARKHAM AND BAYM, 2008; SVENINGSSON, 2003), at others they are pitched as generally continuous with anthropological ethnography (BEAULIEU, 2004). The challenge and duty of ethnographic work is to create a meaningful description of the meaning and practices of a particular group. According to Clifford Geertz, the ethnographer is an immersed actor trained by the very culture he is studying. All his ethnographic research is interpretative and what is interpretive is the flow of social discourse.

[...] doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise, it is the

kind of intellectual effort. It is an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, “thick description” (GEERTZ, 1973, p. 6)

Geertz uses as an example of the distinction between a thick and a superficial description two boys winking. One of the boys performs an involuntary twitch and the other is performing a conspiratorial signal to a friend. A superficial description would be saying that both of the boys performed the same gesture, but a thick description takes into account that the boy winking is communicating in a precise way and to someone in particular, because contracting your eyelids on purpose is a cultural gesture within the environment that boy is inserted (GEERTZ, 1973).

All researchers have to follow the ‘human subjects research model’ and its three ethical concepts are confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. Consequently, the issue of anonymity is also one of the main problems in this kind of research, giving people uncertainty of the claims when it comes to online ethnography (HINE, 2008). Giving that, this qualitative and interpretive research aims at answering the following research questions: How can fanfics contribute to language studies and language education? How do the participants view LGBTQ+ fanfics and their roles in terms of representativity?

I have chosen to interview five people and I have assured to all of them their much desired anonymity, creating a confidentiality between us and I have received their consent to publish their surveys. One thing I will share with the readers is the information of where the subjects are from and their age, of course, with their consent. I think it is of extreme importance to show how people from different parts of the world feel the same way about the same subject and how this does not fixate on a certain age range, although we will see there is a pattern. I have conducted these interviews, as I have mentioned before, through a famous social network, Twitter, since it is “where” I have met most of the members of this community.

I have written the questionnaire thinking as a member of the community, but also as a researcher, meaning, I had in mind questions my subjects would be able to respond fully, considering they would be talking about something they deeply love, as I do, but I had to look from afar so I could find meaning in what they gave me so I would find easily the evidence I knew I would find, since I have been observing and being part of this community for so long now. I have randomly picked five people to interview and six questions were asked to them.

Their answers will be placed along the chapters according to the matter and relation to the subject discussed. At last, but not least, I will also bring excerpts and commentaries from

two fanfictions written about the couple in question: *Two's a Crowd* written by Rainproof⁶ and *The Reason You Ruminates the Shadowy Past*⁷ by Mizzy, posted on Archive of Our Own (Ao3). *Two's a Crowd* was published in April, 30th of 2013. It has 48,433 words and 10 chapters. The comment section has over 246 comments made by readers and also responses from the author. Over 45,705 people have read this fanfiction, 423 readers have saved on their bookmarks (section on the website to save your favorite stories) and 1,592 people have left their “kudos” (kudos are similar to Facebook and Twitter “likes”) on this work. The plot is focused on Tony and Steve’s already established relationship, but it is kept in secret due to Steve’s internalized homophobia. To those who don’t know Captain America’s story, he is a man born in Brooklyn, New York in 1920 and was chemically enhanced by the American army to serve in the World War II as a super soldier. Steve Rogers heroically crashed his World War II plane into the arctic ice to save the rest of humanity from the weapon on board. 70 years later his body was found and revived, without a scratch and looking not a day older. It is a common feature in all LGBTQ+ fanfictions involving this characters that he might be, considering he is from the beginning of the 20th century, a close-minded character. Rainproof took advantage of this trait to write a story where Steve has always been bisexual but he has deep troubles with an internalized homophobia, which instigates him, as a public figure, to hide his relationship with another man and Tony has to go through that with him even though he is an out and proud bisexual man. What inspired me to choose this fanfiction over so many others is how Steve Rogers is serving as a mirror experience for the author, who has admitted in the comment section that they have looked into their own personal troubles with the matter to write the story, in hope that it would help them and also so many other LGBTQ+ fans that have not just yet found a way to accept themselves.

The Reason You Ruminates the Shadowy Past was published on May, 10th of 2015. It has 25,846 words and one chapter. The comment section has over 319 comments made by readers and also responses from the author. Over 145,225 people have read this fanfiction, 1765 readers have saved on their bookmarks and 7,022 people have left their kudos on this work. Due to its popularity, this fanfiction has also been translated to Spanish, Polish and Chinese by other writers. Contrary to *Two's a Crowd*, Steve Rogers is not a close-minded person even though coming from the 40s. His main wish as a bisexual man and also a public figure is to normalize being LGBTQ+, since he was taught from a very young age that he was abnormal. After

⁶ *Two's a Crowd* by Rainproof. Available in < <https://archiveofourown.org/works/772207>>.

⁷ *The Reason You Ruminates the Shadowy Past* by Mizzy. Available in <<https://archiveofourown.org/works/401626>>.

watching homophobic slurs being thrown at a gay young man, Steve decides to publicly display affections with Tony Stark, his heterosexual best friend and work colleague, intending to pass along the message that if superheroes are LGBTQ+ then maybe the young generation, which composes most of their fanbase, will grow up accepting the community. After faking a relationship for a year to truly find results in what they are doing, they fall in love, of course. These stories are sometimes the same old love telling, but what I want to focus is on the voice of the author, the subject, through this text, and how readers have reacted to the representation found in this story. Therefore, most of my excerpts and commentaries from these two fanfictions will be inserted on my chapter about Discourse, to focus on the voice of the subject through the text and how can we view these fanfictions with a political point of view.

To conclude, I have chosen two fanfictions, both of them include the main characters in a relationship together, and both of them are in the public eye, meaning, their actions have an impact on their audience. In the first story, the enemy is inside the head of one of the characters, because even when all will clearly accept him for who he is, he still hasn't found a way to accept himself. In the other story, the enemy is not inside their heads, but in a prejudiced American society, so the focus is not to change their own views, but the other's. But first of all, I need to provide an explanation on why I have chosen this cyber literature to talk about this pressing matter that harms millions of lives each year: prejudice.

2. Why *Fanfiction*?

Fanfictions are retellings written by fans of works that belong to someone else based on their universes. When explaining like that, it is easy to acknowledge that this is not a new practice that came with modernization. Take for example in Ancient Greece, where Homer, or who we believe it might have been Homer, wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, great epic stories that created a new universe of fiction that was open to interpretation. Centuries later, in the 5th century B.C.E, play writer Aeschylus wrote a tragedy, *Agamemnon*, in which his main characters were created previously by Homer. The audience clearly knew the end of the story, *Agamemnon* would be murdered, but the difference was that the author retold Homer's story in his own way by changing the motive and also the murderer, giving the whole telling a new interpretation and an alternative experience to the audience (AESCHYLUS, 5 B.C.), which is the whole point of fanfiction. "Fanfiction" is merely a post-modern term we have given recently to nominate fan-created stories about many different canonic or non-canonic source materials. There are classic heavily thought books which can be classified as "fanfiction" if looked through the right lens. Dante's *Divine Comedy* was a self-insert fanfiction of the Bible where Dante gets to "hang out" with divine beings from the Bible who deem him worthy enough to share their craft with. More recently picture *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) is a wildly popular fanfiction of *Pride and Prejudice* (AUSTEN, 1813), and the very famous Disney movie *The Lion King* (1994) is a direct retelling of *Hamlet* (SHAKESPEARE, 16th century), only the names are changed and well, the humans are now animals and Hamlet is a lion. How is this any different from a young girl or boy writing stories about a work they deeply love and giving a new and fresh interpretation to a story? The difference is that these retellings had enough resources to legitimate their fictions or got lucky enough to reach the right people so that their works could be recognized in a time when globalization was not at its full potential and connectivity was not as reachable as it is nowadays.

Therefore, fans have been writing fictions about their favorite stories since a long time ago, but with the lack of connectivity around the globe, very few fanfictions have been reached by other people. With the beginning of the digital era and the development of accessibility through technical devices, novel fan practices and 'virtual' communities that are based on popular cultures seem to increase daily (BLACK, 2006). One of the first fanfictions to become its own canonic work was *50 Shades of Grey*, written by E. L. James. I think it is impossible to write anything about the fanfiction phenomenon without mentioning *50 Shades of Grey* due to all its

success and nature. James used to write erotic fanfictions about Twilight, trilogy written by Stephenie Meyer, and eventually, her stories became so famous that a publisher decided to invest in them. The names of the characters had to be altered, of course, since the characters belonged to Meyer, although the story belonged to James. Anyway, the books turned out to be a big hit and millions of copies were sold around the globe. The book was later adapted to Hollywood movies.

Ever since mainstream media has normalized fan cyberculture, the practice has in fact gained a lot more exposure, but most of the fanfictions that had this much recognition had a lot of sexual content. Hence why it became common knowledge to non-readers that fanfictions were only about this: bizarre and extreme sexual activities. There is one thing that must be specified: there is a massive difference between stories that are written for shock factor, comedy or satire from real fanfiction. Back in 2013, during the presidential elections in Brazil, a lot of people wrote satiric stories about Dilma Rousseff and Aécio Neves, both candidates elected by the people for second innings, that got a lot of visibility in social media such as Facebook, and since these stories had been published online by anonymous writers, people decided to name them as fanfictions, since they did not know how else to call these stories that became a huge joke in the internet.

Now that I have clarified that I will be talking about real fan work and not an internet trend used to make people laugh or frown, let's get back to that. As I was saying, most of the time, actors, movie directors, producers and authors refused to take fanfiction seriously because of this misconception a lot of people have about what fanfiction really is. Many of them even discouraged fans from writing stories, since they do not deem them worthy or capable of writing their own stories with their own original characters. Not only people were not being encouraged to write, but they were also expected to feel completely satisfied with what they were watching or reading. Fanfiction is not a way to undermine or speak ill of an author's work. Why would someone write a story based on a plot they detested? It simply wouldn't happen. Writing these stories takes time and dedication, some fan novels take years to be completed and furthermore, the readers keep track of these fanfics throughout the years. It's too much work and people would not do this if they did not love and believe in the original work. Fanfiction is a personal way of looking at your own self and asking: "How could this have been different?", "What if we look more into the main character's personal trauma experience?", or even "What if this specific character was bisexual, gay or transexual?". Day after day, people of all kinds of fandoms post their stories that consist mainly in interpretations and adaptations from the entire

work. Sometimes, these stories are just adaptations from just an aspect of the whole work itself, like the personality of a character or, what will be the main subject of this essay, the sexuality of a character. To have fanfiction written about your work is nothing more than an honor, in my opinion. It shows how people have deeply appreciated the universe you have created to the point that they will work their imaginations off in finding ways to expand and make it more diverse. Writing fanfiction is a way to bring something you love even closer to your life. The interview below was conducted with Diana, she is from Germany, she is 21 years old and has been reading fanfiction since she was 12. She has started reading “Stevetony” fanfic a couple of years ago and that is how I got a hold of her Twitter account. When I asked Diana if she viewed fanfiction as a legitimate literature, the answer was the following:

Do you see fanfiction as a legitimate reading material?

Diana: Okay so, yes! I definitely see it as legitimate reading material. Sometimes even more than "normal" books. The thing with fanfiction is: people do so many researches for their stories and they get nothing in return but our love. Which should be enough but honestly, so many more people should read their stuff because it's just amazing. But the word "fanfiction" is for many a turn off because, as you mentioned, they immediately think about stuff like Fifty Shades or whatever. But there are so many amazing fanfictions. Especially because I feel like, fanfiction authors focus more on the real problems. They're not afraid to go in full detail of mental health or LGBTQ for that matter. Also, they're able to do so much with characters. Like, for example, Steve or Tony, they have so much potential, which they didn't fully use in the MCU in my opinion. Also, fanfiction authors, they just get and understand what people our age feel like and what we want and what's really important! It's not Fifty Shades, it's so much more. It's... Coming back home. Now that The Avengers are done, fanfiction is a way we can still have it in our life, even though it's officially over. It's a way for us to go back home. Because that's what it is. Home. When I read fanfictions it's a feeling of coming home. I know the characters, their story, their deepest fears and desires. I know them and as strange as it sounds, they know me. Every time I read fanfictions, I'm like: "Wow, that's so me. I know exactly how Tony feels in that moment" and I feel understood and loved, like I belong there. With a normal book or movie or TV show, there's always an ending and normally you would move on from that. But people like us we found our home in those characters, in their universe. So, fanfiction

gives us a way to always go back there. And that's why I think it should be legitimate reading material.

As most fanfic readers, Diana used *Fifty Shades of Grey*, as I have mentioned before, to talk about the recurrent notion that is used to undermine the legitimacy of fan works. According to Diana, yes, fanfiction is a legitimate new literacy and one of the main reasons is how much work writer put up into their stories in exchange for nothing except the reader's love. In my opinion, what she meant about "normal" books refers to works that got published by an editor and have their own original background, and most likely received compensation for it. After my interview with Diana, I have noticed that one of her most appreciated factors in a fanfiction is how she can "talk" to them personally, meaning, how they can mirror her personal life issues with a work that contains one of her favorite characters, which makes it so much more special to them. As I have said before, fanfiction writers are passionate about the source material they choose to write about, and sometimes, they use their writing skills to extend the original work and even bring in issues that is recurrent in their personal lives, and as Diana mentioned, the real problems, such as mental health, LGBT struggles, etc.

Fanfiction gives them liberty to go beyond and that is how they get readers like Diana to always come back, because they give comfort and a feeling of "home" as she mentioned. Diana gave me a beautiful and personal insight on how fanfictions created a safe space for people to give and receive positive help and guidance through the "voice" of their favorite characters. But now, in despite of all of the psychological aspect, how is this important and how can this be a matter to the academic world? How do we even begin to analyze this phenomenon and should we do this anyway?

2.1. Is Fanfiction a matter to Academia?

From the beginning of my academic life, I have noticed how conversations about fanfictions of all styles have become something much more frequent in my day-to-day life than before. However, the absence or sometimes even the deafening silence in the classrooms when the fateful question was asked "Who in here reads or can tell me a little about the famous fanfictions?" was hard not to notice, even more so knowing that at least half of those who were there had already read once or read them constantly. For reasons already discussed in previous chapters, fanfictions were called marginalized texts because of the stigmas associated with the

authorship and audience of the original works. While I was conducting interviews with authors and readers of fanfiction to add to this research, the last question I always asked was whether the person preferred anonymity or whether it was okay to put their name and nationality in my research. None of the subjects wanted to have their names published. Of course, I understand that it is completely usual for people to prefer the anonymity, but my subjects offered me the reasons they didn't want to be showcased. One of them had no objections in telling me that she had never spoken about fanfiction with anyone before the day I interrogated her. She was of course relieved to be able to talk to another person about something that is so common and familiar in her life, but she never had the courage to talk to anyone before. One or two had a couple of friends in real life (IRL) that also loved fanfictions and she had the intimacy to talk about that now and then, but most of them found comfort on the online communities where they could be anonymous if they wished to be. The reason one of the subjects gave me was that fanfiction was considered shameful by the people she knew in school and not even her family knew about her hobby. She wanted absolute anonymity because if the people in her school knew that she read fanfictions, she would be bullied. The last thing she told me was that out of all things one could be humiliated for during their life, she did not want to be shamed for doing something she love and is so important to her. Velma is 21 years old and from Minas Gerais, Brazil. During our conversation, I decided to ask her if she talked to people outside the internet about her habit of reading fanfiction. This question was not premeditated, but since I noticed that she mentioned how nice it was to finally talk about this subject with someone, I realized that maybe, unlike my experience and the other subjects, Velma rarely talked to anyone about their beloved hobby and I wanted to understand the reason.

Do you talk to your friends and family about the fanfiction you read? If yes, how does that go for you? Are they friendly about it? If you do not talk about fanfiction with them, why is that?

Velma: No, I don't really talk about reading fanfics with most of my friends, only with those who also read or write, even when the ship is straight. The biggest reason is that I believe they wouldn't understand the motivation behind this hobby, unlike books, fanfics are stories about other stories that already exist, but also because I see that some of these friends feel a certain contempt for people who immerse themselves in fandoms, reading fanfics for example, they think that these people have no social life and to avoid fatigue and arguments on the subject I prefer to discuss this only with friends who share the same interest. But yes, I believe that if I

commented with them with certainty the judgment would be greater if the fandoms in question were of a homosexual couple and even worse if they were of homosexual animation characters, like anime for example. I've seen many people talking things like "shut up you read gay fanfiction about 2D characters" and honestly, I don't want to be judged by my hobby.

After reading her response, it becomes even clearer why cyber communities are so famous. Fanfic readers and writers know the reason why the practice is so subjugated, so to avoid discussions and arguments, they decide to not talk about it at all, only doing so with people that enjoy it as well. In Velma's point, there is more than one prejudice to be added to the package. Velma likes to read LGBT fanfictions about *animes*, a Japanese cartoon style that is not well seen by those who do not watch it. It is no wonder why they prefer keeping their hobby a secret.

It is easy to say that I was flabbergasted by her response, but when I stopped to absorb her reactions, it came to me how understandable they actually were. I also have been ashamed to confess that I read fanfictions during my adolescence, even though they were helping me as an English Language Learner (ELL) and also being a huge source of entertainment. What inspired and directed me to acknowledge fan works as legitimate literature was viewing it as an academic matter. One of the greatest lessons I have learned writing this academic research was that we must always take into consideration all kinds of social context before deeply analyzing any kinds of actions and practices, and noticing that the only person I interviewed that held no issues in being an out and proud fanfiction writer and reader was also a Language Studies Bachelor. This guided me to realizing that the academic environments that we are placed in gave us a background to confirm that fanfiction is literature. Paul Valéry once said:

Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art. (VALÉRY, 1964, p. 225)

Meaning that it is impossible for us to expect that art is one invariant aspect of life and that the many uncertainties and profound difficulty to find meaning in modernity due to many

new variants won't alter or change the way we perceive and construct new forms of art. By the very definition of the term 'art' found on the prestigious Oxford Dictionary, art is the use of the imagination to express ideas or feelings⁸, and fanfiction is nothing more than that, it is the subaltern literature that only exists because of deep appreciation and love for a novel, movie or a TV show that inspires people to express their feelings and possible outcomes that came from their imagination. Jennifer was also a Language Studies Bachelor and she has studied at the Lane Community College and University of Oregon. She is 39 years old, from Oregon (USA). When I asked her what she thought of fan literature, it was easy to notice the difference between her point of view from the others, considering she is used to talking about fanfiction as a legitimate reading material since she coursed college many years ago.

Do you see fanfiction as a legitimate reading material?

Jennifer: There are people who claim that it is not because it is derivative; entirely dependent on its source material. But fanfiction is just the term we have given it recently. The very popular Golden Compass/ is Dark Materials work is based on Milton's Paradise Lost. How is that any different from the girl writing a story where a newly unfrozen Steve Rogers meets them and falls in love? At their hearts, fanfiction is just the beginning of a new story with familiar characters. Or, a retelling. My best friend and I have been talking about how Paradise Lost explores the points of view from characters that don't get a lot of "screentime" in the Bible: Eve, Satan, these central characters who are relegated to support because the narrative is Male. So, Milton took these purposely vilified characters and explored their thoughts and motivations. It is fanfiction at its best! All about finding the story that is right there, but not being told.

Jennifer brings the bridge between original works and fanfiction even closer. I loved talking to Jennifer. She gave me so many insights of how many original works were inspired by already existing works. Apparently, being an English Major really opened her eyes to the practice of writing. Jennifer's repertoire is incredible and she told me that talking to her friends about this matter became almost as a fun game to them: "let's find out the source material this famous new novel is inspired". Talking to Jennifer reminded me a lot of Lev Grossman's works and his explanation on the obsession with originality and how this can be harmful to the notion that fanfictions are merely unoriginal copies.

⁸ Definition of art. Available in <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/art_1?q=art> Viewed on June 29th of 2020.

Lev Grossman is a New York Times bestselling author, novelist and journalist. He was formerly the book critic and lead technology writer at Time magazine for over fifteen years⁹. He has been analyzing fanfictions and contributing to a lot of fandoms during the past few years, such as Harry Potter, one of the most famous sagas of books and movies of the 21st century; Adventure Time, a cartoon show that has gained a lot of fame and recognition; and How to Train Your Dragon, a film trilogy that has been nominated for several awards, including for an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film of the Year. According to Grossman, the challenges of writing fanfiction and writing traditional fiction are essentially the same, of course in fanfiction you will be working with characters and background stories that have been already created by someone else, but if you think about it, novelists rarely start from scratch. They take inspiration on historical figures as they can also borrow characters:

I often think of my books as responses to other books. It's a bit like the theory Harold Bloom writes about in *The Anxiety of Influence*, about how poets create by responding to their predecessors. Some fanfiction does this very well — very resourcefully, very daringly, very outrageously. And I've learned from reading it. I think fanfiction's negative reputation comes from our contemporary obsession with the idea of originality. I'm not a lawyer, but it seems to me that we put a huge amount of emphasis on stories as intellectual property. There are great reasons for doing that — I might not have a career otherwise. But there are other ways to think about originality. For example, Shakespeare thought nothing of borrowing characters. He didn't invent Hamlet, but borrowed him and used him for his own purposes. Virgil didn't invent Aeneas, and Goethe didn't invent Faust. I think plots and characters circulated more freely back then. That freedom could give rise to masterpieces. (GROSSMAN, 2005)¹⁰

I think Grossman would agree that fanfictions have been getting much more attention from academia lately. Our obsession with viewing fanfiction as a mere reproduction of the real work of art itself has sidelined incredible talents and hindered this reinvention of literature from becoming an easygoing topic amongst the University's halls and classrooms. To start studying fanfiction and displaying its topic as an academic matter will only benefit us, by giving more freedom to people, such as my subjects, to talk about their beloved hobby freely and with no shame and also to discover a whole new field of researches.

⁹ Lev Grossman Personal Blog. Available in < <http://levgrossman.com/>> Viewed on June 29th of 2020

¹⁰ Lev Grossman, S.E. Hinton, and Other Authors on the Freedom of Writing Fanfiction. Available in <<https://www.vulture.com/2015/03/6-famous-authors-whove-written-fanfiction.html>> Viewed on June 29th of 2020.

2.2. Fanfiction for English Language Learners (ELL)

Rebecca W. Black is an Associate Professor of Informatics at the University of California, Irvine, and she has done innumerable research projects regarding fanfiction and what she likes to call New Literacy Studies. To gather enough data, she has conducted a virtual ethnographic research and has assumed an observer role on FanFiction.net, one of the most famous fanfiction websites till the beginning of 2010, in which she has mainly focused on the anime¹¹ section, particularly on the Card Captor Sakura category, an extremely famous anime. Although the series is popular within a range of readers and viewers, the target audience consists of preadolescent girls. As a participant/observer, Black posted her own fanfiction to the site, "providing feedback for other writers' texts and interacting with a diverse group of fans" (BLACK, 2011, p. 22). In her chapter, *Digital Design: English Language Learners and Reader Reviews in Online Fiction*, Black's goal was an "inquiry into the ways in which many "fannish" activities are aligned with or have the potential to inform school-based literacy practices" (2011, p. 21). Her approach was "traditional ethnographic methods such as collecting field notes, artifacts, and conducting interviews over two years of participant observation located in the site itself" (BLACK, 2007, p. 119). She points out that FanFiction.net allows posting in many different languages, including the participants' native languages, and so the participants made a specific choice to write in English. In her paper, she gathered field research on reader feedback for Nanako's fourteen-chapter fanfiction titled *Love Letters*, which has received 1694 reviews (as of May 21, 2005). Nanako is an English Language learner (ELL) who writes in English and relies on the feedback of reviewers in order to improve her English literacy. Master in Applied Linguistics, Black's goal is to find out what sort of "linguistic" work are Nanako's texts and the readers doing and how "Nanako's texts and reader feedback are indexing the author's identity as a successful writer and the readers' identities as knowledgeable participants, thus helping them all accrue forms of social and intellectual capital in this space?" (LANKSHEAR & KNOBEL, 2007, p. 120).

Every fanfiction has overall four sections, and this can be applied to almost all websites known till this day. A summary, where the author briefly disposes, through a short text, the

¹¹ *Anime* is a word used by people living outside of Japan to describe cartoons or animation produced within Japan. Using the word in English conversation is essentially the same as describing something as a Japanese cartoon series or an animated movie or show from Japan. Available in < <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-anime-4154949>> Viewed on June 30th of 2020.

initial overview of their narrative; The Author's Notes (A/Ns), where the author presents themselves to their readers, sometimes even telling private details of their intentions in writing that fiction; the narrative itself; and at last, the comments section where the readers can leave their opinions about what they have just read. Nanako, Black's subject, "begins her chapter by identifying herself as an ELL [...] asking that readers overlook her typos and grammatical and spelling errors" (2007, p. 123). This is an extremely common trait of ELL fanfiction writers. Black took it as an opportunity to understand how ELLs, who have always struggled with English classes in school, have developed skills and grammar lessons by writing fanfiction. Black separates the comments aimed at Nanako's grammatical errors in Gentle and Focused Critiques. Gentle Critique is often presented with an introduction from the reader, a response to the A/Ns, a disclaimer and a positive note of encouraging to the writer. Focused Critique follows the same positive and encouraging background, but it is often followed by a specific critique or a "technical-wise suggestion", "the reader draws on and displays knowledge of a school-based form of feedback as she comments on specific conventions and traits of writing such as grammar, spelling, and word choice" (2007, p. 127). As Black has mentioned, this helpful, playful and performative aspect of reviews are a common element in online fanfiction. In an additional note taken from years as a fanfiction reader, there are ELL fanfiction writers that unlike Nanako are not entirely comfortable in publishing their story with grammatical errors, even though it has been explicitly said that the author is not a native English speaker. In those cases, the ELL writer requests help from a native English speaker they trust to be their *beta*, and what does this mean? The ELL author, responsible for the narrative and all the writing takes the role of an *alpha* writer. The *beta*'s duty is to perform focused critique and to review all the grammar the ELL writer may have misspelled: "Fanfiction.net provides a clear example of an affinity space in which members are using digital literacy skills to discover, discuss, and solve writing and reading-related problems, while at the same time pursuing the goals of developing social networks and affiliating with other fans" (LANKSHEAR & KNOBEL, 2007, p.133).

Black's main point, as an academic researcher and a University Professor is that understanding how these online communities can help all educators on how the way English is taught in schools can be rearranged, not changed. The point is not changing the system, but rather finding new directions that can only improve how children and adolescents view language learning classes and how the stigma of "learning as an elite and solitary enterprise

centered on authorized interpretations of canonical texts” (2007, p. 134) can be made more attractive to the learner.

It also becomes necessary to consider differences between how ELLs, and adolescents more broadly, are positioned in schools versus how they choose to position themselves in out-of-school spaces. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from sites such as Fanfiction.net, where the absence of imposed or ascribed social roles enables adolescents from a range of different backgrounds to act both as teachers and as learners. (BLACK, 2006, p. 182)

At last, the author calls out to all literacy educators and researchers not only to know all the new literacies of the globalized world, but also, *how to know* all these literacies and how they can be applied on our classrooms. Concluding, how we can turn the changes of our globalized world in our favor and to integrate them into understanding literacy instruction in schools.

2.3. Fanfiction as a Critical Response Discourse

Henry Jenkins is the Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Arts and Education at the University of Southern California. He arrived at USC in Fall 2009 after spending more than a decade as the Director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program and Peter de Florez Professor of Humanities, according to his personal and active blog.¹² He denominated himself an ACA-Fan, which is, according to him, a hybrid creature that is part fan and part academic. His goal has been to bridge the gap between these two worlds. He defends the idea that fans build their own world through fanfiction, music, artwork, and many other ways from content appropriated from mass media, reshaping it to serve their own needs and interests. In one of his most famous books, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins talks about participatory culture and the idea of a moral economy that is the presumed ethical norms which govern the relations between media producers and consumers.

Fanfiction sums up how consumers of popular media streams have become producers. The production of their own literature has challenged copyright laws. These grassroots collide with the corporate media, which must adjust to the consumers so as not to lose them. Jenkins brings questions about the increasing interactivity, such as how commercial culture affects the reliability and how the easily accessible information affects people's integrity. “Fan writing, then, can be characterized as a type of textual 'poaching'” (de CERTEAU, 1984), as a strategy

¹² JENKINS, Henry. Who the &%&# Is Henry Jenkins? Available in <<http://henryjenkins.org/aboutmehtml>> Viewed in June 30th of 2020.

for approaching materials produced by the dominant culture industry and reworking them into terms which better serve subordinate or subcultural interests” (JENKINS, 1992, p. 215). Jenkins has become one of the most famous media scholars, and while Rebecca W. Black aimed her mediatic research towards linguists, Jenkins’ goal is to study the social and cultural construction of a new genre in fiction that voices out the interests and issues of the superstructure. The author claims how this emerging social phenomenon should not be underestimated and further studied and analyzed by the Academy.

What roles should academic researchers play in helping their culture to adjust to this process of change? If we simply identify best practices, we run the risk of being accused of being apologists for the media industry. If we simply critique, we run the risk of foreclosing possibilities which may further long-standing goals of cultural diversity, civic engagement, and grassroots media power. We need to rethink the categories and perspectives through which we have traditionally framed media phenomena to respond to a profound and prolonged period of media in transition, but we need to do more than that and think more deeply about our roles as academics and our shifting relationships with both media industries and audiences. If the new and emerging paradigms emphasize the relationship between knowledge and power, we need to take more seriously the power we exert – or could exert – as knowledge workers in an emerging creative economy. (JENKINS & DEUZE, 2008, p. 11)

In my view, fanfictions have never gone under noticed by academia. As I have said before, numerous people have confessed on reading them, but due to our obsession with originality, people still view fan work as a reproduction of the real work of art, as if fanfiction is comparable to a photograph taken of a piece of art. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1965), Walter Benjamin discusses the difference between an original work and a reproduction. It has become increasingly easy to reproduce or make a replica of a work of art. Benjamin says that although the reproduction is aesthetically near the same, it does not hold the same value as the original. The original holds an aura, a history, and its impact on people makes it different from the reproduction. Therefore, it is not about the appearance but the meaning it holds.

Following the same line of thought of all the language professionals I have mentioned so far in this chapter, fanfiction can be directly linked to what Benjamin believes is a work of art. The reason why fanfiction is seriously challenging copyright laws is because they cannot be taken down for being reproductions or be interpreted as plagiarism. Fanfictions are sometimes respected and praised by fandoms just as the original works are. The impact they have on the readers holds a meaning in itself. In addition, the history each one of them carries comes with pieces of the writer’s personal social context. I personally encourage people to view fanfictions with different lens and by doing so, a new literacy school will be displayed in front

of our eyes and I am glad to know that I am not the only one who's view upon this phenomenon has changed.

2.4. My experience as an ACA-Fan

As Henry Jenkins contends, I wish to bridge the gap between my two worlds, the academic world and Fanfiction. I will not go to the same path as Black and Jenkins, who have looked at fanfiction with a broader view. Jenkins has analyzed and depicted the production of fanfiction as whole and Black, in one of her many researches, has analyzed the community of ELLs and how non-native English speakers are creating a safe environment to perform their newest linguistic skills. In my case, I will overlook and abuse my role as participant for over a decade to analyze and interpret the most sought fanfiction nowadays, the LGBTQ+. The demand for LGBTQ+ couples in fanfiction has overpassed any other by far and this is beyond from going unnoticed anymore.

I will address in this monograph the links between the art of writing and reading fan literature with humanities theories that will justify and explain why the relationship between language and culture with the production of meaning and representativity generated by groups and communities with the same view upon the world and its meanings is important to be analyzed; the political interpretation of the discourse found in interviews excerpts of some works and finally, I will take my shot in talking about one of the academic theories that closely addresses the social struggles of a community that challenges rules that set a standard for the few and the exclusion of many, taking responsibility for much of the inequality of both gender and freedom of expression of human beings. I believe that by the end of this, people will understand how the lack of representation in the ideological culture imposed by the superstructure inspired fans to manifest through the creation of communities that share the same view upon something, and the result has become one of the most popular trends of the internet on the 21th century.

3. Discourse and Fanfiction Studies

There are many ways to study language, for example, you can concentrate on the study of signs and meanings, leaning towards linguistics, or you can concentrate on language standards, leaning towards Normative Grammar. Discourse Analysis has emerged from the idea that there are a lot of ways to study language and that there should be a way to study language in practice, and that is what the word “discourse” means, it’s the language in movement, in use. Discourse represents language as an indispensable instrument for the mediation between man and reality, and the transformations we all go through (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992).

Discourse Analysis constitutes itself among the space of issues created by three fields that are also a rupture with the 19th century: Linguistics, Marxism and Psychoanalysis. For the discourse analysis, the language has its own internal functioning. Whereas, it is not completely autonomous, provided that history has its reality affected by the symbolic, and the subject is not in the center, but in the middle, between language and history (ORLANDI, 2001). Words that reach us come full of their own meaning. Discourse Analysis questions Linguistics on the importance of the history that it neglects; it also adds the Marxism theory about the symbolic into discourse studies, and distinguishes Psychoanalysis by considering historicity; it sees ideology as something materially unconscious without being absorbed by it. In short, Discourse Analysis is not about the transmission of information, but the effect of the meaning upon people, and meanings are produced through interpretations, not just through the text itself, but the processes between people and their contexts.

[...] meanings are produced through interpretations of texts, and texts are open to diverse interpretations which may differ in their ideological import, and because ideological processes appertain to discourses as whole social events - they are processes between people - not just to the texts which are moments of such events. (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 89)

It is not possible to fix Discursive Studies (abbreviated as DS) in one school of academic research, one period of time or one methodology. We believe that DS is the result of a convergence of numerous theories and methodologies originated in many countries and it can be associated with many areas within the humanities such as linguistics, sociology, literature, etc. In this chapter we will see how Discourse Studies can be used and associated with the studies of the new literacies of our time, fanfiction. Therefore, the social sciences will be the most highlighted area, because in order to understand the phenomenon of fanfiction, we have

to understand what changed within a community that served as an inspiration to reproduce and express through language and semiotic its needs and social experiences.

The discourse analyst analyses the language that is around us. In this sense, the analyst does not see language as a closed matter, but as a social-historical product. They do not see society and history as two opposite products that don't mix with each other. Language is materialized in ideology and ideology manifests itself on language. Through discourse we can perceive the relation between language and ideology and how this union is expressed by people, and received by them as well. The discourse analyst does not only interpret the text, but also understands how it works, how it produces meanings.

When taking this fact into consideration and regarding what we are studying in this research, while the fanfiction reader is reading and interpreting the story adapted by the author, the discourse analyst will not only interpret the fanfiction, but also understand what made the author change the source material and how their social life and struggles are reflected on their text. Fanfiction is never neutral; it is not simply a story written by people who could not create their own characters. The main point of fanfiction is to change or adapt something you really enjoy or something you think could be a better fit into your personal life and views. The very word *change* is already one way to explain how fan created texts are embedded in meaning and history. To analyze the discourse found in fanfiction is to understand what people would change on the dominant culture discourse, why they would do that and how they are transforming the way people can either accept or manipulate ideology. In this chapter we discuss some primordial theories about Discourse and how it does not only represent the world, but it also signifies it, “constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 64).

3.1. Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis

According to James Paul Gee, Professor of Reading at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, language could be associated with two primarily related functions, “to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (GEE, 2001, p.1). By social “identities”, Gee refers to the ways people can participate in different social groups, cultures and institutions (GEE, 2005) such as “a (video) gamer”, “a good student” and even a “fanfiction reader”.

The identity function relates to the ways in which social identities are set up in discourse, the relational function to how social relationships between discourse participants are enacted and negotiated, the ideational function to ways in which texts signify the world and its processes, entities and relations. (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 64)

Discourse is an identity kit or a set of instructions that makes us recognizable to people within a specific context, it gives what we do meaning in certain social contexts. Primary Discourse, according to Gee, is something people gather in their homes by interacting with their family members, friends, etc. Now, the secondary discourse is something you acquire when you enter other social environments such as school, college, etc. For example, it is in your school that you acquire your academic discourse, which is considered the dominant discourse and something Gee claims that we become literate to advance in society. In life we can become literate in many secondary discourses. There comes a point when Gee points that we can acquire a metal-knowledge, meaning that with this knowledge we can look upon social contexts we use to frequent and notice how primary and secondary discourses can converge and create different meanings. When seeing and noticing these meanings we can find a new way to make meaning-making.

Gee (1999) made a distinction between little d/Discourse and big D/Discourse. Little ‘d’ Discourse refers to language bits and grammatical aspects. The big ‘D’ also includes language bits but it also carries meanings and identities within of what is being pronounced. Big ‘D’ Discourse is present when we are representing, valuing and believing what is being said with language bits. “This distinction helps us see that form of language cannot exist independent of the function of language and the intention of speakers” (ROGERS, 2004, p. 5).

Gee’s (1999) big-D discourse theory and method of analysis differentiates between little-d discourse, which is language in use, and big-D Discourse, which is the compilation of semiotic, material, and expressive resources individuals use to “pull off” certain socially situated identities. Thus, d/Discourse is an apt analytical construct for exploring how an adolescent ELL fanfiction writer uses her mastery of design to discursively construct and sustain an achieved identity as a highly popular author in this space, rather than taking on an ascribed identity as an ELL who struggles with writing in English. Such an approach also facilitates understanding of how this author and her readers, through interaction and negotiation, are able to co-design a social and learning-based space where native and non-native English speakers alike are able to display expertise and build on their different forms of personal, cultural, and linguistic capital. (BLACK, 2007, p. 119)

The initial intention of a fanfiction author is never to enter the community to improve their English, this is always a consequence. Authors enter the community with the desire to write their story and demonstrate their point of view on a certain story. That alone already

transcribes all fanfiction authors a unique online identity amongst the fanfiction community: the writer, the provider of content, and they will never be seen as an ELL. All fanfiction readers have crossed paths with texts with grammatical misspellings, it is normal for this community. I cannot say the same in an academic discourse and environment, and that happens for a reason. Published texts must be revised multiple times, by multiple people. A book goes over several people before being properly revised, and then published, so it is not common to catch misspelling and grammatical errors in a printed text. My intention is not to say that the act of writing and reading fanfiction is unconcerned with grammatical rules and that stories are always published unrevised, no, and it definitely isn't the author's intention to deliver a story badly written, but with a satisfying plot. My point is that the ELL aspect is not the foremost identity these authors assume when writing stories in another language. As Black mentioned in her quotation above, the community has established an environment that is rarely found, where author and reader can interact with each other intentionally. These interactions, fully desired by the author, help the community to create a learning space full of cooperation. Fanfiction authors create their identities and a safe space through their works and that is how their popularity grows bigger inside the fandom.

Gee focused on how to apply critical discourse analysis on aspects of modern life. He has participated and has his own chapter on Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear's book named *A New Literacies Sampler* (2007), which targets to exam the wide range of approaches potentially available for researching and studying new literacies; these are video gaming, fanfiction writing, weblogging, using websites to participate in affinity practices, and social practices involving mobile computing. Gee's chapter about the pleasure and learning in playing video games is followed by Rebecca's W. Black's amazing chapter on English Language Learners and Reader Reviews in Online Fiction (Fanfiction) and the author mentions how Gee's theory on Discourse Analysis can help researches to identify in real practice the building of meaning and identities in fanfiction websites. Although I have already discussed about Black's research on my previous chapter, I found this passage extremely useful and insightful.

According to Gee (2001), in the New Capitalist or "modern" value system of the information age, discourse and dialogue play an important role both in designing identities and in having others recognize such achieved identities within affinity spaces and online environments. Fanfiction.net is a clear example of a site where traditional print-based language, as well as post-typographic forms of text, plays crucial roles in defining the affinity space, creating and sustaining social networks, and enacting achieved identities within the site. (BLACK, 2007, p. 119)

One of the things that led me to appreciate Gee's work so much was his concern on taking a chance on what he calls our modern, information-oriented society. He stated that computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the Internet can provide new opportunities for using Discourse and text to discursively construct and enact achieved identities in online environments (Gee, 2004; Thomas, 2004). Gee also discussed a distinctive approach on Discourse Analysis, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Basically, CDA encompasses the language knowledge, power and social issues worries, it is not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se, but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodological approach. It goes further than analyzing how form and function of the language can correlate with social practices, since these practices are correlated to many other variants such as status, relations of power, personal contexts, etc. "Approaches to discourse analysis that avoid combining a model of grammatical and textual analysis (of whatever sort) with sociopolitical and critical theories of society and its institutions are not forms of critical discourse analysis" (GEE, 2004, p. 20).

CDA emerged in the early 1990s after a symposium in Amsterdam (January 1991), through the support of the University of Amsterdam. Certain activities, identities and social interactions create a certain group, i.e., these activities make one social group differ from another. Gee recalls that language-in-use is always present and is always "political", remembering that by political he does not mean politics in the government sense, but how "social goods" are thought about. Social goods are any source of weight, income, value and worth as academic intelligence. Gee wants to show us that certain speakers and writers use grammar to design their sentences in a way that it communicates their perspectives or a reality, but he also makes it clear that his book is not about grammar, because at no time will he delve into any knowledge of grammar. Each issue has its own discourse analysis. There is no general theory that serves to analyze all discourses, because, as explained by Gee, theory cannot be separated from method. Being critical means establishing a practical link of social and political engagement with a sociologically informed construction of society; in other words: making visible the interconnectedness of things.

Van Dijk, a scholar in the fields of text linguistics and discourse analysis, contributed to the development of the psychology of text processing and what is Critical Discourse Analysis. The purpose of CDA is to understand, expose and resist social inequality persistent in racist, political, religious and other types of social dominance discourses, "critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social

inequality” (VAN DIJK, 2001, p. 352). The critical discourse analysts must understand their important role in society. Instead of arguing that scholarship and society are two different things, the critical discourse analyst must discuss how they are actually related and there’s always a relation between the discourse and the analyst. There are many types of CDA and all of them can be quite diverse. Most of them will ask questions about the how specific discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance, whether they are part of a conversation or a news report or other genres and contexts, according to Van Dijk.

Crucial for critical discourse analysts is the explicit awareness of their role in society. Continuing a tradition that rejects the possibility of a “value-free” science, they argue that science, and especially scholarly discourse, are inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction. Instead of denying or ignoring such a relation between scholarship and society, they plead that such relations be studied and accounted for in their own right, and that scholarly practices be based on such insights. Theory formation, description, and explanation, also in discourse analysis, are socio politically “situated,” whether we like it or not. Reflection on the role of scholars in society and the polity thus becomes an inherent part of the discourse analytical enterprise. This may mean, among other things, that discourse analysts conduct research in solidarity and cooperation with dominated groups. (VAN DIJK, 2001, p. 353)

CDA needs to explain them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure rather than merely describe discourse structures (2001, p. 353). Overall, the main duty of the analyst is to focus how discourse can legitimate relations of power and dominance in society. Certain groups can obtain power if they can control the acts and minds of people. The dominated groups may most of the time accept and legitimate such power, and even find it natural most of the time. Ordinary people are, in most cases, easy targets of these types of social power. People such as bosses, teachers, police officers, priests, politicians, etc., can simply tell what these people can believe or not, what they must condemn and obey, and as we see with religious discourse, this effectively works.

Van Dijk has divided the discourse in two levels, the macro level and the micro. The macro level is when power, dominance, and inequality between social groups are controlled and overlooked by a dominant speech, such as law, medical, political, e.g.; the micro level englobes the language used to interact and communicate. For example, election debates, discussions at the parliament and law implementation can be classified as micro level, but when these matters take part in the law, it will be escalated to the macro level, since the legislation performs a dominant and controlling role on society. CDA has to differentiate these two levels that form a unified whole in everyday speech, keeping in mind that the gap between the two of them has been socially constructed (ALEXANDER et al. 1987; KNORR-CETINA and

CICOUREL, 1981). What makes the discourse analysis critical, according to Van Dijk, is that the analysts have to insert themselves inside the community they are analyzing, in this case, the fanfiction community, so they can investigate their object closely, but still looking at the critic from afar. Take this example below from *The Reason You Ruminates the Shadowy Past* by Mizzy.

Steve's never nearly lost it in public before. Not when facing the terrible enemies they've faced in the past. Not when facing bullying and homophobia himself. But when that last kid told him how he was punched in the stomach for being gay, and pointed out his bullies, Steve knows he did not exactly display the calmest expression.

One of the bullies, Tony gleefully pointed out at the time, wet himself. Purely from Steve's expression. Like Steve should be pleased about that.

He feels dizzy and he's still angry—mostly with himself - when the principal shows Steve where he can get changed back into his civilian clothes. They do all public appearances in their Avengers suit. It's better that way. The suit distinguishes between the name and the person. You see the suit and you know you're safe. Or you should know it. But Steve had only blathered about his own history of being bullied, with the kid had seemed quite happy about, and the whole auditorium had applauded, and Steve just felt sick as he got off the stage.

Because he should have done something. There should have been some damn thing he could have done to make things better.

To show them.

If the law said being gay was okay, why didn't those kids know it?

(my emphasis).

After strongly reacting to an attack caused by prejudice towards a gay young boy, Steve is visibly shaken. The author wanted to show how strong and unshakeable superheroes are, but this kind of violence was sufficient to leave him shaken to his core, with intention to show the horror and cruelty in an act of homophobia. The author used the superhero status to affirm with more credibility such an act.

Still in the same scene, Steve is saying how his superhero suit will put him “above” the civilian status and automatically give people more confidence and security, and this is all embedded in the discourse superheroes are inserted. Even if superheroes don't exist in real life,

there are several fictional stories where they will represent the Big D Discourse, as Gee would suggest.

At the end of this scene, Steve is questioning himself what he could do to make things better, because he knows he has the discourse and position to overpower this act and show people that there is nothing wrong in being LGBTQ+. Even more than that, he questions: “If the law said being gay was okay, why didn’t those kids know it?” And this is the macro level of discourse based on the superiority of the Law Discourse. It is known that when discourse hits the level of law, this will automatically have a different effect on society and Mizzy is showing that by constantly explaining in her story the Amendments created by the USA Government to aid the LGBTQ+ community. A pure example of that is R’s comment in Mizzy’s fanfiction and the author’s response to them after the following scene that introduced the story:

Tony's flicked it onto something he says is science-fiction, but the last science-fiction show Tony showed had space in it and stars, and **this one has two men in military uniforms in a bar, and they're kissing like the world is ending.**

Steve's stomach lurches uneasily. He risks a small look to the left. Natalie's sneakily stealing popcorn from Clint and Tony's bowl, alternating deftly between them both while watching the screen. Bruce is saying something about the show needing more doctors, which sounds in character; **he catches Steve looking at him in confusion and Bruce just winks. Steve's eyes fly back to the screen where the two men are still kissing,** and he feels tight and hot, and his fingers clench into the material of his pants just above his knees, and he feels absolutely frozen, because of course there's depravity on TV now, there's pregnant girls whaling on each other, and so **of course there would be two men kissing, but why isn't anyone making disgusted sounds or changing the channel?**

(my emphasis).

Steve, Tony and three other major characters are watching television together and this occurs no long after Steve, as I have mentioned before, has awakened in 2012. He has missioned the 1960s, and all other important social movements related to the LGBTQ+ cause. The first line in bold is describing what is streaming on television: two men in military uniform engaged in a kiss. This is major to Steve since he is from the military and a closeted bisexual man with repressed needs. This scene is instantly shocking to him because he never thought something like that would stream on TV and he feels sick, but not sick on the stomach because that repulses

him, but because he fears what his teammates might say of something that is so close related to his life and wishes.

He is watching the room around him, waiting for someone to say something cruel or change the channel since this is all he's even known from other people when the matter was homosexuality, but he is frozen and in shock, no one is saying anything, no one looks disgusted and no one is screaming offenses at the TV. He relates this to another terrible American reality show that he was watching that involved addicted pregnant girls wrestling, and of course modern TV would show two men kissing when people think that reality shows like Keeping Up With the Kardashians are a normal and decent TV show. Then, why wouldn't they show something as terrible as a public display of affection between people of the same sex? Now this is what follows:

No one in the room looks shocked, or disgusted. Tony isn't instantly turning the channel over. This new world has apparently gone insane. Steve tunes back in and listens to the words and his brain blanks out, completely blanks out.

“Don't ask, don't tell - the 1993 policy signed by President Clinton that made it illegal for commanders to ask soldiers about their sexual orientation - has now been repealed. Gays and lesbians are now free to serve openly in the U.S. armed services. The U.S. military has been preparing for this repeal for months, updating regulations and training to reflect the impending change, and they have already been accepting applications from openly gay and lesbian individuals...”

Steve swallows, hard. He's not a freak. He's not deranged. He might possibly be very, very normal.

It's way too much to process.

"Is this another fictional show?" Steve asks then, his voice uncertain and quiet. His thoughts are so loud he thinks maybe he's actually shouted it, but Tony reacts as if he's the only one to hear; then again, Tony just seems to be tuned into him more than any of the others.

"It's the news," Tony says. "Fact." Then he pauses, and because he has no tact, he whispers, "Wait, are you crying?"

"No," Steve says automatically, and then blinks a few times, and because even though his life is unutterably bizarre he's still unflinchingly honest, says, "Um, yes? It's-" He searches for the word, and doesn't have to search far. **He thinks of the words that were repeated through his childhood as fists rained into his small, weak body. "-disgusting."**

"Woah, woah, wait a second right there," Tony says, heatedly, **"I realize you're bringing with you forties' values and gung-ho stuck in the mud the army is the best anthems in your patriotic little heart, but you can't fling around outdated, unrealistic insults like that. Your generation had a fucked-up idea of what was okay and what wasn't; the sooner you learn that, the better you'll be able to function in this world. Christ, I can't even contemplate fighting evil alongside a homophobe, I- I mean, they're just kissing, kissing isn't anything-"**

Tony's rant is a little confusing, but Steve's getting the gist of it at the end; especially the part where the idea of not fighting next to him is being contemplated and Steve interrupts, desperately, **"I meant I thought I was disgusting."**

"That makes more sense," Tony says. "Stupid sense, but sense. Hey. Welcome to the twenty-first century. Where it's not illegal to be who you are. Unless who you are is a pedophile, rapist, murderer, drug-dealer, genocidal lunatic and/or suicide bomber. Or a Kardashian. They should really look into that last one. I'm wary of the potential threat to humanity on that count."

(my emphasis).

Tony switches the channel to the News and the Don't Ask Don't Tell Amendment is being discussed since it has gone through some changes before Mizzy published this story. When Steve hears that he is even more in shock because in his conception it was impossible that a law to protect LGBTQ+ soldiers would actually be real, he feels the need to confirm with Tony if that is another fictional show, Tony assures him that it's the Fox Channel and he realizes that Steve is crying.

When Steve is questioned on why he is tearing up, he mindlessly repeats a prejudiced slur that he heard many times directed at him to his teammates: "disgusting". Tony strongly reacts because he understood that Steve thought that homosexuals were disgusting and he responds fervently that Steve needs to let go of the "forties' values" because this is not how society, in his vision, works anymore, but Steve corrects his choice of words and explains that he thought he was the one who was disgusting, meaning, he has just come out of the closet to all his teammates and everyone is completely okay with that. Steve needed to see from the mediatic discourse that being LGBTQ+ was okay and that validated his sexuality. The macro level of discourse plays repeatedly in this fanfiction, whether it is the mediatic discourse, the law or the political. All the times a LGBTQ+ friendly discourse comes from any of these

sources, the movement is validated. Before diving into this discussion, here is comment left by a reader after reading this scene:

R:

I just wanted you to know:

When I got to the part where Steve is struck dumb by the news coverage of the repeal, I burst into tears. **I enlisted in 2004 when I was 19 years old**, and I thought then there was never any hope of serving openly. **I knew I wasn't disgusting, but I was afraid**. Last weekend, when I complained of needing a haircut, one of my senior NCOs told me I should get myself a husband or wife--or wife!--to cut it for me. I almost burst into tears then, too. I'm not out at my unit, but it looks like I could be. I love the chance of reliving the moment when I read in the Times that the repeal had passed. Then, I had turned to my partner and (you guessed it) wept.

Thank you for that opportunity. And for the lovely story it came in.

Mizzy:

Thank you so, so much for this comment - I ummed and ahhed for a few times whether to write this fic, because **I knew some people would be upset that I didn't tackle subtle prejudice, but the opening was just something I had to do**. I cried so much at the announcement, because my heart used to break over and over for the amazing men and women who served knowing they could never serve openly, and I just. I always want to celebrate that finally, finally people are starting to see sense. I don't want to ever forget how amazing that moment was.

I want to take this moment to thank YOU. ♥ **I'm pretty fond of my freedom, and thank you for making that possible**. All my love and best wishes to you. ♥

(my emphasis).

The reader related to the character because she went through a similar experience with the army, hence enlisting in the third line, and being LGBTQ+. She rephrases that unlike the character, she never thought that she was disgusting, only afraid. One thing that struck me the most was when the reader described their experience with one of her senior NCOs. When he even mentioned the possibility that she could one day marry someone of the same sex, it felt liberating, hearing this from someone like him felt like she was allowed to be everything that she wanted. She still hasn't come out to her unit, but now she feels like she could and she didn't

need to be afraid anymore. The story made her relive this important moment. Mizzy's comment was also incredible. She knew this was a sensitive subject, but she knew she had to tackle it in her story. She shared with her reader her joy when the Don't Ask Don't Tell Amendment was announced and this mirrors a victory to the community.

In the example below, I took another comment from the same fanfiction we are discussing in this chapter and Glitterandlube says:

Glitterandlube:

Well, technically, you break things as an excuse to build something better in its place
Thank you for the neatest definition of engineering that I shall be stealing.

Tony's not distracted, and his mind is as quick as ever. Unfortunately, without Steve on his a-game, it's a disturbing spectacle of what Tony will get up to when he doesn't have to cart Steve around like his human Jiminy Cricket.

Tony kicks out his briefcase, steps into it, and his Iron Man suit smoothly assembles itself around his body. Tony charges up his right hand blaster before the guy can even blink, and aims it at his face.

I LOVE YOU FORVER

Mizzy:

Ahahaha, I'm not an engineer but that's what I do as an excuse to spend an afternoon fixing something so I can see how it works, lol. So. Maybe I'm just an engineer at heart (my granddad was, so maybe it's genetic.)

THAT MOMENT WAS THE ONLY REASON I WROTE THIS FIC. Because how many times, hooooowww many times do you get an insult yelled at you on the street and you just wish you could go Iron Man on their ass? So. Wish fulfilment all over the place! x

Glad you liked it. <3

(my emphasis).

Tony and Steve visit a High School and witness a homophobic attack towards one of the kids, Tony's immediate reaction is to threaten the bully with his Iron Man armor in order to scare him out and give a statement in how he was in favor of the LGBTQ+ community. This scene caused an impression on the reader Glitterandlube and they show how in favor they were of Iron Man's reaction towards the bully. Mizzy's response confirms that one of the reasons

she wrote this fanfic was to write a scene that represented how badly LGBTQ+ young kids wanted someone as Iron Man to react like that, or even be the one to do it, towards the people that try to harm them daily. This is not only an example of how the subject, a LGBTQ+ author, is embedded in this discourse, but how the big D Discourse is used in everyday life. Since Mizzy and her reader don't have Iron Man to do that for them, they will talk about it in fanfiction.

Taking everything discussed until now into consideration, it is easy to convey that CDA is essential to determine the power relations between media and its public. I will present on my next chapter about Language and Culture Stuart Hall's theory on the hegemonic view of culture and how non-hegemonic culture (fanfiction) is creating a whole new way of interpreting mediatic content and transforming meanings. I must add that the power relations established between the media, the source material, and the audience is related to how considerably bigger is the reach to the public than any other sources have. Journalists will have more influence with their discourse upon their viewers than a common individual has on their social platform (VAN DIJK, 2001). Therefore, the source material will, of course, have more influence and power upon the public than fanfiction material, and this divergence will undermine the legitimization of fan created texts as not only legitimate literature but it is also a big opportunity to create safe environments that lead millions to use Discourse as a way to create new communities with shared interpretations and identities over a specific social context.

3.2. Subject and Ideology

According to Michel Foucault (1926-1984), discourse is a set of rules and practices that produce meaningful statements that regulate discourse within a historical condition and is necessary to understand systems of representation. To understand from what point Foucault comes from, we must remind ourselves the way the analysis was done before Foucault started his transition from analyzing only impersonal and autonomous discourse to redirecting his focus to works related to power. The philosopher of language, who was responsible for analyzing the discourse, became aware that to analyze a discourse, he had to belong to it. Discourses are produced by society, meaning that the human history is the variant that shapes semantical processes within it. When realizing this, scientists such as Michel Pêcheux, French philosopher, proclaimed that without a subject, there is no discourse and an ideology is always embedded in this subject. So far, that is called the second phase of Discourse Studies, it was up

to the scientist to decide what really meant to analyze a discourse and to determinate what that text was all about (PÊCHEUX, 2009).

[...] Taking up the terms we have introduced above and applying them to the specific point of the materiality of discourse and meaning, we will say that individuals are "challenged" in speaking subjects (subjects in their discourse) by the discursive formations that they represent in language to ideological formations that correspond to them. (PÊCHEUX, 2009. P. 147)

On the third phase of Discourse Studies, there are significant changes: social issues such as racism, homophobia, sexism, etc., became indispensable matters to consider in the analysis. A relationship started to form between the scientist and the text they were analyzing, and they did not only interpret the text, but they also began to understand its function and its meanings, seeing it through other lens. But still, this task is assigned restrictedly to the scientist. And then, we get to the fourth and last phase, which stands to this day and is the phase that reflects the modern society. Foucault started his work upon only structuralism and his linguistic self was the one that emerged through. The beginning of his career was of great importance and relevance, but it is the middle towards the end of his career that the author of this research is interested in; when Foucault lets go of his structuralism view and becomes one of the fathers of post-structuralism.

When Foucault applied his critics on how the discourse had been analyzed until that point, he started to challenge every concept of science concerning discourse. Discourse provides a language with a way of representing knowledge about a particular subject matter at a particular historical juncture, he did that by creating his own methodology: he started to analyze how society came to be through genealogy, in other words, he started digging out historical contexts trying to understand how everything that didn't belong to the social norms was subjugated. Foucault's ideal is not to find the only truth, because there isn't solely one rule that governs us all. His concern is with an 'ontology of ourselves', that is, to turn that analytic gaze to the condition under which we, as individuals, exist and what causes us to exist in the way that we do.

According to Foucault, if there is language, the producer is always implied in it and it does not matter the subject, whether it's math, physics, history, etc. By doing that, Foucault is challenging the truth, especially when thinking about big institutions, such as education and churches. Because through an abstract way of looking through language, you produce the truth, just like we've seen on the second phase of Discourse Analysis, ideology is always embedded on the subject and vice versa and ideology is an essential condition to relate world and language.

Foucault denies this possibility because, in his point of view, language is alive, it's always in movement and impossible to capture in your grasp.

Foucauldian discourse theory, though often wrongly accused of so doing, does not deny the subject. It aims to analyse the constitution of the subject in its historical and social context from a diachronic (i.e. longitudinal) and synchronic (i.e. cross-sectional) perspective: who was conceived of as a subject at a particular point in time? How, and how come? (JAGER & MAIER, 2009, p. 50)

Therefore, Foucault, in his structuralist period, which we must be careful to say since his relationship with structuralism was rather dubious (MILLS, 2009), and what he has named "archeology" (Foucault, 1972), has taken a specific period and analyzed the common language of it and started to contextualize this discourse on society. He was not interested in interpretation, but in going back on human history to see how there is always a context and how history repeats itself constantly. Nothing came to be by no reason.

For Foucault, there is never an author, only the body of them. The author writes and analyzes the text and it's up to the interpreter to understand and choose what the text is talking about, and knowing about the author's life will add nothing to the true interpretation of the discourse. And how can this theory be applied when analyzing fanfiction discourse? When we stop trying to trace the motivations of the individual, in this case, the fanfiction writers, we will uncover the working of discourse (MILLS, 2009). Questions and demands for reforms about representation on the media is not something passed from individual to individual through language (fanfiction), "power is seen by Foucault not as something which is imposed on another but as a network or web of relations which circulates through society (FOUCAULT, 1978)" (MILLS, 2009, p. 30). These transformations are a demand long desired by the LGBTQ+ community and they have been transmitted in many ways; fanfiction is another one of them. People have this internal belief that fanfiction must be directly associated with the author's personal needs and wishes, and I am not saying that it shouldn't, as I have demonstrated in the interviews I have conveyed for this research. Many writers write fanfiction because it is a way to transmit meaning and inner needs that have always been repressed in their personal lives. My point is: it is so much more than that.

When we analyze LGBTQ+ fanfiction discourse through the lens of social causes and personal contexts of millions of people, we will realize that they are far from what closed minded people say. The fight and demand for representation on the media is the base of every LGBTQ+ context on fanfiction communities and CDA will give basic theory on why that is so obvious. This community is absorbing dominant discourse (movies, TV Shows, canonic books, e.g.) and instead of just legitimizing it, they are creating their own interpretations and most

importantly, they are problematizing the system. By doing that, the obvious lack of LGBTQ+ representation on mediatic content is impossible to ignore. When we finally comprehend that every subject carries its ideology and vice versa and that all discourse must be analyzed through the lens of social context, we will understand that as Foucault have said, nothing happens for no reason. LGBTQ+ content is being purposely ignored and erased from the media and fanfiction communities have realized that by critically studying the system.

The practice has become so famous that almost every new media content is put into question by the community. The possibility to openly invent new interpretations and post them online has become so common that producers are with their hands tied, after so many years of fanfiction “manufacturing”, copyright laws (big D/Discourse) can no longer threat or get in the way of fan manifestation. Authors such as J. K. Rowling, mostly famous for writing the globally known saga Harry Potter, have been trying to undermine fanfictions inspired on their books since the beginning (2000s). Nowadays, she is online on Twitter trying to validate and insert on her already published works LGBTQ+ representation, since she has been criticized for being reclusive and not open to social causes. Well, the fans will not have it. She has been in many headlines for the past couple of years for trying to fix her reputation with the fans that basically made her one of the richest women in the world. Isn't this a big progress? In my opinion, bigger than I can put into words. 20 years ago, LGBTQ+ people wouldn't even dream about having representation on globally famous books and now, they get to openly demonstrate their frustrations and get real substantial changes. Is this enough? No, obviously not. Is there still a long way to go for the community to get the representation they really want and deserve? Absolutely. I am seeing the changes happening with my own eyes and I believe that because of what the theorists discussed in this chapter, mine and everyone's present is changed for the better.

4. Fanfiction: Language and *Cyber Culture*

Language and Culture are inseparable variants that are being shaped everyday by people and they represent our humanity. At the same time you are producing language, you are producing culture. They are bound together in the project of modernity and are equally important in the formation of nations.

Culture is connected to language in three major ways: semiotically, linguistically, and discursively. Not in a deterministic way, and not in the dictionary meanings of words, but in the enunciative choices of speakers and writers and in the affective, social, and political meanings they assign to these words. With globalization, applied linguists have had to deal with the multilingual uses of language in multicultural contexts and the co-construction of multiple, changing and sometimes conflictual cultural flows (FERRAZ, 2019). Culture is not a stable institution that people belong to by virtue of having been socialized in it and that pre-exists the individual. “Culture is, rather, a process of language use that is integrated with other semiotic systems such as “ritual, dance, music, graffiti, beat-boxing, clothing, gestures, posture, ways of walking and talking” (KRAMSCH, 2009, p. 42). But at the same time, the performative shows that the very political forces that have constructed culture can also be used to deconstruct and reconstruct culture in different ways. Performativity can indeed be seen as transformativity. (PENNYCOOK, 2007).

Language is closer to us because we use it constantly, whereas culture seems to be something out of our reach. Most of the time, people see culture as an act of materialism, as if an object could summon culture, like how museums objectify life. Since language is an everyday practice, it is always open to change and to adaptation, such changes are studied by linguists in two main categories: synchronic and diachronic – according to Saussure’s principles of semiology (SAUSSURE, 1916), which mean respectively, to study language in a certain moment in history, in which the comparison between past and present are not involved; and the latter would be the study of the changes language goes through in a certain period to the other. Hence, when knowing that culture and language are inseparable variants that are crucial on the making of what it is to be a human being, it is also important to make the association that if language is always bound to change, then culture will inevitably change with it. Therefore, let’s be guided through this chapter by the principle that culture had a distinct meaning in the Enlightenment, just as it meant another thing in England at the beginning of the 20th century,

also in the United States post-Civil Rights Movement and a new innovated variation nowadays, for the modern concept of what it is to be human in a globalized world.

4.1. What is culture?

“‘Culture’ is one of the most difficult concepts in the human and social sciences and there are many different ways of defining it.” (HALL, 1997, p. 2). Culture is a concept derived from nature, The Latin root of the word ‘culture’ is *colere*, which means to *cultivate* (EAGLETON, 2000). The concept of culture has been discussed for a long time now, but let’s pick up on the very first moment this concept began to be discussed in high institutions as an academic matter. It began to be studied precisely in 1917, when F. R. Leavis, one of the biggest representatives of the ideological concept of culture, founded the *English* discipline in the *University of Cambridge*, expanding the possibilities of academic studies about Literature and Culture. Leavis was also responsible for elaborating the method of “close-reading” (the act of searching and examining the formal elements that assemble a literary work), which we still use as a way to approximate ourselves and to fully comprehend a literary work. The tradition in which he was a representative has a perception of culture as a component that is unreachable to society. Culture was seen in a superior sphere, the deposit of the greatest values of society. According to this concept, culture is supposed to aid only few privileged men in understanding and fully comprehending historical values of ancient civilizations – however, the downside of that is the fact that culture will remain static and unable to variate and change. This tradition favored by F. R. Leavis was dominant from the Enlightenment until the 20th century.

Leavis viewed culture as something created by few and also made for few. His vision was not democratic; it was an elitist, restrictive, anachronic and authoritarian view on culture. His proposal was to attribute power and responsibility to the minority who he judged “competent” to access and study culture:

Our power to take advantage of the most significant human experiences of the past depends on this minority, which keeps alive the most subtle and fragile aspects of tradition. The implicit patterns that order the most refined forms of life of an era are dependent of it, the sense that something here is more valuable than something there, that we should go in this direction and not in that direction. (LEAVIS, 1930, p.143)

Raymond Williams and some companions went through a formation based on the concept of culture, but it was experiences and studies that assisted them in completely changing

the way to view cultural production. In 1958, Williams formalized a new conception of culture in which experience is valued; tradition is as important as creation, and culture is the breeder of social life. His view, unlike Leavis', is democratic. It proposes that every social object can be a field of cultural study. Its theoretical importance stems from its relentless work in demonstrating that one cannot understand an artistic or intellectual project without understanding its conditions of formation; design and formation, base and superstructure, culture and society are inseparable, that between each of these dualities there is a series of complex relationships that intertwine them. We are no longer studying just the canon, but every cultural manifestation. Culture is not just an art mode, but a way of life.

Williams reacts not only to the idealistic tradition effectively consolidated by Leavis, but also to orthodox Marxist currents of thought. In *Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory* (1980), the author criticizes the unilateral conception that the base determines the superstructure. As the founder of cultural materialism in England, Williams argues that both the base and the superstructure are processes and not states, and that the base is more complex than it appears to be, that is, it is not a static notion of economics. Williams saw the base not specifically in men, but in their social and economic relations.

Even before his formalization of base and superstructure in his book *Culture and Society* (1958), the author uses five terms (*industry, democracy, class, art, and culture*) to demonstrate that the pattern of change in the meaning of these words – mainly from the 18th century - results and reacts to changes in life within the context of the Industrial Revolution. “The development of the word culture is a record of a number of important and continuing reactions to these changes in our social, economic and political life, and may be seen, in itself, as a special kind of map by means of which the nature of the changes can be explored.” (WILLIAMS, 1958, p. 15). Thus, in his approach to culture, the meanings, senses and values of a social group are not written on paper; on the contrary, new social practices, just as new words that emerge in the lexicon of a language and its significant meanings, are the result of a process of change and social struggle, individual and historical.

The 1960s was one of the most important decades in the history of men. It was at this time that the Civil Rights were created, when the youth's desire for change ruled in the United States and the whole world. In addition to the cultural development that took place during this period, the political movement also took on a different facet and the New Left was created. With that, the cultural movements ruled by Williams were very aligned with the economic and political interests of the 60s. As previously mentioned, Williams believed that men were rooted

on their social and economic relations and that it is in these relations that contradictions happen and show a dynamic process:

We have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process. (WILLIAMS, 1980, p. 34)

To comprehend the base, Williams raised the term used by Marx, "productive forces", that after the developments of the 20th century got more associated with "capitalist economic relationships". These difficulties in the proposals presented brought an alternative development: Notion of Totality. This notion shows how thought is determined by the relationship between the production that exerts limits and the pressures that propel thought, and this limitation of thought appears in the superstructure. Williams argues that in order to understand this notion of wholeness in cultural studies, it is necessary to think about the Notion of Intent, as society presents a specific organization and structure and the principles of that organization are governed by certain social intentions that start from a certain social class. These principles and values established by a dominant class of society constitute hegemony, that is, the domination of certain ideas over others, building a reality that defines and controls the society [base] that ends up sharing these imposed values.

Assuming that the superstructure is responsible for creating an ideology that would be adopted by the base, Marxism helps us to see that this is a false pretense and that the base must not embrace it. One cannot believe that things happen by chance, the ideology imposed on society was created based on the interests of the superstructure and they do not represent the same reality as of the base. As Williams said, the base is not a static notion of economics, just as we must believe that the base is not a static notion of *culture*. In order to change this reality, Marx claimed that the base must be aware that this imposed ideology is false, for everything starts with social awareness. "For Marxism, the culture of modernity is indeed in a sense autonomous of material conditions, and it is precisely material conditions which permit it to be so" (EAGLETON, 1943, p. 234).

It is possible to talk about culture without mentioning Marx, even Raymond Williams would be able to talk about his theory without talking about the theorist once (HALL, 1997), but it cannot be left unmentioned that this monograph will be centered on the fact that culture can be seen in binaries (EAGLETON, 2000): the big 'C' culture, which refers to the hegemonic view of culture, which is very common in literature, for example, authors such as James Joyce,

William Shakespeare, Jane Austen are seen and taught all around the globe as the best literature can offer to all, as if humanity was one united front with only one point of view, a collective objectivity; and the little 'c' culture, which is about everything that is considered "not important" to society, according to the hegemonic class, the superstructure.

What I intend to do is to understand how creations from the "base", which in terms of Eagleton's theories, are seen as part of the little 'c' culture, are creating a whole new way of interpreting the language of movies and comic books, and consequently, a non-stoppable phenomenon of modern culture.

4.2. Representation and Meaning

Raymond Williams was interested in moving down from high theory to thinking about working-class organizations as a part of culture, rendering culture ordinary (HALL, 1997). According to Stuart Hall, the sociological and the anthropological move were crucial, but were cast in terms of a humanist notion of social and symbolic practices. Hall was interested in the popular arts; the breakdown between high cultural forms and popular forms, and the idea that popular forms give some access to forms of consciousness which are not inscribed in the great books or in the serious high-level philosophies. According to Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practice*", meanings can only be shared through our common access to language, so language's part is essential to meaning and culture has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings (HALL, 1997).

Language creates meaning by operating through a representational system that stands to other people's ideas and concepts. So, according to Hall, representation through language is central to the processes by which meaning is produced. Culture is, in sum, an exchange of meanings between people who share the same values, concepts, ideas and interpretations of the same subject, meanings created by the access to language by a group of people.

Therefore, a representation system is formed by how we give meanings to things; the stories we tell about them, the words we attribute to them, the way we interpret them, etc. Culture is involved in these practices that are not automatic, but a consequence to the value something represents to us. Meaning can be created through different sources of media (HALL, 1997), especially nowadays with global communication and a circulation of meanings between people from different parts of the globe, from completely different cultures.

With the growing importance of visual forms of communication and of research on multimodal semiotic systems (Gee 2014; Kress 2010), the interpenetration of the verbal and the non-verbal has created additional links between text and context, linguistic and visual forms of meaning making. Particularly online communication, that looks both at and through language, blurs the distinction between text and context in a complex virtual culture that creates additional layers of reality. (KRAMSCH, 1998, p. 30)

Concluding, language is a signifying practice and without it, according to Stuart Hall, it would be impossible to create and reject identities, making it also impractical to sustain the common practices which we like to call culture. Assuming that individuals that share the same language can also share the same imaginings, we should also recall individuals that had a connection with other languages and through experience, their individual way to see the world that has always been shared by their community, could change them and their culture forever. So, is it viable to say that practices can change culture? After all, haven't we cleared that culture is always up to change?

Now taking into account the fanfiction community and more specifically the Marvel Universe fanfiction community that relies heavily on sources of entertainment such as comic books and movies, we can apply Hall's saying that language is an important factor in the creation of identities and the ability to share the same imaginings. While conducting my survey, I have considered that all my subjects, although from very different places and cultures, shared the same access to the language found in Marvel's sources and that made possible for 5 different and non-related people from different countries to share the same imaginings upon the same subject, and that is how fanfiction communities are created. As we can see in the section of comments collected down below:

Jasmine: I mean, I haven't read a lot of comic books, but there's this particular one that stood out to me, It's the '98 Cap/Iron Man Annual. They clash over their morals a lot in it. Correct me if I'm wrong, but Tony's [Iron Man] pragmatic. He'll do whatever it takes for the greater good, no matter the morals behind it, but Steve's the opposite of that. His morals cloud his judgment and makes him narrowed-minded sometimes. And I like how throughout the story, they realize where the other is coming from, and they try their best to work together to compromise, because they're two sides of the same coin. As different as they seem to be, they work towards the same goal but go about it differently, And I guess I just like that about them. And also the fact that things don't turn out well when they don't work together kinda does it for me, I mean, I'll be frank, I don't ship much. I could like a couple and think they're cute or whatever, but there's something about them that has my full attention? I think I like the complexity of their

relationship, like they're friends and they clash and well, shit goes down sometimes, but no matter what, they always come back to each other, in every universe, and yeah, the multiverse is another thing. The fact that their relationship is so important and it is a focal point in almost every verse is insane. Yeah, the multiverse is crazy. The endless possibilities, and I like angst, but not too much. As long there's a good ending to it all, [laughs]. Which is basically most of my stevetony fics. Also, the fact that they're kinda opposites (past/future, red/blue, etc.) does it for me too. For some reason.

Jennifer: When Marvel movies started, we got Tony [Iron Man], and he was this beautiful star. A little tarnished, a little dented, but he was the sun that we began to circle. But then Avengers and oh goodness, there's Steve. Suddenly we have these two suns, equal in light and power, and they are circling each other. From almost their first moments onscreen together these characters (admittedly, largely through the actors who portray them at first) have this remarkable chemistry. It does not feel safe. It feels wild and electric. What was pushed as a run of the mill friendship was clearly able to be so much more. Steve was so dependent on and disappointed in Tony in Avengers: Age of Ultron, but the layer from Captain America: The Winter Soldier, the audience's knowledge of his inherent betrayal at the time when he is chastising Tony for the decisions he has made, oh! that dramatic irony is delightful. Civil War really cinched it for me. There was no moment between either character and one who was set up as a romantic opposite (Peggy, Pepper, Sharon) that felt as emotionally charged as the moments between Steve and Tony in that movie. The contention, the betrayal, even the slight joking all felt like more. I think many people felt that only a romantic connection really made sense for the culmination of that storyline. And so, the fanfiction continued to fix it. As with so many other stories, these two characters were not allowed to be happy. Not allowed that ending that would be satisfying. So, the fanfiction fixed it. I ship Steve and Tony because they are the center of the Marvel-verse. All of these stories are capable of being told without them, but their inclusion makes other stories better. I think that this relationship resonates with so many people because of the many layers that it has, that it shows us. Even only taking into account the MCU, we have a contentious friendship which is bolstered by resentment and lies. They are undoubtedly the parental figures in this team/family of the Avengers whether people wish to see them like that or not. People can easily see a relationship that they recognize in these two characters. The MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) has them teetering on the edge of a romantic relationship for eight years, regardless of what they intended.

Diana: I guess I have my own personal reason for why I ship these two so hard. You know, I mostly read fanfictions where either Steve or Tony are struggling with their mental health. So, lots of angst. I love these two together because I feel like they're perfect for each other. Fanfictions where Tony is struggling with his anxiety or depression or alcoholism, always being the pessimist and Steve being in his true nature, always the optimist, but also struggling with the new age and leaving his past behind. You know, they're perfect because Steve always tries to see the good and is there for Tony. And Tony is always there helping him to adjust in this new world. They just get each other. As Steve said "it's hard to find someone with shared life experience" but these two, they have that! It's just—I love reading about Steve and Tony being there for each other, being an anchor for each other. They push each other to always be better and they accept each other's flaws. Let's not forget about their arguments and sexual tension there. When I talk about them, I always think about my all-time favorite fanfiction. It's just so perfect. Also, the fact that Tony basically grew up with Steve being his hero, but also hating him from day one because his father was obsessed with him and not in his own son. It makes it even more perfect. I think people love these so much because they're not perfect, but they try to be for each other. I just love most that they have this deep connection, you know? Understanding each other even though they have different views of the world. It's weird—they're like light and darkness, day and night, but that's what makes them perfect for each other.

Velma: I could talk about this forever [laughs] so, it all started when I watched the Avengers and there was a lot of animosity between them at first, but during the movie you realize that they get over it and become friends, this friendship being very important to unite the Avengers. Up until that point there was a feeling of "oh they would be an incredible couple". But everything got more intense after I saw the fandom works because it opened my eyes to really love the ship. For example, the fact that they complement each other, Steve is a man from the past, while Tony is a visionary man from the future. Steve is very idealistic, and Tony is more rational. So, noticing how balanced they were and how this was a positive impact on the team that they co-lead, more specifically in the Avengers Assemble animation, was what made me gain an eternal love for this couple. It was also influenced by the comic universe, knowing all the things they achieved together and how this was only possible because they were always there for each other, it was a beautiful relationship and I am sure that if one of them was a woman, everyone would ship it, which is only further proven by the alternative universe of a comic book in which the two of them get married, but Tony is a woman in this universe. Anyway, seeing a relationship where both parties clearly care about each other, where one helps

the other grow and be better as a person is what made me ship stevetony, but then everything went down the drain with Civil War.

Hayley: They're so similar yet so different. I think they balance each other really well. They just have this deep connection that just jumps out at you like they are one of the most important people in the world to each other and that shows. Especially in Civil War when you see the pain that being at odds causes both of them. They have similar experiences and trauma. Neither of them had much family and so the Avengers and particularly each other are so special and important to them. They have this instant chemistry from the moment they meet, but it takes them some time to really get the other. I really think they push each other to be and do better. They have different approaches and ways of thinking and they're at their strongest when they are listening and working with each other. Everyone sees Steve as this sweetheart and Tony as a snarky asshole, but Steve is secretly sarcastic and snarky and Tony is secretly a softie, the softest.

When I am trying to explain to someone why I *ship* stevetony and why most people ship them as well, I find myself always repeating the same reasons my five subjects gave me above. It seems that when all of this started, many years ago, the fandom created an identity for both Steve and Tony and for us, these identities are unchangeable and the main aspects that can be used in answering why they would be a perfectly good match in the first place. This is not an unchanging truth and if we try to give these reasons to people outside the fandom and the community, none of it will make sense, because this interpretation is shared within our group and to enter this community, one must share the same views and meanings.

As we can see in the comments, there are keywords: opposites, understanding, betrayal, future, past. All of the subjects believe the characters are opposites that understand and complement each other and that these traits that make them so different are what fit them together so well. Velma specifies that although already thinking in the past that they would form a great couple in her conception, being an avid part of the community is what helped her to open her eyes to so many more aspects of their relationship and to create an undying affection for the couple, meaning that when thinking about this alone, it was only a thought, but when entering the community and sharing these views with other people, a whole meaning was created and a culture established within the group. Now, Diana relied on a more individualistic reason on why she supports the couple. As I have talked about in my second chapter, Diana's more acquainted with stories that analyze the issue of mental health, given that this is a main

feature in her personal life. So, in this case, we can say that there is a collective thought about the characters that makes “sense” of the idea of them together. However, we can also say that each one of them have their own personal context and reasons behind their assertions and what has brought them to enter the community in the first place. After all, the subjects and everyone in this group have been analyzing and been given access to the same language, and it was up to them and their personal reasons to find meaning and then find people with shared views upon the same subject.

4.3. Nature x Nurture

Is it possible to produce culture because “something” happened? According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, yes. The concept of culture is, most of the times, connected with the view of human nature dominant in the Enlightenment, which is a scientific way of thinking about culture. The Enlightenment view of man was that he was wholly a piece of nature and shared in the general uniformity of composition which natural science has discovered there. Following Geertz’s *The impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man* (1973), the notion that men are men has not been replaced with “other mores”. Basically, the Enlightenment has established to the world that the nature of humanity had some much less acceptable implications, and the main one, in which Geertz quoted Lovejoy himself, is: “anything of which the intelligibility, verifiability, or actual affirmation is limited to men of a special age, race, temperament, tradition or condition is of itself without truth or value, or all events without importance to a reasonable man”.

The problem with this kind of view is that the image of human nature walks alone and independent of time, place, occurrences, meanings and events that can happen to oneself. Man is actually entangled with where he is, who he is and what he believes it is inseparable from them. Geertz believes that these occurrences and circumstances make the drawing of a line between what is natural, universal and constant in a man and what is conventional, local and variable. Men have layers and each of these layers have their own importance, their origin and all of them together are the making of a man. Human nature plus social life compose culture. Geertz makes his point clear by saying that there is no way of generalizing men, save that he is a most various animal or that the study of culture has nothing to contribute towards the uncovering of such generalizations. The author proposes two anthropological ideas for the exact image of man: the first one being that culture is not, as most say, a gathering of traditions,

customs, habits or whatever, but a set of control mechanisms for the governing of behavior. The second one is that man is precisely an animal most desperately dependent upon outside-the-skin control mechanisms, such as cultural programs, for ordering his behavior. These “control mechanisms” being both social and public, can impose meaning upon experience.

Despite the existence of general trends that can be seen in the histories of societies, it is not possible to establish fixed sequences capable of detailing the phases that each cultural reality has gone through. Each culture is the result of a particular history, and this also includes its relationships with other cultures, which may have very different characteristics. (SANTOS, 2006, p. 12)

Therefore, studying culture this way, according to José Luiz dos Santos, contributes to the battle against prejudice, because everyone will understand that there is a nature that makes us one, but also nurture, that represents all our individual experiences that “shape” our culture, and finally, we will be able to dignify and respect each human relationship.

By the end of the nineties, the modernist concept of culture was coming to be replaced by late modernist concepts like historicity and subjectivity, that put the focus on the historical and subjective nature of culture, conceived as co-constructed “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings. Even when they have left that community, its members may retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting” (KRAMSCH, 1998, p.10)

Understanding and, most importantly, *accepting* this aspect of modern culture will be essential to comprehend a phenomenon that occurs amongst fans of many entertainment sources throughout time. Stories generated by ordinary people that found themselves having the same imaginings and interpretations of the same source material, fan-created retellings that have received a very specific term to denominate them: fanfictions.

I have discussed in this chapter how language and culture are two variants that walk alongside one another in the process of shaping humanity, and as it was compared to the linguistic studies created by Saussure, language goes through several changes and there are in fact studies that help us perceive and comprehend these alterations throughout time. Concluding, after all, culture and language are inseparable, then culture is also subjected to change, so it is impossible to say that the concept of culture is an immutable variant. If that were true, then there would not be any discrepancy between the modern civilization and the ancient, if culture doesn't change, then men would not as well.

Culture is not a deposit of the best values of ancient societies as the Enlightenment men proclaimed, culture is supposed to help us understand where we came from but also to fully

comprehend the reality we live in today through cultural manifestations and representation. To understand our reality, it is of extreme importance that the base sees that the ideology imposed by the bourgeoisie, or the superstructure, is false and does not mirror the real point of view of society. If society does not embrace its own point of views, its own interpretations and imaginings, then culture would remain in the hands of the hegemonic class and would not represent life. The contact between cultures results in new adaptations of one's nurture. When realizing and accepting this phenomenon, it will be simpler to embrace every cultural manifestation of the base and also to resist prejudices against the marginalized culture, Eagleton's little "c" culture. When every cultural expression is embraced, the big "C" culture will lose its hegemonic power over the folk culture.

5. The LGBTQ+ Movements in 21th century's Fanfiction

Something I have noticed from the past ten years as a fanfiction reader is the unmatched presence of retellings with LGBTQ+ perspective inside media spaces. From an outside perspective, this may seem a bit odd because there are obviously and undeniably more straight characters on the media than there are LGBTQ+ characters. Then if that is a fact of our reality, why is it that when we look what fans choose to write and read about, this plot is what people tend to gravitate to? The practice isn't particularly new, taking into consideration that fanfiction writers have been pairing the protagonists of Star Trek, Spock and Captain Kirk, way back in 1960s, it has become impossible to ignore the magnitude that this interpretation has reached. Over 5.5 million fanfictions have been published of 35 thousand different fandoms. According to the stats calculated¹³ by the Ao3 of the Top 100 fictional pairings between 2017 and 2019, 71 of them are LGBTQ+: 66 stories of gay couples and 5 about lesbian couples. When you look up the most popular pairings in the most popular fanfiction websites, you will find that all of these pairings are between two men. Why is that?

One of the most conspicuous facts about all these popular pairings is that the majority of them are not actually together in canon¹⁴. In fact, most of them are actually involved with women in the source material. What I want to dissert about in this chapter is where does this need amongst fans to find queer subtext in mainly heterosexual media environments come from? And can we say that the fanfiction writers are wrong? Are their visions getting a little bit too far? And are they letting their own identity struggles on a daily basis get in the way of concrete and established stories that should not be altered? Or is it possible that maybe this wave has been growing for so long that entertainment enterprises cannot hold the wave of change anymore? Is the LGBTQ+ representation in fanfictions of mainly cis straight fandoms a cry for help, a scream of anger, of fans that have been oppressed for too long and cannot handle one more day of going unrepresented by their most appreciated works? To answer all these questions, we must understand the roots of a crucial dilemma many people face when trying to grasp concepts of sex, sexuality and gender, and the links between them. We gathered that fans are "acting" queer, but what is it to act queer in the first place?

¹³ AO3 Ship Stats 2017-2019. Available in <<https://archiveofourown.org/works/19963579/chapters/47258407>> Visited in January, 9th of 2020.

¹⁴ Another word for official. Used quite often in fanfiction to differentiate between the official storyline in which the fanfiction is based on. <<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Canon>> Visited in April, 16th of 2020.

5.1. Queer Studies: Highlights

On June 28th of 1969, a massive conflict broke out between the gays, lesbians, transgenders and sympathizers community and the police on the famous stage at The Stonewall Inn bar, on Greenwich Village (New York). Fed up with the oppression, the community reacted against a police invasion in the bar, which was followed by protests against the New York Police Department (NYPD) and the queer folk's claim for their rights. Years later, the community, which had become politically active, was once more suffering from several incisive attacks by society due to the AIDS pandemics, which had started in 1981, consequently, studies about sexual orientation, identity and gender began to circulate amongst the Academy in the late 1980s, with the intention to fight back the homophobic slurs the community was struggling with, and that is when we got acquainted with what is called today as the queer studies (BERUTTI, 2010).

Eliane Berutti questions in her book "Gays, Lesbians, Transgenders: The Rainbow Path in North American Culture" the reason why the term "queer" was chosen instead of "gay" and "lesbian" for the theory, considering the negative historical baggage the first term carries along with itself. The term "queer" was by far the most defiant choice for this theory, which is loaded with challenges, prejudice and rejection simply for existing and Berutti mentions that these studies have become something that "defies dominant heterosexist paradigms" (BEEMYN & ELIASON, 1996, p. 163).

It should be noted, in this essay, that queer theory is not restricted to discussing issues related to sexuality. This theory also aims to problematize questions of identity. For Ruth Goldman, queer "represents any number of intersecting anti-normative identities" (1996, p. 169). In this way, race, gender, ethnicity and class provide material for these intersections. Queer theory therefore implies a multiple of identities. (BERUTTI, 2010, p. 30)

Taking what Berutti implies into consideration, the theory is about a bundle of identities and can be used against prejudice in contexts of any nature since "people are not queer in the same way" (SEDGWICK, 1990, p. 22). Queer Studies means what we do and not what we are, so although the term can be used as a noun, an adjective and a verb, we will be viewing it more as the latter. We act *queer* and we *queer* things. When we start analyzing and foremost understanding the theory with this point of view, it will be way easier to fully grasp the link and importance of this interpretation that will aid people to escape the prejudice they go through

when they are labeled as “abnormal” by society. “The preference for “queer” represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal.” (WARNER, 1993, p. 26)

What Michael Warner, a great theorizer of Queer Studies and author of *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, means is that when we resist the normal, we are acting queer. When we are reviewing public norms, the common sense and how *we* can normalize the way people live their lives when not obeying the “normal”, we are resisting a constructed way of life that was imposed on most of us based on our genders and our sexualities. According to Warner, the term “queer” was mostly created out of terror and violence that minorities were going through; it came by the realization that prejudice was more than just intolerance, it came by the resistance from society to break the normalization rules. So, the reason a gay man or a lesbian woman or transgender person is denied to live their life freely as a heterosexual person would, it is not only because people are intolerant with their choices, it is because this person has to break the “rules” every day in order to be who they truly wish. To be homosexual, to be a woman and to be black in an environment most favorable to white, heterosexual men is to break the wheel of order every minute you go out of your house to work, to meet your friends or your lover, to say out loud that you refuse to go out of your house one more day without being accepted by society. “Queer”, therefore, also suggests the difficulty in defining the people “whose interests are at stake in queer politics” (WARNER, 1993, p. 26), then let us understand the main ideas that the theory seeks to convey and then comprehend how to define the concepts of simply being, living and doing queer things amongst modern society. As it was mentioned previously in this chapter, the theory arose in the late 80s, combining the need of a theory background to fight back the rise of bigotry caused by the AIDS pandemic and cultural studies that took place in the 20th century with a backbone of French post-structuralism designed by Michel Foucault. The main intent of this theory was to debunk certain ideas conceived by a heteronormative and controlling society and to also question, problematize and transform the “minorities”, who have always been excluded.

The Queer theory is also here to complement the LGBT+ and feminist theories that surged in the 80s in order to find advanced solutions and explanations about inequality and oppressions within society, and this fact leads us to one of the most important things we must know about the term you will read probably over a hundred times in this chapter of my thesis alone, *queer*: When talking about this theory, one must always include problematizations about

sex, sexuality and gender; this is the reason why applying the Queer Studies into contexts where society “selects” a group of people and classify them as “normal” is brilliant, because by doing that we are considering people’s experiences and personal agendas. Individual experiences are just as important in this context as it was when defining the many points of view in culture, as I’ve talked about in the last chapter. When you take into perspective that being a gay man is not a defining feature for men who are oppressed in other ways, such as racism for example, then the LGBT+ movement would not be sufficient for a black gay man. Black women often criticize the feminist movement because most of the time, feminists do not take into account the race struggles black women go through, so being a woman in this context does not matter much for someone who is experiencing other kinds of oppressions as well, and this is where queer studies comes in, because it helps us to see the big picture: sex, sexuality, gender and race all intersect in terms of resisting the “normal” and most privileged individual in our society, a white cisgender male. Therefore, when studying this theory, one must always include all these different categories into account, because if you do not, that will often lead to neglecting some portion of the minorities, which will be no use to anyone, especially to people who are experiencing multiple oppressions.

Taking all that has been said until this point into consideration, one of the main things Queer Studies resist is Identity Politics, which is “the idea of fighting for rights on the basis of a singular identity” (BARKER & SCHEELE, 2016, p. 18). Cathy J. Cohen, whose field of expertise is American Politics, is one of the most influential people when it comes to how we can take Queer and Identity politics and revolutionize our political and equality movements (COHEN, 1997, p. 437-465). Queer politics has established a disunion between heterosexual and those who are identified as queer. Straight people are seen as dominant and controlling and queer people are thought as marginalized and invisible. Cohen believes that you cannot think of only one aspect of your identity, sex or sexuality, because when you do that, you will eventually neglect the intersecting oppressions. Certainly, a heterosexual woman cannot be oppressed by being straight, for example, but she will probably be oppressed due to her gender, for simply being a woman. Rather than building our politics around who is queer and who is not, Cohen suggests rooting political analysis and strategies around the most marginalized in our society (COHEN, 1997).

5.2. How to *Queer* Common Misconceptions

Basically, what I intend to do here is to present the main conceptions of what Queer Theory is all about and also the social misconceptions it wants us to forget. First of all, much like everything in our lives, our ideas about gender, sex and sexuality are socially constructed (BARKER & SCHEELE, 2016). Society wants us to believe that our sexual identities are something “fixed” and static throughout our lives. If you were born with female genitalia, then according to many people, you will live, be and do things as a woman for the rest of your life and no experience or act can change that. “As culturally and historically constituted individuals, we began to see the division between male and female as something fixed, natural, indisputable and full of unquestionable truths, that is, as something reified” (SOUZA & CARRIERI, 2010, p. 50). Creating labels and categorizing people result in presuming that there are normal and abnormal people based solely on their sexual practices and that is one of the many ways people are marginalized and excluded from society, becoming invisible and fitting into the minorities groups (JAGOSE, 1996). “The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual. The category of “man” and “woman” exists only in a heterosexual system, and to end the heterosexual system will end the categories of men and women” (WITTIG, 1993, p. 7).

Judith Butler is an American academic of the early 90s whose work on gender has become perhaps the most influential approach on queer theory. On her most acknowledged book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler also defends the idea that gender is socially constructed based on culture (BUTLER, 1990, p. 26). Her approach on the subject is that the notion of gender is performed. Creator of the conception of performativity, she affirms that gender is not what we are, but what we do and that there are no real authentic “performances” of gender, all performances are copies of what we perceive throughout our lives, how stereotyped versions of being a woman and a man act within cultural discourses. “The construction of gender and sexuality takes place through innumerable learnings and practices, it is insinuated in the most diverse situations, it is undertaken in an explicit or disguised manner by an inexhaustible set of social and cultural instances” (LOURO, 2008, p.18, my translation). One thing we should all have in mind is that performativity does not mean that all our performances are heavily thought or that we are actors performing our genders (BARKER & SCHEELE, 2016).

In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither it is a set of fluctuating attributes, as we have seen that its substantive effect is performatively produced and imposed by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Consequently, gender shows itself to be performative within the discourse inherited from the metaphysics of the substance - that is, a constituent of the identity that it is supposed to be. (BUTLER, 1990, p. 48)

Butler emphasizes that the limitations established by the binaries of gender demand to a degree an oppositional and solid heterosexuality when believing that sex somehow requires a gender, and that gender can only claim *one* experience alone of sex. If gender is a psychic designation of a heterosexual individual that needs the opposite gender only because it represents not a mirror of yourself but your opposite, then it suggests that *desire, sex* is a form of expression of the gender and that gender is a reflection of desire. According to Butler, this is a way to explain and prove the political reasons why defining gender as a substance is convenient. The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality demands gender to be seen as binary, and a barrier is automatically drawn between people. The consequence of this is a segregation of each gender's terms, needs and rules regarding sexual identities (BUTLER, 1990, p. 44-47).

Based on what I have briefly discussed until this point, every action most of us have seen to be reproduced by our parents, grandparents, friends and work colleges are not naturally given truths of human nature that control our systems and prevent ourselves to change. When we validate that individual experiences can in fact change the way we view culture, which is also a social variant, then it will be easier to grasp that it can also change the way we think about sexual and gender identities. Butler has introduced a new concept we know that the way we display ourselves is not based on the gender we were born with, but based on copying performances we had contact with throughout our lives; if our sexualities and gender identities are not static and go through changes according to our experiences and if we finally come to realize that we have been wrong this whole time and there is no concrete definition of what it is to be classified as "normal" In our society, then people may come to the conclusion that heterosexuality is also an ideology created by certain groups of people who had their best interests in mind and it is time we finally find a way to cut these imposed roots so we can build a better world for all of us.

5.3. Heteronormativity

Heterosexist doctrines make it possible to reinforce the domination of "normals" over "abnormals", in addition to having in common - from medicine to sexology, through psychoanalysis and anthropology - this formidable capacity to produce discourses about homosexuality; indeed, such speeches are justified by discriminatory policies. (BORRILLO, 2010, p. 64, my translation)

Queer Theory seeks to dismantle the idea of heteronormativity, which is the definition of a normal or natural form of attraction and relationship being between a man and a woman (BARKER & SCHEELE, 2016). Heteronormativity's heritage comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition, but centuries before the Christianity had been well established, in Ancient Greece, a sexual relation between men was seen as a "preparation for marital life" (BORRILLO, 2010, p. 44) and pederasty¹⁵ was seen as legit aspect of men's social life. The love shared between two people of the same gender was present even in famous lyrical works, such as by Sappho, an acclaimed Greek poet. She wrote before all else about the erotic universe that was exclusively shared between women. Also, the origins of the term "lesbian", that represents all women who are spiritually and sensually attracted to other women, is derived from her home, the Island of Lesbos.

In Ancient Rome, homosexuality was also considered legit, but under certain conditions. The norms that concerned in what should consist the relationship between men and society were well established by then, hence, the condition for a man to lie with another man was that his actions should not deviate him from his duty, which was to marry a woman and become a *pater familias*, which means to have a lineage. The other condition was that man should avoid assuming the passive role in his relationship with another man, since that attitude was essentially associated with femininity, a feature considered shameful and degrading for a Roman male. The Greco-Roman civilization did not find it strange when man found company with both man and woman, however, the position he assumed during the act itself with his partners was something of extreme importance because it had a close and personal link with the position of power and class a man had in society. "The dichotomies male/female, active/passive defined the social roles, the access to power and the position of each individual according to their gender and class" (BORRILLO, 2010, p. 47). Although both civilizations were considerably sexist, they never saw homosexual practices as something "abnormal", it was an act that was part of society and these practices even intersected with man's relationship with a

¹⁵ The term "pederasty" – from greek *paîs*, *paidós* (boys) and *éros*, *érotos* (love, passion) – implied the spiritual and sensual affections of an adult male for a boy (BORRILLO, 2010, p. 45).

woman. Heterosexuality as a social and religious norm became harsh and cruel since the rise of Judaism and Christianity during the Roman Empire.

Christianity introduced a new doctrine that would never be considered by the Greco-Roman because it went against their erotic way of life and traditions: abstinence. The main intention of engaging sexual abstinence is to find a way to get even closer to God, since being closer to God by spirit was deemed not enough by the Catholic church. Men had to set aside their carnal desires and only then would they be able to establish a connection with God, since their flesh would no longer be distracted by pleasures created by men. The only exception established by the Church to break such Christian conduct was reproduction within a religious marriage between a man and a woman. Thus, the intention of the Church becomes evident. If the final goal was reproduction of the species and the only way to achieve this was with a heterosexual relationship, it becomes clear why the religious marriage was exclusively between a man and a woman. With this, homosexuality becomes a double sin, because besides the fact that the man is fleeing from sexual abstinence, he is throwing himself out of marriage with someone who will not make him a *pater familias*¹⁶. To believe in the condemnation of sex outside marriage despite gender, it is enough to remember how many women have been condemned for being adulterous or even for being pregnant outside of marriage. Their children were called bastards, they could not be baptized by the Catholic Church, they were not accepted by their biological fathers because they were conceived outside of religious marriage, the children were not legitimate heirs of their possessions, and according to the patriarchal society of the time, not being a legitimate heir was enough to disregard a person as your own son.

Under the influence of Christianity, the first law against homosexuals appeared in the Roman Empire under Constantinus II in 342, but the first laws condemning them appeared during Justinian's empire (527-565), however, in 390, Emperor Theodosius had already enacted the burning of all passive homosexuals at the stake, since they threatened man's duty to society. The Old Testament was the basis that the Emperor had found to justify such hostility to these men.

According to Daniel Borrillo in his book *Homophobia: History and Critique of a Prejudice*, the people of Israel, concerned about the prolific progeny, "will vigorously condemn any sexual behavior that has no purpose of procreation" (2010, p. 49).

¹⁶ It was the highest family status in ancient Rome and it was always occupied by a male. The term means *a family father*.

To guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well established in the anthropological literature of kinship, have instated sexual reproduction within the confines of a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system. As Foucault and others have pointed out, the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural 'attraction' to the opposing sex/gender is an unnatural conjunction of cultural constructs in the service of reproductive interests. (BUTLER, 1988, p. 519-531)

Thanks to the cultural interests of Christianity, a relationship between sex and sexuality was established and with it, the new heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy was created, with heterosexuality being the only behavior accepted by society. There were centuries of persecution and torture against homosexuals and the Old Testament legitimated barbarism against the human being, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." (Leviticus 18:22). Heredity was law, it was man's obligation to society and to himself, if he did not have a son, who would care for his possessions after his death? Having an heir was an economical and cultural interest to a man. As well as his economic possessions and his legacy, the Church gets one more devotee, and the consequence of that cycle? Christianity became the most preached religion in the world with about 2.3 billion believers.

Any sexual act that prevented the reproduction of man became a sin according to the Church, hence, "masturbation was condemned, as was any behavior with the wrong species (bestialism), the wrong sex (homosexuality), or the wrong organ (oral or anal sex)" (Thomas Aquinas, II ae, q. 154, 11). Homosexuality was considered a crime against the nature of man, a perversion against the will of God, and a call from the dark forces of man's desire, which prevented him from prospering and being who God wanted him to become, lying with the same gender diverted man from his destiny on earth, and the Church reinforced that sins about sexual acts had consequences on his spirit and body, which God gave us. "Keep away from the desires of the flesh. Every sin which a man does is outside of the body; but he who goes after the desires of the flesh does evil to his body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

As in many other areas of the history of European civilizations, the French Revolution changed society's view of certain aspects already long lived and the sinful bias towards homosexuality was changed. The last death sentence on a homosexual man was in France in 1783, and for a long time homosexuality was ignored by the state as it drifted apart from the clergy (BORRILLO, 2010). However, decriminalization against homosexuals is still harmful in many places. The intention so far has been to present the facts that give rise to the heterosexual ideology that is imposed by society by all possible means. To be aware of how

much we are imposed on the normality of heterosexual life, just turn on the TV, watch a film in the cinema, read a novel and a magazine, etc. "To live in society is to live in heterosexuality (...) Heterosexuality is always already there within all mental categories. It has sneaked into dialectical thought (or thought of differences) as its main category" (WITTIG, 1992, p. 40).

With this brief contextualization I presented about why heterosexuality was so important to the great institution of Christianity, we could see how sexuality is interconnected with relations of control and power over others, benefiting those who control our visions and free will for their own benefit. We now understand discursive and non-discursive practices, knowledge and powers that aim to normalize, control and establish "truths" about the body and its pleasures. The device of sexuality is "a type of training which, at a certain historical moment, had as its main function to respond to an urgency" (FOUCAULT, 1996, p. 244). The problem is that we still live under this constant repression created centuries ago. Man feels history running through his fingers and man can understand history, the reasons why it happens and why, in a certain way, according to Foucault, it had to occur in order to respond to a certain urgency, but speaking from experience, I do not see man using history as an attribute to fix and be applied to our present. According to Foucault, history should not merely be studied because it is interesting to know the history of the world and the more you know, the more you will know about culture, no. The philosopher's intention was to study history through genealogy (FOUCAULT, 1966); thus we should take all these facts here to understand why homosexuality is still seen as an abnormality and heterosexuality as "normal" and "natural", and more than that, use the data here presented to find a way to change the world we live in today so then we can all live in a world where two people can love each other in harmony with nature, despite of gender and sexuality, and this is where queer studies comes in, it goes beyond everything we know or even don't know about who we are and why we were born this way, it is about living a life free of socially constructed values based on other people's urgencies and interests, "we must strive to become homosexual and not obstinate in recognizing that we are" (FOUCAULT, 2005, p. 1).

Foucault's proposition is simply that the community has to start talking. Homosexuals, bisexuals, transgenders, everyone, should speak up. Only when stating and showing to whoever desires to listen what is homosexuality or being a transgender, meaning, only when the freedom of another person is understood, then acceptance will surely come right after. When homosexuals start expressing homosexuality, because it is of his or her own being, it constitutes itself and is constituted by others as a subject who emits a truthful discourse. This is where I

bring back the importance of writing LGBTQ+ fanfiction of source materials which are viewed worldwide from a heteronormative perspective. Now that we understand the origin of heteronormativity, it becomes evident how repetitive and common the representation of heterosexuality is in all the media and communications of modern society. The Comic Books¹⁷ mainstream media is considered not only an extremely biased, but as a closed shell that for many years has not been adept to change. Anyone who knows at least a little about the fanbase of Comic Books and Superhero movies at the end of the 20th century, knows how much women are mocked when they say they like the subject, or how a gay man is said to be someone who would never read such types of entertainment because the idea of the effeminate homosexual man created from the prejudice against the passive role is still prevalent nowadays by most of these fans. To be anything other than a white straight male in this environment is to fight back commonly known prejudice acts every day, and to have none of your social struggles represented on your most favorite sources of entertainment can be way more harmful and stressful than it seems.

When I questioned my subjects during the survey on why did they think representation through fanfiction was so important, Velma from Minas Gerais, Brazil, complemented my commentary above on how necessary it is to see yourself and your story represented in front of you.

Velma: The representativity is very important in these scenarios of great notability, whether it is through a female scientist, a black president or a trans volleyball player. But it turns out that the universe of entertainment unfortunately doesn't give much room for that. I believe that representativity matters because everybody deserves to feel that they identify with something and I think it would help a lot of people who feel that they were "born wrong", when there is this representativity they start to realize that it's all right to be who they are, that they don't need to be ashamed or try to change. In the specific case of Marvel's universe this is even more important because, historically, the "geek" world, be it through comics or games, is dominated by straight men, but people other than them also have the right to like this universe and feel welcome and represented in it.

¹⁷ A comic book is a magazine that contains stories told in pictures. Available in <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/comic-book>> Visited in May, 10th of 2020.

What I enjoyed most about their comment is that they specified how this representation is needed from all the groups we are talking about in Queer Theory: people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, women. Representation is important to all people who are told by society that there is something about them that is abnormal, something that keeps them from living freely. Velma also said how the “geek” fandom overall, that includes all kinds of entertainment: movies, video games, comic books, etc., is mostly composed by heterosexual men, and in my opinion, this is a common knowledge between all queer people that also love this kind of entertainment. This is where LGBTQ+ fanfiction comes in, for people to find comfort, representation and even a way to express their voice with the characters and plots they adore so much.

5.4. Fanfiction: Creation of Representation

Fanfiction has been considered shallow nonsense only worthy of mockery and one of the main reasons for that is because of whom fanfictions are typically associated with. In 2010, the most popular fanfiction website of the time ran statistics to find out what were the gender and age of the majority of the users and the results pointed out that just under 80% of the userbase was composed by female and most were young adults¹⁸. Although the statistics are legit, it has been 10 years and much has changed, especially considering that the most popular website of the time is barely reached by fans anymore. The importance to know the statistics is to understand why fanfiction is mocked in the first place, it is no secret that most of the things that are related to teenage girls are quickly associated with frivolity and considered “silly” and thoughtless. It is a common practice that in order to devalue a novel or a movie people relate the work to teenage girls and that will not be considered as serious as it was instantly. Therefore, it is my instinct to point out that if someone uses the argument based on gender and age to undermine the practice of writing heavily thought stories that exist for a reason, then this person should not be taken into consideration, since sexism is not a valid counter-argument when we have just contemplated the basic knowledge of queer studies and the dysfunctional morals that were imposed on us, right?

The reason I pointed out one of the prejudice held against fanfiction is to prove how baseless and unfounded the reasons people dismiss this practice so then we can start further analyzing why the act of writing about two fictional characters that stray away from the pattern

¹⁸ Fanfiction Demographics in 2010: Age, Sex, Country. Available in <<http://ffnresearch.blogspot.com/2011/03/fan-fiction-demographics-in-2010-age.html>> Visited in May, 12th of 2020.

represented to us every day on mainstream media is so popular in the first place. In short, why is it so popular amongst the fans nowadays to take the “normal” and... *queer* it? First of all, the misconception that most of the readers and writers are straight women have been proven wrong by a Tumblr¹⁹ user called Centrum Lumina in 2013. According to her statistics²⁰ that polled over 10 thousand users on the most famous website for fanfiction, *Archive of Our Own*, just 30% of the writers are straight women and most of the respondents identified themselves as queer in some way. Heterosexuals may think representativity on media is not that important or life changing and, in my opinion, the reason for that is because if you do not miss representativity, it is because you already have it. If most of society thinks heterosexuality is a normality then how would they even picture a world that when you turn on the television, you find nothing but LGBT+ rom coms²¹? My point being that LGBT+ people do not have the pleasure to witness their own realities mirrored in front of them, something that could help in some way or another to overcome difficulties and our boundaries regarding our social lives. Not seeing someone like you on media can be pretty demoralizing and it can easily make someone feel like they are alone struggling with this issue or that no one will ever understand what you are going through. Depending on the city they live in, a lot of queer people almost have no acquaintances to share their struggles with in their real lives. Where are queer people supposed to find comfort through difficult moments in their lives? In no one? Not even on the media? Are they supposed to never fully find a way to heal their mental wounds caused by being categorized as “abnormal” by society?

This excerpt from *Two's a Crowd* is an example on how fanfiction is a way for writers and readers to mirror their own personal experiences and struggles with their own sexuality due to the lack of representativity in media. In the context, Captain America, Steve, has a very deep internalized homophobia with himself due to the time he comes from (1940s) and what his public figure presents: God's righteous man, a representation of what is a true American man. This prejudiced vision, although it has been proven wrong a long time ago, especially after the 1960s, still prevails in some niches. Take for example Donald Trump and his followers with

¹⁹ Tumblr is a blogging and social media tool that allows users to publish a "tumblelog", or short blog posts. Tumblr's major differentiator is the free-form nature of the site and the ability of users to heavily customize their own pages. Available in <<https://www.bigcommerce.com/ecommerce-answers/what-tumblr-and-how-it-used/>> Visited in May, 12th of 2020.

²⁰ AO3 census data analysis based on Sexual Orientation. Available in <<https://centrumlumina.tumblr.com/post/62840006596/sexuality>> Visited in May, 12th of 2020.

²¹ *Rom com*: abbreviation for romantic comedy: a film or television programme about love that is intended to make you laugh. Available in <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pt/dicionario/ingles/rom-com>> Visited in May, 13th of 2020.

the motto “Make America Great Again”, which indicates that America’s good sons and daughters have been left behind in the past and they meant to bring them back. Captain America is a symbol of that and Steve is struggling with keeping this persona and still accept himself as a bisexual man who is in a relationship with another man. In Chapter Four he and Tony are arguing:

Steve leaned in, forehead resting on Tony’s knee. “Being Captain America is what I live for. I can’t prioritize anything over that, even you.”

“I’m not asking you to. I’m just saying it’s not a black and white decision – and I think you’re grossly overestimating how much the public will care. We’re moving into a golden age of indifference, Cap. **Gays in the military, marrying left and right, in a few generations people are gonna look back at Westboro Baptist the same way we look back on white supremacists in the 1950’s and think damn! Not to mention, do you know what a hero you’d be to all the scrawny kids out there who might still be thinking there’s something wrong with them? That’s a hell of a thing to be.**”

“I don’t think I can be that role model like this,” Steve said, uncertainly. “Not when I don’t want to be this way. Not when I’m too embarrassed to interact with you in public in case somebody notices what’s going on. Not when I want to be normal.”

Normal?!

Tony felt like he’d been punched in the gut; the painkillers didn’t help at all with that kind of hurt. He pulled his hands away from Steve’s face, and at his withdrawal Steve lifted his face and scanned his eyes up to Tony’s. (my emphasis).

In the first two lines he confirms how his Captain America persona is all that he is and all that he lives for and this is one of the reasons he can’t accept his sexuality. Tony uses as an argument several historical events that mean a lot to the LGBTQ+ community as the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell amendment, LGBTQ+ marriage being accepted in all of the States, as a way to convince Steve that this idea that being a true American is a heterosexual white man has been left in the past and most importantly, how his acceptance would change the way new generations thought about themselves and this metaphorically represents what fanfiction is. The author, rainproof, is simply showing the truth: how this representation could change a lot for so many people.

His reaction is negative, of course, because his demons are much more internalized than they appear and his last phrase is “*Not when I want to be normal*”. Normal, the word that society wants to impose on people, this duality in what is normal and abnormal that controls so many people. Rainproof uses this word constantly in her work as a way to represent what she, a LGBTQ+ woman once thought of herself as well. This scene provoked this reaction below in two of her readers and her response was the following:

mfaerie on Chapter 4

“Being Captain America is what I live for. I can’t prioritize anything over that, even you.”

“I don't think I can be that role model like this,” Steve said, uncertainly. “Not when I don’t want to be this way. Not when I'm too embarrassed to interact with you in public in case somebody notices what's going on. Not when I want to be normal.”

...

Yeah, I'd be gone too. No one is going to put a freakin' title as a priority over me. And he could go be **NORMAL** with someone else, because I wouldn't be with someone that was ashamed of being w/me because of my gender. They could suck it. I'm glad Tony left & thought about himself. (my emphasis).

The reader, mfaerie, put the excerpt that shocked them the most, including the part where Steve says he wants to be normal. Their reaction was brave and angry, saying that they would never be with someone that prioritized a title over them. This line has incited this reaction on them because this struggle is common and recurrent.

Anya K on Chapter 6

This fic has made me cry like nonstop. It's really hard to write believable internalized homophobia. And even tho it hit me where it hurts they weren't cheap shots. The “**I just want to be normal thing**” **just killed me...** So much love and kudos to you... And your Pepper is perfect. Thank God for Pepper.

rainproof on Chapter 6

Pepper is amazing and I love her!!

I'm glad Steve's issues don't seem over the top - that kind of homophobia something **I've had some personal experiences with so it's important to me that I get it right.** <3(my emphasis).

Another one of Rainproof's readers posted this comment and their reaction was much more sorrowful, and they have specified how the line has also hit somewhere closer to home. Notice how this phrase has touched two different people in two different ways. What instigated me the most was the author's response to this comment: "*I've had some personal experiences with so it's important to me that I get it right*". Which means that one of the reasons that the author has chosen this specific topic and the importance to get it right is because they had struggled at some point with the same internalized prejudice and the wish to succumb in society's patterns and be "normal", and her way of getting this out and "talking" about it was to write a fanfiction with her favorite characters and mirroring her own views in a character that could think the same way that she did.

When I asked to subject Hayley, from Pennsylvania, United States, the importance of this kind of representation, she told me that they are part of the LGBTQ+ community and her answer is similar to Rainproof's own experience:

Hayley: God it's incredibly important to have representation, to feel SEEN. As a bisexual woman who grew up in a very conservative, homophobic home, fanfiction was the only place I had that made me feel like being gay was okay. It's still equally important to me as an adult. Having bisexual representation is still so hard to come by, and having it portrayed well. The world still is very biphobic even in the LGBTQIA community. So, having a character, like Steve or Tony, who I relate to and look up to portrayed as bisexual is deeply meaningful to me. It's kind of hard to express fully in words. But there is still a sorely lacking amount of representation in tv, films, and books. So having the LGBT representation in fanfiction, which is free, accessible to everyone (with internet access), and in so many different genres, tropes, and so forth is just so wonderful. When the entertainment industry won't provide us with what we want it's amazing that talented writers spend their time making these stories for us. Stories that inspire us, touch us, make us laugh, cry, and most importantly let us know we are not alone and that things can and do get better.

According to Hayley, to be represented is to feel seen. She was inspired by her own experience as a bisexual woman and how fanfiction has helped her when growing up in a very conservative house with a very close-minded family. Hayley is 31 years old now and still is a reader of fanfiction and no matter what age, she has told me how important it is to be represented in whatever type of media.

A peculiarity in Hayley's comment is how Steve and Tony, Captain America and Iron Man respectively, are almost always portrayed as bisexual men in fanfiction. Both of the characters have had relationships with women in canonic works and both of them are considered well written and healthy by their fans, healthy meaning that they were essential in the making of those characters, they would be different if they had not gone through them, so fans rarely decide to erase this aspect of their stories in their fanfictions, and even though they will get in relationships with men in the works, describing them as bisexual men is the best way to still be faithful to the source material.

Given that representation on the media is extremely important, even more to people who were designed to feel excluded by society, it is pretty understandable why LGBT+ fanfiction is such a popular practice, even more so now that we know that 70% of the writers are in fact part of the LGBT+ community. People often question why the LGBT+ fans don't turn their attention and focus to LGBT+ legit content on media, which in fact exists, more nowadays than ever, but it is still pretty limited comparing to the extent of cis-straight oriented media content. It is also no secret that a lot of queer folk express their dislikes for the stereotypes represented on the media, most of the content are about the AIDS pandemics, tragedies involving death of one the characters²², toxic relationships, and that goes on and on. Although the natural solution when you don't find what you desire on media is to create your own original work, it can be more difficult and intimidating than it seems because it involves so much more than simply being a good writer, you must find your own target public, the right publisher, how to create an affection between the public and your characters, when on the other hand writing about existing characters on fanfiction is simple, for free, anyone can do it and it is way easier to find people who are just as enthusiastic as you are about the characters.

Subject Diana from Germany is also a member of the LGBTQ+ community and she believes that even though there is a representation in mediatic content, it still is very poor and sometimes easy to be forgotten, and in fanfiction, the main characters and any character for that matter can still be part of the community and that's what she wants to see.

Diana: First of all, I am part of the LGBTQ, I'm bisexual so I totally get how horrible it is to not be accepted. Anyway, I think it's important to keep representing LGBTQ through fanfictions

²² "Bury Your Gays is a literary trope that has appeared on media across genre since the end of the 19th century. Works using the trope will feature a same-gender couple and with one of the lovers dying and the other realizing they were never actually gay, often running into the arms of a heterosexual partner." (HULAN & DEMOTH, 2017, p.17) Available in <<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1579&context=mcnair>> Visited in May, 18th of 2020.

because obviously we're the only people who do it! Yes, there are a few movies or TV shows with that topic. But it's not that many, you know? Movies like Marvel, or Disney, they don't represent LGBTQ and if they do, it's mostly a side character with not much development or any story at all. And in fanfictions, for example like Steve/Tony, it's about the main characters being in a gay relationship. Because for us it's normal. It's not about gender, it's about having a connection and understanding each other, being there for each other. And why does it matter if you have a penis or a vagina? Absolutely nothing. You love who you love and we all should kiss the people we want to kiss.

Fanfiction made it way simpler for LGBT+ people to write stories in which they can talk about their favorite characters and find a way to connect personally to them. Writing a story where a character you already love discovering their true sexual orientation can be a self-reflection of the writer's real life and a therapeutic way to find comfort and support in what transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc., go through their lives. The comment below from Jennifer has reflected so much in what I'm trying to pinpoint in this whole monograph, on how little fans try to "change" in the source material to create this safe space in which one can find normalization of what they go through on their real lives and how that can serve as hope and inspiration to so many.

Jennifer: The inclusion of LGBT in fanfiction is so important because until it is normalized in the media, it will be fetishized and complained about in equal measure. When the community is baited by movie makers with "the first LGBT character" and then it is a throwaway line by an unnamed character in a film with more possibility for true MLM love than any other, people get upset. Fanfiction takes the base of especially the Marvel universe, and honestly tweaks very little in order to show LGBT relationships. They are right there, mainstream media has only to acknowledge the fact that they are possible and we'd be there. Also, so many of us know that certain books... [cough] (Fifty Shades of Grey) [cough]! began as a fanfiction of another story [Twilight Series]. We know that fanfiction can matriculate into mainstream media. I am hopeful that one of the phenomenal writers who focus on the Steve/Tony relationship one day take one of their amazing stories, change the names, but keep them queer, and publish it. I think that in particular, fanfiction is both escape and hope. We can escape to a world where two powerful men tell the world to hang if it can't handle them together, but they are surrounded by other powerful people who support them and encourage them. How amazing is that? And we save

our hope for the future where we might have a true, real gay superhero. One whose storyline doesn't focus on that, perhaps, except that hey, that female superhero has a wife back home. The hope is the normalization.

Jennifer has mixed two misconceptions that need to be forgotten: that fanfiction cannot matriculate into mainstream media when we know it can and already has and that LGBTQ+ representation in the Marvel Universe would completely corrupt the essence of the main story. The fact that so little has to be changed between the source material and fan written adaptations is a proof that representation is already there, but with so much involved within the industry, entertainment enterprises would never go along with it.

I agree completely with Jennifer that fanfiction is both an escape and hope for the community. As we can see in the insert excerpt taken from Two's a Crowd by rainproof, the writer created a universe where there is hope and normalization for a LGBTQ+ superhero. This is unparalleled for fans and gives hope to all that one day this will be the "new normal".

"Neither of you should quit! Christ!" Clint groaned, shoving his forehead into his palm.

"I agree with our gifted marksman," Thor nodded, succinctly.

"You may be our team leader – and sure, you could have come out to us sooner, but it's really none of our business who you sleep with or when you share it. Tony's used to being in the spotlight; his idea of a relationship's normal progression is questionable."

"Hey," Tony protested, pleased to hear Steve's voice mirroring his own.

"I think what Natasha is trying to say, Steve, is that nobody here resents the fact that you didn't tell us. How many months has this gone on?" Bruce said, softly. **"If you were treating us differently because of your relationship with Tony, I think we would have noticed by now."**

"Nat noticed," Steve muttered.

“Natasha’s powers of observation dwarf those of most mortal souls, she cannot be used fairly in protest!” Thor rumbled. “Captain, it is natural for warriors to bond in the course of their struggles together. I have grown close to many a great fighter in my own time.”

“Huh,” said Tony, filing that mental image away for future consideration.

Bruce pushed his glasses up. **“Steve, the Avengers need you. You’re our leader – without you we’re nothing. No one else here could draw the team together, could plan and execute the way you do.”** (my emphasis).

In one of the last scenes from Chapter 10, Steve tells the rest of his team about his relationship with Tony, his teammate and a man, his first thought was to resign from the team for letting his relationship get in the way of his decisions, which could endanger everyone else in the battlefield, and also for lying and hiding his relationship with Tony. However, the team steps in and tells them that they shouldn’t quit, specially not for this reason. They assure Steve, who was battling with his inner demons throughout the whole story, that his sexuality and his secrets didn’t matter, they wouldn’t judge him because of that, they cared for him as their friend and their leader and being bisexual would never get in the way of that. That is an example of the kind of normalization that the readers seek and hope to find. A scene where coming out of the closet would not involve fear. Even more than that, at the end of the scene they tell him that being bisexual, gay or whatever, would never change who he was and what he represented to them, and isn’t that what the community desperately hopes to find? To be seen and respected for what they were and who they love or feel attracted to, would not be a reason to change who they were.

Following this thought, then every source material can be remixed and reviewed by their fanbases and turned into fanfictions, right? Right. But how can we explain that certain pairings have more tendency to be described as LGBT+ than others? Why do they have such popularity amongst the community than others? The reason for that can be upsetting for all the fans that seek representation and since it has been happening with a certain recurrence, this has received its very own name: *Queerbaiting*.

5.5. Queerbaiting

Queerbaiting is a word that terrifies millions of queer fans. In short, queerbaiting is when producers of a work of fiction deliberately hint the possibility of a romantic relationship between two people of same gender in order to draw in fans with no intention of actually following through. What makes queerbaiting a master trick is that the heteronormative audience would hardly figure out the romantic hints and suggestions given by the producers regarding their characters due to their lack of experience and opinions concerning the LGBT+ community, therefore, producers found a way to maintain both of the audiences pleased, the queer audience, for giving them a grain of salt with a taste of sugar, and the non-queer, for never making their characters officially LGBT+ because unlike heterosexual characters that never need to proclaim their sexuality to the world, the queer ones must do that, because when they do not, people will automatically assume they are straight, since it is the “normal”, right? Wrong.

Queerbaiting is actually an off-shoot of another term, queer coding.²³ Queer coding has its roots in the 1960's, when the U.S. government, along with a number of religious and conservative groups, became concerned with the effect various forms of media were having on the public. During these times, the Comics Code Authority appeared, banning comics from objectifying women. At the same time, depictions of LGBT+ characters were, while not banned, heavily discouraged in American cinema. This doesn't mean these characters were eliminated, but they were hidden in subtext. Directors would tell actors to play their characters as stereotyped versions of gay people. Those characters possessed certain characteristics: styles of dress, mannerisms, phrases, etc. That would make them recognizable to other members of the community while maintaining a guise of straightness to the general public, and, more importantly, to the censors. Therefore, queerbaiting has been happening for a long time, but after the rise of LGBT+ movements at the end of the 1960's, the queer audience became significantly large in monetary terms. The movie companies realized they could not ignore how much the queer audience had grown and to maintain their money coming, they had to find a way to please them, but without losing their conservative audience.

It is important to point out that queerbaiting is not applicable in every case. There are fans who ship two people of the same gender, but that does not always happen because their relationship in the source material was hidden in subtext or because they were simply a bait to

²³ The Strange, Difficult History of Queer Coding. Available in <<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/the-strange-difficult-history-of-queer-coding>> Visited in May, 13th of 2020.

engage the queer audiences. Many of the characters who are described as queer in the source material are often portrayed having a close and intimate friendship with a person of the same gender, but living a healthy and well-constructed heterosexual relationship. There are many legit examples of mostly TV shows that create this psychological manipulation upon the queer fanbase and all of these relationships that served as bait can be found at the top of the ranking list²⁴ of the most popular pairings people write fanfiction about.

Subject Jasmine is from Malaysia, is Muslim and also a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Her situation is so particular and different from the other subjects that one of the most famous fanfiction websites [fanfiction.net] is banned in her country because of the nature involving its conceptions and practices.

Jasmine: Okay, well personally I'm bisexual. I'm bisexual and Muslim and living in a country that's very anti-LGBT. Like, it's so bad to the point that fanfiction.net is banned here [laughs]. Because of that. I have this thought that if Steve and Tony were created in recent times, they'd be a couple, I mean, Exhibit A: Earth 3490, And if Marvel wasn't afraid of the backlash from their close minded fans, they would've made them hook up or canon or whatever, because bonds like theirs, strong like theirs are usually depicted in romances than friendships. I mean strong friendships are great. Not knocking that down, But I just think that the bigots do have an influence on the sexualities of older characters. As to your question on fanfiction, I'd say yes. I know it gets a lot of flak because of the infamous ones like Fifty Shades of Grey, etc. And people might see it as unoriginal because writers don't come up with their own characters, settings, etc. But I feel like a lot of writers are on par, if not, better than popular writers, heck, even comic writers. They understand the characters and give them justice. I think I read somewhere someone once said that comic writers are similar to fanfiction writers. There are comic writers who understand their character and their motivations and relationships, and those who don't, like a fanfiction writer. Not to mention that they're building on that same world too, so how does one get more praise than the other when they have more similarities than one would think they have?

Jasmine has explained perfectly what is the nature of queerbaiting and how that can be applied to Steve Rogers and Tony Stark: if one of those characters was originally a woman, the

²⁴ AO3 Ship Stats 2017-2019. Available in <<https://archiveofourown.org/works/19963579/chapters/47258407>> Visited in May, 13th of 2020.

probability that they would have been put by the writers in a romantic relationship is enormous, and why is that? Because the original script has so many similarities to heterosexual couples' stories that have been involved for so much less, that it's almost impossible to think otherwise. More than that, Jasmine has given a very famous example and proof for that theory within the "stevetony" fandom: In June of 2009, a new universe was created in the comic books universe: Earth-3490, a parallel reality from the one people became acquainted until then. In this reality, Tony Stark is originally a woman named Natasha Stark and her/his partner was no one less than Steve Rogers.

Eventually in that reality, the characters got married. Montreal Comic-Con panelist Sophie Delmas said on the matter of queer superheroes in September 14th of 2012: "If your first instinct, after making Tony Stark a woman, is to hook her up with Captain America, then they were probably already pretty gay to begin with". This is the epitome of queerbaiting; the gender of the characters is the only and foremost impediment from making them a couple.

The community has found support on one another and queerbaiting has become a famous trend. A YouTube Channel that has ascended with fame because of the impact of this topic is called *Are They Gay?*²⁵, created in 2015. The channel has over 200 thousand subscribers and their main purpose is to discuss whether a popular pairing is gay or not based on real evidences given by the source material and what the producers have to say about their fictions on press conferences. Whether the channel is right or not, whether the pairing is queer or not, everything points to one issue: even though part of the community watching these shows are well aware that they are being fooled, what other choice do they have? There is not a massive variation of queer representation on media and the fanbase is used to consume whatever little representation they can get, and of course, fans have found a safe zone to express their wish for representation and be praised for it from millions of other people that have the same wish, through fanfiction.

"I adore the way fanfiction writers engage with and critique source texts, by manipulating them and breaking their rules. Some of it is straight-up homage, but a lot of [fanfiction] is really aggressive towards the source text. One tends to think of it as written by total fanboys and fangirls as a kind of worshipful act, but a lot of times you'll read these stories and it'll be like 'What if Star Trek had an openly gay character on the bridge?' And of course the point is that they don't, and they wouldn't, because they don't have the balls, or they are beholden to their advertisers, or whatever. There's a powerful critique, almost punk-like anger, being expressed there—which I find fascinating and interesting and cool." – Lev Grossman

²⁵ *Are They Gay?* Available in < <https://www.youtube.com/user/alexwantsyoursoup/featured> > Visited in May, 13th of 2020.

Why is queerbaiting so troubling and worrying? Because in a society where reasons to not be LGBT+ are disposed every day and much of what people do is to make them feel out of place, frightened and not accepted, using an artifice like this to give the community a representation that does not go forward, is extremely unnerving. Queerbaiting is an economic and manipulating strategy to deceive the community that drives over three trillion dollars around the world in consumption of cultural pop resets and brands.

While my main intention here was to describe and present all that is wrong and unjust in the broadcasting media regarding their most faithful audience, that even without the representation they deserve, keep on being there, motivating and some of them even believing that the next show will be different (and some of them are right), I wanted to give people perspective on why fanfiction is such a popular trend and how we can explain the phenomenon it has become nowadays. I am aware that everything comes with its own bad reputation, but after all that it was discussed in this chapter about the real reasons this practice is legit and life changing to a lot of people, I ask everyone to think twice before deeming a work without canonical property as something frivolous and invalid.

Most importantly, I do not want to end this chapter by saying that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the practice of fanfiction. There is a serious discrepancy in who fans are willing to develop their works. When we take a look at the Top 100 Most Popular Pairing on Archive of Our Own of 2019²⁶, only 3 of them are about a lesbian couple, only 27 of them are about people of color and there are no fanfictions in this list about transgenders. This dark side of fanfiction that demonstrates that while people are willing to elaborate stories about white men also shows us that the same consideration and willingness are not extended to people who do not fit into this mold. Part of the reason can be explained to the majority of white people in mainstream media, hence the reason of the popularity of the fictions, also, when talking about female and people of color characters, some of them are often not well presented or well developed in the original stories. Still, there are good characters that are presented fairly and well represented and fans still insist in ignoring their existence.

All of this proves that while the LGBT+ people are calling for representation, it does not always mean they are completely wide open and receptive to change. Most of the still small broadcasting media that represents queer people is still insisting on representing only white gay

²⁶ Ao3 Ship Stats 2019. Available in <<https://archiveofourown.org/works/19963579/chapters/47258239>> Visited in May, 13th of 2020.

and cisgender men and the other variants are still being left out most of the time. Concluding, the fanfiction community is not absolutely flawless and there is still a lot to change, believe it or not, the first step has been taken and now it is a matter of not getting our heads down. The movie *Moonlight*, by Barry Jenkins, has won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2018, in which its protagonist is a black gay man; the TV Show *Sex Education*, by Laurie Nunn, has become one of the most famous television shows on Netflix with one of its protagonists being also a black gay man; and most recently, a kids cartoon on Netflix, called *She-ra and The Princesses of Power*, a reboot of a classic cartoon of the 80s, adapted for television by Noelle Stevenson, has explicitly displayed a relationship of its two main female characters, and the show marked history in May of 2020, by ending the show with a public display of affection between two main female characters in a cartoon, which has given hope and joy to thousands of fans that for the first time, were not caught in the bait of prejudiced producers that are only interested in the money they will get in the Box Office. As it was said, the first step has been taken, and although there may seem to be several bumps along the roads of the future, we cannot go back to the way it was before. When giving the taste of real and legit representation to the people who were taught to live as marginalized and invisible individuals, they will want more, as they deserve.

6. Final Remarks

I haven't started reading fanfiction because I was seeking representation, I admit that. I started reading fanfiction because I am a fan and I've always been one. Whether it was a fan of a novel, a TV Show, a movie, I've always been passionate about something and fanfiction represented the extension of what I dearly loved and wanted to know, see and to understand more. My love for the Marvel Universe led me to read more about Captain America and Iron Man and the cyber community helped me to see them through other lens. Alongside the community, I started to comprehend how there could be so much more than what they were giving us, and by them I mean mainstream media. Although I have always been a fan, it took me a long time to step aside of the box and take more time to analyze and create other interpretations, and when I began to do that, another world of possibilities, but also struggles, became to unfold in front of me.

Discourse Studies are here to help us understand, analyze and describe, but Critical Discourse Analysis is aimed at solving problems. I know I cannot start to solve problems by myself and I won't let myself believe that it could be possible for me to do this on my own, even more with a social problem that is so deep engraved in our social historical roots that even years or decades won't be sufficient to completely erase homophobia from western society. Still, Discourse guided me to see that when you are able to understand something, you are able to criticize it and problematize it and this was the beginning of it all, after reading so many fanfictions and so many comments related to the wish of LGBTQ+ people to see more representation in the media and since they couldn't have that when they wanted, their only way out was fanfiction, I began to use to understand the system of representations.

To study culture and language contributes on the battle against prejudice (SANTOS, 2006), because when accepting the diversity of contacts one goes through a lifetime and how our nature can be altered depending on the contexts we are submitted to, new interpretations will no longer seem like a distorted view of reality, because we will see that there is no true reality, no true self, we are always changing. Meaning can be created through different sources of media (HALL, 1997) and they can be shared between people with the same view upon the world. Language is embedded in culture and the same goes through the other way, so if culture can be altered and shaped in different contexts, then the language found in the dominant discourse, the superstructure, will slowly lose its dominance over the folk, and stories, retellings and interpretations, such as fanfictions, could be given a whole new role in the shaping of young

generations. I can speak for myself and even for my subjects, who have dearly accepted to participate in this monograph, when I say that fanfiction can change people, it can be a guiding hand when you need someone the most and it has opened doors for so many people. But most importantly, it has more than opened doors to the LGBTQ+ community, they have given hope, a hope of normalization.

Queer Theory was a new area for me at the beginning of it all. I reckon it is to most, since it is the youngest theory related to all the other I have discussed on this work, but I assure it is the one we might all need to add into our lives, specially nowadays. Unfortunately, this research could not delve deep into other pressing matters that Queer Theory gave me more than enough background to problematize, such as the lack of lesbian, interracial, and transgender relationships in LGBTQ+ fanfiction, a shocking difference when compared to gay and bisexual. Perhaps even the community needs to evolve a lot when regarding the other abbreviations in the LGBTQ+ and more so when regarding people of color. Even though I strongly support this practice and the reason behind it all, it was when I started to dive in deeper into the matter that I could also see its flaws and what is lacking. Still, the theory in question is necessary for us to dismantle this idea of a duality present in our society that no one created and put it there but ourselves: “normal or abnormal, what am I?”, Queer Studies are here to say, this does not exist, everything is socially constructed, even our gender, according to Judith Butler, is performed. If by diving into history we see that the sin behind homosexuality existed purposefully to increase the power of the Catholic church and many other reasons, why do LGBTQ+ still need to battle with inner homophobia? Because we were born in a society that its roots are severely stained by a historical paranoia regarding the control of our bodies and our minds.

in order to conclude, this monograph cannot start solving the problems on its own, as much as I wanted, but I hope this could give a short insight on what is happening behind the curtains of cyberculture. There is a world behind the screen that even though it can be used against us, there are thousands of people that are being helped, heard and seen in ways that mainstream media, and even the world, is not prepared to. People cannot simply wait. We cannot wait for the day that LGBTQ+ couples will be openly represented on television and movie theaters as any other heterosexual couple would, where their sexuality wasn't the most important part of the movie. There is no time to wait, the time is now and fanfiction is here to give voice to those who don't feel seen, and while the world is not ready, they will be there, giving all the push they have to, to create the world that will be better for us all.

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APPENDIX

Jasmine from Malaysia

How old are you and where are you from?

Jasmine: 22, but I'll be 23 in June. I'm from Malaysia.

How long have you been reading Fanfiction?

Jasmine: I think I started reading Fanfiction when I was 12, so around ten years. As for *stevetony*, I only started reading about them last year [2019], and then I began writing about them a couple of months after.

What inspired you to write Fanfiction?

Jasmine: I've been told I was good at writing since I was a kid. That I was good in writing stories, so I kinda built up on that.

Back when you started writing, was it about a LGBTQ+ couple?

Jasmine: No, it was hetero.

Why have you started reading/writing about Captain America and Iron Man? And why did you start *shipping* them?

Jasmine: I actually only got into them because of *Avengers: Endgame*. Before that, I wasn't really into Marvel. I mean, I enjoy the movies and I follow the storylines, but I wasn't invested. I didn't really ship the characters except for Peter Quill [Starlord] and Gamora, from *Guardians of the Galaxy*. I used to ship Steve [Captain America] with Natasha [Black Widow], but as time went by, I kind of lost interest in them. But yeah, I don't know. It was the argument scene that did it for me. The one when Tony [Iron Man] poured his heart out to Steve and gave him his arc reactor. It kind of hit me in the face that it's his heart he's giving away, you know? Steve broke his heart and here is Tony giving it to him again. To show what he did. I think. I'm probably wrong [laughs]. After that, I started reading Fanfictions. I think there's a lot of interpretations on the scene. But yeah, after that I just couldn't stop thinking about them, even during the rest of the movie, I was fixated on them. It kind of hit me how important their relationship is, that Tony and Steve needed each other. That things don't work right when they're not together. And then Tony died and then Steve went back in time and that's that for them

[laughs]. So, I went to read the Fanfictions. I went on *tumblr* and followed some blogs to learn more about their relationship, found out that even in different universes, their relationship makes or breaks the fate of the universe. And I don't know. It's a dynamic that stuck with me

Why do you think they are such an iconic *ship*? They have almost 40 thousand Fanfictions registered on *Archive of Our Own* alone and they have been on the Top 100 Most Famous OTPs on the same website since 2012. What makes the idea of them together as a couple so special to people?

Jasmine: I mean, I haven't read a lot of comic books, but there's this particular one that stood out to me, it's the '98 Cap/Iron Man Annual. They clash over their morals a lot in it. Correct me if I'm wrong, but Tony's [Iron Man] pragmatic. He'll do whatever it takes for the greater good, no matter the morals behind it, but Steve's the opposite of that. His morals cloud his judgment and makes him narrowed-minded sometimes. And I like how throughout the story, they realize where the other is coming from, and they try their best to work together to compromise, because they're two sides of the same coin. As different as they seem to be, they work towards the same goal but go about it differently, And I guess I just like that about them. And also the fact that things don't turn out well when they don't work together kinda does it for me, I mean, I'll be frank, I don't ship much. I could like a couple and think they're cute or whatever, but there's something about them that has my full attention? I think I like the complexity of their relationship, like they're friends and they clash and well, shit goes down sometimes, but no matter what, they always come back to each other, in every universe, and yeah, the multiverse is another thing. The fact that their relationship is so important and it is a focal point in almost every verse is insane. Yeah, the multiverse is crazy. The endless possibilities, and I like *angst*, but not too much. As long there's a good ending to it all, [laughs]. Which is basically most of my *stevetony* fics. Also, the fact that they're kinda opposites (past/future, red/blue, etc.) does it for me too. For some reason.

Considering the world as it is today, being LGBT still is very hard in some countries and sometimes even a crime. I am from Brazil and our President, Jair Bolsonaro is openly homophobic on media and towards the community, so things like Fanfiction are sometimes our only line of defense and refuge from so much hate. Why do you think it's important to represent the LGBT community through Fanfiction, in your opinion?

Jasmine: Okay, well personally I'm bisexual. I'm bisexual and Muslim and leaving in a country that's very anti-LGBT. Like, it's so bad to the point that fanfiction.net is banned here [laughs]. Because of that. I have this thought that if Steve and Tony were created in recent times, they'd be a couple, I mean, Exhibit A: *Earth 3490*, And if Marvel wasn't afraid of the backlash from their close minded fans, they would've made them hook up or canon or whatever, because bonds like theirs, strong like theirs are usually depicted in romances than friendships. I mean strong friendships are great. Not knocking that down, But I just think that the bigots do have an influence on the sexualities of older characters. As to your question on Fanfiction, I'd say yes. I know it gets a lot of flak because of the infamous ones like *Fifty Shades of Grey*, etc. And people might see it as unoriginal because writers don't come up with their own characters, settings, etc. But I feel like a lot of writers are on par, if not, better than popular writers, heck, even comic writers. They understand the characters and give them justice. I think I read somewhere someone once said that comic writers are similar to Fanfiction writers. There are comic writers who understand their character and their motivations and relationships, and those who don't, like a Fanfiction writer. Not to mention that they're building on that same world too, so how does one get more praise than the other when they have more similarities than one would think they have?

Thank you so much and this interview opened my eyes to so many things and I want to keep in contact with you!

Jasmine: I had fun doing this. I don't really talk about my reasons behind loving *stevetony* in such detail.

Jennifer from Oregon (USA)

Hi, Jennifer! How are you? Thank you so much for volunteering!

Jennifer: Hi. So, I am a reader. Mostly. Though I do edit for a few writers and I am currently working on a story of my own though I haven't posted any of it yet.

How old are you and where are you from?

Jennifer: I am 39 and I am from Oregon.

How did you find out about fanfictions in general?

Jennifer: Oh, god. I was actually looking for a way to get through a weird level in a Harry Potter video game. I searched the scene and it popped up with, maybe <http://Fanfiction.net>? And I was so confused because I clicked in and started reading and was like, huh, interesting, not going to help me beat this game.

It's amazing how many fanfic readers and writers started with Harry Potter, most of them actually!

Jennifer: That doesn't surprise me at all. When we read the books, we were young(ish) and idealistic and they were perfect, but age showed the holes in the story and wisdom showed how simplistic some of the relationships were. Then people started writing to fill those holes and adjust the relationships to things that fit better in many ways.

How long have you been reading fanfiction? In general, and *stevetony* too.

Jennifer: In general, I started reading in 2009 I believe. I moved through a few fandoms from Harry Potter, the Tin Man miniseries, then Once Upon a Time. Then the Hobbit, which strangely led me into Avengers, and *stevetony*. I started reading Marvel Fanfictions only in 2018. I just searched my AO3 and was blown away. My bookmarks are overwhelmingly Marvel, but I've only been reading it for 2 years. First bookmarked Marvel story was March, 21th of 2018.

Why do you they are such an iconic *ship*? They have almost 40 thousand Fanfictions registered on *Archive of Our Own* alone and they have been on the Top 100 Most Famous OTPs on the same website since 2012. What makes the idea of them together as a couple so special to people?

Jennifer: When Marvel movies started, we got Tony [Iron Man], and he was this beautiful star. A little tarnished, a little dented, but he was the sun that we began to circle. But then Avengers and oh goodness, there's Steve. Suddenly we have these two suns, equal in light and power, and they are circling each other. From almost their first moments onscreen together these characters (admittedly, largely through the actors who portray them at first) have this remarkable chemistry. It does not feel safe. It feels wild and electric. What was pushed as a run of the mill friendship was clearly able to be so much more. Steve was so dependent on and disappointed in Tony in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, but the layer from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the audience's knowledge of his inherent betrayal at the time when he is chastising Tony for the

decisions he has made, oh! that dramatic irony is delightful. *Civil War* really cinched it for me. There was no moment between either character and one who was set up as a romantic opposite (Peggy, Pepper, Sharon) that felt as emotionally charged as the moments between Steve and Tony in that movie. The contention, the betrayal, even the slight joking all felt like more. I think many people felt that only a romantic connection really made sense for the culmination of that storyline. And so, the fanfiction continued to *fix* it. As with so many other stories, these two characters were not allowed to be happy. Not allowed that ending that would be satisfying. So, the Fanfiction fixed it. I ship Steve and Tony because they are the center of the Marvel-verse. All of these stories are capable of being told without them, but their inclusion makes other stories better. I think that this relationship resonates with so many people because of the many layers that it has, that it shows us. Even only taking into account the MCU, we have a contentious friendship which is bolstered by resentment and lies. They are undoubtedly the parental figures in this team/family of the Avengers whether people wish to see them like that or not. People can easily see a relationship that they recognize in these two characters. The MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) has them teetering on the edge of a romantic relationship for eight years, regardless of what they intended.

Considering the world as it is today, being LGBT still is very hard in some countries and sometimes even a crime. I am from Brazil and our President, Jair Bolsonaro is openly homophobic on media and towards the community, so things like Fanfiction are sometimes our only line of defense and refuge from so much hate. Why do you think it's important to represent the LGBT community through Fanfiction, in your opinion?

Jennifer: The inclusion of LGBT in Fanfiction is so important because until it is normalized in the media, it will be fetishized and complained about in equal measure. When the community is baited by movie makers with "the first LGBT character" and then it is a throwaway line by an unnamed character in a film with more possibility for true MLM love than any other, people get upset. Fanfiction takes the base of especially the Marvel universe, and honestly tweaks very little in order to show LGBT relationships. They are right there, mainstream media has only to acknowledge the fact that they are possible and we'd be there. Also, so many of us know that certain books... [cough] (*Fifty Shades of Grey*) [cough]! began as a Fanfiction of another story [*Twilight Series*]. We know that Fanfiction can matriculate into mainstream media. I am hopeful that one of the phenomenal writers who focus on the Steve/Tony relationship one day take one of their amazing stories, change the names, but keep them queer, and publish it. I think

that in particular, Fanfiction is both escape and hope. We can escape to a world where two powerful men tell the world to hang if it can't handle them together, but they are surrounded by other powerful people who support them and encourage them. How amazing is that? And we save our hope for the future where we might have a true, real gay superhero. One whose storyline doesn't focus on that, perhaps, except that hey, that female superhero has a wife back home. The hope is the normalization.

Do you see fanfiction as a legitimate reading material?

Jennifer: There are people who claim that it is not because it is derivative; entirely dependent on its source material. But Fanfiction is just the term we have given it recently. The very popular *Golden Compass/ is Dark Materials* work is based on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. How is that any different from the girl writing a story where a newly unfrozen Steve Rogers meets them and falls in love? At their hearts, Fanfiction is just the beginning of a new story with familiar characters. Or, a retelling. My best friend and I have been talking about how *Paradise Lost* explores the points of view from characters that don't get a lot of "screentime" in the Bible: Eve, Satan, these central characters who are relegated to support because the narrative is Male. So, Milton took these purposely vilified characters and explored their thoughts and motivations. It is Fanfiction at its best! All about finding the story that is right there, but not being told.

Jennifer, as I've said before, talking to you has been so enlightening and I bet you're a wonderful teacher!

Jennifer: Thank you :) I'd love to read what you have when you're finished.

Diana from Germany

How old are you and where are you from?

Diana: I'm 21 and from Germany!

How long have you been reading fanfiction? In general, and *stevetony* too.

Diana: General: since I was 12 and *stevetony* I just started two years ago!

And what inspired you to start reading *stevetony* fanfiction? What has got your attention in them?

Diana: I guess I have my own personal reason for why I ship these two so hard. You know, I mostly read Fanfictions where either Steve or Tony are struggling with their mental health. So, lots of *angst*. I love these two together because I feel like they're perfect for each other. Fanfictions where Tony is struggling with his anxiety or depression or alcoholism, always being the pessimist and Steve being in his true nature, always the optimist, but also struggling with the new age and leaving his past behind. You know, they're perfect because Steve always tries to see the good and is there for Tony. And Tony is always there helping him to adjust in this new world. They just get each other. As Steve said "*it's hard to find someone with shared live experience*" but these two, they have that! It's just— I love reading about Steve and Tony being there for each other, being an anchor for each other. They push each other to always be better and they accept each other's flaws. Let's not forget about their arguments and sexual tension there. When I talk about them, I always think about my all-time favorite Fanfiction. It's just so perfect. Also, the fact that Tony basically grew up with Steve being his hero, but also hating him from day one because his father was obsessed with him and not in his own son. It makes it even more perfect. I think people love these so much because they're not perfect, but they try to be for each other. I just love most that they have this deep connection, you know? Understanding each other even though they have different views of the world. It's weird—they're like light and darkness, day and night, but that's what makes them perfect for each other.

Considering the world as it is today, being LGBT still is very hard in some countries and sometimes even a crime. I am from Brazil and our President, Jair Bolsonaro is openly homophobic on media and towards the community, so things like Fanfiction are sometimes our only line of defense and refuge from so much hate. Why do you think it's important to represent the LGBT community through Fanfiction, in your opinion?

Diana: First of all, I am part of the LGBTQ, I'm bisexual so I totally get how horrible it is to not be accepted. Anyway, I think it's important to keep representing LGBTQ through Fanfictions because obviously we're the only people who do it! Yes, there are a few movies or TV shows with that topic. But it's not that many, you know? Movies like Marvel, or Disney, they don't represent LGBTQ and if they do, it's mostly a side character with not much development or any story at all. And in Fanfictions, for example like *stevetony*, it's about the main characters being in a gay relationship. Because for us it's normal. It's not about gender, it's about having a connection and understanding each other, being there for each other. And

why does it matter if you have a penis or a vagina? Absolutely nothing. You love who you love and we all should kiss the people we want to kiss.

Do you see fanfiction as a legitimate reading material?

Diana: Okay so, yes! I definitely see it as legitimate reading material. Sometimes even more than "normal" books. The thing with Fanfiction is: people do so many researches for their stories and they get nothing in return but our love. Which should be enough but honestly, so many more people should read their stuff because it's just amazing. But the word "Fanfiction" is for many a turn off because, as you mentioned, they immediately think about stuff like *Fifty Shades* or whatever. But there are so many amazing fanfictions. Especially because I feel like, Fanfiction authors focus more on the real problems. They're not afraid to go in full detail of mental health or LGBTQ for that matter. Also, they're able to do so much with characters. Like, for example, Steve or Tony, they have so much potential, which they didn't fully use in the MCU in my opinion. Also, Fanfiction authors, they just get and understand what people our age feel like and what we want and what's really important! It's not *Fifty Shades*, it's so much more. It's... Coming back home. Now that *The Avengers* are done, Fanfiction is a way we can still have it in our life, even though it's officially over. It's a way for us to go back home. Because that's what it is. Home. When I read Fanfictions it's a feeling of coming home. I know the characters, their story, their deepest fears and desires. I know them and as strange as it sounds, they know me. Every time I read Fanfictions I'm like: "Wow, that's so me. I know exactly how Tony feels in that moment" and I feel understood and loved, like I belong there. With a normal book or movie or TV show, there's always an ending and normally you would move on from that. But people like us we found our home in those characters, in their universe. So, fanfiction gives us a way to always go back there. And that's why I think it should be legitimate reading material.

Diana, thank you so much for your help! Talking to you was amazing and so enlightening!

I'm glad we met and I hope we can keep talking in the future <3

Diana: You're more than welcome!!! And yes, we definitely continue talking.

Velma from Minas Gerais (Brazil)

How old are you and where are you from?

Velma: 21 and I am from Minas Gerais, Brazil.

How long have you been reading fanfiction? In general, and *stevetony* too.

Velma: I knew fanfics well before shipping stevetony, a friend of mine who introduced them me, the first site I used to read fanfics was Nyah, and I started with Percy Jackson. I must have been about 12, 2010 then. And stevetony, gee, a long time, like I never read the comics, but I ended up finding out more about them after the movies, I know I ship them since Avengers (2012), so I probably read since then.

Why have you started reading stevetony fanfiction, meaning, why did you start shipping them?

Velma: I could talk about this forever [laughs] so, it all started when I watched the Avengers and there was a lot of animosity between them at first, but during the movie you realize that they get over it and become friends, this friendship being very important to unite the avengers. Up until that point there was a feeling of "oun they would be an incredible couple". But everything got more intense after I saw the fandom works because it opened my eyes to really love the ship. For example, the fact that they complement each other, Steve is a man from the past, while Tony is a visionary man from the future. Steve is very idealistic, and Tony is more rational. So, noticing how balanced they were and how this was a positive impact on the team that they co-lead, more specifically in the Avengers Assemble animation, was what made me gain an eternal love for this couple. It was also influenced by the comic universe, knowing all the things they achieved together and how this was only possible because they were always there for each other, it was a beautiful relationship and I am sure that if one of them was a woman, everyone would ship it, which is only further proven by the alternative universe of a comic book in which the two of them get married, but Tony is a woman in this universe. Anyway, seeing a relationship where both parties clearly care about each other, where one helps the other grow and be better as a person is what made me ship stevetony, but then everything went down the drain with Civil War.

Why do you they are such an iconic *ship*? They have almost 40 thousand Fanfictions registered on *Archive of Our Own* alone and they have been on the Top 100 Most Famous OTPs on the same website since 2012. What makes the idea of them together as a couple so special to people?

Velma: I think many factors. But surely the most significant is the MCU, the chemistry between Robert Downey Jr. and Chris Evans is undeniable and since the last years superhero movies have received greater notoriety, more people have been able to notice not only that, but also how the characters complement each other, how they are each other's anchor, you know? That person you're looking for when everything goes wrong and you want to feel safe and you need someone who will say that everything will work out, so Steve and Tony are that for each other. I believe that Stevetony has always been amazing, even because in the comics all this comes into focus and you can see and understand even more the relationship between them, the new fame of the world of heroes in the last decade only made more people realize this. I think it's interesting to comment that they probably became icons for the LGBT community because they are heroes! For a group that always feels not only left aside, but also mistreated, it would be very important to have heroes as representatives of the cause, to show that there's nothing wrong with being gay, that it doesn't change who you are or what you're capable of doing in life and still play under stereotypes of "homo".

Considering the world as it is today, being LGBT still is very hard in some countries and sometimes even a crime. I am from Brazil and our President, Jair Bolsonaro is openly homophobic on media and towards the community, so things like Fanfiction are sometimes our only line of defense and refuge from so much hate. Why do you think it's important to represent the LGBT community through Fanfiction, in your opinion?

Velma: Representativity is very important in these scenarios of great notability, whether it is through a female scientist, a black president or a trans volleyball player. But it turns out that the universe of entertainment unfortunately doesn't give much room for that. I believe that representativity matters because everybody deserves to feel that they identify with something and I think it would help a lot of people who feel that they were "born wrong", when there is this representativity they start to realize that it's all right to be who they are, that they don't need to be ashamed or try to change. In the specific case of Marvel's universe this is even more important because, historically, the "geek" world, be it through comics or games, is dominated by straight men, but people other than them also have the right to like this universe and feel welcome and represented in it.

Do you talk to your friends and family about the Fanfiction you read? If yes, how does that go for you? Are they friendly about it? If you do not talk about Fanfiction with them, why is that?

Velma: No, I don't really talk about reading fanfics with most of my friends, only with those who also read or write, even when the ship is straight. The biggest reason is that I believe they wouldn't understand the motivation behind this hobby, unlike books, fanfics are stories about other stories that already exist, but also because I see that some of these friends feel a certain contempt for people who immerse themselves in fandoms, reading fanfics for example, they think that these people have no social life and to avoid fatigue and arguments on the subject I prefer to discuss this only with friends who share the same interest. But yes, I believe that if I commented with them with certainty the judgment would be greater if the fandoms in question were of a homosexual couple and even worse if they were of homosexual animation characters, like anime for example. I've seen many people talking things like "shut up you read gay fanfiction about 2D characters" and honestly, I don't want to be judged by my hobby.

Do you see Fanfiction as a legitimate reading material?

Velma: Absolutely. Just because it's based on characters and universes that already exist doesn't mean they're of an inferior quality, I've read a lot of fanfics better than a lot of books out there. The dedication that a fanfic author had to create their story was the same, if not greater, because they are not even paid for it. The whole plot, characterization, problematic, dialogues, climax and resolution was their work and that is original, even if the characters are borrowed. Even many famous authors began as authors of fanfics, a great example is J.K. Rowling, author of Harry Potter. I believe that the most important thing is to read, to exercise your mind, relax and even practice another language, as I read more fanfics in English, no matter the genre, if it's a fanfic or a New York Times best seller, if it makes you happy, read whatever you want.

Hayley from Pennsylvania

How old are you and where are you from?

Hayley: I'm 31 and I'm from Pennsylvania

How long have you been reading Fanfiction?

Hayley: For 16 years I only started reading SteveTony about a year ago. I actually started reading fanfiction when I was in high school, I found it through the Harry Potter fandom on livejournal. So, I've been reading fanfiction for over half my life.

What inspired you to start reading Fanfiction about Captain America and Iron Man?

What has got your attention in them?

Hayley: They're so similar yet so different. I think they balance each other really well. They just have this deep connection that just jumps out at you like they are one of the most important people in the world to each other and that shows. Especially in Civil War when you see the pain that being at odds causes both of them. They have similar experiences and trauma. Neither of them had much family and so the Avengers and particularly each other are so special and important to them. They have this instant chemistry from the moment they meet, but it takes them some time to really get the other. I really think they push each other to be and do better. They have different approaches and ways of thinking and they're at their strongest when they are listening and working with each other. Everyone sees Steve as this sweetheart and Tony as a snarky asshole, but Steve is secretly sarcastic and snarky and Tony is secretly a softie, the softest.

Considering the world as it is today, being LGBT still is very hard in some countries and sometimes even a crime. I am from Brazil and our President, Jair Bolsonaro is openly homophobic on media and towards the community, so things like Fanfiction are sometimes our only line of defense and refuge from so much hate. Why do you think it's important to represent the LGBT community through Fanfiction, in your opinion?

Hayley: God it's incredibly important to have representation, to feel SEEN. As a bisexual woman who grew up in a very conservative, homophobic home fanfiction was the only place I had that made me feel like being gay was okay. It's still equally important to me as an adult. Having bisexual representation is still so hard to come by, and having it portrayed well. The

world still is very biphobic even in the LGBTQIA community. So having a character, like Steve or Tony, who I relate to and look up to portrayed as bisexual is deeply meaningful to me. It's kind of hard to express fully in words. But there is still a sorely lacking amount of representation in tv, films, and books. So having the LGBT representation in fanfiction, which is free, accessible to everyone (with internet access), and in so many different genres, tropes, and so forth is just so wonderful. When the entertainment industry won't provide us with what we want it's amazing that talented writers spend their time making these stories for us. Stories that inspire us, touch us, make us laugh, cry, and most importantly let us know we are not alone and that things can and do get better.

Do you see Fanfiction as a legitimate reading material?

Hayley: It absolutely is literature. And just like published literature there's great works and trashy ones, masterfully crafter and not well written. It's like self publishing a book. You can't say that a self published book is not legitimate reading material. (I can say this with confidence as someone who actually works in publishing) You can like or dislike any piece of literature but that is one hundred percent subjective upon each individual reader. Several fanfiction writers have developed their own characters and stories and gone on to become published and very successful. There's no reason these authors have any reason to be less proud of the things they wrote as fanfiction. It's all art. I would argue that fanfiction is not only legitimate reading material but that it's very special. These authors pour their heart and souls into these stories and share them with the fandom for free. Sometimes they even write them to raise money for charity. Fanfiction is a beautiful, wonderful art form and deserves to be treated with respect. I wish there wasn't such a stigma around it.