AFFILIATION AND PARTICIPATION: WHAT FANNISH PRACTICES CAN TELL US ABOUT BUILDING COMMUNITY IN THE WRITING CENTER

by

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ABSTRACT

HANNAH MARIE MAYFIELD. Affiliation and participation: what fannish practices can tell us about building community in the writing center. (Under the direction of DR. LIL BRANNON)

This thesis examines the discursive activity of participatory fannish practices and the opportunities they afford the university writing center in responding to student writing. The project begins with an analysis of participatory fandom; specifically, their interactions guided by gifting, collaborating, and validating identity through praise and affirmation. The possibilities these activities pose for writing center praxis is then explored to determine how participatory fannish praxis might influence and shape a participatory conference model. This project brings into focus the role of affirmation and praise in the writing conference.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Studying fan audiences allows us to explore some of the key mechanisms through which we interact with the mediated world at the heart of our social, political, and cultural realities and identities. Perhaps the most important contribution of contemporary research into fan audiences thus lies in furthering our understanding of how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world" (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, 10).

1.1 Introduction

This project examines the similarities between fan activity and writing center dialogue for the purpose of tethering fannish practices to the ways writers build community in the writing center and conference. In the writing center, engaging with a piece of writing means engaging with each other. While the room size, appearance, and technology may vary from center to center, the practices and approaches to writing are similar. Tutors and tutees sit together at a desk, table, or other space often facing one another with the student's writing situated in between them. Whether hunched over a piece of paper or looking together at a computer screen, the tutor and tutee are working with a piece of writing and with each other. In the writing center students not only write, but with their tutor they *talk* about their writing.

Contemporary research indicates the abiding popularity of the "Idea" of a writing center. While writing center scholarship continues to take up Stephen North's call to

produce “better writers and not better writing” (50) writing center work emerges as a site of conversation and engagement at best. At worst, the center becomes a space of confinement where dominant groups impress normative traditions upon marginalized writers. While romantic notions of the center indicate a positive ethos regarding process, collaboration, and shared discourse, theorists and practitioners are careful in examining the negative outcomes of tutors initiating writers into new discourse communities. Rather than operate under what Nancy Grimm calls the warmly persuasive metaphor of community (6), we are pressed to consider the writing center a site of social struggle where relations between dominant and dominated groups are enacted.

In practice, this struggle for control in writing is accompanied by traditions in western education, specifically student writing experiences. Writers in the center that suspend engagement with their own writing results from a larger institutional framework designed to create better writing—better products. Suffice to say writing is not America’s pastime. Lack of participation in the tutoring session or the dislike of writing hinders the conversation between tutor and tutee. As a result, there is little engagement. There is little participation.

The capacity to engage, participate, and create normal discourse in order to be known and accepted as a colleague is a practice relatively expected in order to master the means to enter and be accepted into a discourse community. But problems arise when the dislike of writing hinders this “master of a ‘knowledge community’s’ normal discourse” (Bruffee 330). The ability to navigate among a body of knowledgeable peers is a shared practice. That is, in similar ways to how fans gain access and membership in online communities, in the center students write to enter a discourse or to gain access to a

conversation. In Kenneth Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" he comments on this practice by asking, "How would it look if we assumed . . . that people write in order to be accepted, to join, to be regarded as another member of the culture or community that constitutes the writer's audience?" (651). What if writers were treated as fans?

The following analyses concern two discourse sites where language is used to craft an identity fit for membership—the writing center and fan communities, specifically those online. While online spaces, such as Tumblr, support the community building practices that participatory fandom engages with, the features that define the writing center leave scholarship wary of community building practices that endanger the writer and imply that a standard discourse is necessary for agency in the academic community. While fannish community building practices supposedly operate under an idyllic ethos of consensus, which poses its own complications, the writing center has traditionally posited students with their school identities of tutee or client. In positioning students in this way, academic discourse suggests a hierarchy of professional and amateur where power is distinctly situated with the knowledgeable or experienced professional, leaving the tutor with the task of negotiating the power dynamic by engaging the student writer or stirring their participation in the conference. While having its own endangers, which will be acknowledged in this project, participatory fandom offers writing center praxis ways of engaging student writers that in some ways contests the hegemonic tendencies of academic community building praxis. In analyzing the discourse practices of online fan communities on Tumblr, this project discusses how approaching the writing center as a participatory space will impact the writing conference and writing center praxis.

To engage students who enter the writing center as fans assumes that these students are not only writers, but also contributors to a culture or community where specific communal ideologies are being expressed. This premise adopts identity as something in constant flux and open to change. As a result, tutors have an opportunity to engage students in academic discourse communities using practices applied in online fan communities, such as gifting, collaborating, and validating identity through affirmation and praise.

This project assumes a social view of writing and makes use of rhetorical analysis when examining the participatory nature of fan activity situated on an online digital platform. In doing so this project approaches texts and artifacts using Henry Jenkins' features of participatory culture as qualifying markers for what is transferable to community building practice in the writing center and conference. Jenkins describes participatory culture as one with relatively low barriers for engagement or contribution, strong support for creating and gifting creations, some type of informal mentorship whereby experience is transferred, members who believe their contributions hold value, and members who feel socially connected to one other; that is, they care about one another's opinion of their labor (5-6). These characteristics emerge as features of fannish practice in online communities.

1.2 Artifacts

To illustrate these activities, this project analyzes a body of artifacts curated from Tumblr, a digital platform available for communal use, participation, and prosumption. Tumblr was chosen as this project's site for analysis because of the activity occurring in this space, which is a result of the nature of the space itself. This online platform, while

participatory due to its user's activity, is digital due to its means. Because web 2.0 features characterize Tumblr, its participatory nature is exaggerated making fannish artifacts more visible as collaborative and discursive in practice. Web 2.0 features include folksonomy, usability, user-generated content, and dispersion. As its name suggests, folksonomy is information classified by the "folk." Strongly related to user-generated content, both folksonomy and usability value the audience or reader, as well as the user. How easily the audience can change, interact with, or contribute to the content, is what defines a rich user experience. In addition to folksonomy and usability, a digital text or space will include dispersion and basic trust. Dispersion calls on multiple channels for delivery, while basic trust calls upon the belief that contributions are not only permissible but also valued. From these characteristics, change emerges as a prominent qualifier for what is digital. The text or space must be changeable. Again, Tumblr emerges as a space defined by its users and their activity.

As a result, Tumblr operates as a hive for fannish participation and prosumption. On this micro-blogging platform, the emotional intensity and communal fixation collect like the notes on a user's blog. Founded in 2007 by David Karp, Tumblr is described as a place for social curating, a practice somewhere between creating and consuming. For Karp (2012), you pull together stuff you like, photos, animated GIFs, YouTube videos, quotes and use the material you have found to say something different. As such, Tumblr is a space uniquely set apart from other social networking sites.

Karp describes the site (2010) as a space where people are creating identities that Facebook and Twitter are not designed to allow you to do. As a platform set apart by its ability to foster the practice of curation, Tumblr is a prime operating space for a gift

economy. Curation—as a means of communicating a common fixation with a particular source text in order to express and contribute to a specific fandom narrative—is central to the process of identity construction as well as the gift economy. And no culture is better accustomed to this economy than the participatory culture relatively maintained by active online fandoms and media prosumers. Tumblr is a site for community among fandoms where fans come to consume, create, and communicate with high levels of enthusiasm and a confidence that the expressions and actions of their discursive identity will be met with little to no judgment from within their figured world. Tumblr offers a corpus of artifacts for analysis that have revealed elements relevant to varied discourse sites beyond online fandoms, such as the writing center and conference. That is, the practices—gifting, collaborating, validating—demonstrated by these artifacts holds implications for building community in the writing center.

Discourse sites do not operate without the concept of power. Similar to writers in academic discourse, power is negotiated among fans in conversation and practice. Fans demonstrate their status through prosumption using the social exchange of appreciation and feedback. In an economy where value is found in the practice of sharing and collaborating, power is located in the volume of conversation as much as the quality of enthusiasm. The notion of the gift, or gifting, is the foundation of the fan economy (Hellekson 114). This reciprocity model leads to a stable relationship between giving, receiving, and exchanging that creates a power negotiation reliant on contribution rather than production for monetary gain. This dramatizes the exchange that is taking place among academics and writers in everyday practice. For example, value in the academy does not necessarily lie in monetary gain. Currency for this discourse community is

similar to that of fandom. While not related in most minds as a result of fandom's non-normative taste and enthusiasm, both parties find sufficiency in attention. For academic communities, this comes in the form of publication and professional networking while, for the fandom, this is gifting, collaborating, and the overall engagement of text and audience. In addition, the language use of the academy, similar to fandom, assists in finding entry points to a conversation. While the barriers for participation are not quite as low as those in online fannish practice, there are entry points wherein scholars create space for themselves in the research narrative of an area of inquiry. Scholars locate gaps in research and fill those gaps by entering conversations with a normative level of interest. In sum, it can be relatively assumed that the discourse communities of academic writers and fan prosumers differ in the following areas: motivation, normative taste, and normative levels of engagement.

In the academy the classroom generally motivates students to visit the writing center. Whether as a course requirement listed in the syllabus or their own conscious effort to improve their writing, students find themselves at the door of the writing center carrying a series of experiences with writing. Most often, these experiences result in a pressure that surrounds the writer ego telling the student they *need* assistance, that their work or ability is lacking in some way when measured against the expectations of the academy. Even those student writers who visit the writing center with a willingness, even eagerness, to invest their time with the tutor and engage with the writing between them, the motivation for this visit is housed within a cultural value system that expects improvement for the sake of product.

Rather than contribute to a conversation for the purpose of joining a community, students are treated as though they write to meet a series of expectations (both self and institutional) for the purpose of receiving positive assessment. Operating as a means of policing student writing, assessment in the academy indeed motivates student activity to meet institutional expectations. However, it would be a disservice to the student-writer to assume that motivation is always this transparent. As a nuanced phenomenon, student motivation can appear as an extrinsic and/or intrinsic force. Indeed, while the academy and the classroom suggest that student motivation is grounded in assessment and varying expectations such as, genre, context, and an instructor's preference, the motivation of fans in online communities is not as idealistic as many assume.

While fans appear intrinsically motived, their "self-motivated" activity looks to a similar force of assessment found in the academy. While not evaluated in the same vein as academic writers, fans contribute to fannish community discourse in order to receive positive feedback, such as likes and comments on any *gift* they have shared with the fandom community. A fannish rubric can be characterized by popularity and recognition. Assessment in this context shifts from strict critical evaluation to a judgment call on liking and sharing. While initial perceptions of fandom suggest a self-motivated body of prosumers and contributors, their activity is realistically inspired by a call to increase the capital of their fandom community.

In addition to the nuances in motivation, student writers and fans differ in the areas of normative taste and normative levels of engagement. Jenkins discusses the history of fanaticism and the "scandalous category" of fandom, including its stereotypical conception due to non-normative taste and high levels of enthusiasm. While fan, an

abbreviated form of fanatic, has Latin roots from the word "fanaticus" meaning "of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee" (Oxford Latin Dictionary), it has come to assume more negative connotations evolving to any "excessive and mistaken enthusiasm" (Oxford English Dictionary). The fan in today's contemporary culture remains one whose interests are "fundamentally alien to the ream of 'normal' cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality" (15). However, Jenkins reminds us that concepts of normative or good taste and normative enthusiasm are embedded in social experiences and are reflected in class interests, reinforced by social exchanges and encounters with higher education (16).

While evolving as more receptive of media education, including its counterpart–play, the academy remains wary of pleasure and entertainment as a source of high value for inquiry, critique, and research. Jenkins, as well as, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice J. Robison address three sincere problems within new media education and describe them as the participation gap, wherein access to new media technologies is unbalanced, the transparency problem, in which students do not have the tools to actively reflect on their learning from participation, and the ethics challenge, where much of the critique of play is located. The ethics challenge is the dilemma wherein students have not developed the ethical norms necessary to navigate online in a multifarious social environment.

Given the tensions between the professional producer and the fanatic prosumer, participatory cultures are inciting situations that one would not find themselves nearly two decades ago. Largely due to the participatory culture of online fandom, the line between producer and consumer is continuously blurring. For Jenkins, "professional

organizations are the watchdog of ethical norms." And while the academy as a professional organization remains the "watchdog" or gatekeeper for ethical norms and norms of taste, the practice of play is largely located in more informal settings where there are no gatekeepers and barriers for participation are increasingly low. But with barriers so low and the "watchdogs" of normative practice nonexistent, what benefits does play have for the academy, specifically the writing center community and conference?

Play has been defined as "the capacity to experiment with the surroundings as a form of problem solving [or critique]" (Jenkins et al 35). While most strongly associated with early learning and experimenting as a child, play is key in shaping identities, experimenting with processes, and exploring new environments (35). Very specific mental attitudes surround the act of play and facilitate the shift from play as fun to play as engagement. "The key is that this activity is deeply motivated" (Jenkins et al 37). Students are more than happy to undergo academy routines of school when there is a motivating goal or purpose behind their labor that intimately matters to them and their self. This is the capacity for engagement, even participation. Coincidently, this trait is shared among professional academic communities and more fanatic prosumer communities. Both discourse sites are recipretory of play; however, the academy, specifically the writing conference, is not necessarily reflective of engagement. This reveals an evident disconnect between the praxis of play in the conference and the capacity of participation, even engagement, currently at work in the conference model.

At its capacity, participation incites engagement and enthusiasm in practice and reinforces the act of play as inquiry. Enthusiasm and play operate as a "launch pad" for

immersion and invitations into a text. If pleasure can be appropriated and realized in some way as praxis for writing center tutors and professionals, the benefits may reveal possibilities for young writers to engage with text and other writers in collaborative practice.

Artifacts for this analysis illustrate the ways in which fans can be invited into a text and how a text can reach out for the audience, a two-way passage allowing participation and investment. Immersion also makes the distance or dimension between text and fan permeable, lowering the barriers for participation. This portal into the text is accomplished through what Jenkins describes as "gaps" in the text or narrative. These "gaps" create access points for contribution, collaboration, and participation. Again, similar to the ways in which academics create space for their input to the conversation. For example, the academy is predicated on the activity of creating awareness, inquiry, and space that was not previously there in a larger research narrative. In any conversation there is the negotiation of voice and space, and for the academy, as well as fandom, this negotiation is accomplished through contributions to an ever-evolving conversation or narrative. That is, a scholar negotiates their place in the field through the quality of their activity. There is no shared assumption that their contribution necessarily holds value. The barriers are too high for a gift economy. Instead, the academy keeps their gatekeepers in place. In response to the gift, the discursive response is, "yes, but."

The artifacts of this project also demonstrate a fandom's desire to protect their borders. Here, it becomes important to note that this project does not endeavor to endanger fandom by appropriating fannish practices with academic values. Different from the landscape and culture of the academy, the participatory nature of fan activity

significantly lowers the border for membership while remaining simultaneously aware of their Otherness placed upon them by more "professional" and normative social tastes. While all fandoms hold a relatively mutual understanding of their own borders, there is a familial, even very permeable approach when bringing new fans into the community. This invitation to participate is akin to the ways academic writers can be guided to engage in discourse communities. If the writing center community adopts a participatory climate to engage young or new writers, the outcome of such moves would reinforce writer egos and raise the engagement levels of students in a growing convergent academy.

1.3 Fan Activity

Practices of gifting, collaborating, and validating identity through affirmation and praise are qualities that can be found in fan activity and strategically brought over to writing center praxis. Fan activity offers a unique approach, as it exaggerates the ways in which writers work to form identities in practice and engage collaboratively. Operating within a gift economy, the currency of these two communities is attention through mediums of publication and reuse. Fans, as well as writers in academic contexts, use language as a way to locate entry points to a conversation. Their differences in access originate from how low the barriers for participation are for those located outside the discourse community. For fans, these barriers are low and permeable; where, similar for academics, a demonstration of knowledge is required for entry. This identification process secures open portals whereby fans can fill gaps in text or conversation.

In plotting similarities between these two discourse communities, this project briefly considers the idea of a participatory writing center and profoundly argues for a

writing conference in which writers gift their experiences and labor, collaborate with one another, and validate identity through affirmation and praise. In doing so, this praxis creates a low barrier of access for student contributions in an effort to cultivate engagement and participation at its capacity. In sum, this project works to reveal approaches wherein individuals can *like* writing.

Sketching connections between writing communities and fannish prosumer communities arises from a kairotic moment in our cultural climate. Narrative consumption in the 21st century has taken a relatively recent turn, at least within the past two decades, which moves the individual from consumer to contributor. Peer discourse shares this characteristic with online fandom discourse as individuals are invited to participate with a text, to share an experience.

Participatory culture is founded on theories of interaction and collaboration among participants who might engage in dialogue, even over space and time, as creators of content in a virtual or physical community. Participatory culture is most strongly associated with social networking, video sharing sites, and blogs for their ability to foster simulated exchange among and within communities. However, what might be mistakenly classified as a digital artifact of participatory culture are web sites or other static technology designed to be read conventionally. With this in mind, it comes as a curiosity to consider how the writing conference might relate more to participatory, even digital, values than a static webpage in which people are limited in their interaction with the content. The possibilities for a participatory writing center conference are prevalent and evolving.

However, a writer's hesitancy to contribute or consider their labor active participation is a pragmatic problem in the writing conference. Theories regarding this hesitation or the assumptions that their work holds little to no value, heavily point to the ways in which writing instruction has promoted and socialized a conventional writer experience. A young writer's indifference can develop from a "yes, but" writing atmosphere. And yet, resistance forms as writing studies works to negotiate this normative tradition.

The push for passive consumption sits amidst the media's modern cultural shift of audience from passive consumer to active contributor. Fewer and fewer individuals are content to scroll through blogs or their social media pages without commenting, posting, or contributing in some way, perhaps tapping into the ways children read, whose pop-up books invited us to push, pull, even tear, and ultimately change the nature of the texts we were reading. Participatory writing taps into these readership experiences wherein individuals informally experiment with text and their environments, whether virtual or real. And often, this playful writing experience as a creator happens in fandom communities.

On Tumblr, where users are considered "the world's creators," members of fandom discourse communities can be invited into a text and a text can reach out to the audience – creating a two-way passage fostering participation and investment. Immersion also makes the distance or dimension between text and user permeable. And again, lowering the barriers for contribution. However, this "passage" in the text remains a deviance both in the context of genre and hegemonic culture. As a non-normative behavior, the individual's participation as active contributor, and no longer passive

consumer, pulls and pushes against the power dynamic set up between professional producer and fanatic prosumer.

In many ways, the participation of a reader, their experience or interpretation of a narrative, offers criticism and new theoretical approaches to existing texts. The participatory nature of fandom has been around longer than many of us think. And it is compelling to consider the ways in which we react to narratives. A fannish reaction to text or inquiry is not closed; it is collaborative, sensory, and alive. As a lived experience, it engages you. Consider how the professional academic might describe their relationship to a discipline or area of inquiry in a similar manner.

Participatory culture asks that natives re-construct their identity, seeing it as a concept both in flux and as a part of a communal ideology. In a monetary and hierarchical social climate, writers are invited to participate. Discourse, as well as genre, monitors participation levels, making it difficult to interact and engage with writing at its participatory capacity. However, in light of relatively new turns in literacy, access is steadily increasing. To describe this phenomenon of low barriers for participation, Jenkins' participatory culture describes less the static and imposing normative and more a fluid and inviting experience.

1.4 Published Transcripts

To intersect fannish practices with academic rituals in this way assumes that community-building practices are features of discourse rather than enclosed pedagogical exercises. They happen in conversation, and as a result, these approaches become transferrable. However, to securely tether fannish community building practices to

writing center praxis, a firm grasp or understanding of current praxis is necessary. Included in this project is an analysis of published writing center transcripts.

The purpose of these published transcripts is two-fold. First, their analysis serves as an evaluation of current practice or inquiry asking how power is negotiated, where value is located, and how value is attributed in the conference. To understand what online fannish communities can share with writing center praxis, current community building approaches in the writing center must first be identified and evaluated for their impact on the writer. Second, their analysis provides insight into how tutors are already engaging students as writers, working to build community, and collaborating effectively to promote participation in a living community. That is, this project is not assuming that the writing center is altogether void of participation. Rather, its purpose is to reveal how the writing conference might reach its participatory capacity, including what that means for writing ego and identities.

1.5 The Writing Center

The writing center provides both a community similar to the one that students must eventually write for in everyday life and a social context in which they can experience and practice the conversations that academics most value (Bruffee 329). By recognizing that the writing center privileges conversation in the conference, this project approaches the methods of current praxis not as a failing enterprise, but as one open to engaging with tutees in discourse that can be “emotionally involved” and “intellectually and substantively focused” (Bruffee 329). Writing center work values conversation, but also conversation as it is practiced within a community.

The primary approach of writing center discourse reflects a social view of writing, a belief in "the writer as a member of a larger literate community" and that the act of composing is "a socially determined action" (Faigley et al. 17). As a result, this project shows how collaborative learning creates an awareness of writing as a social exchange and how this conversation paired with participatory practices can engage and rouse the writer ego.

1.6 Rationale: Why Fannish Practice

This call for engagement in academic discourse communities is identified as a practical problem in this project. That is, how can tutors engage their tutees insofar as to stimulate willing participation in written discourse? This research question investigates the approaches and perceptions of community pedagogy in the writing center. As a result, the idea of a participatory writing center conference develops and considers what fannish practices can tell us about building community in ways that do not endanger the writer identity but rather, support the writer ego.

The importance of this project is two-fold. First, this investigation into the ways we build community in the writing center asks that writers, and not their writing, become the focus of theory and practice. While a romantic notion, valuing and prioritizing the writers within our centers embraces a shared and convergent environment. This project also acknowledges a practical demand, recognizing the emerging cultural call for participation and connectivity. While dominant Western culture continues to value ownership, individualism, and product, continued advancements in technology work against these resilient values. Whether willing or not, our advancements are moving us towards a convergent culture. In an Age of Information (or Digital Age), the call for

connecting and sharing information, ideas, and processes has become increasingly prominent.

These demands call for participation and connectivity across time and space. A participatory writing center conference that guides students on how to enter and engage in discourse communities using gifting, collaborating with peers, and validating identities through affirmation and praise as praxis, meets and suits the continued changes in academic environments and social landscapes.

1.7 Research Questions

Three research questions guide this study:

1. How can writing center tutors guide students to engage in written academic discourse?

2. If writers are treated as fans and members of a given community or culture, how might this validation of identity affect the community-building praxis of the writing conference?

3. In treating the writing center as a participatory space, where writers gift experience, collaborate, and validate identity, how might this affect a student's participation in writing?

These questions are designed to relate and intersect upon examination. Assuming a distinct value set, these questions align with a social view of writing and identity. They focus on the writer as contributor and align the writer-identity with fan-identity as participants within a specific community. These questions aid in situating this project within a context, which defines writer and fan as identities related to one another through their ability to question dominant models or normative traditions.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of this study deals with issues of participation and community in discursive environments. Grounded in a social view of the writing center and conference, this study assumes that meaning and identity is negotiated, rather than fixed. Assuming that writing is a social act and that conversation and collaboration are essential to promote successful writing, this project builds upon inquiries that explore the negotiation of power in writing center conferences. Laurel Johnson Black addresses this "difference in power between participants" (39) to consider the access and participation level of members in discursive events, a present and important concern in conferencing. In addition to the location of power in the conference—who gets to talk and when—scholarship on building community in the writing center reveals a divided perspective.

While romantic notions of the center indicate a positive ethos regarding process, collaboration, and shared discourse, theorists and practitioners are careful in examining the negative outcome of tutors initiating writers into new discourse communities. Rather than operate under what Grimm calls the warmly persuasive metaphor of community, writing center scholarship is pressed to consider the writing center as a site of social struggle where relations between dominant and dominated groups are enacted (Bawarshi and Pelkowski). These perspectives remind us of the negotiation of power that is ever present in discursive environments, including the writing communities found both in the center and online.

As scholarship investigates the role of power in the conference and the politics of writing center praxis, writing center "ideas" and practice continue to emerge from the field of composition studies. What remains is an inquiry that moves beyond the abiding popularity of the "Idea" of a writing center. While writing center scholarship continues to take up Stephen North's call to produce "better writers and not better writing" (50) writing center work is influenced by a variety of theoretical approaches. Among these theories is an approach to the writing center as a site for collaboration through peer discourse.

Bruffee's review of peer discourse calls it an alternative for the traditional classroom and examines its "powerful educative force" (326). The relative success of peer tutoring builds upon the premise of a shared experience. From this experience, it is hoped that students embrace their own collaborative learning, changing the social context in which they learn (325). Within his examination of peer influence, Bruffee also explores the origin of thought and comes away with a view of writing that is grounded in community. That is, any understanding of thought follows an understanding of conversation, and any understanding of conversation follows an understanding of community that generates that conversation (327). For Bruffee, all roads lead to conversation, to social experience. But Bruffee is not alone in his social view of writing that assumes thought and conversation are similar practices and social artifacts.

In response to Bruffee's work and those who critique him, John Trimbur examines collaborative learning in order to explore the issue of consensus, one of the most misunderstood terms of collaboration. Criticism of Bruffee's social constructionist pedagogy follows two lines of thought. First, an urge of caution is aimed at collaborative

learning as consensus supposedly endangers the individual. Now this first line of critique emerges from the polarization of the individual and society, a relatively outdated conception. Second, consensus as it appears in Bruffee's collaborative learning overlooks the status of exchange among individuals. The danger of consensus, as some argue, is that this model of collaboration assumes the current production and distribution of knowledge as unproblematic. Unchallenged in this model of collaborative learning, Bruffee's use of consensus "reduces [conversation] to an acculturative technique" (612) returning us again to the concerns raised by Bawarshi and Pelkowski as well as Grimm, that community poses as a tool for conformity and domination. Trimbur reminds us of this problem. To tell students this is how we [writers, researchers, academics] talk to each other or "do things" (612), or to describe consensus in community practice as a sort of demystification process, is to hinder the transformative potential of collaborative learning in which consensus is reimagined as utopian desire.

To view consensus as a means of transforming conversation to identify power relations, requires a movement from the "expert-novice model" (613) that initiates writers into discourse communities organized by the academy. This movement calls for a model that better suits democratic participation for the purpose of changing the social character of production (612). This is the entry point for a shared conversation. Joining this dialogue on movement from a traditional productive apparatus to discourse communities based on reciprocity and recognition of participants, including their differences, is the field of fan and audience studies. Analysis and attention on the movement away from the normal workings of discourse communities has gained traction in the past two decades.

Jenkins is noted for taking up the observation of fans—their interactions and their relationship with media. His landmarking work, *Textual Poachers*, originally published in 1992, speaks to the representation and position of fans. From the growth of fandom over the past two decades, fandom studies explores the fans movement from a traditional, static consumer to an inventive, active contributor to conversation and meaning. Similar to recent critiques on community from writing studies, fan and audience work labors over the implications from consumers of media who challenge the traditional apparatus of knowledge production. The endeavor to resist dominance and yet pursue conversation collectively rises as a subject engaged by more than just writing center professionals and new media studies.

As early as the 1970s when the second wave of feminism was gaining influence, feminist criticism of new media labored to craft "counternarratives and counterrepresentations that contest male regimes of cultural production and empower women to use media for their own interests and pleasure" (Watkins and Emerson152). At the beginning of the new millennium, S. Craig Watkins and Rana A. Emerson in "Feminist Media Criticism and Feminist Media Practices" chart the influence of feminist criticism on new media, specifically reception studies as it was then called, and acknowledges strategies of participation and appropriation that enable women to find pleasure and actively construct meaning. This approach responds to the dangers of new media, specifically pleasure, as it drives hegemonic values and productions.

In their discussion, Watkins and Emerson provide commentary regarding the influence of feminist criticism on fan and audience studies, then called reception studies, as they examine "how audiences actively engage the media-scape around them" (Watkins

and Emerson153). As they sketch the evolution of media's representation of women and the organizational structure and culture of media noting the improvements and challenges, they arrive at issues related to the reception and use of media to find that these issues remained largely underprobed (156). Published in 2000, their article notes a growing awareness of audience studies, specifically participatory culture wherein members are "actively involved in the construction of meaning" (156), and considers the ways in which women creatively engage posited gender roles in modern culture. According to Watkins and Emerson, feminists can approach media as having the potential to both produce and contest hegemony.

Various accounts of feminist-inspired media critique have developed since the new millennium. Nearly ten years since Watkins and Emerson, Kristina Busse writes the introduction to *Cinema Journal*'s In Focus issue, "Fandom and Feminism: Gender and the Politics of Fan Production" wherein she introduces contributions that consider media fandom, or television and film fandom, in which dominantly female fans are contributing to digital narratives. Deeply rooted in the grounds of economics and gender from its inception, media fandom highlights women who began recreating narratives that professional media culture would not provide. Feminist scholarship and conversation actively consider gift culture as well as the dangers of convergence culture, but not without acknowledging the value of fandom in its endeavor to upset the subject-object relationship.

> [W]riters become readers and readers become writers; texts remain unfinished and become fertile ground for new rewrites; community interaction and creative production become indistinguishable as creative

> endeavors turn into commentary and criticism into fan works; commercial interests become complicated as a gift economy questions capitalists models of labor and exchange while nonetheless participating in them in various ways (106).

However, both fandom and feminist scholars alike are quick to complicate this observation and are careful not to promote an illusory feminist ideal. The complete embrace of communal, noncommodified fannish practice remains problematic as more recent work by Busse reveals the resilience of industry and production driven values as they permeate fannish consumption and prosumption in community practice.

Writing in 2015, her examination of fan labor and the gift model in "Fan Labor and Feminism: Capitalizing on the Fannish Labor of Love" considers the phenomenon of fan merchandise as it grows exponentially. This phenomenon testifies to the growth of both media commercialization and fannish cultures (Busse 110). And while more positive media portrayals of fans have increased, specifically females, the mainstream's embrace of one always risks excluding another (110-111). Unfortunately, hegemony continues as "the white middle-class heterosexual male geek in popular culture redefines but does not erase boundaries of exclusion" (111). But as fandom enters the mainstream what follows is a shift in fan and audience work that focuses on industry connections. And while fannish countercultural prosumption is residual, it is the entertainment industry's apparatus for profit that raises concern and warrants critique. Introduced as a new industry-fan model, "an emerging hybrid model of circulation, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far

more participatory (and messier) ways," (qtd. in Busse 111) this apparatus endangers fan labor to exploitation and hegemony from media producers and professionals.

Similar to the cautions raised by Bawarshi and Pelkowski as well as Grimm in the context of writing studies, the fan and writer alike are similarly endangered as participants in the Digital Age as they are posited in larger social structures that police the borders of conversation—who may talk (or produce) and when. Writing center praxis can benefit from "listening-in" on the dilemmas of fandom discourse communities as they offer some subversive strategies for agency, appropriation, and participation in an environment where low barriers emerge from both technological advancement and a shifting communal ideology.

Rather than research writing center praxis through theories emerging from composition studies or approaching practice under a sole lens directed by writing center studies, this project takes aim to bridge disciplines by extending the definition of writing and writer. In treating writing as participation, even a conversation, and writer as contributor to a conversation and further, a community, the approaches taken and examined by fan and audience studies come to strongly resemble similar conversations in composition and writing center studies. If treating writers as contributors to a conversation, who assume that their work will be valued, were to become the normative tradition in writing center praxis, how would the participation level of students in the writing conference change? In viewing the writing center conference through the lens of participation, access, and community, the activities in the conference have the potential to operate using features commonly found in other, more subversive communities.

By decentering systems of ownership, similar to a socialist view of writing, Jenkins suggests that the activities that operate in participatory culture will change the ways in which individuals view themselves and the ways in which they view the work of others, including the construction of their identity when he says, "Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from individual expression to community involvement" (6). In validating the identity of writers who enter the center by affirming and praising their contributions to the session, their perception of self and writing may stimulate involvement and spur participation. Participatory culture, primarily the work of Jenkins, broadens the approach of writing center praxis causing us to consider the writer as contributor, participant, and engaged member of a discourse community.

Rather than view writing and text only as a process or even a product, assuming that writers begin as consumers of a conversation in an effort to eventually produce meaningful ideas to enter a community, Jenkins focuses on the writer (or fan) as a contributor to a conversation and validates the individual's authority to add meaning. The value is ever present in their contribution, always assumed. Jenkins calls participatory culture as one with:

1. Relatively low barriers for artistic expression and engagement.
2. Strong support for creating and sharing creations with others.
3. Some type of informal mentorship where what is known by the most experienced is passed along to the novice.
4. Members who believe that their contributions matter and will be valued.
5. Members who feel some degree of social connection with one another or care about what other people think about their work or craft.

With Jenkins approach to participatory culture, Rebecca Ward Black discusses the role of participation in discursive environments in her examination of access and affiliation, specifically as it relates to writing and literacy. In her study, written while Black was a graduate student, she takes an ethnographic approach in examining the ways FanFiction.net provides access to language and affiliation with a language community. Specifically, Black analyzes the engagement of English Language Learners (ELLs) in their meaning making processes and identity construction practices.

Black highlights how their acceptance into an online fandom community, their affiliation, and their interactions encourage participation in the community. Among the implications from her study, she emphasizes the benefits of praxis that are less critical and more communal. Her studies in online fandom continues with her publication, "Online Fanfiction: What Technology and Popular Culture Can Teach Us About Writing and Literacy Instruction" where she prompts literacy educators and researchers to consider the new media and digital literacy practices that students of the Digital Age find so engaging and are "enthusiastically writing, reading, and socializing in this space." Here we find Black's words echoing those of Jenkins as he describes fandom in *Textual Poachers* as "a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, inviting many different forms of participation and levels of engagement" (2). Black emphasizes the causal relationship of this engagement as she evaluates how fandom communities enable personal strengths for meaningful participation; facilitate communication that is not solely based on language and writing skills; and encourage familiarity with conventions and other members. Black appears to pioneer the research field of digital literacy practices and what contributions fandom can make to this conversation. Her call to professionals and

educators is the exploration of such spaces as they may provide insight as to the kinds of activities that students find meaningful. To the astonishment of conventional practitioners, she says,

> Members of fanfiction.net engage in activities that are congruent with what we already know about best practice in writing instruction: that it is important to integrate multiple modes of meaning-making into literacy activities, that collaborative activity and discussion between peers enhances writing ability, and that language use is social and intimately tied to identity.

Similar to Black's own conclusions and in answer to her call for further inquiry, my project serves to highlight the common ground between online fandom and the academy. Rather than approach the tensions amidst social tastes, this project engages the practices of these discourse communities and investigates their relationship as one may learn from the other.

Consideration for a participatory conference model largely calls upon the writing center as a site for performance and play. Performance is "the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery" (Jenkins et al 47), which aids online fandom communities in their approach to identity and assists in protecting home cultural identity while also introducing members into a given community. For example, James Paul Gee coins the term, projective identity, referring to the fusion of identities in media, specifically game players. This discussion of alternative identities takes place in his book, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, where Gee says that players "project one's values and desires onto the virtual character" and "seeing

the virtual character as one's own project in the making" (qtd. in Jenkins et al 47). Both Gee and Jenkins align themselves with the concept that performance holds value in its ability to encourage students as they assume various identities, and through their discursive activity in play, develop a deeper understanding of their selves and social stations in a hierarchical set of privilege.

In addition to Gee's work, Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. L. Harrington examine the intersection of identity and community, including how fan culture has redefined normal participation. In their work on affiliations and expressions, they discuss the relationship of writer and text, as well as individual and community. Gee refers to the term, affinity spaces, as informal learning cultures that many have argued resemble "ideal" learning environments. Here Gee contributes to this discussion on engagement in practice, as he explores why students "learn more, participate more actively, and engage more deeply with popular culture than they do with the contents of their textbooks" (10). He argues that affiliation, as a bridging mechanism, prioritizes common efforts over differences, as well as inclusivity and validation, as each participant is allowed to feel like an expert "while tapping into the experiences of others" (10), sustaining opportunities for learning and discovery. In sum, the participatory culture of online fandom communities provides ample possibilities for learning, writing, and community building praxis.

However, cautions need to be raised similar to those considered by Grimm, Bawarshi and Pelkowski in the context of writing studies. Among these cautions and critiques of participatory culture is Christian Fuchs, whose work centers on the political economy of media, as well as media's relationship to society and social theory. He asks

that we consider the politics of participation, specifically participation democracy theory, as Jenkins' model of participation evades the "relations of dominance" at work online (Fuchs). He charges Jenkins for taking a "both … and" argument and criticizes cultural studies scholar for their tendency to exaggerate creativity and participation on the web. While romantic notions of participation would suggest a positive reception to any activity that would regard collaboration, community, and equal access, critical analysis would refrain from a biased acceptance of Jenkins' participatory culture.

Elizabeth Ellcessor joins Fuchs in a critique of participation as equal access. In *Restricted Access: Media, Disability, and the Politics of Participation*, Ellcessor uses different ability as a lens to interrogate access. Her work highlights the ways in which the normative class or community of individuals defines participation and access. Because participatory culture is shaped by the practices of normative bodies and abilities, the actual level of access involved in these practices debunks any idyllic related to participatory practice. There is more work to be done. And while participatory culture is not to be held as an idyllic, a careful culturalistic perspective of participation can draw relevance for writing studies.

Both discourse sites, the professional writing center community and online fandom community, use language and writing as a way to craft an identity fit for membership. While digital spaces, such as Tumblr, support and even exaggerate the participatory culture of online fandom communities, what characteristics define the space that most colleges and universities brand, the writing center? Through analysis, evaluation, and published praxis, the academy's writing center implies that a relative level of fannish praxis is at work in the conference. Bruffee, Lunsford, Trimbur, and

other writing studies professionals provide sufficient evidence of a conference model that is collaborative, student-centered, and focused on tutor and tutee discourse, the one-on-one interaction or individualized attention not feasibly present in classroom pedagogy.

However, with high barriers for participation in place and policed by gatekeepers of normative discourse, dominant academic praxis remains wary of the contributions and conversations of fandom scholars. Similarly plagued by the stereotypes that are attached to fans, fandom scholars, or acafans, are working to professionalize their field just as fiercely as that of writing studies professionals and writing center administrators. Perhaps through professional relations as well as mutual respect and empathy, these disciplines might acknowledge their shared practice and approaches to both identity and community in conversation and writing.

Fan and audience studies, as it relates to participation, offer a lens for examining the actions and motivations of the writers and fans in this study, grounding their behaviors in the context of their community or culture. This project examines the participation of members in a fandom and the participation of writers in a writing center to draw on the similarities and differences of talk when entering a discourse community. The value systems and cultural practices are identified through forms of analysis and examined in published writing center transcripts as well as artifacts recovered from fannish practice and online discourse sites, specifically Tumblr.

There is an absence of literature that prioritizes the writer's engagement and is concerned with their participation as it relates to their perception of identity and community involvement. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how the writing center could guide writers on entering and engaging in academic discourse communities

using similar practices such as, gifting, collaboration, and validation, that seem so successful in online fan communities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The examination of fan and writer discourse is grounded in a study that investigates the role of gifting, collaborating, and validating through affirmation and praise as social artifacts are exchanged between individual and community. This chapter outlines the methodology and analysis for this study, focused on the role of participation between writer and community.

3.1 Research Problem

RP1: There is a lack of engagement in writing, either as resistance or indifference.

RP2: Community building praxis in the writing center is problematic as it is in danger of initiating conformity and reinforcing the homogeneity of the academy's knowledge production apparatus.

RP3: There is a lack of writer participation in the writing center conference.

3.2 Research Design

This study focuses on two discourse communities as they interact in a myriad of places. The fandom community will be analyzed as they interact on Tumblr, a digital and convergent micro-blogging platform. Their discourse community will be explored through the analysis of artifacts that effectively demonstrate the cultural values and behaviors of the fandom community. Artifacts include notes, comments, anon requests, GIFs, fics, and fan art. In general, fan labor will be interrogated. The writing center conference will be considered through an analysis of published conference transcripts. In

examining the published transcripts of writing center conferences, the conversation and approaches taken by the tutor will be reviewed to establish a relative current condition for community building praxis in the writing center. The analysis of this study deals with issues of engagement, participation, and validation. Grounded in a social constructivist view, this study takes as its premise the position that knowledge and meaning is created within contexts and discursive practices, even conversation.

3.3 Analysis of Artifacts

My endeavor is to understand the fandom culture produced on Tumblr, but it is important to understand Tumblr as only one site of several which serve to "house" fandom language, practice, and culture—albeit Tumblr is a dominant and popular one; and therefore, the appropriate site choice for an analysis on fandom community practice. Because of the vast interactivity among fandoms, especially online, this analysis of texts and artifacts has not been restricted to specific fandoms. Rather, artifacts have been selected for their demonstration of cultural practices and values, and for the permeation of theses practices and values. Fan labor for analysis will not pay respect to specific source material but rather, the participation level of these groups through discursive activity. Participation will be approached through affiliation– membership in online communities– and defined by gifting, collaborating, and validating identity.

Tumblr, as a platform for online community, is a site for writers, but not writers as defined in the traditional sense of any longstanding canonical or normative history. Tumblr rarely observes any normative production apparatus, nor does it heed to traditional composition processes wherein writing is published and inaccessible for audience contribution, aside from the permissions set to "comments allowed." Tumblr

allows less room for any traditional writer and more for the creator– the fanatic. This micro-blogging platform is a site for community among fandoms, where anonymity is normal and mania is very typical. Users are less likely to connect with someone known within their existing social circle and more likely to collaborate and curate from someone known to them only through their online identity and mutual fixation on a source text.

Fans log onto Tumblr to prosume, create, and communicate with the confidence that the expressions and actions of their performance will be met with no judgment from within their figured world. Again, as Jenkins has noted, the value is ever present in shared creations. It is assumed, even warranted. Activity on Tumblr meets the characteristics of participatory culture as writers experience support and validation for their labor. This experience happens as a result of the gift economy exercised by this discourse community, a practice largely maintained and recognized in fannish collaboration.

It is the purpose of this project to reveal how the writing center and conference might endeavor as a participatory space and what this might mean for the writing ego or identity. While the writing center conference and Tumblr as sites of conversation diverge in a number of areas including functionality and spatial capability, they hold similar potential for supporting writers who like writing and who recognize their own value in the larger conversations and discourse communities to which they are a part.

To refer to participation in discourse communities is to understand that there are levels of participation: *affiliation* or affinity space (Gee) refers to membership of a given (often online) community, whether formal or informal; *expressions* refers to producing new innovative forms, such as fanfiction or other forms of remix; *collaborative problem-solving* refers to working together, whether formal or informal, to create new knowledge;

circulations refers to shaping the movement of media, such as blogging (Jenkins, et al 9). In proposing that the writing center and conference endeavor as a participatory space by approaching writers as affiliates of their discourse is to imply that the validation of identity contributes to engagement. In a community with tolerant gatekeepers, what happens to the barriers for participation? With low barriers for contribution, Jenkins' has already supplied the outcome—an environment in which members actively engage with narrative, with conversation and creation thereby restructuring their identity, often affirming it.

Participatory culture relies on the gift or act of gifting and sharing labor. But what incentive do creators have for sharing their crafts, comments, and activity? How does a fan know when to gift? Again, I defer to Jenkins' explanation of narrative "gaps" wherein fans create space for themselves where previously there was none. Referred to as, "balance between fascination and frustration," Jenkins repurposes the term, "negative capability" to describe this concept. He gives us five types of negative capability: kernels (details in the narrative that are not central to the plot and can be expanded), holes (elements missing from the narrative but necessary to the plot), contradictions (information given to the reader but not fully explained and for which alternatives exist), silences (intentional exclusions from the narrative), and potentials (space outside the narrative boundaries). Negative capability is where fan activity and conversation exists as they attempt to fill these "gaps". However, fans do not participate individually with narrative, they do so in community. Just as they collaborate with the text, they also create narrative together. With these incentives also comes what fans must acquire prior to their gifting—knowledge of the source text and the communal knowledge surrounding the

text—or, a fandom's narrative of the source, similar to the research narrative of an inquiry or issue. In the gift economy of fandom blogging, a thorough knowledge of subject matter, whether canon or headcanon (i.e. fandom narrative) is made a social good. Without this knowledge, survival in fandom communities on Tumblr becomes problematic yet the barriers for participation remain permeable.

Consider Figure 1.1 in which *leswhorables* gifts their conversation without narrative knowledge of the source material. The exchange centers on the source text, *Supernatural*, an American fantasy horror television series created by Eric Kripke.

FIGURE 1.1: A discursive exchange on Tumblr among *Supernatural* fans and a nonfan

Narrative knowledge provides the fan with an awareness of the popular exchange in the early conception of the text,

Sam Winchester: Why are we still even here?

Dean Winchester: [pulls out John's journal] This is why. This book. This is Dad's

> single most valuable possession. Everything he knows about every evil thing is in here. And he's passed it on to us. I think he wants us to pick up where he left off. You know, saving people, hunting things. The family business.

With the entry point of "dad has a weird obsession," *shavingryansprivates* gifts with knowledge of the source text followed by other fans obviously aware of the community's discursive expectations as well as site knowledge, or how conversation is treated by the fandom community. However, while *leswhorables*'s contribution is unfamiliar with the source text and *plaidshirts-lover*'s addition to the conversation with "someone's new here" emphasizes this unfamiliarity, the contribution still stands. It remains stable. Because of the low barriers that Tumblr exaggerates, every contribution, regardless of relevance, is received. This is the crux of the gift economy– an environment wherein creators can share their contribution to narrative and identity regardless of relevance or the absence of an explicit invitation.

leswhorables's contribution or gift, "fossils," can be described as a misstep in fannish conversation. However, because the gatekeeping of fandom discourse is policed by the fans themselves and reliant on consensus among the fandom, the borders of this community are in constant flux. Fandom communities are unique in their paradoxical ideology of resistance and acceptance. It is because fandom communities, where power is enthusiastically negotiated, are operating in a participatory space that contributions are eagerly accepted regardless of relevance. That is, tensions remain and are ever present in debates on the genuine fan, wherein borders are maintained; but with tension, equally so, is the eager acceptance of fandoms online, especially on Tumblr where barriers for contribution are increasingly low.

3.3.1 Gifting

The gift economy largely exercised in participatory culture fosters the life of community-based activities, whether they include the production of knowledge, the circulation of social goods, or the construction of gender. Fandom populations conduct language practices within this gift economy– a mode of exchange wherein valuables are not traded or sold but gifted. There is no immediate quid pro quo, but rather, an assumption that the gift carries value with no gratification other than the validation of identity.

This reciprocity model also illustrates the ways in which fans can be invited into a text and how a text can reach out for the audience. Immersion makes the distance or dimension between text and fan permeable, lowering the barriers for participation. This portal into the text is accomplished through what Jenkins describes, and as mentioned earlier, as "negative capability", creating access points for contribution, collaboration, and participation. Again, similar to the ways in which academics create space for their input to the conversation. Areas of inquiry that can be expanded, have not previously been explored, possess some alternative approach, have not been examined at all, or hold opportunities for additional inquiry, are all elements of academic discourse communities in practice. While Jenkins attributes "negative capability" to fan communities, these features or spaces for contribution are a shared trait between two groups that diverge on points of normative and non-normative engagement, high and low taste, and audience expectations. However, while their expression, subject matter, and audiences may differ, their means for achieving their respective goals is the same. Through conversation and

contribution, members of academic and fannish discourse communities engage in their writing and activity. Both groups gift their experience.

However, the motivation for this gifting practice differs in form. Fannish motivation is an assessment defined by opinion—informed by a fans emotional attachment. Their decision to like the gift and continue to share the contribution within the community is guided by a series of cultural and community expectations. That is, fans are encouraged to gift by a communal call for low levels of criticism. In contrast to academic writing spaces, fannish criticism or evaluation approaches the gift as a valued and positive contribution to the fandom community discourse. However, the evaluation of fannish work is grounded in ideas of popularity and recognition. Accepted as a social good, devotion and attention work to build the capital of fandom.

When gifting specifically online, the use of language becomes a means by which meaning is not only constructed but also understood as a social good. Language, conversation, and discursive activity become a gift. Fandoms maintain a dominant presence on Tumblr largely due to their ability to navigate a gift economy, to share their creations and curate their conversations. They strengthen their status through an exchange of labor among one another. While each fan's own participation may be sufficient to maintain an active presence, the nature of their relationship among one another works to reinforce and build upon their own community– a fandom. They both collide and collaborate through gift culture. But it is the nature of gifting that emphasizes the significance of this sharing activity. Figure 2.1 documents gifted conversation and fan labor among a community of fans.

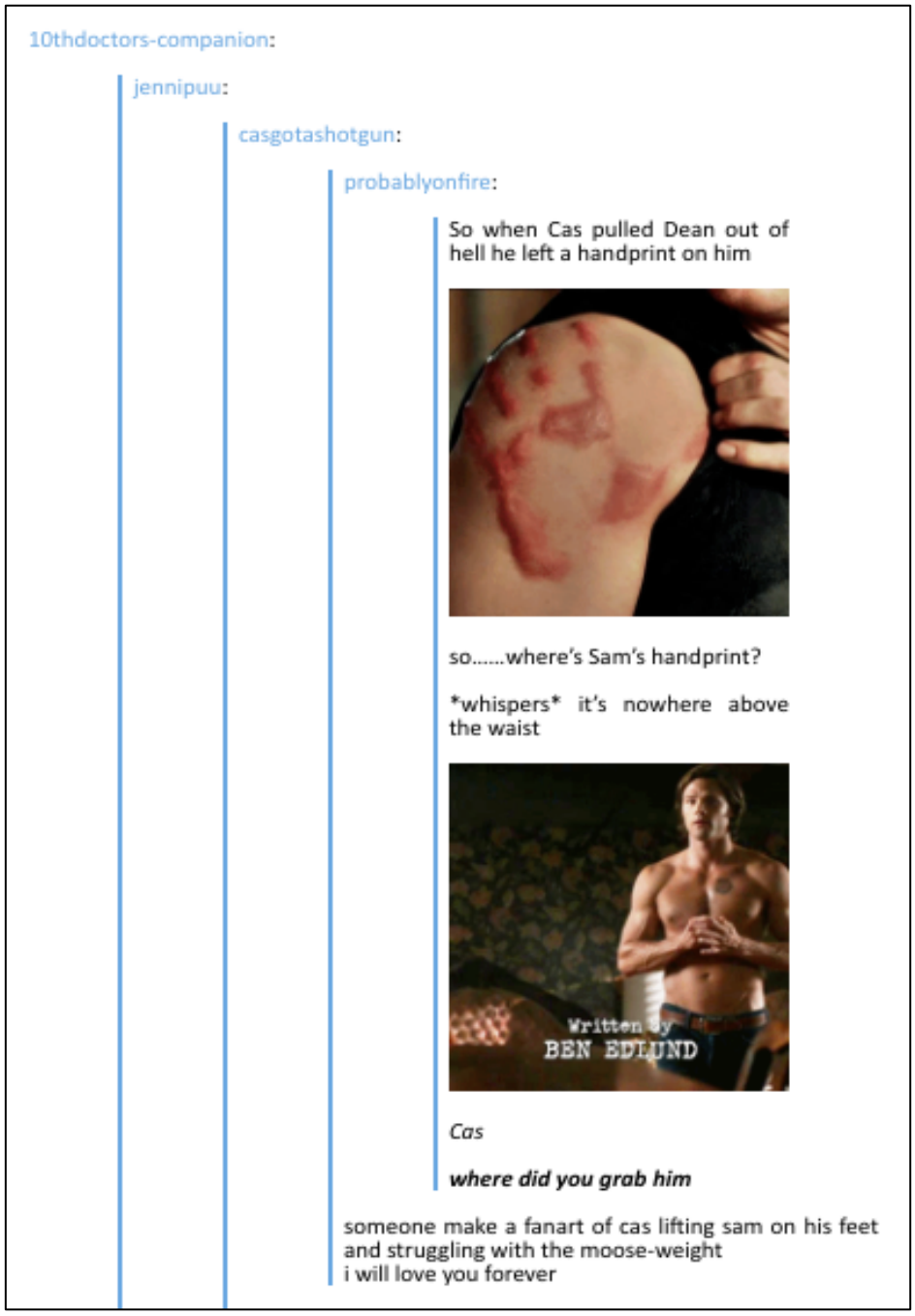


FIGURE 2.1: A discursive exchange among fans requesting a fan art

The original text post serves to open a point of conversation among the fandom by pointing to a kernel in the narrative, a detail in the narrative that is not central to the plot but can be expanded. For the purpose of meeting the expectations of academic discourse

communities, it can be said another way. *probablyonfire* opens an issue, an inquiry. However, for the fandom community, this inquiry is known by another name. Coined by Jenkins, *probablyonfire* points fans to a "negative capability" in the text. One might see the academy's Bizzaro of this as the call for research, to further expand on an issue. To answer this call, *casgotashotgun* responds not with questions but with a request. This is important. Academic discourse communities call for questions, for critique, for pressure on issues for investigative purposes. These communities seek to ask why, how, and to what extent. They seek to uncover meaning through rhetorical analysis and academic inquiry. Fandom communities have a different, although not unrelated, agenda. These communities seek creations, contributions, and conversation. They seek to create new narrative knowledge, both for themselves in the construction of their personal identity and their fandom as their communal ideology.

In Figure 1.2 *jennipuu* responds to *casgotashotgun*'s request and gifts their labor, a fan art of Castiel lifting Sam from hell. This gift serves two purposes. First, it serves as a discursive contribution to canon; thus, creating narrative knowledge. Second, it validates both parties' membership in the *Supernatural* fandom, or the SPN family. By responding in this way, *jennipuu* validates the presence and identity of *casgotashotgun*. Because this response takes the form of gift, the fan labor both responds to the request and mimics the immediacy of conversation. Fandom discourse, with the help of Tumblr, mimics conversation, giving it the appearance of synchronous exchange. Conversations on Tumblr play out over time and space as heteroglossic activity.

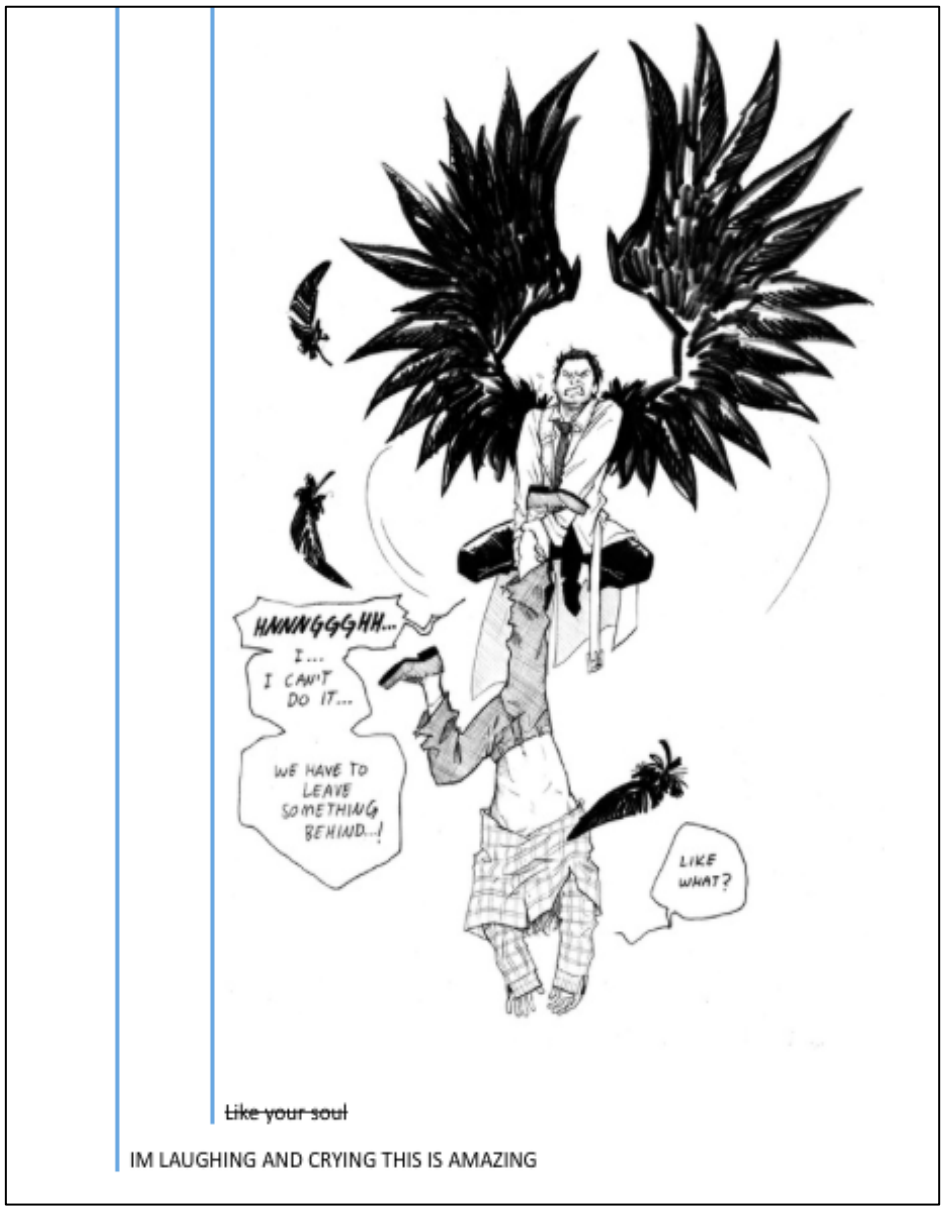


FIGURE 2.2: A discursive exchange among fans gifting a fan art

Although fanart, the sketch in Figure 2.2 becomes discursive. It not only replies to a conversation, but also contributes to a collaborative, fandom narrative as well as the identity of *jennipuu* as a member of the fandom.

Through gifting, fannish composition practices are meaningful as a participatory cultural act, as they shape how fans construct their identity. The nature of the lexicon and

events that organize fandom culture and experience on Tumblr are reliant on the shape and meaning of communication. That is, the activities and relationships being enacted on Tumblr harmonize with the discourse practices of gifting. Tumblr as a digital platform succeeds in dramatizing the practices of a participatory fandom because of its nature and web 2.0 features as an interoperable program. However, this practice of gifting or sharing labor is not always clearly and explicitly invited as we saw in Figure 2.1. The artifacts above, while illustrative of fannish community building praxis, also closely resemble the discourse and collaborative practices of academic writing communities. In a collegiate writing context, where high barriers exist to limit or impose normative contribution and engagement, an invitation to participate in conversation must be explicitly stated. While in fannish practice, the barriers are low enough that invitations to participate in narrative and conversation are not needed. In fannish discourse, the act of gifting occurs as synchronously as conversation. Gifts become "negative capabilities" in their own right as heteroglossic activity that continues to deconstruct and reconstruct narrative knowledge. Gifting both fills "gaps" and creates entry points or "gaps" for members to collaborate in practice. Contribution becomes inherent, implied, even assumed.

In Figure 3.1 *catie-does-things* creates a brief text post in response to the source text, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (TFA) a 2015 American film directed, co-produced, and co-written by J.J. Abrams. While not raising an issue, *catie-does-things* does point to a "negative capability", a potential or space outside the narrative boundaries. In this example they craft a concept for the purpose of creating an identity, or personal ideology, within the fandom narrative and communal ideology of the adapted source text (TFA).

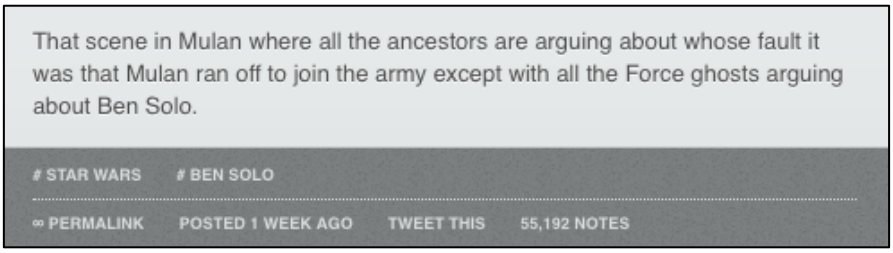


FIGURE. 3.1: A text post and fannish remix of source material

In this example of the gifting process, the text post serves as an attempt on the part of the individual fan to validate their own identity and offer a piece of narrative knowledge for communal value. As it is referencing two source materials, this artifact becomes directly intertextual and heteroglossic. While appropriating its place as a source text in its own right, it calls upon a presumed audience to respond, even without a direct invitation. Again, this invitation to participate and engage in conversation is inherent in collaborative fannish practice. While this artifact is in response to both TFA and Disney's *Mulan*, a 1998 American animated film based on the Chinese legend of Fa Mulan, it also serves as a "negative capability" or potential in the fandom narrative. It creates a "gap" that it invites other fans to fill.

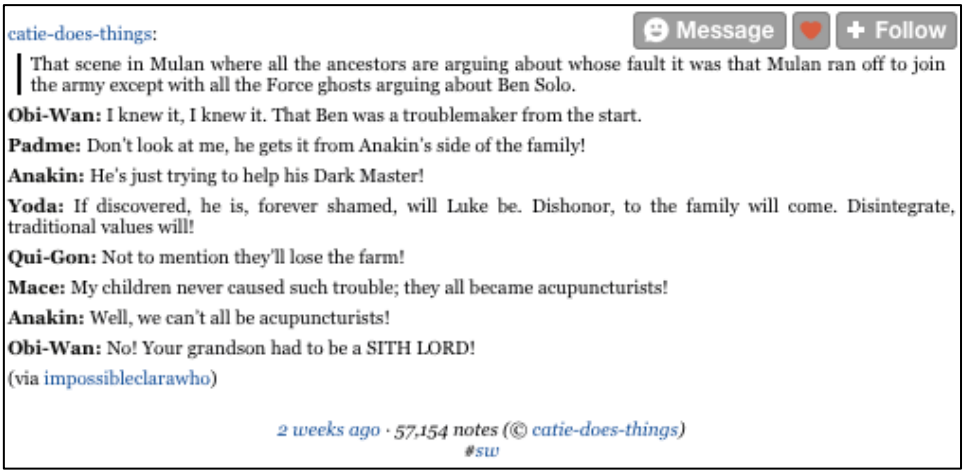


FIGURE. 3.2: A set of discursive text posts and fannish remix of source materials

Accepting this implied invitation, *impossibleclarawho* replies by re-blogging the source post with a post of their own—a text post of dialogue, illustrating the potential created by *catie-does-things*. In Figure 3.2, the text post has evolved as *impossibleclarawho* appropriates quotes from Disney's *Mulan* and remixes them with the lexicon and elements of the Star Wars universe. The conversation has developed to collaboratively co-construct a narrative or contribution of fan labor. A concept has been accepted into the fandom's corpus of narrative knowledge and adapted for additional pleasure and entertainment as fans continue to play with this concept.

FIGURE. 3.3: Gifted fan art and remix of source materials

As a result, the fandom's narrative of TFA (see Figure 3.3) is the collaborative efforts of *catie-does-things*, *impossibleclarawho*, and *freakxwannaxbe* through their discursive activity. Figure 3.3 serves as a brief sample of the fan art that *freakxwannaxbe* creates

and gifts to the fandom community in response to the "negative capability" or potential as we cannot actually see the characters in the context that *catie-does-things* and *impossibleclarawho* creates except through individual imagination. The fan art responds to this "gap" by contributing to the communal narrative with an illustration of the suggested scene. Participatory fans constantly create space for contributions regardless of individual relevance as a result of their discursive activity, feedback culture, and validation practices. While the functionality of Tumblr as a digital or web 2.0 space makes these collaborative constructs possible over time and space, it is the participatory nature of fandom culture that enables members of this discourse community to engage with other members, with the conversation, and with their own identity as creator.

But what does the participatory nature of fandom communities and their praxis offer writing studies? What does gifting tells us about building community in the writing center? As a highly participatory space concentrated in engagement, fannish practices offer a model for participation wherein barriers are low enough for explicit and implicit invitations for involvement. But how do writers– contributors and creators– implicitly know that their labor will be well received? Where is the lever, which lowers the barriers for participation? While for fandom communities, this apparatus is the digital and convergent platforms on which they converse and create, the apparatus controlling the barriers for academic engagement is more socially and systematically embedded.

Writers in the academy, both experienced and inexperienced, can be found hesitant to enter a discourse community. High barriers can impart a "dislike" of writing rooted in experiences that span from insistent critique to imposter syndrome–the belief that their accomplishments and value hold little worth to the community to which they

would like to join and a fear of being exposed as a fraud in a given community. In sum, the writer ego is damaged, or at the very least, hindered by a systematic apparatus that creates a pattern in student writing experiences, a "yes, but" environment. And in an environment where audiences are constantly responding in a critical fashion, the result is a writer who constantly critiques the self. While purposeful to their ability to conduct critical and rhetorical analysis, this praxis also endangers the writer to self-abuse. In an environment where the only visible praxis is critique and product, how can writers conceive the process and collaborative nature of writing in practice? This is where the writing center holds potential as a participatory space and as the apparatus that can lower the barriers for participation. If taking its cue from the praxis of participatory fandom, the writing center holds the opportunity to draw the curtain back a bit to reveal the Oz of the academy.

Gifting, as a fannish practice, does a number of things as a feature of participatory culture and fandom. It brings about opportunities for collaboration and opens spaces for the validation of identity. And while the writing center conference may share these traits, it is the praxis of gifting in fannish discourse that values the importance of play in community building praxis. Examples of play permeate all acts of fannish practice, even the collaborative construction of narrative and communal identity.

3.3.2 Collaborating

The role of play in fannish collaboration often arises in the discourse practices of fanfiction writers. In Figure 4.1 an anonymous Tumblr user, gifts a writing prompt per the invitation issued by *dust2dust34* as part of a fanfic writing challenge, the Olicity Fic Big Bang, conceived as a forum where, "amazing people from the Olicity fandom cheer

each other on to write a story that's a minimum of 15,000 words. AND THEN PEOPLE MAKE ART/MANIPS/GIFSETS/PLAYLISTS FOR THOSE FIC … those who don't write can still participate as a beta or cheerleaders!" This fic challenge centers on a fandom's ship, or act of supporting the romantic relationship, between Oliver and Felicity. This ship is from the source text, *Arrow*, an American television series based on the DC Comics character, Green Arrow, and developed by writers and producers, Greg Berlanti, Marc Gugenheim, and Andrew Kreisberg.

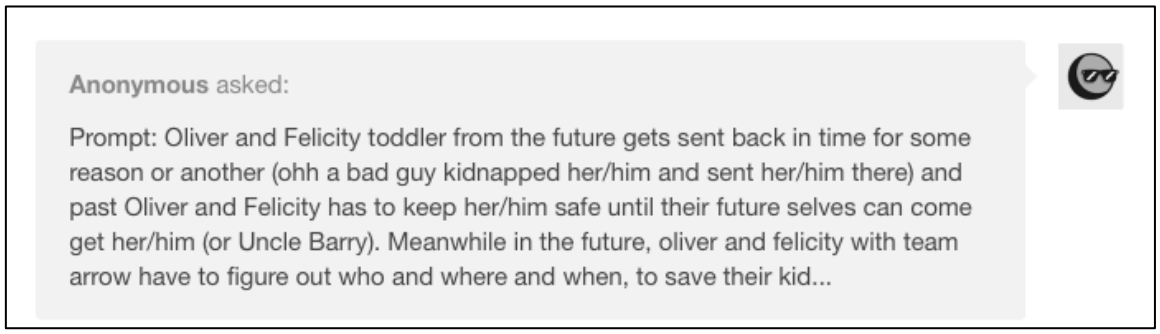


FIGURE 4.1: A writing prompt as an anonymous ask on Tumblr

The motivation for this writing prompt, while responding to an issued "negative capability" or potential, is rooted in play or playful critique. Jenkins calls fanfiction both a "creative response" and a "critical analysis" (2008a). Fans enjoy and are devoted to a source text, yet they recognize spaces for expansion wherein different ideologies can be placed or extended. Jenkins says that this "balance between fascination and frustration" (2008a) motivates and encourages fan activities. A sense of pleasure and displeasure must both be present for "negative capabilities" or "gaps" in text to be filled. Play offers writing praxis the unique union of "creative response" and "critical analysis" to engage writers in the real world sharing process and social practice of writing.

When fans gift their fanfiction, they are responding as creators and critics to the entry points of source text and narrative, even conversation, especially if we approach the source text as a reflection of or glimpse at the producer's ideology. In Figure 4.2 *dust2dust34* responds to anon's prompt or concept of "negative capability" with the first chapter of the fic.

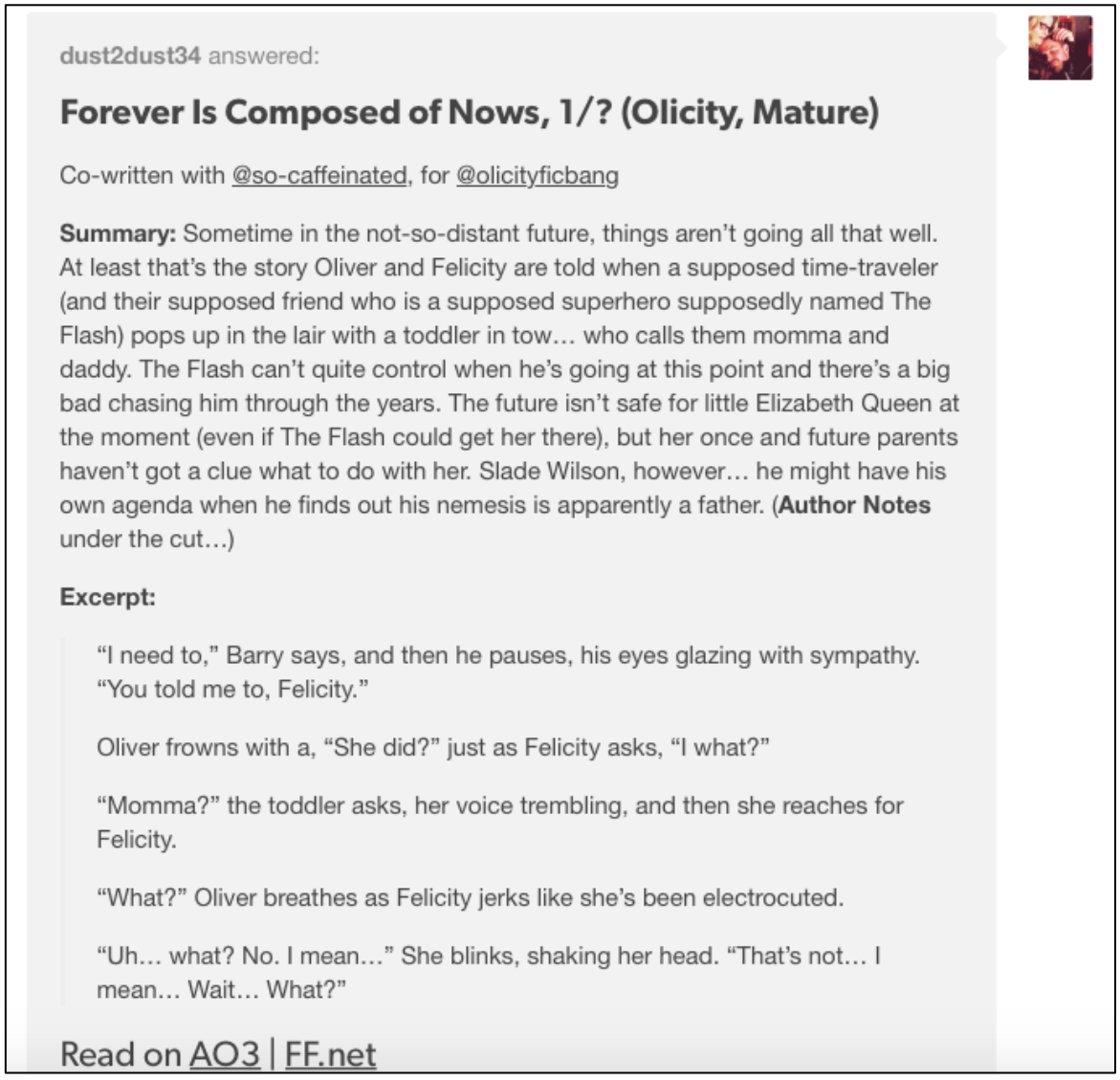
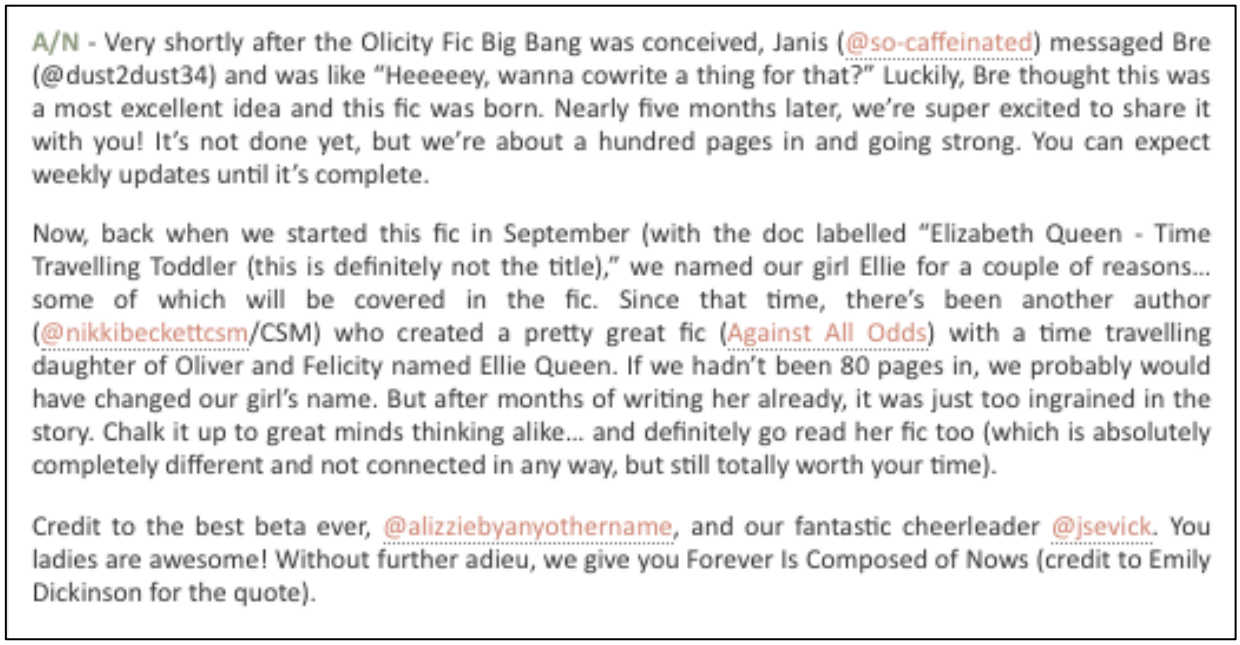


FIGURE 4.2: A gifted fanfic as a user's response on Tumblr

This artifact serves to illustrate playful collaboration as the newly repurposed and gifted work. “Forever Is Composed of Nows” is the result of cooperation among anon, *dust2dust34*, *so-caffeinated*, *alizziebyanyothername*, and *jsevick* as the formation of the concept, the labor of writing, and the response of audience all contributes to the craft of writing in a fannish discourse community. As proof of such, the writers, *dust2dust34* and *so-caffeinated*, credit their muse and audience in Figure 4.3 where they share their collaborative processes and validate the identity of a fellow fic writer by referencing the labor and the identities of their betas. Here, fans are demystifying the collaborative processes involved in the craft of their activity.



A/N - Very shortly after the Olicity Fic Big Bang was conceived, Janis (@so-caffeinated) messaged Bre (@dust2dust34) and was like “Heeeeey, wanna cowrite a thing for that?” Luckily, Bre thought this was a most excellent idea and this fic was born. Nearly five months later, we’re super excited to share it with you! It’s not done yet, but we’re about a hundred pages in and going strong. You can expect weekly updates until it’s complete.

Now, back when we started this fic in September (with the doc labelled “Elizabeth Queen - Time Travelling Toddler (this is definitely not the title),” we named our girl Ellie for a couple of reasons… some of which will be covered in the fic. Since that time, there’s been another author (@nikkibeckettcsm/CSM) who created a pretty great fic (Against All Odds) with a time travelling daughter of Oliver and Felicity named Ellie Queen. If we hadn’t been 80 pages in, we probably would have changed our girl’s name. But after months of writing her already, it was just too ingrained in the story. Chalk it up to great minds thinking alike… and definitely go read her fic too (which is absolutely completely different and not connected in any way, but still totally worth your time).

Credit to the best beta ever, @alizziebyanyothername, and our fantastic cheerleader @jsevick. You ladies are awesome! Without further adieu, we give you Forever Is Composed of Nows (credit to Emily Dickinson for the quote).

FIGURE 4.3: A fanfic author’s note

By simply gifting the experience of collaboration when sharing the exchange, “Heeeeey, wanna cowrite a thing for that?” fans reveal the core of contribution, the underlying means of entering a community– conversation. And it is conversation that I believe is

diligently being employed in current writing center praxis. But if conversation, even collaboration, is evident in current writing center praxis, as we will examine later, what then does fannish participation offer the writing center conference in spurring engagement?

While interconnected, gifting responses to "negative capability" and collaborating in practice are both relational to the construction of identity, or rather, how the fan identity is treated in a community of peers. That is, through gifting, collaboration, and affirmation, identity is then validated. I believe that engagement in writing or discursive activity, while related to affection for source text, is not solely reliant on "liking" source material. It seems problematic to divorce the role of appraisal in the community building praxis of fannish discourse communities.

Collaboration is prominent on sites of fannish practice, specifically Tumblr, because the conversation and discursive activity is synchronous, as it mimics actual conversation. The lexicon lends itself to appear as an immediate exchange among writers, which serves fannish participation in its efforts to validate individual fan identities. I raise this element of fannish exchange as it relates to the means by which fans validate identity.

3.3.3 Validating

The validation of identity for fannish communities is the encouragement to consume, to prosume or to gift to the community, regardless of relevance. Validation is to encourage the improvisation of identity regardless of normative or appropriate levels of excitement or participation. This element of fandom has historically been the most problematic, even reviled by mainstream or normative discourse communities.

In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, Jenkins provides commentary in the afterword, "The Future of Fandom" on the validation practices of members in online communities. He critiques the mainstream's perception of "social media" or "web 2.0" as it drives industrial focus on "harnessing collective intelligence" (qtd. in Jenkins, ed. Harrington et al 357). Jenkins criticizes the news media's commentary on online communities as they reduce the praxis to, "it's not an audience, it's a community" and describe the phenomenon as a transformative practice that changes "the relationship between media producers and consumers" allowing "consumers of brands and branded entertainment … an active role in shaping the flow of media throughout our culture … drawn together by shared passions." (qtd. in Jenkins, ed. Harrington et al 357). Jenkins raises tensions for us by highlighting a distinct omission. Nowhere in this observation was the term "fan" ever mentioned. Instead, news media professionals are calling web 2.0 or online community practices a liberating force for the consumer to transform and emerge as the active audience; but they credit this phenomenon to the technology rather than subcultural practices of the participating body. As Jenkins notes, none of the commentators of this new apparatus for media circulation are referring to the online fan community, even though these are the same social practices that fans accomplish through validation, affirmation and praise. Jenkins contests the notion that this phenomenon is due solely to the technological innovations of the Digital Age when he says, "Many of these young people are being drawn towards fan communities—not because of their passionate and affectionate relationship to media content but because those communities offer them the best network to get what they have made in front of a larger public" (360). However, what these commentators do offer is a

public acknowledgement of the “real economic and cultural impact” of fan community practice (359). More and more educators and academic professionals are considering fan communities for their impact as informal learning spaces.

But what does the fannish validation of identity teach us about building community in the writing center? How does affirmation and praise affect the writer ego and thereby, their level of participation and engagement as writers in practice? Participatory fandom embraces levels of validation that reaffirms their position between identity and community. As participants of heteroglossic activity, fans are in constant commentary on their own identity and the identity of others. In Figure 5.1 fans engage in this commentary amidst a conversation on normative consumption.

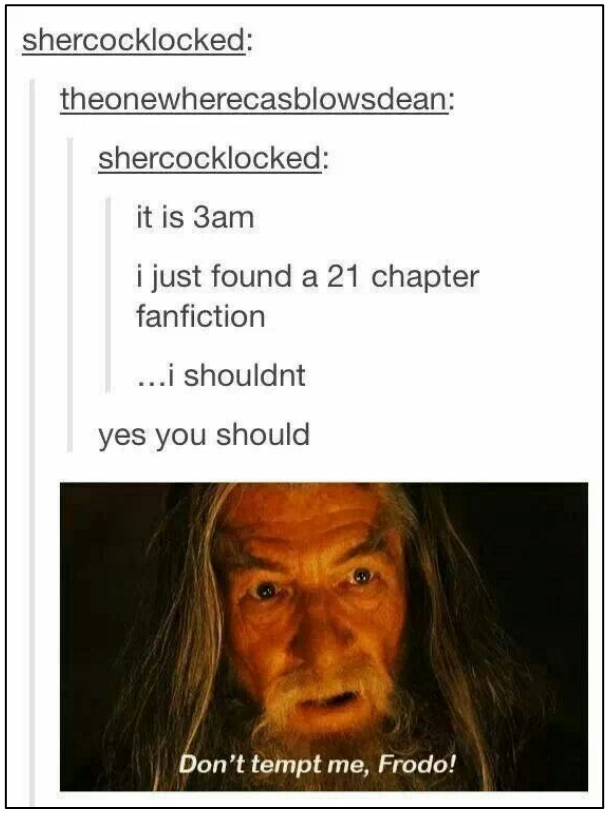


FIGURE 5.1: A discursive exchange using a GIF as paralinguistic restitution

In this exchange, fans utilize both text post and GIF posting to mimic the synchronous exchange of real life conversation. But because fannish discourse lacks physical cues, users fill this vacancy using paralinguistic restitution, which Bax refers to as "emoticons and other symbols [that] overcome the absence of visual and auditory clues" (152). Thus, we have the phenomenon of the GIF and its role in the validation of fan activity. The GIF is a common fannish practice used to mimic discursive conversation, creating a transformative act on its own. That is, conversations on Tumblr play out over time and space. This use of paralinguistic restitution or, the GIF, dramatizes the validation practices of fannish discourse. While the textual validation, "yes you should" alone may contribute to the affirmation in this exchange, it is the use of the GIF that imparts tone, expression, and an imitation of synchronous exchange–features of conversation in practice that endorses participation. While barriers may remain low due to the operational nature of Tumblr, creating access and a user-friendly functionality, it is the nature of participatory culture with low barriers created by the members of the community that makes exchange, contribution, and conversation possible.

Just as fan identities are reliant on the mutual exchange of labor and conversation, writer egos are relational to mutual exchange in practice. Writing is never isolated, as validation is a back and forth movement in conversation, from one identity to the next, as a writer performs to "adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery" (Jenkins et al xiv). Improvisation is possible because all other identities are partaking in the invention of self simultaneously.

Because fans are constantly crafting their self, as well as their communal identity as member of a fandom, their validation practices are reflective of new participation– a

level of engagement that says *more* when other discourses say *less*. In Figure 5.2, an anonymous (anon) user asks *dust2dust34* how their writing is going so far.

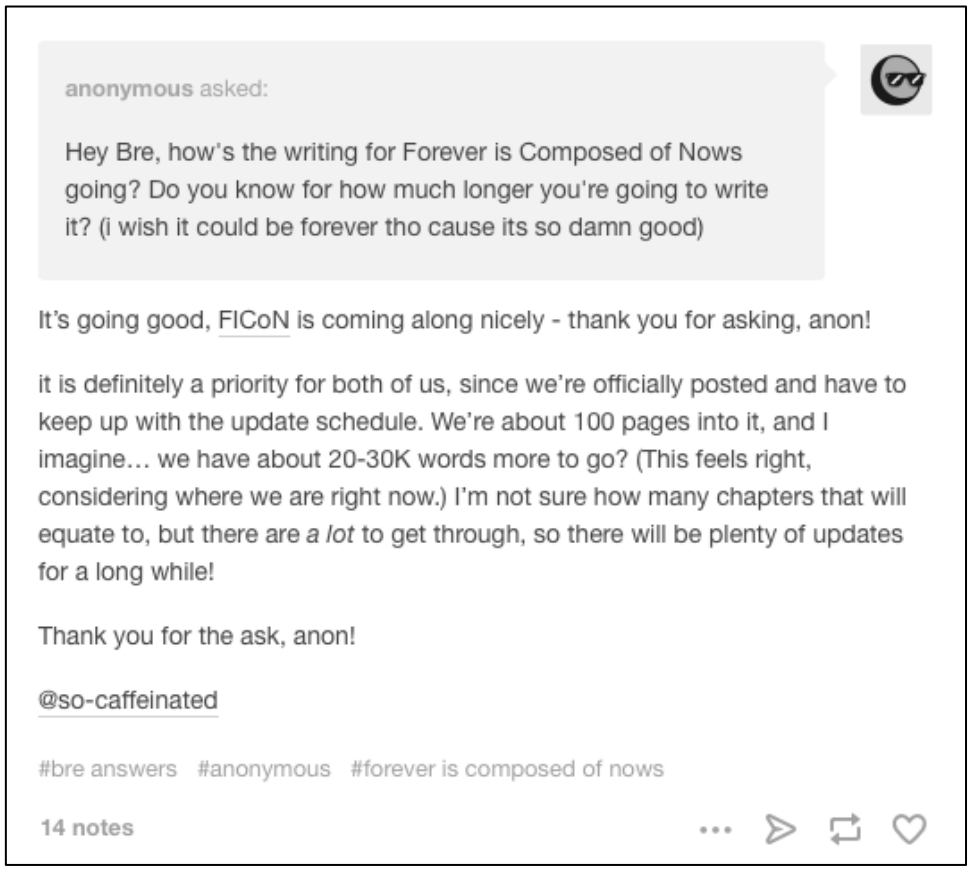


FIGURE 5.2: An anonymous ask and Tumblr user's response

Consider anon's affirmation and praise when they say, "(i wish it could be forever tho cause its so damn good)." In this example of validation, anon both directly and indirectly affirms the identity of *dust2dust34* through inquiry ("how's the writing … going?'). This validates *dust2dust34*'s identity as both fan and participant through acknowledgement of their labor (Forever is Composed of Nows) and through praise ("its so damn good"), which reinforces the writer ego. This treatment of one another as a member of fandom and fannish practice is consistent throughout fannish conversation online.

Because the barriers for participation are low enough for the gifting of labor, regardless of relevance, these barriers are also receptive of excessive validation. Characterized by enthusiasm, even expletive language as in Figure 5.2 with, “so damn good,” and comradery laced with encouragement, the stereotyped enthusiasm of the fan community pushes against the socialized critiquing strategies of academic writing.

3.4 Discussion

The treatment of the writer ego in the academy reveals a frustrating atmosphere for the student. They are met with audience expectations that conflict not only with the social and collaborative character of the writing process, but also their own interests and freedom to occupy space as writer. To address these concerns, scholarship on responding to student writing is not lacking. Engaged by this area of inquiry, ample professionals and writing center theorists are striving to transform the praxis of tutor and teachers of writing alike.

In Nancy Sommers’ “Across the Drafts,” she enters the conversation with an agenda that addresses where students feel neglected in the "transaction" of feedback on writing. Here, she conducts years of research to discover that student progress is complicated and not as steady an incline as the academy is often led to believe. She raises questions, targeting written feedback, and comes away with a revised telling of reader commentary.

> I now challenge my earlier conclusion by arguing that feedback plays a leading role in undergraduate writing development, when, but only when, students and teacher create a partnership through feedback— a transaction

> in which teachers engage with their students by treating them as apprentice scholars (250).

This sounds a great deal like support and informal mentorship often seen in participatory culture, and more specifically, fan communities as they interact online. Here, Sommers indicates that engagement and validation as scholar is key to reinforcing the writer ego. Validating the student's identity as writer builds confidence that, hopefully, incites their consideration for comments on their writing. "The role of the student is to see comments, not as attacks, but as portable words to take across drafts" (250). But, too often, comments on writing are either taken as criticism of self, endangering the engagement level of writers; or feedback is received indifferently wherein comments reach the paper but not much farther. For example, as one student in Sommers' study suggests, "too often comments are written to the paper, not to the student." (qtd. in Sommers 250). These dilemmas in the response to student writing cannot be aptly resolved using any singular approach or theoretical model, as the evolving research narrative shows. However, through collaboration in practice, Donald A. Daiker offers insight to the praising practices of written response and how this praxis relates to student apprehension.

Daiker refers to what he calls "the predominance of correction over commendation" in "Learning to Praise" where he interrogates the praising practices of writing instructors as they provide feedback to student writers. His data reveals not only a lack of praise, but also a deficiency in what I am defining as language of affirmation. The figured charts for correction feedback distinctly lack a symbol for praise. Instead, *frag* for fragment and other indiscernible markings proliferate on student papers. Daiker does go on to highlight the evolution of praxis as "for several decades now, composition scholars

have reported the value of praise in improving student writing" (155). However, while positive reinforcement is improving in our praxis as more and more writing professionals acknowledge the relationship between positivity and a reduction in student writer apprehension, the history of critical response to student writing has unfortunate residual effects in American culture. Hesitancy to participate in writing and writing conferences emerges from the residual praxis of critique and formal assessment that is distinct from the informal learning spaces that online fan communities provide.

Amongst the exclamation points and capitalization in fannish community building practice, therein lies praise for sharing and gifting. There is steady appreciation. Participatory fandom offers community building praxis in the writing center the chance to demystify the academy for young writers and tutees, opening space for them to participate and validate their identity as writer. It shows them how all writers improvise. As a result, hopefully, their ego can strengthen and by extension, their engagement can reach new participatory levels.

Engagement has a lot to do with experiences in writing, specifically the treatment of their writer ego. I believe that the validation or affirmation of identity – as a valued participant– along with regard for the source material or discourse community is key to engagement in writing. As the definition for writing in the academy shifts and evolves into creating and making, taking with it a shifting ideological approach that moves the student's role from interaction with knowledge to a creator of knowledge, similar to the shift felt by fandoms as they exist between the tensions of producer and consumer as a prosumer, the measures writers take to gift, collaborate, and validate cannot be overlooked.

Just as the fan community is known for its gifting praxis, so is modeling emergent as praxis within a writing context. Also, as the writing center is unarguably known for its conferencing pedagogy that utilizes the tutor as peer in mutual discourse, so does the fan community both collaborate and employ informal mentorship in its development of community among creators and collaborators. In sum, both discourse communities know the meaning of sharing and working together, including its importance in community building pedagogy. While eager in our endeavor to produce better writers and not better writing, I believe praising the writer in their endeavors and affirming their choices as writers is not a highly evident practice. What analysis reveals is that the validation of identity, as a participatory community defines it, is sorely lacking. Now I am not naively romantic in the notions of my proposal. I fully realize that to praise a writer in this cultural climate is to resist the systematic expectations of young American writers across the academy. Regardless, this praxis is in flux. Now taking this direction of inquiry, this project will evaluate the current state of praxis in the writing center conference.

3.5 Analysis of Published Transcripts

In my endeavor to evaluate current praxis in the writing center conference for the purpose of proposing specific features of fannish community building practice to writing center pedagogy, an analysis of published writing center transcripts is valuable as it posits the current state of praxis. However, as Michael Pemberton brings to our recollection, "research in rhetoric and composition was all about talking, transcription, and coding" in the early 1980's (23). As a result, transcribed writing center tutorials as published scholarship has nearly faded, as the cognitivist view from the process movement has evolved to writing center scholars' focus on "the sociocultural dimensions of tutor

conferencing and to design research studies that employed qualitative rather than quantitative methodologies" (Pemberton 24). However, while transcript analysis as a method of research has "disappeared" as a result of absent training or the hesitancy to quantify writing studies, the impact of this approach had resilient effects on the field as a whole as we "produced a wide array of descriptive models that helped us to understand, to some degree, how writers planned their texts, constructed a sense of audience, and made rhetorical decisions as they composed" (Pemberton 23). This agenda remains the same as I seek to evaluate the treatment of the writer ego in the conference, even as writers themselves construct their identity through improvisation with the writing tutor.

While research has focused on the praxis of writers in the conference, I believe it is this practice and their level of engagement that cannot be divorced from the appraisal of value inherent in each act of process in writing. That is, our practices, discursive or otherwise, are inextricable tied to our identity. The treatment of the writer ego is relational to how a writer plans their text, constructs a sense of audience, and makes rhetorical decisions as they compose. To understand these processes, an appreciation of the role of identity is warranted. In sum, how do we treat our writers in the conference model? If the tutor, as scholarship suggests, takes on the combined role of peer and teacher (Davis et al. 32), what are the current goals of the 21st century writing center? And how do these goals complicate or refine the appraisal of young writers in the conference?

Back in 1980, Thomas A. Carnicelli in "The Writing Conference: A One-to-One Conversation," describes, defines, and provides a rationale for the conference model as it emerged as common praxis nearly three to four decades ago. During the prime of

transcript analysis in the field of writing studies, he shares transcripts from two conferences between student and teacher– one with "good" results and one with "failed" results. While an analysis of published transcripts from nearly four decades ago does little to illustrate the current praxis of writing center discourse in the conference, it does highlight, albeit briefly, a history of praxis and goals for the writing conference, which in turn revisits the evolution of academy expectations over time.

As a relative reflection of cognitive praxis, Carnicelli characterizes the conference method as pedagogy that cannot be divorced from the course, or largely, the academy. When he refers to the conference, he regards it as it is situated amongst certain teaching principles that primarily center on writing taught as a process. Assuming this view has not changed over the past three to four decades, rather with distinctions drawn amidst expressive, cognitive, and social views, writing is still considered a fluid practice.

3.5.1 Successful Conference

A successful conference, characterized by Carnicelli, is one in which the writing is read carefully, encouragement is offered, the right questions are asked, the writing is evaluated, specific suggestions for revision are made, and the tutor is listening. Taking into consideration that Carnicelli's conference is one between a student and teacher, elements of the "good" conference are tinted with an instructor's values. However, what emerges as a line of pedagogy is conversation.

While Carnicelli is careful not to provide a "formula" for conferencing or to indicate that a "perfect" conference exists, as writing remains a fluid process, he does distinguish the successful conference as one in which, "the student seems to find a promising direction" and "it proved to be very helpful to the student" (119). From this

explanation of the conference with "good results," let us now turn to a sample of the transcription.

> S: Well … I have so much to say about my music because I've done quite a few things, and so it's really crammed. I could've written a lot more, with more interesting things.
>
> T: I think you've really hit the nail on the head. What you've got here is almost a short chronology of all the things you've done, and I don't think that's the thing you really want us to know about: 'Should I go on?'- your music and how you feel about it. I mean, the title is 'A Life of Music?' and you don't really address that as much as you could have. I think it's really interesting to see your varied experiences and how professional they really were, but I think you could tighten that section way down.
>
> S: I think with a five-page paper … or it would take about at ten-page paper, easily.
>
> T: Yeah, but I'd want you to focus in, though. There's so much in this paper. Why did you decide not to go to Emerson? I think that's something you should tell us more about.

While only a fragment of the transcribed conference, this selection illustrates two elements of praxis that resemble fannish values or rather, participatory features of engagement. In the teacher's first response to the student in the sample above, they use a colloquialism for the purposes of assuring the student. Here, the teacher has taken an appraisal approach in responding to the writer, followed by an explicit request to "tell us more" about something that was left unwritten or unsaid. From Carnicelli's successful conference, conversation emerges as a platform on which appraisal and an explicit request for gifting is active. Bearing in mind that these fannish practices are evident in a conference nearly four decades old and in companion with elements that motivate a clear focus and purpose to meet audience expectations, the instructor's expectations, the model of conversation exemplified above indicates favorable results for a participatory writing conference. However, to validate the resilience of this praxis, consider Carnicelli's

"failed" conference and the practices that follow in the next thirty years of writing center pedagogy.

3.5.2 Failed Conference

To distinguish the failed conference, Carnicelli describes it as one in which, "the teacher began with an open, supportive stance and ended up being highly directive" (129). For Carnicelli, the conference failed to produce an improvement in the paper because the teacher did not listen. In the transcription provided in *Eight Approaches To Teaching Composition*, the praxis illustrates a lack of support and validation in the conference model. Carnicelli reports that the student "dutifully remove[s] … almost all other traces of the idea she seemed most interested in" (129) and uses the instructor's suggestion, "which belies the spirit of the whole paper" (129). And just as quickly as the history of our praxis gives promise to a participatory model, it proves more elusive. Whiled coded as a failed conference, the experience of the student writer itself indicates praxis that actively controls the student's writing. To better trace the evolution of praxis, especially that regarding community building and affiliation in the conference, let us turn now to the transcript analysis of the late eighties that frames the conversation among peers.

3.5.3 High and Low Rated Conferences

In Carolyn P. Walker and David Elias' "Writing Conference Talk: Factors Associated with High- and Low-Rated Writing Conferences" they apply discourse analysis to seventeen writing conferences that were both audio recorded and transcribed in an effort to reveal the satisfaction level of writers, teachers and students alike. Here the evaluation of the "successful" and "failed" conference places power in the hands of both

tutor and tutee alike. From their results, conferences devoted to the expression of criteria for success in writing and to evaluation of the student's work ranked the highest levels of satisfaction from instructors and student writers. Conference praxis characterized by questions for explanation ranked lower levels of satisfaction. Their findings also indicated that in successful conferences the focus was on the student, rather than the tutor, and on the student's work; while in unsuccessful conferences the power of the conversation was with the tutor who tended to exclude student participation in the process of evaluation. Consider the following conference transcript sample from a high-rated conference wherein tutors encouraged self-evaluation:

> T: …First of all, let's look at the title and then let's look at the first paragraph. Ok. First question is, what should be in a title?
>
> S: Well, that was my joke, because remember we talked about [how] I'm saying "On Lying to Patients" and then I never talked about lying?
>
> T: Yeah.
>
> S: So, that's what I was doing. It's not a real clear title, I guess.
>
> T: Well, now, why? You say it's not a clear title. Why is it not a clear title?
>
> S: I don't say… [hesitates] I don't express my opinion in the title.

While in this sample of a conference transcript, the tutor engages the student in self-evaluation with open-ended questions such as, "Why is it not a clear title?" what remains missing for this exchange to resemble a participatory model for writer engagement is validation.

Consider the opportunities for reinforcing the writer ego when the student says, "that was my joke" or "that's what I was doing." While the student may need guidance in self-evaluation for considering the nature of a title in a manuscript, what can accompany

this praxis is affirmation and praise for risk-taking, for play. In this brief sample of a transcript, the addition of validation in conferencing clarifies my project as a proposal not for a radical shift in practice, but rather a compliment to current praxis. That is, our goal to produce better writers would benefit from praxis that acknowledges the importance of supporting the writer's ego and self. While the student's agenda, goals, and writing is at the center of writing center conferences, it benefits writing professionals to remember that the writer identity (student self) is just as central to engaging high levels of participation.

Supporting the student's identity as writer and participant of a given community can come in the form of validation, whether implicitly or directly. Look to the following conference transcript sample from a high-rated conference wherein tutors use student expertise:

> T: I'm wondering whether you might want to say "Wage and price controls apply to the oligopolistic elements within our society" and then parens "free motor companies build automobiles, utility companies control electrical prices" —that would give enough to …
>
> S: Unfortunately, the utility situation is almost monopolistic, because of AT&T's predominance (laughter). Apparently, their assets and profits every year are like seven or eight times the next competitor.
>
> T: Is that right?
>
> S: Yeah. It's true.
>
> T: I didn't know that, I didn't know that.

While validation, as affirmation and praise, is not directly apparent in this sample of the conference transcript, the tutor does surrender authority, and thereby power, in the conference by confessing a lack in their knowledge set. As a result, the tutee's identity as knowledgeable in a given area is indirectly affirmed. Opportunities for direct affirmation

can be found in the following conference transcript samples from low-rated conferences wherein tutors take over the conference:

> T: Well, let's call the next scene the most important scene where he speaks to her, the one we've already read, ok? Write this down: "The, uh …"
>
> S: Well, does the, by the way she speaks of it, isn't it kind of the start of how she's going to manipulate him? To get her something? And how he's trapped into it at the end? That he fell right into it and realized it, you know what I mean?
>
> T: OK [composing for the student], "the scenes in the story make up a progression [pause] from innocent freedom to …"
>
> S: "To sudden insight?"

While the final exchange is an interesting illustration of collaboration as both the tutor and student's words are literally coming together to craft a complete thought, the tutor evades affirmation of the student ego when ignoring the non-rhetorical question, "You know what I mean?" Here, an opportunity for direct validation has been missed.

The validation of a tutee's identity is not always explicit. By simply responding to a writer's inquiry directly, a writer's ego is reinforced. Consider from fannish practice, in Figure 1.2 wherein *casgotashotgun* requests a fan art. In this exchange, the identity of *casgotashotgun* is validated by their peers through gifting, which simultaneously acts as validation. Similar to the explicit request, "someone make a fan art" the student's question, "you know what I mean?" seeks affirmation. Both open space for other members of the discourse community to respond, validating the individual's presence and voice. Open acknowledgement itself can operate as validation. Responding to writers, as one's equipped with specific knowledge sets, whether as expert, member, or affiliate, assumes that the writer is a participant in a given community. This praxis illustrates, perhaps even for the student writer, their implicit affiliations with a body of peers.

When these opportunities for positively reinforcing the student's writer-identity are overlooked the participation level of conference tutees is affected. In the following transcript of a low-rated conference, the tutor leaves little room for crafting a positive ethos around the student's identity as writer.

T: [Composing] "… In every scene there is some symbol or symbolic gesture."

S: Oh! Just what we wrote.

T: Write this: "The unity of effect in this story insists, or is made, is created …"

S: Wait, wait. "The unity of effect is shown in all the scenes by representing a symbol."

T: Good.

S: Oh, God, now I'm lost.

Here the student participated very little in the construction of ideas and formulation of sentences. Because the tutor took complete control of the conference with the imperative, "write this" and monopolized the role of writer in this conference, the student was left with little space for participation in the conference.

As Walker and Elias surmise their results, three conclusions emerge. Among them, Walker and Elias note that successful conferences focused on the student and their writing rather than the tutor's agenda (281). From the high-rated conferences a pattern emerges resembling a positive ethos towards the affirmation and validation of identity in the conference. While in Walker and Elias' study students highly rated conferences that were devoted to evaluation and criteria for success, they also seemed to favor those conferences that shifted power, as it relates to a strong ego, from tutor to tutee. This suggests that students value affiliation and that membership in writing communities

reinforces the writer ego. In the following decade, writing center praxis remains illustrative of conversation in the conference that leaves room for affirmation and praise.

3.5.4 Power in Conversation and Collaboration

In their work from the late eighties, "The Function of Talk in the Writing Conference: A Study of Tutorial Conversation," Kevin M. Davis et al. compare the language of peer conversation to determine both *what* is being said and *how* in an effort to fill gaps in research that evade the nature of conversational interaction. Observations on prior research indicate that peer conversations consist of either "statements about content and the writing process" or "questions about content" (qtd. in Davis et al 27). However, their project, which studied the interactions of undergraduate writers and graduate tutors, indicated that peer conversation is akin to both teaching and non-teaching styles (32). "According to our findings, tutors occasionally act as teachers, structuring the conversation and waiting for the writer to respond; at other times, however, they act as participants in a conversation" (32). This suggests that tutors improvise with the hybrid identity of teacher and peer. As a current site of discussion among writing center professionals, this hybrid identity of professional peer may generate tensions as Gee's affiliation and Bruffee's peer discourse suggests that students work together in collaboration as a body with shared identity or similar experience. A professionalized peer, who improvises the teacher identity, can disrupt the potential of the collaborative and participatory conference when a distinct power dynamic of knower and needs-to-know is actively in place. This hierarchy, however implicit or explicit, is reliant on the negotiation of power in conversation.

In the late nineties, a fascination with the role of conversation in writing center

praxis continues in Black's *Between Talk and Teaching: Reconsidering the Writing Conference*, as well as Susan R. Blau, John Hall, and Tracy Strauss' "Exploring the Tutor/Client Conversation: A Linguistic Analysis" where they interrogate the nature of conversation and collaboration in the tutoring relationship when the conversation between tutor and student writer is unbalanced. Blau, Hall and Strauss suggest "true collaboration can only can occur only when collaborators are members of the same community" (in Blau et al. 19). While considering the tensions among the scholarship's definition for what it means to be a peer in the writing conference model, their study sets out to reveal the nature of the tutoring relationship in writing center conferences. Using Bruffee's conversation as their lens for focus, they analyzed the linguistic cues in tutoring dialogue for insight into the nature of peer-to-peer discourse.

From their analysis, they revealed the nature of conversations in tutoring sessions as well as the complex and cautious use of collaboration in writing center praxis. Consider the following transcript sample from a conference wherein the session was classified as collaborative:

> T: Do you say that anywhere? Do you say that both the weak and the evil find their identity through violence?
>
> S: Maybe I have to be more specific here?
>
> T: Do you want to assume that everyone will understand your reference?
>
> S: Maybe I shouldn't?

Using open-ended questions, the tutor engages the student writer in conversation and leaves space for the student writer to take control of the conference. Notice the repeated use of, "Do you" in crafting these questions, placing emphasis on the power of the student in the writing. While the study indicated that the tutor felt uncomfortable from

this leveling of power (24), this conference, as well as the transcript sample that follows, illustrates how control in conversation rises as a factor for considering the session as collaborative and participatory:

> S: … they would need some link, you know what I'm saying?
>
> T: Yeah, I just haven't heard of the Board of Education. I'm wondering if it's the Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Education, or if it's board of education together across the U.S. I don't know.
>
> S: Yeah, I wasn't sure, when I found that, I was like …
>
> T: Where'd you find it? Nexis or someplace?
>
> S: Yeah.
>
> T: Did you print it out?
>
> S: I don't remember if I printed it out or not.
>
> T: Well, you might double check. Not a big deal.
>
> S: But now for, because, when I had read this, I thought, like, my school had a board of education that consisted of teachers, parents, that kind of stuff, so that's what I thought they meant by that …
>
> T: So like the National Education Association or something like that?
>
> S: Yeah.
>
> T: It's possible.
>
> S: Okay.
>
> T: You could write around it. You could say, "A national study involving four hundred and thirty schools nationwide showed …" but only if you want to. It's your choice (laughs). If I was the teacher, though, I would say, "What board of education?"
>
> S: Right.

Here the tutor validates the student's identity by simply responding to a writer's question, "you know what I'm saying?" a simple and indirect means of affirming the student's

identity as writer in the conference. However, just as the conference might initially resemble a collaboration of peers it also poses as participatory praxis when the tutor says, “But only if you want to. It’s your choice” but follows with “If I was the teacher.” Here, the tutor takes on the role of professional academic rather than collaborative peer in a shared community. In doing so, the conference is stripped of its participatory potential as control in the conference has shifted to the tutor under the guise of low barriers. The tutor’s words, “It’s your choice” poses as low barriers for participation while the reality of praxis in this conference proves that the professionalization of tutors may be “the first step in moving tutors away from the peer relationship” that encourages collaboration among a body of students with a shared experience (20).

Blau et al. explain that their study interrogates whether the writing centers of the nineties have furthered peer tutoring from the “true” collaborative praxis spurred by Bruffee in his landmarking discussion of peer discourse. However, arguments could be made for “tutors [who] are learning to walk the fine line between teacher and peer, hierarchy and collaboration, creating a new, more flexible model for writing center tutoring” (38). But among those discussions of praxis that critiques collaboration and control, consideration for the conference model as space for validation assumes a causal relationship between power and participation.

Taking its cue from Bruffee’s landmark article in 1984, the power of conversation as conference praxis permeates the field of writing center studies. However, as seen in the tutoring approaches and transcript analyses provided, the power relations and amount of appraisal in this conversation model suggests that validating the student identity is praxis in flux. The practice of praising and reinforcing the writer ego is being continuously

negotiated. What more recent practice reveals is a conference model devoted to improving tutoring praxis through reflection and the review of conference transcripts.

3.5.5 Control in the Conference

In their project, "Close Vertical Transcription in Writing Center Training and Research," Magdalena Gilewicz and Terese Thonus argue for a more accurate illustration of peer conversations in the writing conference using vertical transcription, which distinctly contrasts with the "horizontal" transcription style that depicts participants speaking one at a time. Vertical transcription, they argue, presents a more realistic illustration of conversation in the conference model. They justify the vertical transcription by looking to those who benefit the most from their use– tutors, who "want more realistic representations of tutorial talk," (27). The relevance of their argument impacts this project as the method of transcription directly affects the analysis of transcription. Consider the following transcript sample that utilizes vertical methods:

> S: So I'm basically saying nobody would read the book unless they were familiar with the Islamic, I mean they would not, they won't read it, but they would be really confused reading the book if they didn't know anything about Islam or these terms so I'm
>
> T: uh-huh
>
> S: writing for an audience [that's (.)
>
> T: [I see what you're saying.
>
> S: [um actually [whether I should
>
> T: [I see what [you're saying.
>
> S: [change that?
>
> T: [And when I s- (.) I understand what you're saying, I understand what you're saying. And when I,

> when I said that, what I was thinking of is you don't need to give us the plot summary at the beginning of this paper.

Here the transcription informs analysis as it highlights real conversation as it happens, including the backchanneling of the tutor who attempts to seize space in the conversation, as well as illustrates some level of tutor impatience. The transcript, as it relates to this project, comments on the quality of horizontal transcripts from the 1980s, as they are prime for misapplication. While, "I see what you're saying" could be defined as affirmation from the tutor, the vertical transcription better portrays the conversation as one with tension and displeasure when control in the conference becomes an obvious back and forth movement as speakers push and pull for the floor. Continuing into the new millennium, tutoring praxis remains actively aware of the nature of conversation as a social good for power in the conference model.

Shortly after Gilewicz and Thonus' work, Susan Murphy writes in 2006 on the discourse practices in the writing center conference by observing, audiotaping, questioning, and interviewing students. From this analysis, she surmises that conversation in the conference can be used to keep conferences fluid and constructive. Focusing on strategies of self-presentation, Murphy looks for the causal relationship among tutoring pedagogies, student roles in the conference, and the writing centers place in the academy. Her work complicates nondirective tutoring pedagogies by highlighting the ways in which, "consultants will shift positions of power with students/writers as they seek to achieve particular goals" (63), indicating that tutors adopt various identities (directive and nondirective) to negotiate power as authoritarian while simultaneously attempting to engage the writer as peer through rapport and shared experience. Consider the following transcript sample that illustrates the ways tutors self-present in discourse:

T: Uh, is to go to the library and look up criticism () on the work at hand () uh, uh

……. <T explains library databases>

But whenever I'm having trouble just thinking of where I'm going to start,

S: um.

T: That's almost always what I do.

This self-presentation as peer, while it comes after several authoritarian moves in the full transcription of the conference, illustrates indirect affirmation of identity as the tutor gifts his experiences as a writer, specifically his own struggles in identifying space in the research narrative. By breaking down the "good" writer in this way, the tutor reveals the reality of writing in practice– a process that can be difficult for any writer. Here, the tutor highlights the affiliations of a body of peers in a shared space of struggle.

3.5.6 Community in the Center

Tutoring praxis that gifts the writing experience and validates the writer identity supports both students and the center as it crafts an engaging conference atmosphere and participatory space. However, community as a concept in writing center work is nothing new in professional conversation. In the same year as Murphy's analysis, Lauren Fitzgerald contributes to the commentary on community in writing centers with her report of the IWCA/NCPTW conference. In her reflections, she struggles to collectively name the participants of the conference and writing center work; however, it is this struggle that she credits for complicating her ideas of community. Joseph Harris' argument in "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing" suggest that we use community to describe "specific and local groups" that allow for "consensus and conflict" rather than a surmising term that is "sweeping and vague" (13, 20). In agreement with Harris, she

revises her notion of community as it relates to writing center administration, professionals, theorists, tutors, and students who enter the center. Characterizing the writing center as inclusive, Fitzgerald notes that, "writing centers provide one of the few academic arenas in which students can present shoulder to shoulder with well-known scholars, theorists, and practitioners" (28), reminding us that the writing center conference is relational both to the student tutors who staff the center, as well as the institution in which they are located. As a result, any reliable pattern for the "general" writing conference model is unrealistically defined. Instead, common praxis can only be derived from threads of scholarship, grounded in theory or published as transcript analysis. However, to aid this project's objective to aptly demonstrate current praxis in the conference model, consider the theory and practice used to professionalize the peer tutor, preparing them with guidelines for their own praxis.

To consider what theory and practice is teaching the student tutor, let us briefly look at Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner's *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*, Christina Murphy and Steven Sherwood's *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, and more recently Fitzgerald and Melissa Ianetta's *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*. In Gillespie and Lerner's guide, they describe their text as one that "should mirror the structure of tutor training" (v). As such, it briefly sets the stage for new tutors by highlighting the history of the process movement in writing studies, narrowing in on writing as a process, the reading aloud model, and prioritizing the writer rather than the paper itself. What follows is a distinct appreciation for observation, reflection, and taking notes. The guide closes with historical and theoretical context. In a similar vein, Murphy and Sherwood's sourcebook is characterized by theoretical readings for the purpose of

crafting effective tutoring strategies. As an expansion of these training materials, Fitzgerald and Ianetta publish in 2016 a guide for tutors that fills prior gaps in tutor training. For example, in a content listing that is nearly twice as long as its predecessors, tutors are asked to consider authorship, writing identities, and new media. As the most recent manuscript for guiding a tutor's praxis, I am eager to observe and reflect on how writing center praxis might expand to include the validation of student writer identities and affirmation of writer egos to heighten engagement and participation in the conference model.

3.6 Discussion

Suggesting the validation of identity, through affirmation and praise, as a community building practice in the writing center is to consider the student writer a fan having affiliations and passions for contributing to a given conversation or community. In approaching the writer in this way, it is important to consider the nature of affirmation, praise, and play as they function in online fan communities and how they might operate in a participatory writing center community. Adding affirmation and praise to current conference praxis is suggested for the purpose of spurring engagement in the conversation model and raising the participation level of student writers. As allies in praxis, fan and audience studies might offer the writing center community a lens through which tutors can approach the writer ego.

In her discussion of writing center community, Fitzgerald notes that "at least since Steven North laid down the gauntlet to English Departments—and anyone else who didn't understand what we do—the writing center community has seemed to define itself against other communities, some of whom might be useful partners" (29). While the

online fandom community was probably the last community Fitzgerald may have considered when drafting this report, fannish practice, as well as the study of participatory fandom, offers insight into the ways writers encounter new expectations for participating as consumers and prosumers of text and media. If the academy will not recognize the growing rate at which students need the confidence to interact with text, a convergent and digital culture will. While many of the skills for navigating the Digital Age are proliferating new media or digital literacy instruction, the writing center benefits from considering fannish community praxis as it illustrates the role of affirmation as it constructs affiliations, which in turn spurs high levels of participation.

But like the use of any lens or approach, no practice is designed to suit every need or meet any universal expectation. Rather, the fannish practices suggested by this project– gifting, collaborating, and validating– should be strategically applied to the conference model. Given the relational dynamic among the academy, institutions, their writing centers, the tutors that staff those writing centers and the student writers that utilize the center for conferencing, fannish practices as an approach for praising student writers is not a one-size-fits-all model for conferencing. Affirmation and praise should be improvised like any other practice. This proposal for expanding the conversation model sits amidst practices that already demonstrate beneficial and innovative ways for producing better writers. This project stands apart for its call to praise student writers more as it serves to validate writer egos as affiliates of a given community or culture. Assuming that the work of student writers is valuable, that they have something to offer, and that praise should be given for sharing their work, both the barriers for participating

in the writing conference lower and the confidence of the student writer as active participant improves.

But is everything valuable? Assuming fannish and participatory practice, must the writing a student shares be validated regardless of relevance? If the goals of writing center praxis are relational to the academy expectations in which it is located, how can tutors be expected to praise work that the academy finds irrelevant, insignificant, or inadequate? In addition to tutor improvisation and the adjustment of practice to suit the student writer, the praxis of affirming and praising student work is nuanced. That is, praise as an activity of commendation and approval is driven by a value system socially embedded in individual ideologies over time. For example, current praising praxis in the writing center conference might resemble the commendation of a writer's choice to adhere to genre conventions, disciplinary expectations or instructor preferences. What might be less often seen is a praxis that praises for the act of writing itself. Daiker's work on praising practices reviews praise as it is used in instructor feedback to student writing. But how might praise develop when used by writing tutors—peers posited in similar situations or students sharing experiences? Tutors might praise work that is considered irrelevant or poor by the academy when shifting their focus towards the difficult process and task of writing itself.

Again, this praxis should be improvised and adjusted as the tutor interacts with student writers. When possible and most constructive for the student, tutors need take care to reinforce the student's identity, raising their confidence. Fannish practice offers the most favorable model for this as "rather than blind devotion, fandom is a means of expressing one's sense of self and one's communal relation with others within our

complex society" (Brown 13). Online fandom community building practices offer opportunities for centering the self's desires and community expectations simultaneously.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

"The contemporary media scene is complex, and rapidly becoming dependent on a culture of ludism: today's media field is fun, playful, and exuberant. More so than at any other time, the media we use in our everyday lives has been personalized, individualized, and made pleasurable to use" (Booth 2).

4.1 Conclusion

While this project examines the potential of a relationship between fannish community building practices and writing center community praxis, it does not propose an unconditional parallel between the workings of two discourse communities given their distinctions in both audience expectations and social context. Online fandom communities are posited in an environment where gatekeeping, or the enforcement of normative boundaries found in other discourses and settings of textual consumption and production, is relative to the participant. As a result, an unconditional application of participatory fannish practice endangers student writers to an idyllic practice that ignores academy expectations and scaffolding. Instead, this project asks that writing centers, including tutors, professionals and their pedagogy, draw upon the value of affirmation and praise. The call for a participatory writing conference asks that praxis consider not only fannish *inclusivity* in peer discourse, but also the assumption that all writers and their contributions have value. The power of praise, as it operates in fannish discourse

and feedback culture, holds positive opportunities for writing centers to validate student writer identities and to build community.

4.2 A Participatory Conference Model

A strategic and conditional use of fannish practices that employs low barriers for participation not only praises student writing, but also considers the student writer a valid participant in a convergent cultural climate. This convergent culture anticipates natives who engage both notions of self, as well as complex communal relations. A participatory writing conference, or writing center that engages with low barriers for participation and assumes value in student voice and writing, builds the confidence and engagement level of student writers in the Digital Age. When a student writers' ego is reinforced their engagement level encourages collaboration and participation. As part of a larger initiative, this project urges pedagogy to shift writing ideologies from a "yes, but" expectation to a "yes, and" writing atmosphere. In this way, this project works to create space for student writers to engage with their own voice, their texts, the texts of others, and the operations of various communities to which they are a part.

Praxis that praises all elements of student effort also engages with a model of conferencing born from the process movement of writing studies, an approach that accepts the fluid and social nature of writing. This participatory conference model also considers the shift in our media and the way we consume media, acknowledging changes to the ways in which we create and operate in communities. The academic community is asked to craft methodologies that consider these shifts in textual interaction. A praxis that engages praise, and new definitions of participation, provides the student writer with the tools to negotiate self and operate in a complex and convergent society. Fannish activity,

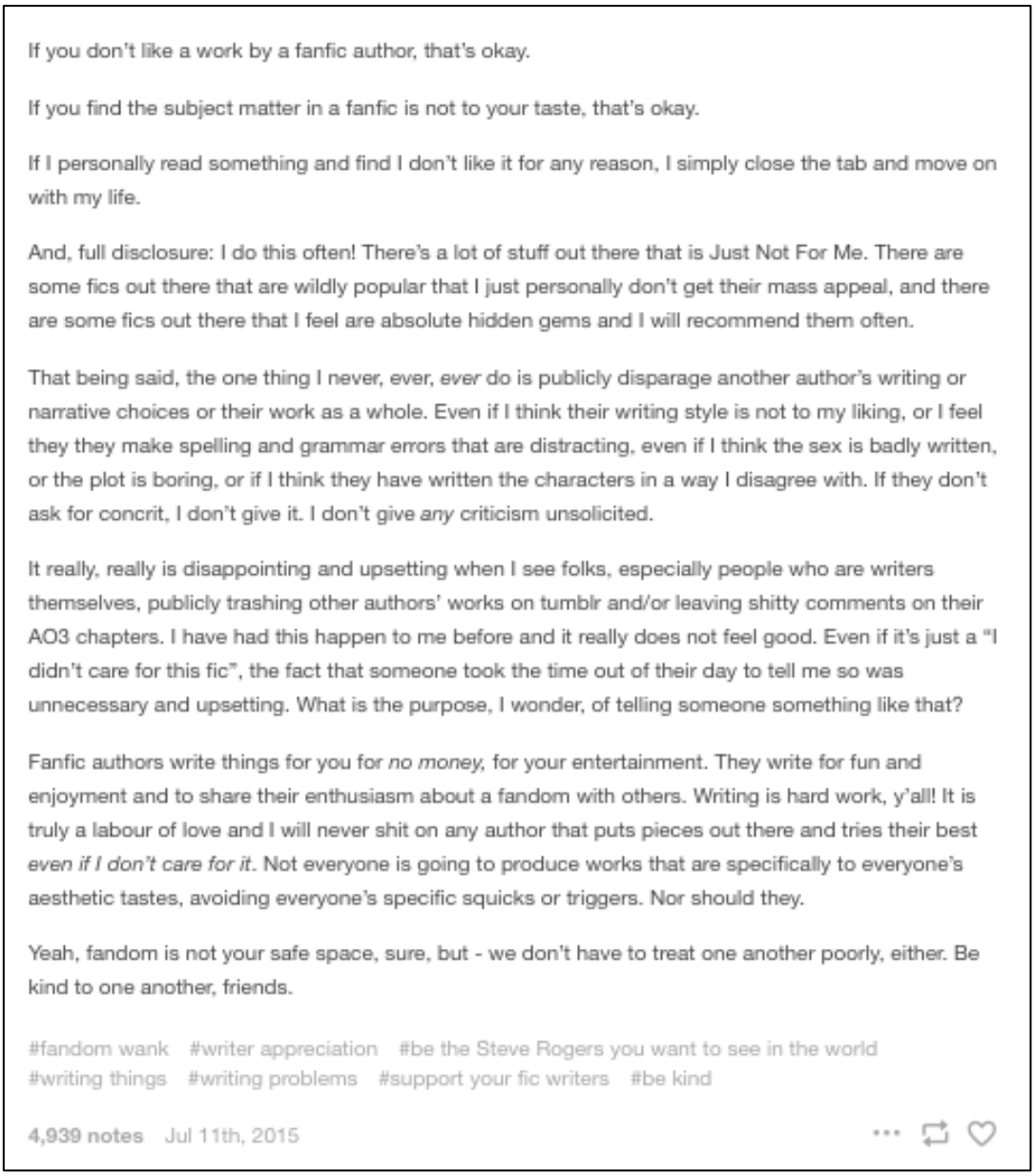
specifically of a participatory fandom, provides a unique commentary on this playful, even informal, praxis. It provides opportunities for student writers to contribute *more*, rather than *less*. Thus, the participatory conference model looks to the participatory fandom for guidance in building a writing community that entertains the notion of writing within a gift economy and assumes every piece of work is in progress and valuable.

4.3 Participatory Fandom

While the traditional perception of the fan highlights their investment of "time and energy into thinking about, or interacting with, a media text . . . enraptured by a particular extant media object," (Booth 11) their social markers are a bit harsher. Characterized as "something no 'respectable' book collector would consider himself, fans are 'vulgar,' and 'miserable wretch[s],' cannot distinguish 'the line between fantasy and reality,' and are akin to 'innocents and children'" (Booth 11), fans are the socially and culturally divergent re-mixers and re-makers of media and text. However, Paul Booth in *Digital Fandom* notes that for over nearly three decades, scholarship has found that "more complex associations can be made about fans than these crude generalizations" (11). For Booth, as well as for this project, fans make explicit what the academy teaches writers to do implicitly.

Booth considers how "fans' use of technologies brings a sense of playfulness to the work of active reading" (12). What this project considers is how they also bring playfulness to the ways in which they create community. Adding that this praxis is not only a response to the shifts in media consumption, but also a valid source for analysis that can provide strategies for inciting engagement and participation in student writing. That is, studying fans tells us something about community building praxis; specifically,

how responses can either support the writer's sense of self and relationship to writing or hinder, even harm, this process. Consider Figure 6.1 for how written response poses both helpful and harmful possibilities.



If you don't like a work by a fanfic author, that's okay.

If you find the subject matter in a fanfic is not to your taste, that's okay.

If I personally read something and find I don't like it for any reason, I simply close the tab and move on with my life.

And, full disclosure: I do this often! There's a lot of stuff out there that is Just Not For Me. There are some fics out there that are wildly popular that I just personally don't get their mass appeal, and there are some fics out there that I feel are absolute hidden gems and I will recommend them often.

That being said, the one thing I never, ever, *ever* do is publicly disparage another author's writing or narrative choices or their work as a whole. Even if I think their writing style is not to my liking, or I feel they they make spelling and grammar errors that are distracting, even if I think the sex is badly written, or the plot is boring, or if I think they have written the characters in a way I disagree with. If they don't ask for concrit, I don't give it. I don't give *any* criticism unsolicited.

It really, really is disappointing and upsetting when I see folks, especially people who are writers themselves, publicly trashing other authors' works on tumblr and/or leaving shitty comments on their AO3 chapters. I have had this happen to me before and it really does not feel good. Even if it's just a "I didn't care for this fic", the fact that someone took the time out of their day to tell me so was unnecessary and upsetting. What is the purpose, I wonder, of telling someone something like that?

Fanfic authors write things for you for *no money*, for your entertainment. They write for fun and enjoyment and to share their enthusiasm about a fandom with others. Writing is hard work, y'all! It is truly a labour of love and I will never shit on any author that puts pieces out there and tries their best *even if I don't care for it*. Not everyone is going to produce works that are specifically to everyone's aesthetic tastes, avoiding everyone's specific squicks or triggers. Nor should they.

Yeah, fandom is not your safe space, sure, but - we don't have to treat one another poorly, either. Be kind to one another, friends.

#fandom wank #writer appreciation #be the Steve Rogers you want to see in the world
#writing things #writing problems #support your fic writers #be kind

4,939 notes Jul 11th, 2015

FIGURE 6.1: A text post on the feedback culture of fandom

In this text post, *fuck-me-barnes* writes in response to the tensions that arise from struggles for "discursive dominance," a practice that Derek Johnson discusses in "Fan-tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom" as a "hegemonic struggle over interpretation and evaluation through which relationships among fan, text, and producer are continually articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated" rather than a "momentary aberration within unified consensus" (286). That is, power cannot be divorced from fannish interaction, especially in responding to writing.

While Johnson's work includes the tensions among producers and fans in relation to interpretation and ownership, his piece works to debunk the idyllic fandom community among fans themselves as one that only circulates unified consensus. *fuck-me-barnes* also discredits this ideal by criticizing those who would "publicly disparage another author's writing or narrative choices or their work as a whole." However, in addition to the criticism aimed at these kinds of readers, *fuck-me-barnes* also provides commentary and insight into the expectations and interactions of online fannish communities. For example, consider the implicit norm in the line, "What is the purpose, I wonder, of telling someone something like that?" While implied, the assumption from this line, even the entirety of the text post, is that this is not how readers of fanfic are supposed to respond.

Further, the implication is that a set of unwritten rules exists among fic readers and the fannish community as a whole. These rules are predicated on the gifting experience. In "An Open Letter to Fanfic Readers," a text post by *bettydays*, they list these rules regarding feedback on fanfic, receiving both favorable and not so favorable responses. However, what pervades is fandom's unique approach to written response. For

example, *frozen-delight* comments, "I love that overall we have a very positive feedback culture in fandom and of course we should shower the people with love who spend so much time creating wonderful things and sharing with the rest of us." Their comment goes on to articulate the difference between constructive criticism (concrit) and censure, to which many respond and articulate what they see as the relationship between constructive criticism and friendly feedback. However, the residual opinion from the corpus of responses is an aversion to severe criticism and to a culture that appropriates identity.

Because fannish practices center on gifting, a fan's response as it circulates among their respective communities considers each participating member, whether they be writer, artist, or other media contributor, as one who is gifting for a specific purpose. This purpose is strongly similar to what Bruffee articulates in relation to writing. Fans gift in order to be accepted, to join or be regarded as a member of a community. They gift for inclusion and pleasure. Fans and student writers are both open to have their identity validated by existing members or other participants in a given community, whether it is online, in a classroom, or writing conference. This practice of validation in the conference, as outlined by this project, is accomplished by responding positively to the student's gift, their writing.

4.4 The 21st Century Writing Center

Responding to student writing is not a new phenomenon to the academy. Rather, this area of inquiry has received ample attention and study. As seen in the analysis of published transcripts, tutors respond to student writing through both open and closed questions, directive and non-directive conference styles, and contextualized perspectives.

Further, responding to writing is a contextual practice. As Richard Straub points out in the introduction to his *Sourcebook for Responding to Student Writing*, there is "no single best way of responding to student writing" as different writing, different audiences, and different goals are all variables in the practice of written response. However, from the corpus of scholars who specialize in this area of inquiry, there arises a set of principles that relatively guide the practice of responding to student writing. Even in the writing center, as it is posited in the academy, a framework for response is at play. Clearly a social view of writing with attention to process, collaboration, and rhetorical knowledge, guides the work of tutors and teachers alike when they respond to writers.

Scholarship has highlighted the journey of responding to student writing, as it charts the dilemma of teachers, and even tutors, who appropriate or take control over student writing. Even in this project's analysis of published transcripts, writing center tutors were seen appropriating the student's writing, event the identity marker—writer. Responding to writing is relational to student engagement, participation, and interaction with text and other writers. How tutors respond to student writers directly affects their view of self in relation to their work and the work of others, even in the communities to which they are a part. Response, similar to writing, is a social practice; but more importantly, responding to writing plays a role in how writers construct and conceive identity.

4.5 The Participatory Writing Conference

It becomes clearer then why responding to student writing remains an active area of inquiry. How tutors respond to student writers, even validating identity, is a chief concern of theorists and practitioners, evidenced in the continued evolution of writing

center "ideas" and approaches to conferencing. The labor of this project has been to consider not only the treatment of writers as valid members and contributors to a given community and the effect this may have, but also the treatment of the conference as a work in progress, using Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson's explanation of the term.

> Work in progress is a term used in the fan fiction world to describe a piece of fiction still in the process of being written but not yet complete. This notion intersects with the intertextuality of fannish discourse, with the ultimate erasure of a single author as it combines to create a shared space, fandom, that we might also refer to as a community. The appeal of works in progress lies in part in the way fans can engage with an open text: it invites responses, permits shared authorship, and enjoins a sense of community (6).

In this sense, every social practice can potentially be held as a work in progress, but specifically the writing conference. By *lowering barriers* for participation—pulling from Jenkins' cultural perspective of participation—and *validating* student identities, a student writers' engagement with text and community can have space to develop.

A participatory model for the writing center not only offers an opportunity for strengthening the writer ego and engagement, but also carries potential for an environment where writers navigate differences, tensions, and grapple with co-existence in community. Fandom remains a suitable teacher as a "community of fans creates a communal (albeit contentious and contradictory) interpretation in which a large number of potential meanings, directions, and outcomes co-reside" (Busse and Hellekson 7).

Fannish practices, as they negotiate in a participatory culture, teach inclusivity and validation as ways of building community.

Similar to the cautions that academic inquiry often takes when permeating new landscapes, it is important to emphasize that this project is not aiming to appropriate fannish spaces or practices with an academic value system. Instead, it is the opposite. This project offers a bridge between academic and fannish practices that urges the academy, specifically the writing center, to acknowledge fannish values and practices as a valid area of knowledge and apply them to conferencing. Rather than privilege academic tastes and boundaries, fandom offers alternatives and possibilities for new levels of participation and new areas of affiliation. A participatory conference, modeled after participatory fandom, reminds our writing center praxis of the value inherent in student writing. The participatory writing conference labors to emphasize how the conference plays a role in reinforcing value, by validating the writer-identity of the student. As a result, this praxis hopes to promote inclusive environments for student writing that may, in turn, reinforce their perception of self and membership in the academic community.

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