

Superhero Movies and Fandoms:
Old and New Fan Communities and *The Avengers*

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Introduction

In this paper I intend to write about two topics. To be able to write about the second it is important to clarify the first. The first chapter will be about fan communities in general. It will give a definition for what these fan communities are and how they work. It will also try to explain what it is that these fans really do that gives them more and more academic focus. My reader will hopefully understand by the end of this paper what it is that draws people in to be a fan and what the experience of being fan means. The second chapter will be more specifically about the fans of *The Avengers* directed by Joss Whedon and released in mid-2012. For many different reasons this fan community is exciting to observe, especially how their behavior reflects the demographic makeup and attitude of the fans it consists of.

There are two reasons for why I chose to write about these topics: a personal and an academic. I have been a member of fandoms for the past seven years and experienced a lot through them. Their existence and the way they work are a part of my everyday life and it was difficult for me to imagine writing a paper like this about them. It felt like as if I tried to write about my breakfast habits: a part of my life but a very simple one. Thanks to the instructions of my teacher my attention was called to the fact that these fandoms are not old news for many people, especially not in an academic context. Honestly, I was baffled by the curiosity and excitement of people when I told them about my topic for this paper, but it ultimately convinced me that it is worth writing about. My academic curiosity was piqued by the research I did for preparing this piece of writing. I read a lot about how other people perceive fan communities. In many cases I agreed with them wholeheartedly when they described fans and at the same time it was strange to read a scholarly document about fans like me. In other cases there were points with which I disagreed. Most of these come from writers who themselves were never a part of a fan community and tried to explain it from the outside. In my humble opinion it is pretty much an impossible task. These two reasons will also cause this paper to be a note more personal than most. It is not due to laziness or the lack of professionalism but it is the most sensible and practical way to introduce fan communities.

Chapter 1: About fans and fandoms in general

With the spreading of Web 2.0 technologies like blogs or social networking sites a golden age of online fan communities came to be. As Heather Urbanski points it out in her introduction to *Writing and the Digital Generation*, in our days the Internet and the television became inseparably intertwined. This connection allowed fans “to be more active and participatory than audiences of the past” (Deery 162) says June Deery. Such an idea of participatory entertainment has long been present in connection with fans of television shows thanks to works by Henry Jenkins and those who followed him. However fandoms are not solely bound to the world of television, though it is easier to observe them in that case. Television series are usually expanded over a longer time period, than a movie or even a movie franchise, thus examining the reactions between fans and producers is much easier. Nonetheless this connection exists in the case of shorter works. As Urbanski remarks “In this growing cultural insistence on participatory entertainment, fans of all kinds expect to be actively involved, no longer content to passively receive messages.” (Urbanski 6)

First and foremost it is important to clarify some phrases that are used in connection with these communities. As there is no unified professional vocabulary for this topic due to the lack of its academic research, I will use phrases that the members of these communities use themselves. The most important of these is the “fandom” which here is not an adjective but rather a noun used for the online fan communities. Its origin is now obscured but most people believe it either came from “fan kingdom” or “fan domain”.

The best way to explain this modern, new generation of fandoms is to try and compare them with their predecessors. Why and how are these fandoms so different from their earlier counterparts? Fandoms have been around for a long time. The exact starting point of their existence would be difficult to determine. One that both in their structure and activity was like all the fandoms that followed, was the Star Trek fandom. Henry Jenkins analyzed this community in depth in his book *Textual Poachers: Television fans and Participatory Culture*. Still this work was published in 1992 well before the time of the internet and the online fandoms and much has changed since. While the Star Trek fandom was an example for later fan communities they did not have the extensive possibilities that are provided by the internet in our days.

This leads to the first difference between old and new fans and their communities. While they are similar in what Heather Urbanski calls the “typical” fan behavior that is “following, supporting and critiquing” (Urbanski 9) they are different in almost everything

else. Firstly it is about the meeting place of the members. In the earliest fan communities these places were little clubs and fans gathered at meetings, which later grew to be conventions. It is not that conventions - or “cons” how fans call them - do not exist anymore but they became secondary to interaction on the internet. Now with the options of the web and especially the social networking sites of Web 2.0 a really big change occurred. Fandoms became global and anonymous. These two factors shaped and created mostly what fandoms are.

Global means that members are from all over the world and the production they are centered on can be from anywhere. There are European fans of Japanese animes, American fans of Korean games, Australian fans of British TV shows and the list goes on. With the help of the internet, there is no time gap between watching an American show in America or in New Zealand. However illegal it may be, content is shared and downloaded by the fans all over the world. This does not mean if their favorite show is aired in their country they will not watch it on TV too, but they will not have to wait months or in some cases even years for the release. In most of the cases the global nature of fandom also means that there is one language that is used for communication and creation. In most of the cases it is English, however there are always members of a fandom who do not speak the language. It does not exclude them from the community as their creations such as the creation of drawings, paintings, videos and other fan arts are not solely bound to language. All in all it can be said that nationality is not a significant factor in fandoms and most of the time it is not even known where a member is from.

This leads to the other main characteristic of online fandoms. Their members are as anonymous as they want to be. On the internet it is not necessary to give out information about yourself only if you want to. This is true for the fandoms as well which gives a sense of security to the members. This want for anonymity may or may not come from the assumption that is best worded by Joli Jenson “The literature on fandom is haunted by images of deviance. The fan is consistently characterized (referencing the term’s origin) as a potential fanatic. This means that fandom is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged behavior” (Jenson 9). It is incredibly rare that members meet in real life, at conventions and it is even more rare that they reveal their identity at these occasions.

According to this anonymity, it is difficult to gather any data concerning the age, gender or even simply just the numbers of online fandoms. Still there are tendencies that can be seen at conventions and among those who are willing to reveal their identity. The two following graphs (Table 1 and 2) are based on a survey done among 50 users of a social

networking site Tumblr, which is one of the most common forums for a number of fandoms. The graphs show the same demographic data that can be observed at fandom gatherings. Strangely enough, the 18-21 year old female audience does not always mean that they were the intended target audience. For example in the case of a mystical horror show called *Supernatural*, the target audience was admittedly the 25-30 male audience and still the fandom consists of mostly 18-21 females. The case of *The Avengers* fandom is one that is more complicated than this and it will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

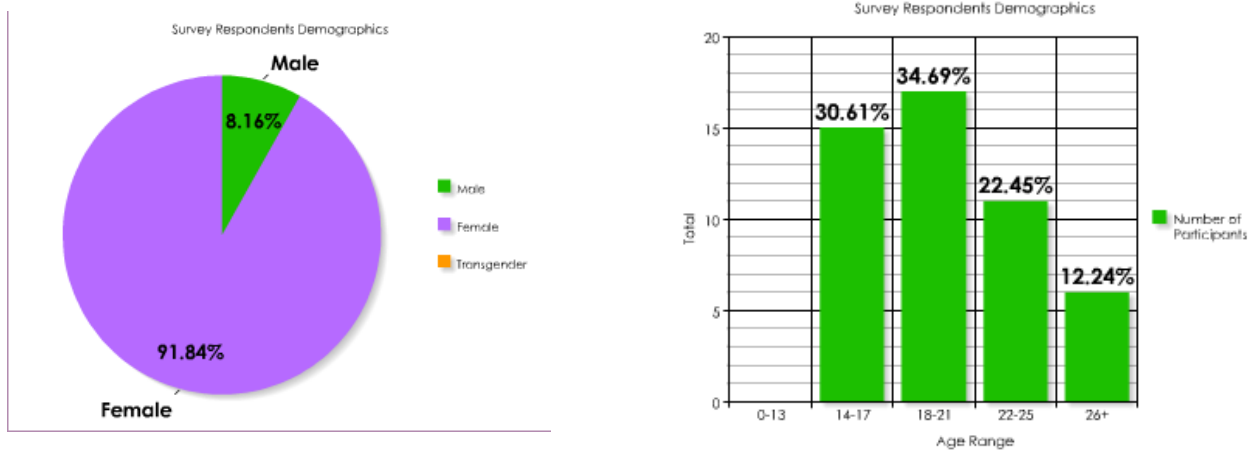


Table 1-2: Gender and age of asked fans

What is it exactly that these fans do? What is it that makes them so special in their activities? And last but not least how do the new fandoms defer from their old counterparts in what they do? Essentially they do just what Urbanski said, that is “following, supporting and critiquing” but it takes largely creative forms.

One of the most popular of these forms is the creative outlets has always been writing fanfiction. Fanfictions, fanfics or fics for short, are difficult to define. “Fan fiction is the way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of the folk.” says Henry Jenkins. Although I agree with his opinion, it is hardly a definition of fan fictions. Most generally it can be said about them, that they are written texts that in some way connect to the production that is in the center of the fandom. It means that fanfictions are not necessarily extensions of the existing reality of what they are based on. They do not always continue already existing stories or writers do not always write themselves into their loved universe. These are the most common presumptions about fanfics but they are much more than that. There are whole genres that are very different from each

other among these pieces. I am sure, I could write my whole paper about the genres of them but just to mention a few: one-shots that are the equivalents of short stories; AUs or alternate universes that take the characters to a completely different environment from their original; pod fics that stand for iPod fictions are fanfictions read out and recorded so people can listen to it on their portable devices; ‘verses that stand for universes created by the author of the fanfiction that can reach the length of novels or novel series and the list goes on. It is difficult to pinpoint when these genres were created, but they are something that can be found in every fandom. Somehow a system was created by fans of completely different productions and it is now an unwritten rule of fanfictions. Now the difference between old and new fan communities’ fictions are in how many people do these stories reach. Old fandoms did not have the internet and most importantly social networking sites to share their works, write reviews to each other, collect them in recommendations or recs that collect the best works in a fandom. They mostly wrote for their shelves or shared it with their closest friends. The difference is very similar to the difference between young fans, who do not have access to the internet yet and adult fans. It may be best understood through a quote from Susanna Coleman’s essay “Young Adult Females Writing Participatory Fan Fiction”:

“As an eight-year-old, still years away from Internet access, I was a fan in isolation: I would watch a show and write or draw about it in my diary, but my participation ended there. Now, however, my fan fiction writing process goes beyond simply reading, watching, or playing a text and then writing a story about it. Because of my involvement with fan communities on the Internet, I am instead a full participant within the text.” (Coleman 95)

There are websites on the internet that have one function, and that is to share fanfictions. Unfortunately one of the biggest sites, fanfiction.net recently ran into copyright problems and many works had to be taken down. But fans do not give up so easily and created a new site, archiveofourown.org to upload their works to. Just the sheer number of new works uploaded is amazing on the new site: 548933 works in 11042 fandoms.

One can say that it is all very impressive but fanfictions will never get out to the public. That is not true anymore. The boundary between the world of online fanfictions and published books has been crossed by E. L. James’ controversial *Fifty Shades Trilogy*. It is an open secret that the books were originally fanfictions written to Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series as an Alternate Universe fiction. By changing the names E. L. James could avoid any copyright problems and her books became the fastest selling paperback books of all time.

Returning to the original discovery of the world of old and new fanfictions we can see the primary difference between them is the platform that is provided by the internet. And it did not only change the world of fanfictions, it gave new creative outlets to fan artists in the form of fanart, fanvids, live-blogging and role playing.

Fanart is a term used for drawings, paintings, sculptures created by fans. Just like fanfiction it has been around for a long time but the difference is now in the sharing and the abundance of new genres. One of the most interesting cases of fanarts originates from Japan and it is called *dōjinshi* or *doujinshi* which literally means “same person”. *Doujinshis* were originally self-published works but its meaning changed in online fandoms. They became a kind of transition between fanfiction and fanart as they contain both drawings and written text just like mangas or comics. In Japan and other Eastern countries these works are often available in printed format but only in a low number. When fandoms who are dominantly from Western countries adopted *doujinshis* they became more internet based and only available in digital format. These works are not that common as they require a great deal of time in their creation and skill in both writing and drawing.

Other more “simple” fanarts are more common. Their quality is not standardized which means that there are sometimes almost childlike drawings are uploaded as fanart at the same time there are artworks that reach (or even exceed) the quality of the production they are based on. There are artists who are well known in fandoms for their work and they reach a kind of “fandom fame”. On the other hand most of the time they do not become isolated but on the contrary. These artists publish their works in progress, older works to see how they improved and even make tutorials for those who wish to learn drawing, painting or whatever they do. It is not surprising that fan artists often become the pillars of fandoms as their work is known by most of the members.

Yet another creative fan production is the world of fanvideos or fanvids. It is important to clarify that these videos are not the short films sometimes also created by fans. Fanvideos use the original productions’ material but change it in some way by cutting it differently, adding music or editing in any other way. They were also already present in old fan communities but after the start of the widely known online video sharing site YouTube they became more and more popular. There are a number of differences between old and new fanvids. The first and most noticeable difference comes from the technologies available. These days there are video editing programs that can be used to create professional looking clips without the need of any qualification in editing. It was impossible to create such videos before without special equipment, now all that is needed is a computer. But fan videos

changed not only in their look but also in their purpose. “Fan music video is ... a unique form, ideally suited to demands of fan culture, depending for its significance upon the careful welding of words and images to comment on the series narrative.” (Jenkins 225) wrote Henry Jenkins in his book *Textual Poachers* in 1992. This statement was true in its time, but the purpose of these videos has grown since. They do not only comment on the series’, movies’, games’ etc narrative but they themselves create new narratives thus they can be perceived as visual fanfictions. The name ficvid originates from this function. As Angelina Karpovich wrote in her 2008 article “Reframing Fan Videos”:

“A vid can focus on a secondary character ... it can dramatically juxtapose the characters’ actions with the lyrics of the song, reframing the characters and their relationships and thus altering their significance; or it can bring together characters from multiple sources.... A vid can explore “alternative universes,” where, for example, characters who were killed off in the source text are still alive and still part of the ongoing narrative.” (Karpovich

Karpovich’s “excavation of multimedia influences on contemporary fan video speaks to the increasing sophistication of amateur video artists. They bring to bear a host of techniques from a broad array of genres that may inevitably exceed those found in their specific fan source text.” (Middleton 121) comments Kim Middleton on the aforementioned article. On the one hand this means that fans have sensitivity to explore other possible meanings of the given visual content through editing. On the other hand it gives an incredibly difficult task to vidders. While fanfiction writers also have a difficult job to not write “out of character” which is one of the main goals of authors, video editors must know the source text and related materials well enough to find the pictures necessary to create a new narrative out of it. As I like to call it in the case of fanfictions the authors find new stories to the pictures while editors find pictures to their stories.

All the fandom creations I have written about were in some form present before the time of online fandoms. It is time to take a look at some activities that were not available without the internet. The first of these is the so called live-blogging. Essentially it means that the fan who watches the series, movie, game or anything he/she’s a fan of does not just simply receive it but comments on it and shares it with other fans on his/her blog. As Urbanski points it out it is a huge difference between the two image of fans because they “are not sprawled on the couch or lounge chair [...] but rather are in front of computers, *writing*.” (Urbanski 10) It would be unexpected to see for example a soccer fan do that, but that is exactly what Thomas Cavanagh writes about in his essay “The Realtime Forum Fan”. What he writes about is

watching and discussing sports events in real time but this type of live commenting was also adopted by other not sport related fandoms. What makes it possible is online streaming with which for example a TV show's episode can be watch all over the world as it is aired. In the case of movies fans sit down in front of their computers and watch the streaming of a movie while they blog about it and discuss it simultaneously. In his essay Cavanagh calls attention to some features of these discussions that are worth observing, namely that "They occur online, they are text based, they are contemporaneous with the sporting event and that they are abstracted from their context." (Cavanagh 87) I would like to observe these features in connection with not just sport based fandoms.

The first two of these four points may seem obvious. I was writing about online fandoms all along, so obviously these discussions will take place online. As I have noted before this is important, because it was not always the case in connection with fandoms and it gives these discussions globality and anonymity. It also means that a lot of opinions will meet from different backgrounds and also due to anonymity they will probably be more honest or straightforward. The second feature is also easily dismissed as obvious but it is very important. These discussions do not happen in words. This means that the participants do not hear each other's voice which means that they have to express their reactions in a different way. The most common expressions are usually instant messenger style abbreviations (OMG, IMO, LOL and their likes) and they also shorten the time it takes to type a message or blog entry. Other commonly used signs are emoticons or smileys which can be Western style (:-) - smiling, xD – laughing etc...) or Eastern style (;_; - crying, O_o – shocked and so on). There is also a new tendency to use gifs the express reactions. These gifs are basically short moving images without sound that many times come from TV series, movies but also commercials almost any other visual source.¹ As we can see these gifs are already somewhat violate Cavanagh's second point which states that these discussions are solely text based. The third feature can be pointed out as the most important. Live blogging always happens as the viewer watches what he/she writes about. It is a kind of activity that could not be shared as widely before as with the help of the internet but it also means that the fan actively watches and criticizes, observes, and thinks about what he/she is receiving. This causes viewers to be as critical in their thinking and receiving even without writing it down as they are while blogging about it. And this way of not passively but actively receiving is one that is a main hallmark of fandoms. The fourth point is that these discussions are abstracted from their context which means that the live blogger takes it for granted that the reader of his/her entry watches exactly what he/she watches and does not talk about what is happening but what he/she is thinking

about it. This also makes the experience more one-off as without being at the exact same point of the context as the blogger these commentaries often make no sense just like hearing only one side of a telephone conversation.

With this we have arrived to my final point in discussing fandom activities and here I would like to write about the phenomenon of role playing. Role-playing in itself is a game that can have many forms and each form has its fans. The original role-playing games or RPGs have a long history, but what we now call these games came to be around the 1960s and 70s with *Dungeons and Dragons* and its likes. These games were revolutionized by computers and digital role-playing games that could be played alone in the 1990s and early 2000s. These years were the time of cult games like *Morrowind* and *Legend of Zelda*. Yet another change came about in the late 2000s with the massively multiplayer online role-playing games or MMORPGs that now allow a lot of people to play in a virtual environment simultaneously. This expansion of role-playing games did not leave fandoms intact but RP manifests itself completely differently in them.

Fandom role-play started as a way of writing fanfiction. For example two bloggers started to interact as if they were their favorite characters or at least they lived in their world. This resulted in role-playing blog circles that interacted with each other and while they played the game they created a text like a fan fiction that could be read by other members of the fandom. This kind of RP in turn resulted in the opening of blogs that are so called “Ask” blogs. For example in the The Avengers fandom there are “Ask Loki” or “Ask Captain America” blogs. It means that someone who is not member of the role-playing game can ask these bloggers questions and they will answer “in character”. True to the enthusiasm of fans they sometimes even dress up as the characters they play. Other role-play blogs blend into fan art more. They answer by drawing and sometimes a series of little comics can be the result of the activity of these blogs. Even though these drawings are mostly quickly draw and sketchy due to the popularity of these blogs and the number of questions they get their quality can be almost as high as official comics’.

There is one more activity that should be discussed in connection with fandoms that is not something they do in connection with the production they are a fan of. It is often said that fans isolate themselves from the rest of the world and in many cases it is true. At the same time almost every fandom engages in some kind of charity. For some reason it goes hand in hand with being a fan no matter what people are a fan of. There are cases where actors initiate it. The best example may be one of the TV series *Supernatural*’s actors Misha Collins’ Random Acts that is a charity foundation mainly focusing on helping the victims of the earth

quake on Haiti. Collins realized that he had a great number of followers on the micro-blogging site called Twitter and started to encourage them to do a random act of kindness every day. From this simple gesture a foundation grew out that raised \$472,945.37 for charity by the middle of 2012. There were also 50 fans of the show who volunteered to travel to Jacmel, Haiti with Collins to build a fish farm and a community center in the city that was almost entirely destroyed in 2010². Another type of charity done by fandoms is when simply fans initiate it. It does not always get to as many people as if it were initiated by a famous person. Even so the fans of actor Tom Hiddleston who plays Loki in *The Avengers* managed to raise £15530.81 for UNICEF in a project called Hiddlestoners Have Heart. It is not only a nice alliteration but Hiddleston's fans call themselves Hiddlestoners and the line "You have heart" is the first Loki utters in the movie. This is the way how fandoms and charity connect. It is difficult to determine why there is a connection exactly but it seems fandoms inspire their members not just to be creatively active but be charitable at the same time.

So what is it that makes it hard to be a fan? Why is not everyone a fan if it is such a great experience? First it is an incredibly time and energy consuming activity. Urbanski herself admits that not everyone "can, or even should, be leading raids in *World of Warcraft* late into the neither weekend nights, nor am I saying that every writing teacher should craft volumes of fan fiction in between grading student papers." (Urbanski 8) Writing, role-playing, live blogging and all the other fan activities can be tiring for someone who has a job or has to run a household. Maybe this gives some explanation to why the younger generations engage more in such activities. Another problem is something more serious that raised debates even in the Congress of the United States and that is copyright. As I have implied before fans do not always purchase copies of their object of fandom legally. It is important to state that they do not do this because they do not want to purchase it legally but it is more or less a direct consequence of global fandoms. If some members of the fandom or in even worse cases the majority have access to certain materials other members will try to get access to it to stay up to date. Fortunately the creators of productions that have fandoms start to realize this tendency and overlook these little offences, as they know their best consumers are the fandom members who buy not just the production but merchandise too and these fans draw new viewers in. Still there is another problem with copyright and fandoms. Fans use pictures, video clips, sound, music, names from their object of fandom. They do not get any kind of profit from it and now every single fan work including ficvids, fanfics, fanvids and all the others come with a disclaimer that the creator of the work does not claim their creation as their own. All the same, some companies are still protective of their property and force either fan work creators

or rather sites to take down every copyrighted material. If they ever achieved their goal completely to cleanse the internet from everything copyrighted it would be an end to all fandoms. It would be impossible to talk about characters, analyze clips and create new narratives by fanvids for anything. Scarily enough this was almost achieved by the PIPA (Protect IP Address) and SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) bills in the United States and the ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) bill in the European Union. While the original idea to stop mass illegal downloading from the internet has been a problem for long these bills suggested banning all copyrighted materials from the World Wide Web. In my humble opinion, that overshoots the mark and restricts people's freedom of speech. Still in some cases the copyright holders did file lawsuits against websites that contained copyrighted material and some cases they did win. For many fandoms these were unexpected and strong blows. Almost the same procedure went down on both Fanfiction.net and YouTube. From one moment to the other fan works were taken down and lost permanently, accounts were suspended and communities fell apart. New sites have been established to replace the old ones, but there are an enormous number of works that can never be recovered. After all these events, it is even clearer why fandom members insist on remaining anonymous, why are they so reclusive and protective of their works.

Sometimes fandoms are looked down upon or are considered illegal. Still its members remain loyal and create an unimaginable amount of art and build communities. Fandoms are maybe best characterized by a fandom member whose Live Journal user name is hesychasm who wrote a short and a bit romantic confession about what fandoms are in her opinion³. First she writes that "Fandom is focus. Fandom is obsession. Fandom is insatiable consumption." She means fandom members who barely even speak the language watch shows or movies, read stories in a foreign language. Many fans (including myself) learn English from online fandoms. The reason can be either because there is no one in their vicinity who knows anything about their fandom or they just simply cannot wait the month or years for a text to be translated to their mother tongue. She also comments on the global nature of fan communities "Fandom is you in Germany and me in the US and him in Australia and her in Japan. Fandom is a sofa bed in New York, a roadtrip to Oxnard, a friend behind a face in London. Fandom talks past timezones and accents and backgrounds. Fandom is conversation. Communication. Contact." She also comments on the creativity of such communities by writing "Fandom is creating. Fandom is drawing, painting, vidding" and also "Fandom is writing for the first time since you were twelve. Fandom is finally calling yourself a writer." These fandoms are places where especially the younger generation can expand their imagination. It teaches its members

a critical thinking and an eye for literary works. It gives strong emotional ties. “Fandom is signal and response. Fandom is a stranger moving you to tears, anger, laughter. Fandom is you moving a stranger to speak.” I have experienced the enjoyment of reading and writing in fandoms first. I believe that those who are members of these communities will enjoy reading outside the fandom too as they know the experiences it can give. And last but not least something that is true for many young fans all around the world: “Fandom is where you found yourself.”

Chapter 2: The Avengers fandom

I have looked into the world of fandoms in the past couple of months and I have been a member of them for even longer. So what is the reason why I chose specifically the fandom of *The Avengers* to look into? The answer is simple: I have never seen such a reaction from fans as I have seen in the case of this movie.

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter a blog site called Tumblr gives home to many fandoms on the internet. The fans of book series like *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, TV series like *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who* gather here. They have one thing in common and that is that these works' fandoms have been around for a long time compared to other smaller fandoms. Even the youngest of them is more than four years old and they were published over a longer period of time. All in all they were not a one-off experience. Still after the release of *The Avengers* in the cinemas, basically every blog started to talk about it. It was an explosion never seen before on Tumblr. A torrent of fan works were created by users. It seemed that this fandom emerged from the shadows to be the most widespread of them all. The truth about what happened was that every blogger got caught up in the new fandom. They all but abandoned their original fandoms and began to create content for the new one.

In my opinion it was the result of a number of factors first of which is not related to *The Avengers*. The release date of the movie was early May of 2012. It means that most TV series were on a summer hiatus that is one of the most painful period to be a fan in. It is the time when no new episodes of shows are aired due to a break between two seasons. This break was filled by a summer blockbuster movie that became the third highest grossing film worldwide with the total of \$1,511,757,910. It means that the movie had something that could appeal to the general audiences as much as to fandoms.

Another incredibly interesting thing is that *The Avengers* does not only have one fandom but it has two that are completely different from each other. One can best be compared to old fan communities described in Chapter 1 and the other is a new online fandom. It is intriguing to see how these groups defer from each other. Do they interact with each other and if they do how?

First of all I will attempt to describe the two separate fandoms as much as possible. The reason why there are two different communities can be found in the origin of *The Avengers*. It is a movie that is based on superhero comic books that were published first in 1963. It means that this fandom was born around that time, which is well in the era of old fan

communities. The demography of this group is also different from a new fandom's. Although it is impossible to get exact data of the readership as it is a well-guarded secret of comic book publishers, it is estimated to be 80-90% males between the age of 18 and 28. It means it is very different from the group that is made up of 18-21 year old females of the new fandom. This difference led to a number of clashes between these groups.

There was a general hostility between the two groups from the release of the movie. Most male comic book fans generally do not approve of the modern adaptations of their favorites. This disapproval has many reasons one of which is that these fans feel like they are invaded and exploited by Hollywood. They feel that these movies are an aggressive invasion of their communities and they destroy what comics were originally about. It is needless to say if someone became the fan of *The Avengers* based on the movie it is a capital crime. At the same time many new fans have never really heard of *The Avengers* before the release of the movie as it became much more widespread and better distributed in many different countries. The most violent manifestation of this unfriendly relationship was a Facebook post⁴ by a well-known comic book artist Tony Harris, who amongst others worked on Iron Man (a member of The Avengers). In his post Harris criticizes female fans for going to conventions without knowing anything about comics. He also criticizes female cosplayers, fans who dress up as a character for wearing such revealing outfits and says these "fake geek girls" only intent to pray on comic book loving men. His comment did not just offend female members of the fandom but also caused public backlash which resulted in Harris removing his post. Still the damage was done and the relationship of these two fandoms worsened even more.

Now it is also exciting to examine why these two completely different groups can like the same texts and still be so far away from each other. The reason why male fans like comic books, have long been researched. Many researchers say including David Coughlan that "the hypermasculine comic book superhero represents an ideal for men" (Coughlan 241). It can be expanded by that this ideal is "constrained by the force of, and their fantasy relation to, a dominant or hegemonic ideal of masculinity as tough, heterosexual, authoritative, successful" says Lynne Segal in her essay "Back to the boys? Temptations of the good gender theorist" (Segal 239). This is supported by the fact that most liked characters of male fans from *The Avengers* are Iron Man, Captain America or Thor who's masculinity and identity can never be questioned.

But what do female fans like? Naturally just the opposite of these. The most liked character by the new mostly female fandom is Loki who is the villain of the story. This is what got me thinking. Why on Earth would the majority of the new fans like the villain who

wants to kill all the heroes and conquer the world? The answer probably lies in the ambiguity of Loki's character. His character is distinctively more feminine than the heroes' but not female. If it were a female character that the female fandom wanted their favorite character would have to be Black Widow but it is not. They like a character that is not overly muscular and does not refrain from expressing strong emotions. Loki is the younger brother who grew up in the shadow of Thor. He is talented in using magic and words to deceive and trick people. When in the movie *Thor*, Loki is confronted by his own identity as a Frost Giant that is the deadliest and most formidable enemy of Asgard where he grew up, he falls into an identity crisis. He runs away from his home to break free of the oppression of Thor and to find out his own identity but he just falls into even deeper despair. He makes bad decisions which results in being exploited by other evil characters. I do believe that the woman of the 21st Century can understand this feeling of getting freed from suppression but at the same time getting more lost than ever.

Let's not forget that fandoms love to explore every text that can be related to their fandom. In these related texts female fans found even more links to Loki's femininity. According to the comic books Loki is a shape shifter, thus he can transform himself into a female form and transform back at will. In Norse mythology Loki gives birth to a number of children but also has a wife. All these in the new and mostly female fandom enforced that they could relate to not the hypermasculine heroes, but rather to a feminine male character who happens to be the arch-villain.

With two groups that have such opposing ideas about the same text like the male and the female fans it is hardly a surprise that they do not agree on almost anything. They remain to go on with their community life separately and avoid each other as best as they can. Still the case of two parallel existing fandoms is something that is not very common in the world of fan communities and to see how differently they perceive the very same subjects, characters and stories is extremely fascinating. It is a pity that *The Avengers* fandoms are exactly two that have such a hostile relationship but there are other fandoms and even more fandoms to come that can change this tendency and show that two fan communities can coexist peacefully.

Notes

¹ I uploaded an example for these reaction gifs to the following url: <<http://imgur.com/cNjv0>> This gif is used to express extreme excitement

² More information about Random Acts can be found on < <http://www.therandomact.org/>>

³ Unedited version of hesychasm's <<http://hesychasm.livejournal.com/187818.html>> writing about fandoms:

Fandom is focus. Fandom is obsession. Fandom is insatiable consumption. Fandom is sitting for hours in front of a TV screen a movie screen a computer screen with a comic book a novel on your lap. Fandom is eyestrain and carpal tunnel syndrome and not enough exercise and staying up way, way past your bedtime.

Fandom is people you don't tell your mother you're meeting. Fandom is people in the closet, people out and proud, people in costumes, people in T-shirts with slogans only fifty others would understand. Fandom is a loud dinner conversation scaring the waiter and every table nearby.

Fandom is you in Germany and me in the US and him in Australia and her in Japan. Fandom is a sofa in New York, a roadtrip to Oxnard, a friend behind a face in London. Fandom talks past timezones and accents and backgrounds. Fandom is conversation. Communication. Contact.

Fandom is drama. Fandom is melodrama. Fandom is high school. Fandom is Snacky's law and Godwin's law and Murphy's law. Fandom is smarter than you. Fandom is stupider than you. Fandom is five arguments over and over and over again. Fandom is the first time you've ever had them.

Fandom is female. Fandom is male. Fandom lets female play at being male. Fandom bends gender, straight, gay, prude, promiscuous. Fandom is fantasy. Fandom doesn't care about norms or taboos or boundaries. Fandom cares too much about norms and taboos and boundaries. Fandom is not real life. Fandom is closer than real life. Fandom knows what you're really like in the bedroom. Fandom is how you would never, could never be in the bedroom.

Fandom is shipping, never shipping, het, slash, gen, none of the above, more than the above. Fandom is love for characters you didn't create. Fandom is recreating the characters you didn't create. Fandom is appropriation, subversion, dissent. Fandom is adoration, extrapolation, imitation. Fandom is dissection, criticism, interpretation. Fandom is changing, experimenting, attempting.

Fandom is creating. Fandom is drawing, painting, vidding: nine seasons in four minutes of love. Fandom is words, language, authoring. Fandom is essays, stories, betas, parodies, filks, zines, usenet posts, blog posts, message board posts, emails, chats, petitions, wank, concrit, feedback, recs. Fandom is writing for the first time since you were twelve. Fandom is finally calling yourself a writer.

Fandom is signal and response. Fandom is a stranger moving you to tears, anger, laughter. Fandom is you moving a stranger to speak.

Fandom is distraction. Fandom is endangering your job, your grades, your relationships, your bank account. Fandom gets no work done. Fandom is too much work. Fandom was/is just a phase. Fandom could never be just a phase. Fandom is where you found a friend, a sister, a kindred spirit. Fandom is where you found a talent, a love, a reason.

Fandom is where you found yourself.

⁴Unedited version of Tony Harris' Facebook post:

I cant remember if Ive said this before, but Im gonna say it anyway. I dont give a crap.I appreciate a pretty Gal as much as the next Hetero Male. Sometimes I even go in for some racy type stuff (keeping the comments PG for my Ladies sake) but dammit, dammit, dammit I am so sick and tired of the whole COSPLAY-Chiks. I know a few who are actually pretty cool-and BIG Shocker, love and read Comics.So as in all things, they are the exception to the rule. Heres the statement I wanna make, based on THE RULE: "Hey! Quasi-Pretty-NOT-Hot-Girl, you are more pathetic than the REAL Nerds, who YOU secretly think are REALLY PATHETIC. But we are onto you. Some of us are aware that you are ever so average on an everyday basis. But you have a couple of things going your way. You are willing to become almost completely Naked in public, and yer either skinny(Well, some or most of you, THINK you are) or you have Big Boobies. Notice I didnt say GREAT Boobies? You are what I refer to as "CON-HOT". Well not by my estimation, but according to a LOT of average Comic Book Fans who either RARELY speak to, or NEVER speak to girls. Some Virgins, ALL unconfident when it comes to girls, and the ONE thing they all have in common? The are being preyed on by YOU. You have this really awful need for attention, for people to tell you your pretty, or Hot, and the thought of guys pleasuring themselves to the memory of you hanging on them with your glossy open lips, promising them the Moon and the Stars of pleasure, just makes your head vibrate. After many years of watching this shit go down every 3 seconds around or in front of my booth or table at ANY given Con in the country, I put this together. Well not just me. We are LEGION. And here it is, THE REASON WHY ALL THAT, sickens us: BECAUSE YOU DONT KNOW SHIT ABOUT COMICS, BEYOND WHATEVER GOOGLE IMAGE SEARCH YOU DID TO GET REF ON THE MOST MAINSTREAM CHARACTER WITH THE MOST REVEALING COSTUME EVER. And also, if ANY of these guys that you hang on tried to talk to you out of that Con? You wouldnt give them the fucking time of day. Shut up you damned liar, no you would not. Lying, Liar Face. Yer not Comics. Your just the thing that all the Comic Book, AND mainstream press flock to at Cons. And the real reason for the Con, and the damned costumes yer parading around in? That would be Comic Book Artists, and Comic Book Writers who make all that shit up.

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