

**The Hunger Games Fanfiction as a Community of Practice: Forming
Identities in Online Communities**

by

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Abstract

This research investigates expressions of identity and formation of identity found in an online fanfiction forum based on the young adult novel, *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. Using Wenger's neo-Vygotskian socio-cultural learning theorem from his book, *Communities of Practice* I observed, then coded posts by authors and respondents using a rubric I operationalized from Wenger's five characteristics of identity in practice. I employed a deductive coding scheme and used Wenger's community of practice as a framework. During the coding process, I found many examples of what seem to be expressions of identity in practice and what appear to be examples of identity in formation. I discuss how this online fanfiction forum operates as a community of practice and consider how this fanfiction space informs other educational applications. There are different instructional strategies that could be gleaned from the coding and analysis process that practicing teachers and librarians could implement into their current online or offline practices. This fanfiction forum is an example of a self-selected online activity with a high level of reading and writing engagement. There are many exciting signs of educational and developmental activities occurring in this fanfiction forum, which suggests further investigation is needed.

Preface

The research and writing contained within this document represents the original work of Susan Henderson and has not been previously published in any other form. This research has been undertaken with the assistance of thesis advisor and MACL co-chair, Dr. Eric Meyers and committee member Dr. Marlene Asselin.

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List of Abbreviations

BTW By the way

CMC Computer Mediated Communication

CMDA Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis

CoP Community of Practice

ICT Information Communication Technologies

IDK I don't know

LOL Laugh Out Loud

LMAO Laugh My Ass off

OOC Out of Character

PM personal message

PTC Premier's Technology Committee

Glossary

Beta reader: Beta reader acts in support of the writer, proofreading and editing.

Canon: The material used as the basis for fanfiction. It also refers to material accepted as part of that world of stories.

Fandom: The fans of a popular cultural artifact, like a novel or person, who come together as a group or community.

Fanfiction (fanfic): Fiction written by a fan of a particular popular cultural artifact. For instance *Hunger Games* fanfiction are stories written about the novel *The Hunger Games*.

Fangirl: Fangirl usually refers to a somewhat obsessive female fan. It can be used as a derogatory term or a compliment to the depth of a fan's devotion.

Fanzines: A magazine that is produced by fans (usually amateurs) from a particular fandom. Can be found in print or online.

On Alert: A preference setting that can be used within fanfiction.net to have an email message to "alert" the reader of new postings from favoured writers.

Suckfic: A shortened form of 'sucky fiction' it refers to poorly written fanfiction. Suckfic also refers to intentional mocking of other writers' work within a fandom by rewriting someone else's work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Hunger Games, by Suzanne Collins has become a worldwide cultural phenomenon both for the astronomical sales of the 2008 Young Adult novel, but also for the equally enthusiastic response to the blockbuster movies of the trilogy. After reading, many teens bounced into their library eager to discuss the characters they care about: the protagonist-Katniss, Peeta-Katniss' forced partner in a fight to the death or even Gale, the boy back in District 12 who cares for Katniss in ways neither have yet been able to explore. The perceived brutality of the people of Capitol City and the different 'Districts' where the characters originate form the foundations of their interest. Both the story and the characters have become important to readers and the source for young readers (and now movie goers), to explore beyond the pages in a myriad of media instantiations. Fanfiction sites based on *The Hunger Games* (Collins) give young people opportunities to interact further with this engaging novel long after the pages or the movies end.

1.1 Origins of Interest

As a secondary school teacher of English Literature and Teacher-Librarian of 18 years, I have experienced first hand the power of stories to shape adolescent identity and culture. Within the communities formed in school, like those within the library and the English classroom, discussions, writing and arguments move adolescents through different perspectives during the shared experience of reading narratives. Seeing how narratives have the power to influence young peoples' identities and spur their imaginations brought me to the study of

children's literature. During a class about digital environments with UBC's Dr. Eric Meyers, I became interested in the idea of extending young adult literature beyond the pages of the book through fan related websites and consequently, extending their reader-experiences. In particular, fanfiction sites, where students wrote their own extensions and different endings to the story demonstrated the powerful opportunities the technology offered to these young readers and writers. The combination of the high interest novel, *The Hunger Games* and the power of personal ownership over their writing in relation to these narratives led to the investigation of *Hunger Games* fanfiction sites.

The young adult novel, *The Hunger Games*, is a powerful pop culture artifact. The tremendous economic success of the book and film series speaks to readers' high interest and deep engagement in this story. This dystopic story, with the brutality and corresponding hypocrisy of the ruling people of Capitol City and even some of the eerily familiar "game versus reality" aspects of the story are just a few of the reasons that teens and adults alike have taken to this story. When I turned to the Internet to investigate, I found many fan websites of *The Hunger Games*. I was further drawn into various fan-lead and organized writing communities or 'fanfiction sites', where ideas from *The Hunger Games* were used as a launch pad for further writing.

On these sites, members post their own stories, explore themes or create new stories of previously unexplored 'Districts' with characters that Collins fully developed or some of her less developed characters. They post and then wait for responses. Readers, mostly fellow posters, comment on what they read. Some responses are reviews and criticism of the story. Other

posts are simple offers of encouragement. Because the members of the group participate as writers, readers, fans, critics and advisors to other writers, it appears they have formed a cultural, literary and social group. Fanfiction sites are more than a collection of people sharing opinions as “fan site” might suggest. These sites are also communities. Learning, teaching, coaching, mentoring, reading, writing fiction, writing literary criticisms and even general fandom are all intricately woven into participation within this community. These ever changing online participatory communities could be considered “communities of practice” as described by Etienne Wenger in his book on an extension of socio-cultural learning theory, *Communities of Practice; Learning, Meaning and Identity*.

These fanfiction sites offer many opportunities for the participants to express themselves in differing and fluid ways. Socio-cultural learning theory suggests that learning is a social process and that various interactions play a fundamental role in our development.

Vygotsky explains:

Properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions (90).

With Vygotsky’s assertion that learning, identity and social interactions are linked, online spaces with multiple textual modalities and many participants that can be observed, provide a foundation for understanding expressions of participants’ identities in formation.

1.2 Research Question and Sub-Questions

Fanfiction Communities as Identity Formative?

At the time that I discovered the kinds of interactions typical of fanfiction sites, I posited there was a reciprocal nature to these communities; participants form the community and form an identity for themselves within the context of the community but in doing so, the community exerts a reciprocal force influencing the members' current and developing identities. This idea was so interesting to me that I went a step further and asked, if using social-cultural learning theory (Vygotsky) applied to this "affinity space" (Gee), what elements of identity development are observable within this community? Does gathering a group of people together in an online environment based on a narrative theme, create the equivalent of a social learning group?

In order to look at the aspects of identity formation in practice, I also asked: Could a fanfiction site be considered a community of practice like other defined communities of practice? For instance, Wenger uses the example of a claims adjustment department as an example of a community of practice. Fan sites serve as active examples of socio-cultural learning theory, (learning through participation). Could I look at those conversations between members and see their identities as writers, readers, critics and fans of *The Hunger Games* as people who are forming identities within this group and are therefore, forming identities in practice?

1.3 Statement of Research Question:

My exploration of *Hunger Games* fanfiction forums is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do young people express their identities as readers and writers in *Hunger Games* fanfiction forums?
2. In what ways do we see these identities formed as part of a community of practice within the fiction forum?

Using the foundation of socio-cultural learning theory (Vygotsky), as expanded and explained in Wenger's *Communities of Practice*, I observed, coded and reflected on the interactions between readers and writers of a young adult novel fanfiction site, and analyzed these exchanges to better understand how they contribute to participants' identity formation.

1.4 Uniqueness and Relevance

At the time of writing, a search of UBC's library journals using the keywords, *The Hunger Games*, I found one thousand and thirty-eight journal articles. When further refined to include 'The Hunger Games and fan fiction' I found sixty-three journal articles, one hundred and thirty-four magazine articles and one hundred and one (e)books related to the topic. The book and its related fanfiction sites have generated a great deal of interest amongst teachers, scholars and fans alike. Educators have leveraged the readers' interest in the novel and suggest multiple topics for class investigation: social justice and violence (Simmons), mathematical probabilities, (Bush and Karp) and disciplinary literacy (Saunders). Kristin Cook's educational discussion of bioethics of engineered creatures within *The Hunger Games* (Cook, et al.) is example of a link for science curriculum. Further, literature based researchers, in a collection of *The Hunger Games* essays in the book, *Of Bread, Blood and the Hunger Games* "Probe the trilogy's meaning using theories grounded in historicism, feminism, humanism, queer theory, as well as cultural,

political, and media studies” (Pharr and Clark). My research uses *The Hunger Games* as a cultural artifact and the original source behind each young person’s impetus to become part of a particular online fanfiction community. Why young adults chose this book in particular is not the aim of this study. There are other researchers who have already blazed trails into online communities, social learning, fanfiction, computer mediated environments and online writing. I used Wenger’s *Communities of Practice* “identities in practice characterizations” (149), as the structure for investigating identity expressions within a *Hunger Games* fanfiction forum.

Looking at the online practices of young people is an area of growing research as researchers attempt to understand what, how and why young people are learning within these relatively newly created communities. There are many predictions of extensive use of online learning groups as an alternative to current physical learning spaces (schools/libraries). British Columbia’s Ministry of Education on their 21st Century Learning webpages describes the new model they are working toward: “In its 10th report in 2007, the Premier’s Technology Committee (PTC) identified technology and e-learning as central to addressing future skill shortages in the work force, particularly in rural areas of the province. The PTC described, “‘blended learning’ – technology-enhanced learning that is both online and in the classroom– as an effective approach to enhance education” (The Government of British Columbia). If educators and librarians alike are going to use these online communities not only as self-selected learning environments but as prescriptive learning environments, it is important that they try to learn as much as possible about the interactions of the young people who engage in this kind of online social learning. The participants in these fanfiction forums are already

involved in online learning communities of choice. As a researcher, this provides me opportunities to look at these online groups in their most ideal form, where the participation is completely optional. This may give me some ideas of what the same but prescribed environment might look like. Insights here could help librarians and teachers create, monitor and mentor communities of interested members. Online practices for young people are still a developing area of research and the public nature of these conversations between writers, reviewers, critics can provide insight into the learning in practice.

1.5 Relevant Concepts

1.5.1 Identity Defined

This study employs Wenger's definition of "identity" from his 1998 text, *Communities of Practice*. "Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other. It avoids a simplistic individual-social dichotomy without doing away with the distinction. The resulting perspective is neither individualistic nor abstractly institutional or societal" (145). The word that is most important for the purposes of this discussion is "pivot". Rather than seeing identity as static, the term pivot asks us to think of identity as fluid within varying social contexts (145).

1.5.2 What is Fanfiction?

According to Bronwen Thomas:

The term fanfiction (sometimes abbreviated as fanfic) refers to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a 'canon' of works; these fan-created narratives often take the pre-existing storyworld in a new, sometimes bizarre, direction. While the activities of fans may take many forms, writing stories deriving from one or more source texts has long been the most popular way of concretizing and disseminating their passion for a particular fictional universe (B. Thomas 1).

Fanfiction sites or forums are webpages of posted shared and reviewed stories on websites devoted to a particular subject such as *The Hunger Games* where fans or interested individuals take already created stories, structures or characters and revise or rewrite them for their own purposes. These groups of writers, readers, fans, collect around a particular movie franchise, television show, comic book or novel to create a space devoted to that particular narrative.

At the core of all fanfiction is the idea of "textual poaching". According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication*, textual poaching is "The subversive appropriation of mass media texts (or of characters within them) by fans for their own pleasure. The concept has been popularized by Jenkins, but the term was originated by de Certeau" (Chandler). Textual poaching has a dual meaning and use within fanfiction. The original poaching occurs when the writers in the fandom take material from the primary subject, in this case, Collin's *The Hunger Games*. The very fact that all the writers are 'poaching' from the same source is part of the

communion of this group. According to Jenkins, "Poaching, to me, captured that process of negotiating over the meaning of the text, and the terms of their relations with producers" (Jenkins xxi).

The other kind of textual poaching refers to how fans relate to how other fans and owners interact with their "poached" materials. Jenkins explains in his book, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, "Similarly the fans often cast themselves not as poachers but as loyalists, rescuing essential elements of the primary text "misused" by those who maintain copyright control over the program materials. Respecting literary property even as they seek to appropriate it for their own uses, these fans become reluctant poachers, hesitant about their relationship to the program text, uneasy about the degree of manipulation they can "legitimately" perform on its materials, policing each other for "abuses" of their interpretive license" (Jenkins 41). In a sense, participants in fandoms 'poach' the other poachers, namely the other fanfiction producers and copyright holders of the original work. In Jenkin's earlier 1992 book, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, he explains that there are social norms that are expectations of what is acceptable poaching. He suggests, "They [fans] are nevertheless responsive to the somewhat more subtle demands placed upon them as members of fandom-expectations about what narratives are "appropriate" for fannish interest, what interpretations are "legitimate", and so forth" (88). Failure for contributors to conform to those group norms may even result in negative responses such as a practice known as 'hacking' or 'suckfic'. According to Fiona Carruthers, "Instead of poaching the television show, appropriating and extracting various meanings, whether implicit

or explicit, from its structure, hackers essentially poach the poachers, stalking members of the fan fiction community across cyberspace and penetrating their works by literally imposing their voices upon the text. Hackers seek out 'bad' fan fiction, fan writings which, for the hacker, do not meet a satisfactory standard of writing and 'hack' the stories, inserting their own mocking comments into the body of the original text" (Carruthers). This mocking and critical writing is called 'suckfic'. Because it comes from within the fandom world, it can establish normalizing behaviors within the community but can also be a fractious and negative act within the group. These pressures from the group, whether direct such as 'suckfic' or in subtler pressure through group norms or habits, influence the participants' behaviors and norms, and therefore their identities.

The writing in *Hunger Games* fanfiction sites can take many forms: art, illustrations, comics, poetry, short stories, plays, scripts and even chapters of developing novels. Writers use aspects of the story and change them such as: pairing up different characters who were not involved in the novel (called 'shippers'); writing detailed stories about minor characters; creating new beginnings or endings; and even writing erotic stories involving characters from the story. Each writing community has its own set of guidelines and expectations for posting and responding. These sites are their own entities and exist only as long as there are people to contribute and maintain the spaces. As was the case of www.thegirlonfire.com, a very popular fanfiction site that no longer exists, submissions could be anything related to *The Hunger*

Games, “As long as it is quality writing” (www.tgof.com)¹. Members of www.hungergamestrilogy.com/fansite/ also no longer operating, did not have the same community expectations of high quality writing, just an expectation to read, respond and write. According to their website section labeled, ‘The Rules’, “I guess you could say we are just trying to reform the place to a more structured (but still fun!) forums” (www.hgt.com)². There are social norms as well as jargon related to fanfiction sites. For instance, if readers choose only to read and enjoy other people’s writing without responding they are called a lurker and the practice is somewhat frowned upon by members hoping for participation. On some fan sites, like the *subreddit* fanfiction pages of www.reddit.com there are guidelines for participants: “Reddiquette is an informal expression of the values of many redditors, as written by redditors themselves. Please abide by it as best you can” (pinwale). Other fanfiction sites such as www.archiveofourown.org have detailed terms of service agreements that participants must accept to post on the site. Specifically, their terms of service include statements on diversity, privacy, harassment and age of users (Organization of Transformative Works).

These guidelines and expectations help to form the community of writers and the individuals who gather together based on their shared interest in the original material. These community expectations, whether they are explicit, or implicit, whether they are blatantly coercive or gentle, guide and normalize the behavior of the members and guests alike. The

¹ www.tgof.com is a website taken over by a domain name company. Going to the page results in an automatic redirect.

² www.hgt.com results in the message, 404 URL not found.

guidelines and expectations are formative in nature. *The Hunger Games* fanfiction sites provide a window into the participants' identities in these online communities.

1.5.3 Hunger Games Fanfiction-A Liminal Space

Fanfiction sites are liminal by their very nature. The transitional nature of fanfiction refers to the practical realities of the ever-changing face of the Internet. As in the case of previously visited *Hunger Games* fanfiction sites for research, www.thehungergamestriology.com and www.thegirlonfire.com both no longer exist in cyberspace. Liminal also refers to the changing internal conditions of the fanfiction participants. When young people search out an online group to connect with others who have also read the same book, the possibilities of what they will encounter are only limited by the parameters of the sites they visit. Fanfiction sites are by their nature constantly changing. The participants themselves become part of this fluid state of being while they communicate, contribute and participate.

1.6 Identity and Participation

Many scholars point specifically at group online practices as opportunities for identity development. According to David Shaffer online games [and online communities], can support a wide range of learning outcomes, social and cognitive development and are “powerful tools to develop the skills, knowledge, identities, values, and epistemology of that community” (164). He also suggests participation (in online games), gives the participant agency. Developing agency and a sense of self is identity development. Ito, uses Lave and Wenger’s argument from

their book *Situated Learning* (1991), that learning is an act of participation within communities of practice rather than on individual cognitive practices (Ito 13). Alvermann suggests that producing online content is an opportunity for rewriting social identities. “Self portrayals” such as “avatars and profiles” as well as “Online social networking communities such as MySpace provide opportunities for young people to write read, and speak their worlds into existence. They also afford windows into the processes young people use to reinvent themselves” (Alvermann 12-13). Guzzetti suggests young people form their social identities through their online interactions (Alvermann 13).

Laura Beals and Marina Bers look at online practices through a developmental lens. From an Eriksonian perspective, “‘identity versus role confusion’ of adolescence, the question, ‘Who am I?’ becomes important” (Beals and Bers 53). Beals and Bers, suggest that for teens, communication is more than the Vygotsky-esque idea of language acquisition within social settings as part of development, but “aid in the establishment of interpersonal connections and identity construction...Adolescents use online communication tools such as instant messaging and social networks to reinforce existing relationships, both friendships and romantic relationships, and to check out the potential of new entrants into their offline world (Subrahmayam and Greenfield 2008)” (Beals and Bers 57). Social needs, including developing a sense of identity, are met through participation in online communities.

Because of the actions participants take within the *Hunger Games* fandom, they are forming identity. Their identities are altered because they are presented with different points of view. Further, their identities are changed because they give and receive direct feedback.

Identity itself is liminal. It is this intersection of place, space, time and people who exist within an ever changing and ever-changeable state where this study observes expressions of identity and identity formation. From an educational and perhaps almost anthropological point of view, it is interesting to see a snapshot of the words these participants use when they communicate with one and another in these ever-changing, fluid places and spaces. At the very least, this study provides researchers the opportunity to simply note how things are in this time and place in the cyber world's development.

1.7 Special Notes

Fanfiction writers will be referred to with the pronoun "she" as the gender of the writers is largely unknown.

For easier reading, citation webpage numbers have been truncated by removing the first part of the address. For instance, Dust Writer <http://www.fanfiction.net/s/9903005/1/A-Journey-North>), appears as: (DustWriter /s/9903005/1/A-Journey-North).

Fanfiction quotes have been left in their raw format for clear representation of how and what was said.

1.8 Summary of Chapter 1

In this chapter, I introduced the study, key terms and research questions. My background as a teacher and a librarian propelled me to learn more about existing online practices of members of a fanfiction forum based on a young adult novel. I explained key concepts relevant to this study. Readers should have a basic understanding of fanfiction, liminal

spaces and Wenger's definition of identity that I used to inform my study. Finally, I briefly explained the link other researchers have made between online participation and identity development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the literature review chapter, I outline the central elements of socio-cultural learning theory (Vygotsky) and the model based upon this theory, community of practice (Wenger) that inform both the methodology and analysis of the following research. In particular, I have included information related to identity in online practices. I compare several related models for online learning and social places including Ito's 'connected learning' and Gee's 'affinity spaces' in contrast with Wenger's 'community of practice'. Also, I review essential academic discourse on computer mediated communications and online practices that are relevant to online fanfiction forums. I also include key concepts related to fanfiction.

2.2 Fanfiction, Affinity Spaces and Online Communities

The goal of this research is to observe and identify the expressions of identity that occur during member exchanges at personal learning and developmental levels, within a particular fanfiction website in order to better understand online learning communities. By developmental, I refer to development in identity within the particular context of the online community. An understanding of fanfiction itself as both a cultural entity and also as a socio-cultural learning space will aid in understanding some of the more nuanced aspects of the application of socio-cultural learning theories as applied within a computer mediated environment and then ideally, to understand identity formation.

The pioneering research of the online world by researchers Jenkins, Gee, Black and Bacon-Smith explain online practices from different perspectives. Jenkins uses the term 'Fan

Fiction’, Black refers to fanfiction forums as ‘Information Communication Technologies’ whereas Gee calls them ‘affinity spaces’. Though there are varying definitions of fanfiction, all of these researchers agree they contain elements of community, culture and also are participatory in nature. In James Paul Gee’s work, *What Video Games Have To Teach Us about Language, Learning, and Literacy*, he defines ‘affinity spaces’ as people associated with a “given semiotic domain” (47) of “people who have an affinity for the content and share endeavors in regard to that content” (197). Rebecca Black describes fanfiction sites as spaces in which “cultural, historical, ideological and semiotic elements of available media often simultaneously converge, are redesigned, and then redistributed through various information and communications technologies (ICT’s)” (Black 19). Black’s definition of ICT’s connects on several levels with Wenger’s social learning theory of “Communities of Practice” applied to fanfiction. They both see the learning and developing as part of the emergent nature of these social groups. Black’s discussion of the semiotics of these technologies mirrors Wenger’s elements of learning communities “whose practice it is to keep alive the tension between competence and experience” (148). Both Black and Wenger recognize fanfiction sites/communities respectively, as collections of people and ideas as well as places of active learning.

Jenkins refers to the democratization of the writing world, as fanfiction tends to be dominated by women (as far as we know given the anonymity of fanfiction). He also notes writers within these communities are “reclaiming marginalized characters” (92) by rewriting them to serve the writers’ own sensibilities. It stands to reason, if participants in these fanfiction websites are as he says, ‘reclaiming marginalized characters’, the writers are also

reclaiming the onus/agency over the use and identification with (or as) these characters. A change in onus or agency also seems to suggest changes to identity through participation. Jenkins' extensive research speaks to the identity of the participants as mostly female writer participants and investigates their identity within the group context and within a global group context. There is no way to tell the ages of the participants in the fanfiction sites I investigated. I do hope that some of the participants are young people because of the connection to a young adult novel. However, it's the learning and community engagement that matters particularly to this research.

In her book, *Science Fiction Culture*, Camille Bacon-Smith suggests that science fiction 'fandoms', (which refers to an original text or franchise on which a fanfiction story is based) (Coleman 97) are "preponderantly women [who] can come together in a lived community structure according to women's ideas of what that means" (Bacon-Smith 115). Bacon-Smith suggests that the move to science fiction online or pre-blog sites, 'fanzines', collections of women's fanfiction published and posted, was as a response to a backlash against women writers in science fiction in the 1980's (109-134). She points to the absence of recognition of women writers in "popular cultural media ventures [fanzines]", a genre that was already "a subfield of a larger field, science fiction, which [had] itself become snubbed by academe" (113). She also quotes a fan, Jailbait, who suggests that it may be a "sense of alienation which brought people into fandom in the first place" (156). This sense of separation or "alienation" as she suggests helps us understand fanfiction sites as cultural groups unto themselves. The people who have moved towards these groups and these spaces are choosing to move away

from the perceived mainstream doctrine and are moving toward a collective. They actively participate in the creation of fanfiction sites.

Bacon-Smith's important research of both the alienation felt and the belonging sought and found within fanfiction sites leaves room to explore both the dynamics of the participants' reciprocal, possibly formative, relationships online and although she speaks to motivation and self-identification, she does not specifically delve into the cause and effect of those relationships of the members of the community. Her references to behaviors and cultural norms within the context of the group help define fanfiction sites as 'communities of practice'.

Scholars such as Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger as well as Heather Urbanski discuss the importance of the different kind of learning and developing environment that online communities provide youth. Urbanski references the "blurred lines between traditional roles of creator and audience in Participatory media" (3). Teens now have the opportunity to engage in a medium (writing, publishing and reviewing) that was previously limited to professionals. Students can publish and critique writing. Lave and Wenger make a compelling case for apprentice-style learning that they call, "situated learning". Rather than focusing on instruction, students engage in active learning through participation. Watching and learning while writing and receiving coaching and guidance where appropriate, completes the learning cycle.

Aside from understanding the basic function and use of fanfiction sites and the sense of alienation that brought many "fans" together in the first place, it is important to look at these fluid cyber spaces as socio-cultural learning places. The theories that have been used to investigate other online groups previously and the theories to be used specifically in this study

need to be addressed. Wenger's *Communities of Practice* is the foundational text and theory that I use to help define the aspects of identity that are observably changed, influenced or highlighted within these particular communities from a socio-cultural perspective.

2.3 Socio-Cultural Learning Theory: Vygotsky's Foundations

Wenger is considered a neo-Vygotskian so an understanding of Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory will aid in explaining Wenger's use and application of his community of practice theory. Vygotsky's social development theory (socio-cultural learning theory in broader terms), argues, social interaction precedes development, consciousness and cognition are the end product of socialization and social behavior: "All the higher [cognitive] functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (57). In his book, *Mind in Society*, Vygotsky delves into psychological aspects of social development of the individual and of society. "Learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function" (90). There are three major components to his theory. First, authentic social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of understanding of child development. Second, learning involves, 'The More Knowledgeable Other', who is anyone who has a higher level of knowledge or expertise than the learner. Often these people are teachers, coaches, adults but they can also be other children with a higher proficiency level on the given task. Third, 'Zone of Proximal Development' which Vygotsky wrote, is "the distance between the [child's] actual developmental level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (86). The central feature of Vygotsky's theory that shifts into Wenger's research is the idea that

cognition, development; learning and social interactions are intertwined and dependent on each other. The implications move past a single child's development of language acquisition and problem solving skills and goes further to explain how people learn, master new skills, and influence other generations.

2.4 Community of Practice

Wenger's states his community of practice theory, is a "kind of social theory of learning [he] proposes is not a replacement for other theories of learning that address other aspects of the problem" (3). The primary focus of his theory is on learning as social participation. Wenger uses Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory as the basis for his theory on group learning 'communities of practice' and extrapolates this practice about an employee group in a workplace. Vygotsky's theory centers on the idea that social interaction plays a fundamental part in learning. In particular, Wenger uses Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' in his own theory around social learning in groups and further, into work places that become *Communities in Practice*. Learning occurs within the framework of what the child/person is able to understand and the social conditions that support that development. In a group context, coaching, mentoring and developing complex skills all support the learning and development of the child (employee) through her own active participation (Vygotsky). Wenger explores the elements of social participation and labels these groups as "communities of practice". Wenger explains his understanding of socio-cultural learning theory:

What if we adopted a different perspective, one that placed learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world? What if we

assumed that learning is as much a part of our human nature as eating or sleeping, that is both life-sustaining and inevitable, and that-given a chance-we are quite good at it? And what if, in addition, we assumed that learning is, in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting out own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing? (3)

In Wenger's book, *Communities of Practice*, he uses his community of practice model on a medical claims processing center in the US. In an ethnographic study, Wenger follows the staff as they process health insurance claims to a private insurance company. He connects the social learning theory to the construction of a "local practice" that makes the demands of a particularly technical work possible and takes into account realities of the work in practice:

1. Provides resolutions to conflicts such as contradictions between measure and work-for instance, processing claims versus time on the phone.
2. Supports a communal memory that allows individuals to do their work without knowing everything
3. Helps newcomers join the community by participating in the practice
4. Generates specific perspectives and terms to accomplish what needs to be done
5. Makes the job habitable by creating an atmosphere in which the monotonous and meaningless aspects of the job are woven into the ritual customs, stories, events, dramas and rhythms of community life. (Wenger 46)

Wenger explains, "The concept of *practice* connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we

do. In this sense, practice is always social practice” (47). He uses many descriptive words to help explain that these communities have a culture that is both visible and invisible to the outsider’s eyes. He refers to, “explicit and tacit, what is said and unsaid, what is represented and what is assumed, language, tools, documents, images, symbols, untold rules of thumb, subtle cues, tacit conventions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions” (47) and many more to allude to the complexity and layers to membership in a community of practice. He refers to the group practice through which we exercise “common sense through mutual engagement” (47). Wenger’s work here in trying to define what happens within a social context both to the participant and to the collective group makes this theory valuable in its application to online communities.

If we are able to assume that many kinds of learning occurs within a social context as Wenger would suggest and further, that identities are both formed and forming as a result of participation within that group-learning context, then we are able to investigate identity formation within the context of group learning. In my study, the group learning occurs within *The Hunger Games* online fanfiction writing and reading community. The conversations between fans (readers and writers), are the window into the ways in which participation in this group have influence or some sort of symbiotic relationship to the development of a young person’s identity. Why then use Wenger’s *Communities of Practice* as the extension model of socio-cultural learning theory for this investigation?

In Wenger’s introduction to his book, *Communities of Practice*, he explains the merits of the community of practice or (CoP) model. He suggests that CoP is “not a replacement for

other theories” but it does have “it’s own set of assumptions and its own focus” (3). He further explains that his model offers, “a coherent level of analysis [that] yields a conceptual framework from which we derive a consistent set of general principles”. These general principles and framework allows for “recommendations for understanding and enabling learning.” (3)

2.5 Wenger’s General Principles for a Conceptual Framework:

1. We are social beings
2. Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprise
3. Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises-active engagement of the world
4. Meaning-our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful-is what learning is to produce (4).

In their book, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Learning*, Lave & Wenger use the concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* –to broaden the traditional connotation of apprenticeship (learning on the job)—to one of changing participation and identity transformation in CoP. Wenger notes that although the concepts of identity are recognized, they are largely left unanalyzed. This provides other researchers opportunities to explore the expression of identity as an important part of a “community of practice” (11). “The primary focus of this theory is learning as social participation, this shapes what we do but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (4).

2.6 Wenger's Categories of Identity in Practice

Within Wenger's book, *Communities of Practice*, he defines five aspects (or characterizations) of 'identity in practice'. These categories form the source for identifying how identities are formed within these online communities. The following are Wenger's characterizations of identity in practice:

Identity as a Negotiated Experience: We define ourselves by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves.

Identity as a Community Membership: We define who we are by the familiar and unfamiliar.

Identity as a Learning Trajectory: We define who we are by where we have been and where we are going.

Identity as a Nexus of Multi-membership: We define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity.

Identity as a Relation Between the Local and the Global: We define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses (149).

2.7 Comparing Fanfiction Research

There are many different models and theories for researching online learning behaviors. Jen Scott Curwood uses James Paul Gee's foundational research of an online 'affinity space' to discuss the ways in which adolescents are able to further their literacy practices. Rather than

discussing the ways that students form their identities as participants within 'affinity spaces', she discusses the opportunities for literary engagement by using Gee's basic principles: self directed engagement, collaboration and multiple paths toward participation. (Curwood 422)

Although Gee's 'affinity space' is a more contemporary model of online practices, I made the choice to use Wenger's community of practice for my study. During an interview for the journal, *Language and Intercultural Communication*, (LAIC), James Paul Gee speaks to why he prefers to think of 'affinity spaces' and the individual participation within a context rather than looking at fanfiction sites as a community of practice. During the interview with St. Clair, Gee voices a particular concern with the "baggage" the word "community" carries as his reason for not using the specific structure of the socio-cultural learning theory associated with Wenger's community of practice (qtd. in St Clair 94). Gee goes on further to explain, "The play with real and virtual identities, the many different routes to participation and status, the recruitment of diverse skill sets, the ways in which 'ordinary' people can be producers and not just consumers, and the porousness and flexibility of 'membership' that these new digital (and often partly virtual, partly real) spaces allow holds out, for me, real promise of new practices for equity and a sense of belonging and agency for people" (qtd. in St Clair 94). Gee's sense of the fluidity or "porousness" of the membership does not dismiss or negate Wenger's similar assertion that membership is always changing due to the "pivotal" nature of identity formation within a social context and liminal aspects of both identity and the online groups.

For this study, the distinction between the merits of using the lens of Wenger's 'community of practice' theorem over Gee's 'affinity space' model is in the focus. Using the

structure of the identity from “stages of identity in practice” (149), allows me to more specifically focus on identity formed as a direct result of participation as delineated by Wenger. This focus on identity is as one of a particular group or community rather than the broader discourse of the individual’s selective participation within a group and their differentiated roles within that space. The study is not as much about their differing personal journeys in multiple contexts, I am asking what kids are doing and how their identities are developing in this particular social learning participation context.

I see the word ‘community’ and the resultant community participation as an important part of any learning, growing, doing, experience. In any social practice there is an exchange that occurs with or without intention with the other people who participate in the same experience. In Wenger’s own words, “the primary focus of this theory is learning as social participation...Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (4). For the purposes of this study, looking specifically at markers for influence or development of identity within these online communities, Wenger’s communities of practice model seems to offer the most coherent structure.

In comparison, researchers, Curwood, Lammers and Magnifico in their article, *Writing in the Wild: Writers' Motivation in Fan-Based Affinity Spaces*, suggest that a broadened use of Gee’s origins of ‘affinity spaces’ offers an appropriate methodology in an ethnographic study of online literacy practices. “We argue that affinity spaces function in ways that knowledge is effectively distributed across learners, objects, tools, symbols, technologies and the environment (Curwood, Lammers and Magnifico 44). Whereas, “At the same time, Situated

Cognition and Discourse theorists (Gee 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) might argue that the ways in which technology seeps into literacy practices would depend heavily on the specific communities and the ways in which the new tools are or are not taken up” (Curwood, Lammers and Magnifico 48). Although both Gee’s research from 2004 and Curwood/Lammers/Magnifico’s research from 2012 are both more contemporary than that of Wenger’s research in 1998, Wenger’s community dependent model is more helpful when looking at a specific young adult novel driven community of learners and the effect that community has on the identity of the participants. Wenger’s model, which depends on the community, mirrors the focus my research questions pose. I investigate identity in relation to the members’ participation in this one particular online group and I wonder what effect participating within this particular context/community, which makes this approach most applicable.

Another study, by Angela Thomas published in 2005, follows 60 children involved in an online community based on J.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. She focuses on these children’s group learning practices from a Wenger communities of practice perspective. She makes a similar argument, that a community of practice provides a clear model for investigating children’s learning as part of a group, essentially a Vygotskian-approach to social learning without the specific intervention of a teacher or coach. However, her research differs from this project by method, using direct discussions with the students whereas I observed online discussions between writers on a forum. Further, her aim differs as she investigated the interactive process of group achievement and problem solving whereas I investigated the

individual experience of identity formation as a consequence of group learning based on a shared interest (A. Thomas). I am heartened to see other researchers investigating the many ways in which learning occurs in these self-selected social networks.

Another learning model that explores online learning is called 'connected learning'. Although Mizuko Ito's "'connected learning' addresses the gap between in-school and out-of-school learning, intergenerational disconnects, and new equity gaps arising from the privatization of learning" (Ito, Gutierrez and Livingstone 3), its general focus is more toward the success of the learning and the resultant positive behaviors. The authors conclude, "connected learning is realized when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success or civic engagement. This model is based on evidence that the most resilient, adaptive, and effective learning involves individual interest as well as social support to overcome adversity and provide recognition" (Ito, Gutierrez and Livingstone 4). In terms of research that hopes to observe identity development and influence rather than the successful learning of the participants, Wenger's, communities of practice offers and "yields a conceptual framework from which we derive a consistent set of general principles." (2)

2.8 Socio-Cultural Learning Theory and Community of Practice

The Group Helps to Form Identities

In Vygotskian terms, the fanfiction site is the tool or mediated environment through which individuals come to understand their role in the world. Although the online communities under investigation are related to a specific original narrative, it is important to note the

individuals who make up these communities have an important role in the identities created within that community. Research from the field of socio-cultural learning theory and the application of the same principles as related to media is extensive. Vygotsky's original works from the early 1930's stresses the importance of our mediated relationship between ourselves and our world, or, "the symbolic, functional, or socially constructed artifacts that 'mediate' between humans and their world" (52-57). He further suggests that cultural development occurs, "as an interpersonal process [and then is] transformed into an intrapersonal one" (57). Looking at the group helps to understand the individual. Within online fanfiction culture, I observe the role of mediation the fanfiction site plays and the affect the group itself has on the formation of identities within that particular cultural framework. Galda and Beach combine socio-cultural learning theory with literary theory to posit that reading and participation in literary practices is individual, social and cultural. When teens participate in these narrative communities, they are influenced and formed by their performance of identity in the group and form the social and cultural construct that forms the environment in which they develop their own identities (Galda). The group participation becomes a reciprocal event, they form the group and group helps to form them.

New media theorists such as Bacon-Smith, Henry Jenkins and Rebecca Black all discuss in some form the different aspects of unique online writing communities (fanfiction) that are identity forming. Jenkins points to the cooperative nature in these online writing groups as a particularly strong force of community bonding. "That creates a channel in which the reader can become a writer, the writer is always a reader, the roles are not as rigidly bound up apart

from each other, and that sense of possessiveness and profiteering is absent, in favour of a sense of community, of sharing, of giving back” (Jenkins 92). Brian Street discusses literacy as a social practice and can be seen within the fanfiction sites. “Literacy practices, then, refer to the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts. A key issue, at both a methodological and an empirical level, then, is how to characterize the shift from observing literacy events to conceptualizing literacy practices” (Street 79). The simple construct of becoming what we do happens during the practice of literacy. The participants develop their identities as individual writers, consumers and critics of written words. They also develop their identities as contributors in popular cultural and in a larger context, cultural literacy practices: “Gee distinguishes between the well known notion of “Communities of Practice” in which novices learn through apprenticeship and scaffolding in their interactions with experts (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and an alternative construct for looking at learning; that of *affinity spaces*” (Black 117). The grouping itself, of like-minded individuals shapes both the individuals and the group—a reciprocal, social development model. Kate Allen agrees and suggests that adolescents who are reading Manga allow the readers to become part of that [fanfiction] community. “In these [literacy] events, personal experience is being shared, ideas are being negotiated, the self is being exposed, and the result is not an authoritative “right” or “wrong” verdict, but a conversation or debate about matters of shared value (Myers *et al*, 2000: 87)” (Allen 270). It is that give and take, learn and teach, read and write, be an individual and part of the collective consciousness that makes these ‘affinity spaces’ so powerful to individual and community development of the adolescent. Williams posits that

students' participation in online communities helps them develop important literate practices such as how to refer to themselves, how to make appropriate comments within a context and how to establish an appropriate ethos (Williams 682-686). They also learn to write for a particular audience and how to interpret feedback. Literacy skills are built within these particular communities and Williams helps to identify some of the less obvious ways this is true.

Wenger refers to the practice of negotiation of "being a person" in a particular context as identity formation within a community of practice (149). He refers to identity in practice as having five parallel themes between practice and identity. This study uses his characterizations of these identities in practice for the purposes of coding participants' commentaries to one and another after they post to the fanfiction site: identity as negotiated experience, identity as community membership, identity as learning trajectory, identity as nexus of multi-membership and identity as a relation between the local and the global (149). I focused on the comments/reviews between readers and writers and used the confines of these categories to observe expressions of identity.

2.9 Summary of Literature Review

Throughout the research on social learning theory, online communities, identity formation and online communications as well as discourse analysis, there is a common theme from researchers—they see a connection between the groups of people and the text which links them. New media theorists like Gee, Black, Jenkins, Bacon-Smith and Street offer important ideas and information regarding online practices however, it is the works of Vygotsky, Lave and Wenger that provide the essential research models that informed my own research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

My research has several components. I had many choices to make in order to find representational communication within a fanfiction sites based on a young adult novel for this study. In the methodology chapter, I describe the criteria I used for the choices made regarding the research subject materials including the source novel, the related fanfiction site, the writers to sample and which stories of those writers to follow. I explain how I approached gathering data in the community and how I operationalized Wenger's identities in practice to create a coding rubric. Further, I explain the coding process and how I reviewed the final data. By the end of this chapter, the reader should have an understanding both of what I did during the research process and why I made the choices that I did.

3.2 Choosing the Text

Choosing the text for my study was originally based upon my students' recommendations. With *The Hunger Games* there was a high level of reading interest and in turn, a high level of interest on the Internet. My own enthusiasm for the trilogy cemented the choice. Since making the original choice based upon my students' interest and my own personal preference, I have followed up by checking the statistics on sales of *The Hunger Games* trilogy. According to *Publisher's Weekly* in March 2013, the trilogy had sold 27.7 million copies, with *The Hunger Games* alone selling 11.7 million copies (Robak). Also, according to *Book List Online*, *The Hunger Games* is listed as a book for youth grades 9-12 (Goldsmith). The

movie of the book has grossed over \$400,000,000 at the box office, which speaks to the widespread interest in this particular narrative.

3.3 Choosing a Fanfiction Site

Choosing a fanfiction site based upon a young adult novel has several requirements for the purposes of this study. Due to the anonymous nature of the Internet, simple observation would not provide many clues as to the age of the participants. Although my original hope was to focus on young adults, it is possible that the writer may not be honest about her/his age. I decided to use the site that had a wide variety of stories and reviewers and recent contributions from readers and writers. Within fanfiction.net I went to the section based upon *The Hunger Games* and then more particularly, the section named “communities”. Having rich discussions and multiple examples of feedback provides the most diverse samples for gathering the comments together to see if and how their comments to one and another are identity formative as described by Wenger’s five categories of identity. ‘Fanfiction/Hunger Games/Communities’ seemed the most aptly named section from which to draw from the writers’ conversations for study: <https://www.fanfiction.net/communities/book/Hunger-Games/>

This particular community requires a rating for posting stories and the labels are: K- appropriate for all ages, K+-might not be appropriate for very young children 5+ years old but otherwise fine for children, T-suggests teens 13 years old and up, M- for older teens and adults, MA-mature and definitely adult content. I did not choose any stories that had the MA rating with the thinking, (although not necessarily true), that children wouldn’t typically write stories

with adult only content. Using this site, I followed the posted comments of particular writers' stories and any back and forth conversations between writers and responders that were publicly visible.

3.4 Gathering Data

The first step for gathering data was to familiarize myself with the fanfiction site I had chosen. I visited the selected *Hunger Games* community to get a feel for the activities and interactions that occurred there. I read their stories and profiles and observed their posted comments and reviews. I looked at what kinds of conversations I could see and how the community fit a Wengerian interpretation of a community of practice "as learning as social participation" (4). Wenger writes, "participation refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (4). I spent time getting to know the culture and this fanfiction forum's canon. I interpreted the *Hunger Games* fanfiction site as an example of "active participation" and a "community of practice". From what I observed at this preliminary stage of the investigation, there seemed to be a rich variety of comments and a large number of participants from which I could observe and collect data.

3.5 The Coding Rubric

After determining that I had a representative *Hunger Games* fanfiction site and that there was sufficient community engagement from which I could draw data, I then returned to

Wenger's *Communities of Practice* for the structure of the coding rubric. I used Wenger's five characteristics of identity in practice and operationalized his words as the foundation for a coding rubric. The five characteristics of identity became the five categories or main themes for the coding chart: negotiated practice, community membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multi-membership and nexus of the local and global. Wenger's detailed explanations of each of the characteristics then became the sub themes for each main theme. The theme of negotiated experience then added the following sub themes: celebrations or rituals of decorum-praise, attaining levels, performance milestones, markers of transition, and reputation-how one is known. The characteristic of community membership included these sub themes: belonging through competence, belonging familiar territory, mutuality of engagement, engaging with other people, play our part of engagement (give & take), negotiability of repertoire-sustained engagement/history of practice, actions and language, and subtleties of practice. The characteristic of learning trajectory included these sub themes for coding: work in progress, participation and reification-becoming, social contexts-temporality of identity, peripheral participation, inbound-newcomers invested in future participation, insider-new events, outbound-lead out or moving on, and boundaries-spanning or linking communities. Nexus of multi-membership included the following sub themes: various forms of membership into one, various identities/constructs of ourselves, influence-social bridges to private selves and different rules and norms (of different relationships). Nexus of the local and global had only two sub themes: lived and shaped identities and broader perspective-a global context. These themes and sub themes then formed the foundation for the coding rubric.

Once I had the assembled Wenger's themes and sub themes into the coding rubric, I used my experience and knowledge of the fanfiction site to assign Wenger's identities in practice a fanfiction context. I matched his characteristics' markers with what seemed to be parallel examples the writing community. For instance, celebrations-rituals of decorum or praise from Wenger's claims adjustment community of practice is seen in the celebration of Sara's birthday by singing and having cake (26) or Nancy "reassuring" Ariel with a smile (30). In a fanfiction forum, celebrations-rituals of decorum most often occur as praise. An example of this sub theme occurs when a reader praises a writer's story: "I could not stop reading this story, it was so good" (MockingjaysAndDandelions /r/8153095/0/3/). These two examples, one from Wenger's community of practice and one from a fanfiction forum are both versions of a pat on the back. With a clear example of a community of practice identity marker in a fanfiction context, I then used the explanation and example to guide my filtering and coding process. Please see Appendices A-D for the complete coding chart. In this particular study, observing the interactions of participants within *The Hunger Games* fanfiction without having direct access or feedback of/from the participants, using a rubric with community of practice exemplars allowed me to keep the context of the interactions as clearly defined as is observable, but still provided for a more emergent look at the collected data.

3.6 Choosing the Writers to Follow

I selected three writers found within the previously mentioned *Hunger Games* forum <https://www.fanfiction.net/communities/book/Hunger-Games/0/4/1/> under the group "Bread&Fire": <https://www.fanfiction.net/community/Bread-Fire/95109/>. Using information

provided within the writers' profiles, I selected writers who could possibly be an adolescent or young adult (although not necessarily). Some hints like comments about parents, homework or school obligations indicated they are young people. In some cases, there were more subtle suggestions of youth like word choices or younger writing content. It is not definitive that the writer is actually a teenager or a young adult; however, even with subtle suggestions, this was a clear way for me to choose from the millions of fanfiction writers online. I also looked for writers who had multiple *Hunger Games* stories from which I could choose. The final criteria were that the writer had to have many reviews to be able to sample the ongoing conversations among the various respondents.

3.6.1 Writers' Profiles

Rose.A.Love identifies herself as an American female and remarks on her artistic nature. Although she does not say her age, there are a few possible indicators that she may be an adolescent. For instance her word choices like "huge nerd" and the way she describes some of her interests as "different stuff," seem somewhat childish. Later she tells us she's "planning on becoming an author when [she] 'grows up'" and how she's "working on [her] first novel." (A.Rose.Love). Generally, her favourite quotes and a long rant on stereotypes indicated she might be a young adult or adolescent. She also met the selection criteria as she had made recent posts, written multiple stories and had hundreds of reviews.

Dust Writer also identifies herself/himself as an American. Dust Writer does not identify age or gender. He/she has recently updated his/her profile. Dust Writer has seventeen posted

stories and thousands of reviews. Unlike Rose.A.Love, Dust Writer’s word choices seem quite sophisticated but still sound like those of a young adult. She/he identifies herself as a “Writer/actor/editor/shiftless layabout from Brooklyn.” (DustWriter) She/he jokes about the probable success of her/his new screenplay that “wins Oscars and lets [her] get cut off by the Jaws theme as [she] babbles on [her] acceptance speech.” (DustWriter)

The final writer is lam97. She/he identifies herself/himself as German. lam97 also does not identify an age or gender. Some possible indicators of lam97’s age are in the interests and obsessions that seem particularly juvenile. lam97 has Donald Duck as her/his icon and says, “that’s one of my obsessions. I’ve loved Donald since I started reading. He’s AMAZING!” (lam97) lam97 also lists her/his ³ favourite movie as a toss up between “Some Like it Hot and Lion King.” None of these preferences alone prove lam97 is a young person, but together they do hint at the possibility. lam97 also has updated recently, has seven stories and hundreds of reviews.

3.7 Choosing the Stories

Choosing which stories to code was the simplest decision. I chose the most recent *Hunger Games* stories by the preselected authors that had many reviews posted. Most of the stories I chose were multi-chapter stories and had hundreds of reviews. The longer stories allowed for more back and forth contributions from writers and responders. The shorter stories had the same kinds of contributions, just not as many as the longer stories.

³ For ease of discussion from now on, the writers and respondents will be referred to as ‘she’ as a representational pronoun as the gender of the anonymous writers is largely unknown.

3.8 The Coding Process

Beginning with the author's own profile page and their comments at the top of each chapter posted, I copied the comments into the first column of the coding rubric. I included the author, responder and their respective links. Using the coding rubric (see Appendices A-D), I set about sorting the types of exchanges writers and responders were having with one and another. Once the raw data was collected, (over one thousand comments), I reviewed all the coded selections to make sure in retrospect that I had put them into the appropriate theme or subtheme. Finally, with the coding completed, I then began the process of looking at the data from the wider perspective of general observations and visible patterns to the more specific examples of exchanges that suggested possible interpretations. I created six Excel graphs to help understand the frequency of use of the various themes and sub themes. This was also a "messy process" (Kinsella 19) as within each sub theme area, multiple sub themes could be found creating different strands. However, in terms of providing a visual overview of the collected data, I found it to be quite helpful.

3.8.1 Unit of Analysis

Once I collected over one thousand comments taken from the three authors of six different stories given by three hundred and twenty-three different participants, I then used the identities in practice rubric to help determine how best to code by theme and sub theme. I quickly discovered that many of the comments could be categorized under several themes. I then determined that I was coding not at the word level but at the idea level. For instance, "I mean, I'm up to a 100 reviews, which is completely amazing, I never thought this story would

make it so far so thank you, thank you, thank you” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/13/Tick-Tock), falls under several sub themes because of the multiple ideas contained within. Although a fair amount of A.Rose.Love’s comment is coded under the sub theme *celebrations-rituals of decorum or praise* by her statements of thanks and her praise for all the reviews, this comment is also coded under the sub theme *attaining levels*, as she is indicating a fanfiction equivalent of a “marker of progress or completion in her writing”. The result of one statement having multiple ideas means the comment could be coded multiple times. By treating each comment as possibly more than one idea, it meant that many comments were multi-coded. Because of the multi-coding of the comments, there were in fact, one thousand six hundred and ninety six separate ‘ideas’ coded from the one thousand and ten comments of raw data.

3.8.2 Reliability – Trustworthiness

With this kind of deductive qualitative analysis, it is important to note the ways in which I provided internal consistency. I have been observing this particular community for over two years and the comments used for the raw data span a period of three years. My immersion in this community allowed me to be a reliable judge of the different kinds of exchanges that occurred. When I began the coding process, I started with a test set of one hundred and fifty comments and coded using the Wengerian characteristics of identity in practice rubric, then stopped and reviewed. I reviewed the data to that point and further refined my rubric chart with additional description words and examples. I made distinctions between members and guests by citing the source page of the comments and also noted the links to the participants’

profile pages. By making these kinds of distinctions I was able to clarify the roles of insider, in-bound or outbound members. I made other similar refinements. Once I reviewed the test group and updated the coding rubric, I went on to code another eight hundred and fifty comments. As Kinsella suggests, “This can be a messy process, but one that recognizes the complexity of understanding language” (Kinsella 19). When I had completed the coding process, I reviewed the entire data set again looking for patterns and making sure I was as consistent as I could be within the conversational context of a fanfiction forum.

3.9 Methodology Final Thoughts

There were many different decisions and choices that I made that contributed to the resultant raw data that is used in this study. The deductive coding schema I used was based on Wenger’s *Communities of Practice* framework. I explained my rationale for the decisions I made for choosing the source novel, the fanfiction forum, which writers and what stories I observed. I detailed the process I used to create a holistic rubric from Wenger’s five characteristics of identity in practice. I explained in detail the coding process and the ways in which I kept an internal consistency during the coding process.

Chapter 4: Research Observations

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss in detail the data set I collected from one fanfiction forum based on *The Hunger Games*. I will give some general observations and a detailed analysis of the five identity themes and the sub themes. My aim is to explain examples in context to demonstrate where I believe I see evidence of identity expression and identity formation.

4.2 General Observations

From the data I collected, the most surprising and somewhat reassuring overall observation is that the general tone of the exchanges in this fanfiction forum was positive and genial. Given that my purpose for this research was from a teacher-librarian's perspective to observe how young people express their identities when they meet and speak to each other online and how this affects their identity, I was quite relieved by what I observed. My previous experience with online communities had prepared me for a less positive perception. Further, through the coding process, I can say that from Wenger's, *Communities of Practice* perspective these participants seem to be engaged in identity expressive and identity formative behaviors.

Overall, the majority of the comments that I observed were encouraging and positive. Many of the comments were pats on the back for the writers and their stories. This also represented the most represented theme of comment, celebrations-rituals of decorum and praise. However, I noticed the comments were less instructive about the writing process and more detailed discussions about the canon than I would have thought. I suspect far more of the specific commentary on the craft of writing happened at the 'Beta' writer level which was not

observable by the public. Moreover, I found the tone of the exchanges to be supportive and contain varying levels of exuberance. Particularly during the longer stories where readers appeared to be invested in the author's vision of their beloved *Hunger Games*, it was clear that the first solid connection these participants shared was a love for the canon and then the new story that evolved out of that first love.

4.3 By the Numbers

This research is focused on the fanfiction works of three authors of six different stories, containing a combined sixty-eight chapters and 224 039 words. It also included one thousand lines of comments from twelve hundred twenty-three reviews from three hundred and twenty-three different participants. Many comments fell under several sub themes with a total of one thousand six hundred ninety-six entries. The most common theme was negotiated experience and the most common sub theme was 'celebrations-rituals of decorum or praise'. Even though there were areas that were not well represented, I still see this website as a community of practice. Although nexus of multi-membership and nexus of local and global did not have many responses, it is possible that there were many of these kinds of expressions. They just were not visible in the post and respond section of the fanfiction forum. The following graph shows the frequency of the main identity themes.

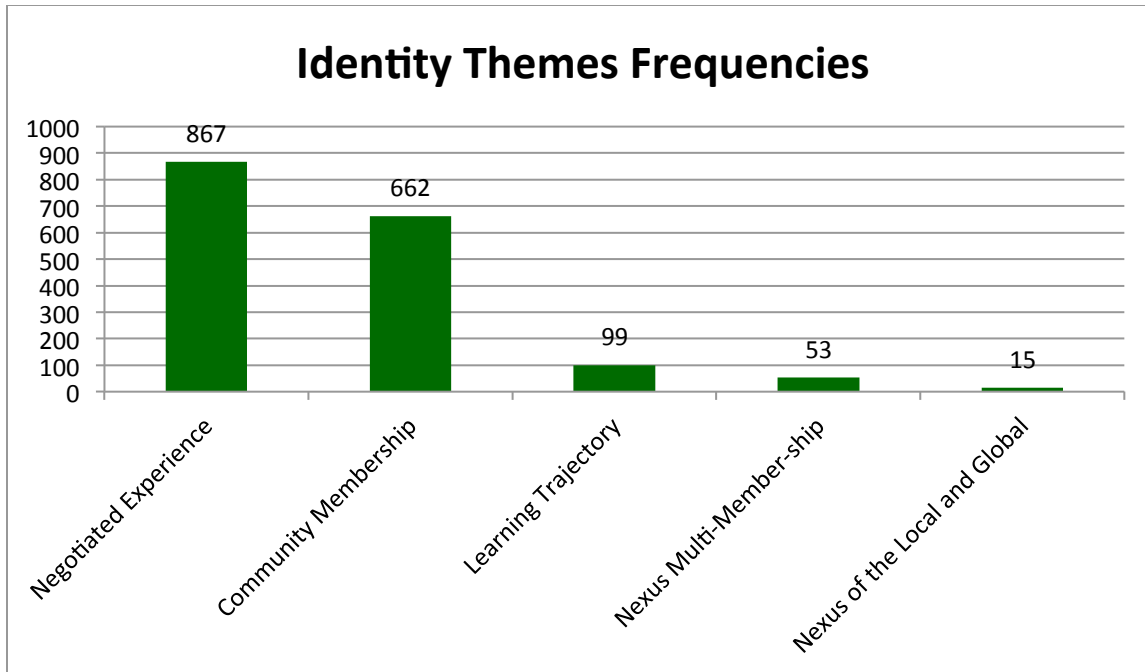


Table 1 Identity Themes Frequencies

4.4 Negotiated Experience

Many of the observed posts used for this study contained some element of a ‘negotiated experience’. Through these posts the participants experienced identity in practice. Wenger states, “The experience of identity in practice is a way of being in the world. It is not the equivalent to a self-image...Who we are lies in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves, though that is of course part (but only part) of the way we live” (151). The social context of the lived experience within this community creates that important (and elusive) pivot point between oneself as an individual in constantly shifting development and that same self, growing and adapting within the group context. The posts I observed provided many opportunities to see expressions of identity and to also see these identities as they are molded and influenced through the community participation.

The following chart shows the range and frequency of the sub themes found within the Negotiated Experience identity theme:

Negotiated Experience Sub Themes Frequencies	
Celebrations or rituals of decorum-praise	795
Celebrations or rituals of decorum-praise / Reputation-how one is known	48
Celebrations or rituals of decorum-praise / Attaining Levels	5
Celebrations or rituals of decorum-praise / Performance Milestones	4
Attaining Levels	3
Performance milestones	3
Markers of Transition	2
Performance milestones/ celebrations or rituals of decorum/ & multi-theme entries	6
Reputation-how one is known	1
Grand Total	867

Table 2 Negotiated Experience Sub Themes Frequencies

4.4.1 Celebrations-Rituals of Decorum or Praise

The most common sub theme within Negotiated Experience, “celebrations-rituals of decorum or praise” is the core of this participatory culture and a reflection of this particular forum’s general practices. Most commonly, participants issued encouragement and praise. These comments range from simple praise and encouragement like, “Love this you must update!” (abk1973 /r/9903005/0/3/), to heartfelt comments like, “Wow. This is just beautiful! Captivating and engaging, with a lovely writing style. You really have something to be proud of!” (Intrepidity-and-Dandelions /r/8139367/), to the written equivalent of gushing or even squealing:

OMG! THIS IS SO EPIC! IT IS AWESOME! I LOVE IT! OMG! THANKKK
YOUUUUUU!1! ITS JUST TOO GOOD 4 WORDS! THIS IS DEFINITELY YOUR BEST
ONE YET! OMG! THANK YOU! I LOOVEEE IT! IT MAKES ME FEEL SO HAPPY! I JUST
LOVE STUFF LIKE THIS! IT WAS AWESOME TO FIND THIS AFTER A DAY'S WORTH
OF HOMEWORK, AND JUST FALL INTO BLISS! THANK YOU! YOU ARE THE BEST
EVERRRRRRRRRR! OMG! THANKS YOU! (Amanda332czx /r/7572849/0/25/).

This praise and encouragement is an important part of the fanfiction forum member participation and was overwhelmingly the most frequent occurrence of written participation.

Wenger defines identity as a 'negotiated experience' as, "We define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves" (149). In these examples, the respondents' compliments are personally directed, using words like "You really have something to be proud of" (Intrepidity-and-Dandelions) and "YOU ARE THE BEST EVERRRRRRRR!" (Amanda332czx). The compliments are also directed to the writing, "Captivating and engaging, with a lovely writing style" (Intrepidity-and-Dandelions) and "you must update soon" (abk1973). The writer then reading these reviews have these words to use as they define, become and reify who they are. The compliments in these cases, being both personal as well as about their writing, provide strong fuel for both identification of the person and the process.

It is interesting to see that in terms of feeding a desire to write and create, at the identity formative level, this community of practice seems to be a powerful resource. However I wondered, how do these writers find themselves as part of this group in the first place? They

would need to, even in some small way, already see themselves or imagine themselves as part of this group. There are soft entry points where people can read and post without committing to the process but again, how do they find themselves there in the first place?

4.4.2 Reputation-How one is Known

Another interesting expression of identity to note is that ‘one’s reputation-how one is known’ was a more frequent sub theme term used than both ‘performance milestones’ or ‘attaining levels’. Within the fanfiction community, it would seem it is more important to be “known” as a good writer and have many members look at your new postings than it was to note awards or particular levels. Respondents would let authors know they liked their previous works or that they had their works “on alert” (to be emailed when there was a new post by that particular author). A.Rose.Love let readers know how much it pleased her to be thought of in this way: “Yay! :D I’m so, so, so very happy/ grateful/ honored by the reviews, alerts, and favorites” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/3/Tick-Tock); And, “The alerts and favorites make me smile, the reviews make my day” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/6/Tick-Tock). Another respondent shares her thoughts on being put on alert: “When you added my story to your alerts, your username immediately drew my attention and I took a look at your profile (hope you don't mind btw) to confirm it was you:)” (DandelionOnFire /r/7572849/0/33/). These participants express their appreciation and continued desire to be “thought of” by their fellow community members. How we think of ourselves within the context of the group, of which we are participants, is an important aspect of forming and reifying our identity.

Through the many differing expressions of ‘negotiated experience’, we are able to see the participants revealing their identities as readers and writers. Through the words they choose in their posts, they note their current state of identity-both by articulating what pleases them and by sharing their personal and writers’ values through the words they choose to express with the other members.

4.4.3 Performance Milestones

Although there are other awards and ways to recognize achievement within a fanfiction forum, the most noteworthy ‘performance milestone’ was in reaching particular numbers of reviews. In the case of lam97, she takes a few moments to acknowledge and thank her “100th” reviewer. In doing so, she is actually congratulating herself for achieving this amount of recognition within the community. “AND NOW A SUPER BIG THANK YOU TO MY 100th REVIEWER Pandora1984 !” (lam97 s/7572849/10/New-experience). lam97 expresses her gratitude to respondent Pandora1984, but in pointing out that it is her “100th” review, she allows herself and the community to celebrate how much attention her story has garnered from the group. As an expression of identity, she highlights herself compared to others.

Another writer congratulates lam97 on “achieving” the performance milestone of one hundred reviews and says she is content with her twenty reviews. However, as she congratulates lam97 she uses the praising commentary as an opportunity to ask people to review her work. “When I read the part about your 100 reviews I was like "WOW! I wish I had 100 reviews!" Hahahhahahaha I'm pretty content with my twenty though, AND I JUST UPDATED!

Check it out ([CharmChaser /r/7572849/0/27/](#)). This example clarifies the importance of how others see each participant within the community. It isn't enough to post stories and comment; it is important to be noticed and recognized by the rest of the community. In receiving praise (and recognition in terms of the performance milestone of the many reviews), the participants see themselves in a bigger context. How many more students might have continued to pursue a solitary talent if they had been able to see and hear the evidence from many people that they were good at what they were doing and that others wanted to see more? In this context, online identities are formed.

4.4.4 Attaining Levels

'Attaining levels' as an expression of identity has a simple role in the fanfiction community. This sub theme became visible when the writer acknowledged his or her own accomplishment in terms of work completion or a new idea that was attempted and was successful. A more complex example occurs when A.Rose.Love notes the encouragement that has pushed her to continue developing her story: "I never thought this story would go anywhere, so thank-you all. It makes me smile and makes my day." (A.Rose.Love [/s/8153095/5/Tick-Tock](#)). A simpler example occurs when the same author lets the community know there is a new chapter to review: "Chapter nine is now officially up" (A.Rose.Love [/s/8153095/9/Tick-Tock](#)). A.Rose.Love recognizes her own accomplishment, even if it is only to note work completion. According to Wenger, "an identity, then, is a layering of events and participation and reification by which we our experience and its social interpretation inform

each other” (151). In Rose.A.Love’s case, her identity formed as she layered what she did with how she reified her experiences with the group context.

4.4.5 Markers of Transition

‘Markers of transition’ are identity expressions that signify where there have been changes in level within the writing or relationship. It is quite subtle and could be confused with aspects of ‘learning trajectory’. In this case, DustWriter informed the community that there was a shift in her writing. “Hello again, long lost land of fanfiction! Apologies for my long absence; I've been working on a screenplay and/or novel based on this fanfiction but I have terrible motivational block. I'm hoping that sharing my work in progress here will spurn me to work faster and get my research done. love the subject matter and frankly, am tired of me holding myself back” (DustWriter /s/9903005/1/A-Journey-North). Dustwriter explains there was a shift in her writing and lets the community know she was moving on to a new level. Her claim of being “tired of holding herself back” demonstrated a developmental shift. She reflected on her own past practice and decided to make a conscious change. Reifying identities is an ongoing process of internalizing and acting on various messages. In this case, the message was from herself but the source was the feeling she got as a result of participating in this community-a powerful instrument of personal change.

4.5 Community Membership

Being part of a community provides a level of the familiar and a place to belong. Wenger states, “our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of

membership but more fundamentally through the competence it entails” (152). Participation in the fanfiction community provides opportunities to engage with others who share a love for the common canon (*The Hunger Games*). Members of the community belong as writers and as fans. They participate in establishing group norms and practices that help to create a sense of the familiar. Throughout the ‘community membership’ identity markers, it appeared that young people were connecting with others in meaningful ways. Whether it is a version of parallel play, or whether they are actively engaging in each other’s stories or requests, the mutuality of engagement makes it appear they are growing as individuals and as a group. According to Vygotsky, “there are highly complex dynamic relationships between developmental and learning processes...” (91). These complex and dynamic relationships that Vygotsky refers to also help explain why in this particular identity category there are many mixed forms of identity markers. A participant can be engaged in the material at hand and also be delving in the more subtle details of the practice, but not using short form/community specific language. The relationships and the practice is both dynamic and complex. The following chart shows the frequency of the various configurations of Community Membership. There were many different configurations within the possible categories as the rubric allowed.



	Total
Community Membership Sub Themes Frequencies	662
Mutuality of engagement	514
Mutuality of engagement / subtleties of practice	68
Mutuality of engagement / engaging in action with others	23
Mutuality of engagement / engaging in action with others / subtleties of practice	11
Mutuality of engagement / Actions and Language	9
Mutuality of engagement / engaging in action with others / play our part in relations give and take	7
Mutuality of engagement / play our part in relations give and take	6
Mutuality of engagement / subtleties of practice / Actions and Languages	4
Mutuality of engagement / belonging	3
Belonging through competence	3
Mutuality of engagement / subtleties of practice / engaging in action with others / play our part in relations given and take and / other multi-theme entries	13
Belonging Familiar Territory	1
Belonging / through competence / familiar territory	1
Actions and Language	1
Our part in relations of engagement give & take	1
Grand Total	663

Table 3 Community Membership Sub Themes Frequencies

The most interesting observation from this category is in the shaping of identity. Within these kinds of comments I saw more of the back and forth among participants and the changes the writers make because of or in spite of the group. Or in contrast, writers simply make independent choices without a visible reason. In this way, identity is a lived behavior. Rather than as Shaffer says, “playing computer games to develop the skills and knowledge, identities, values and epistemology of the gaming community” (164), these members are “playing” at being writers.

4.5.1 Mutuality of Engagement

The first clear link between members was in their shared love of the source material. If not a shared 'love' for *The Hunger Games*, there is at least an interest or passion for the narrative and the characters that brings these participants together. An extraordinary number of the comments were directly related to sharing an opinion about the fanfiction story and its proper or hoped for use of the source material. Sometimes the authors explained or defended the choices they made in regards to the characters or plot: "Oh, I had much fun writing this one;) I don't know if you get why though. But let's just say: How could I forget poor Gale? *grin* And there's nothing funnier to write about than a jealous boy...I know I'm evil" (Iam97 /s/7572849/7/New-experience). Other times members made their opinions clear if they thought the writer handled the material correctly: Hahahahaha, I'm SOOOOOOOOOO glad Katniss admitted that she luhrvs Peeta(': " (CharmChaser /r/7572849/0/31/) and similarly, "You nailed Prim, and this is coming from someone who IS thirteen, so I really saw the connection with her and what I'm growing up with now" (CharmChaser /r/7572849/0/32/).

Participants also engaged in discussions about what characters would or wouldn't have done:

I don't believe you got anyone out of character. Prim's hugs...it's something she would do. Peeta's way of thinking(mainly how he's easily impressed by beautiful things/it says so in *Catching Fire*)...it's something he would do(think this way I mean). And of course Katniss's hesitation...it is HER. I think it's good you still keep it in moderation, though. The first fanfic I've read with a similar plot was

"my first date with Katniss Everdeen". Although it was perfectly written, Katniss's hostility and, more generally, character was a bit exaggerated. Even though she's cautious, she's still a human, not an humans do have feelings and weaknesses. That's why I loved how you handled the have-to-thank-him issue.

(DandelionOnFire /r/7572849/0/33/)

In all three of these examples, the respondents related to what choices each of them would have made or did make. They demonstrate their sense of selves as related to the source material. CharmChaser shows her appreciation for the romantic connections between Katniss and Peeta. Is that because she herself is a romantic? Then, CharmChaser lets us know that as a 13 year old, the writing rang true to her own experiences. Later, DandelionOnFire uses a criticism of another story to praise this writer but in doing so, establishes her own level of understanding about how people would act with their "feelings and weaknesses" (DandelionOnFire). None of these identity conversations would have occurred without the original source material as a foundational link. Likes and dislikes, how people would handle difficult situations and how people of a certain age would react are all discussed within the confines of their mutual engagement around *The Hunger Games*.

4.5.2 Subtleties of Practice

I was quite surprised by what seemed to me to be a lack of detailed discussion on writing practice. There are a few examples where people spoke about character development, grammar or plot choices like Diana's review: "I'm enjoying this story. The writing is good, and

the characters ring true. The only criticism I have is that there are quite a few little grammar errors throughout which sometimes distracted me from this otherwise lovely chapter” (Diana /r/7572849/0/31/). However, more often subtleties of practice were detailed conversations about the use of the canon:

Sorry. ./ anyslut, I vote AGAINST the rebellion in this story. I think it would be too much of a sudden change, especially since u have 9, I guess long chapters. And a lot of stories that don't have Katniss and Peeta in the games usually end up bringing in the games with them, or with prim, or gale, or there's a rebellion, or something involving Snow doing something happens, and it would be too overdone if u did it anyways” (iWouldKillForaCheeseBun /r/7572849/0/28/).

Within this community, the comments where people feel comfortable showing particular expertise, strong opinions and judgments tend to be about remaining true to the original cultural artifact. These strong alignments with their own expectations of the original story and characters are a reflection of the participants’ sense of self. When these participants are able to comfortably delve into the more intricate and subtle aspects of the purpose for their community engagement, they are expressing and forming identity and this “membership constitutes...identity” (Wenger 152). Wenger writes about this confident sense of self as a part of community membership: “We are in familiar territory. We can handle ourselves competently...We know how to engage with others. We understand why they do what they do because we understand the enterprise to which participants are accountable” (152).

4.5.3 Belonging Through Competence

For the purposes of this research, belonging through competence and belonging through familiar territory were used as sub themes of community membership. Neither category had enough comments of significance to report but that may have been a result of a wording choice when I created the sub themes. Belonging through competence is at the heart of what these community members strive toward with every story, post, review, alert and favorite. They are all trying to be better writers of the fanfiction they are invested in. The community praises and encourages those who write stories that meet the community's expectations and show their competency. Jenkins refers to this appropriate use as "legitimate" fan use (88) and is an important part of fandom competency. "We become who we are by being able to play a part in the relations of engagement that constitute our community" (Wenger 152). Belonging through competence within the fanfiction community then is a central part of the community of practice and it seems as though there should have been a stronger showing of examples. A few notable responses such as, "I never, ever thought anything I wrote would bring on such a response, so thank you. J" (A.Rose.Love s/8153095/13/Tick-Tock) and "you are really the reason I'm writing this, and you guys make it worth it. So thank you, seriously, from the bottom of my heart." (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/10/Tick-Tock), demonstrate the importance of this aspect of identity within the community.

4.5.4 Engaging in Action and Give and Take

These two sub themes are grouped together as they are both clear examples of the participants' individuality and agency becoming part of the group and the reverse, the group becoming part of the individual. Part of membership is to interact with each other's writing. Each participant who posts a story is engaged with the material and the group in some way but in terms of revealing identity, it is when the participant moves past herself and becomes involved with another member that these expressions of identity are revealed. For instance, A.Rose.Love offers, "If you have any questions, message me, I'm willing to beta for anyone who requests it" (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/1/Tick-Tock). A.Rose.Love volunteers to help another member. The offer to beta read for another is to offer help and mentorship as has been given to her.

In another instance, several members gave translation assistance (that the public can't see) to DustWriter: "Updated: thank, Mini13 and darkenedruby for your translation help!" (DustWriter /s/9903005/7/A-Journey-North) and, "Thank you, ElsterBird, mini13, thesoulwithinme, and darkenedruby for help with my German! (and please keep letting me know what to correct)" (DustWriter /s/9903005/8/A-Journey-North). In another example, the writer asks for help with details of her story. "I screwed up the timeline of the Battle of Berlin. Sorry. I fixed some date references but if you see anything glaringly obvious, PM me!" (DustWriter s/9903005/14/A-Journey-North) Wenger writes about this kind of identity developing behavior as the "inverse" of competence that comes from the familiar as people "venture into unfamiliar territory" (153). This melding of what is "familiar and foreign" helps

develop identities. In the case of DustWriter attempting German and the membership assisting, she forges a new skill, makes mistakes and the community helps her continue. Because DustWriter does not feel confident about writing about WWII, she asks for help and members actively assist her. Both the writer and the respondent in these cases show identity in action and demonstrate agency over all the individual choices they make as part of a community of practice.

The give and take of these identity revealing and identity forming behaviors seems to be most apparent when the writers and respondents refer to each other by name. This does not make the behavior more or less common, just easier for this researcher to see when it occurs. For instance, lam97 tells the membership who has influenced her own writing. Not only is she being careful to give credit if there should be any similarities in stories but she is also giving back to the community by showing support for other readers:

So I promised this would be different and I'm not going to brake my promise. But I wanted you to know the sotries I read were "unfolding" by hgfan1111, "Love at First Song" byt TacoBelle (and sequel) and "Even without the Games" by booksandblades (am I the only one that waits for her to update?). If there are other stories I do not know them, so any similaritities are NOT on purpose and I can't stop them from happening, because well, I do not know this stories (lam97 /s/7572849/2/New-experience).

In this example, lam97 demonstrates the give and take of the community membership when she posts her side of the conversations with several respondents:

A/N: Thank you for reviewing, elisemellark (thanks for wishing me luck too), RandomRandoms14, CharmChaser)oh, she didn't say that...well, not exactly;)), HungerGamesLover1020 (Ha,ha I guess you have to wait a bit), I wouldKillForaCheeseBun, lovetheboywiththebread1, Kari (If I didn't misunderstand you, you'll like this one), Ishearhandsould (OMG thank you so much! That's a big compliment for me), Amanda223czx (don't worry, that's what I plan on doing...only a bit different...yeah, you'll see...), DandelionOnFire (yeah, that's what I thought too (about the accepting thing). That was my main reason for the time jump) and BBree23 (LOL, I just wanted to update when I saw you review, so here is the thanks) (Iam97 s/7572849/7/New-experience).

Of particular interest is Iam97's response to BBree23. She makes it clear she was motivated to change or changed her post-timeline because of what BBree23 said in her review. This seems to that BBree23 had a great deal of influence on the writer. Some comments people wrote to Iam97 in this post flattered her, complimented her, challenged her and then motivated her. All these comments seem to be powerful elements of influence. The writer shows agency and disagrees with some comments and agrees with others and then tells the community she will continue to post because of the encouragement she receives. Throughout these exchanges we are seeing various aspects of Iam97's identity emerge.

4.5.5 Actions and Languages

The identity marker 'actions and languages' refers to the use of specialized vocabulary or activities that are specific to a particular community of practice. From my observations, the most common example of this identity marker had to do with short forms people within this site use and assume others know what it means in their context. Some short forms like 'HG' for *Hunger Games* and 'MJ' for the *Mockingjay* are simply shorthand for communication. Other short forms are now found quite commonly on the Internet but are still used within this group to expedite conversations in the limited text space given-like 'LOL'-laugh out loud, 'LMAO'-laughed my ass off, 'BTW'-by the way and 'IDK'-I don't know.

There were however, some examples of short hand words that are in reference to writing and used quite frequently in the fanfiction forum. POV, or point of view is used to have discussions about whose perspective the writer is attempting to write from. lam97 tells us, "I was thinking about doing this chapter in Peeta's POV, because this way I could have done better with his way with words and his immense charisma. But I decided to stuck to Katniss POV, because I have a problem with writing in a boy's POV. Might be the fact that I don't understand guys" (lam97 /s/7572849/8/New-experience). This word is a common term found in any writers' group or an English classroom.

Another short form found on this site is OOC-out of character. Not only is this short hand for ease of writing in the small text boxes, but also it is a quick way to ask fellow writers if the writer is meeting group expectations. It is short form for, "Have I remained true to the original story?" This is not simply a writing question but a cultural question as well and

respondents weigh in with their opinions. lam97 asks, “Anyway, what do you think? I hope Gale wasn't OOC, but I don't think so. By the way, tell me if you think anyone is OOC, because I don't want them to. I want this to be realistic” (lam97 s/7572849/3/New-experience). Many members respond with what sound like reassurances that she is doing the right thing. “Really Good! I cant wait to read more and I thought the characters were good, not too OOC. Update SOON!” (elisemellark /r/7572849/0/33/) Earlier in lam97’s profile, she explains to her readers how important it is to her to not write OOC:

If there's one thing I absolutely hate, it's stories that make the characters completely OOC. Not like a slight change, we can't prevent that from happening. I mean like a real major character change. I mean, what's the point of it? You take the name but practically, you use a completely different character. So that's what I try to avoid. When I write, I always try to make sure the charcters are true to themselves (lam97).

Wenger reminds us “Membership in a community of practice translates into identity as a form of competence” (153). Through the use of the community language or “shared repertoire” (82), community members express and develop their identities.

4.5.6 Sustained Repertoire-History of Practice

Although sustained repertoire was an identity marker that appeared only once, sustained repertoire is a community practice characterization that occurs all the time but without particular discussion about it. In lam97’s profile page, she outlines the previous stories and collaborations she has been a part of (lam97). Many members have similar lists of

repertoire but it is not common practice to write descriptions of previous projects in their personal introduction when each story that a member posts is listed and linked below the writer's profile. Each story is listed automatically with a short abstract about the contents, ratings and reviews. Under most writers' profiles, the stories they have written on fanfiction.net are simply listed and linked for readers' access. The lesson from lam97's descriptions of her stories is to recognize that no one excels at anything without practice. This includes writers writing or young people developing their identities. "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit" (Aristotle).

4.6 Learning Trajectory

Wenger uses the term 'trajectory' as a way of trying to explain and link the "temporal and ongoing" process of identity development within any community of practice. He refers to trajectory not as a "fixed destination" but a way of "continuous motion" (154). As a way of explaining the temporal nature of a learning trajectory, he says that identity doesn't happen on some sort of developmental schedule like "growing a permanent set of teeth" (154). With that in mind, the examples of comments that were coded into the learning trajectory show a process either individually or within the group context.

The following chart shows the frequency of the coded comments for this category. There were more comments (or it was easier to see the comments) for inbound behaviors rather than outbound behaviors:

Learning Trajectory Sub Themes Frequencies	
Peripheral participation / Inbound members of the future	34
Insider: new events, demands, inventions	27
Work in Progress	21
Inbound: newcomers-invested in future participation	5
Participation & reification-becoming	5
Work in Progress / Shifting, temporal identity	2
Insider: New events, demands, inventions / Work in Progress/ other multi theme entries	4
Participation & Reification / Insider: New events, demands, inventions	1
Grand Total	99

Table 4 Learning Trajectory Sub Themes Frequencies

4.6.1 Peripheral Participation

The most frequent comments in this category were related to newcomer or inbound members. Again, the reoccurrence of this sub theme may be as a direct result of my ability to see these expressions of identity through more obvious markers. For example, the sub theme of peripheral participation was easily identifiable. Peripheral participation refers to a new member’s ability to participate without whole-heartedly committing to the process. A simple example of this entry point identity behavior is the non-member’s ability to read the community’s fanfiction and even post a review simply using the “guest” login. This soft entry point allows new visitors to feel like they already belong but without making them create an account for themselves and sign-in. Someone considering becoming involved can read the stories and then post anonymously without being obligated to post original stories themselves. This ‘just watching’ behavior is sometimes disparaged, and is referred to as lurking. It actually

allows possible new members to “dip their toe” in the proverbial waters before becoming full-fledged members themselves.

4.6.2 Inbound-Newcomers Invested in Future Participation

More prevalent expressions of identity were from inbound members. Their enthusiasm for their new pursuit made them exuberant sharers. New members such as Rainbow Zebras show how the learning process and the connections with other writers help them invest in the future of the membership:

Hi! Sooooo I started reading your story today and I had to drag my computer around cause I'm reeeally obsessed with it! And just a BTW: I'm from another country and I've got NO IDEA what OC or OOC is so could you please do me a favor and PM me? And another BTW: You're an awesome writer! :) bye!--

Laniebanie (you can author search me if you want to help me with the OC OOC thing, I'm new in FanFiction and I've got...one story hehe anyway bye-bye! :)

(Zebras /r/7572849/0/25/)

Later, Rainbow Zebras becomes a regular member in this community but her starting point was to ask a question about the language of the community. She notices a post by ‘Laniebanie’ and asks to connect with her to learn about this aspect of the writing and reviewing process. Again, even as a newcomer, the respondent expresses identity in process.

Aloha-Pinkly lets the group know she is new and shares that she is in the process of doing something right at that moment, reviewing. As a newcomer, she quickly adopts the

norms of the membership by using the appropriate form of offering praise and reflecting on the details of the writing. “I have not reviewed before but I think that the story is awesome. The book idea was very clever and I have never seen anyone use that before. I also love how you made it a cliff hanger there. Love It!” (Aloha-Pinkly /r/7572849/0/17/) Wenger refers to this kind of identity behavior or ‘trajectory’ for this newcomer being “shaped by efforts-both individual and collective-to create a coherence through time that threads together successive forms of participation in the definition of a person” (158).

4.6.3 Participation and Reification-Becoming

Another sub theme that was harder to see was ‘participation and reification-becoming’. As Wenger suggests, the temporal nature of identity expressions and development made it hard to find ‘snapshot’ comments that demonstrated clearly that the writer was, in that very moment, becoming something new. A.Rose.Love tells us she “plan[s] on becoming an author when [she] 'grow[s] up'. Right now [she's] working on [her] very first novel” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/1/Tick-Tock). Although “growing up” and “writing a first novel” may well be identity activities many members are actively involved in at this very moment, it’s not often that a member tells us that is what they are doing. We can also see as A.Rose.Love is actively engaged in doing something new and reports her new project to the membership while she is in the process of learning and doing something new. “I've decided to try my hand at The Hunger games fanfiction. I plan on eventually writing PeetaxKatniss stuff, but this decided to come first” (A.Rose.Love /s/8123261/1/Twisted-Tea-Party).

4.6.4 Boundaries and Outbound

Although both of these sub themes would seem to be very clear markers in helping to see expressions of identity, surprisingly, neither ‘boundaries spanning and linking communities’ nor the actions of an outbound member were identified.

4.6.5 Work in Progress

The comments posted about a work in progress as an expression of identity are largely from the authors posting to their readers. Aside from sharing the process of writing with their readers, these comments allow us the writers to express what their joys and frustrations they went through to get it to the work to a particular point. We see hints of both the fun and the personal struggle of the writer. A.Rose.Love gives us a few updates along the way and consequently shares her perception of the process: “But, here is chapter 10. It gave me a little bit of a fight when I tried to write it, so I hope it came out okay” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/10/Tick-Tock); and, “Chapter 15 has been giving me some trouble but I do believe I’ve cracked it” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/14/Tick-Tock): “This last chapter was one of the hardest to write and I believe it took the longest. However it’s the longest in return” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/15/Tick-Tock). These series of posts by A.Rose.Love shows her opinion of her own work as she progresses. She shares her frustrations, as it gives her a “bit of a fight” but she also shows some pride and sense of accomplishment when she tells us she thinks she “cracked it”. In identity terms, she is shaped by her own efforts and in doing so creates her own identity trajectory.

A powerful example of the influence on the writing process and identity occurs when A.Rose.Love posts another short story that came out of private conversations with another member, salanderjade: "So, this is what came out of our discussion, and I hope you enjoy it Please check out salanderjade's page and also her stories. (A.Rose.Love /s/8123261/1/Twisted-Tea-Party) The progress (and perhaps outcome) of this story she tells us, has been altered by the conversations she had with another member. She negotiates the writing process in a collaborative process. According to Wenger this negotiation "threads together successive forms of participation in the definition of a person" (158).

4.6.6 Insider-New Events, Demands and Inventions

Once a participant becomes a member of the community (has an account and participates in some way), there is a process by which she becomes more capable and more adept at participating at a more meaningful level. The member moves away from asking questions to making her own demands and start her own exchanges as an insider. One insider exchange of note occurred when a writer told her reviewers that she would give them a cookie if they could answer her question. Even in cyber space, sweets are motivating! Exchanges like these only come when the member has a level of comfort for asking others to play along. "Cookies go to anyone who can properly guess who the Larkspur is. :3" (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/11/Tick-Tock). And then a member jumps in with a response: "It's Beete! It has to be. The glasses, the Woress, and the golden wire. Yep. It's him. Now about that cookie...;)" (lonesomelullaby).

Another amusing 'insider' exchange happened when lam97 asked the community if she should include a rebellion:

READ THIS! IT'S IMPORTANT! I wanted to ask you something (since HungerGamesLover1020 asked me). What I do is trying to show the discontent in the districts a bit in Katniss' and Peeta's mind. Well, the growing discontent, actually. Because this is needed for a rebellion. So my question is if I should write a rebellion, or only do an epilogue. Don't worry, the end of this story isn't too close, but if I decide to write the actualy rebellion, I have to start doing it soon. And I might have to change some things, like the genre and I'll have to take the it's rated T but you can read it if you're younger than it too' back, because a war is definitely NOTHING for someone who is nine or ten. At least not the way I'd write it. I'm a realist and in my opinion, there is no way to moderate a war. So you see, it's really important for me to know. You can review or PM me and there is a Poll on my profile, use the way you like, I will count everything together. (lam97 /s/7572849/9/New-experience)

As an insider, she gives the community lots of options for responding including PM (personal messaging), a poll on her profile and through the review process. And the community does respond:

“Sorry. ./ anyslut, I vote AGAINST the rebellion in this story. I think it would be too much of a sudden change, especially since u have 9, I guess long chapters” (iWouldKillForaCheeseBun /r/7572849/0/28/).

“I don't know about the Rebellion...of course I'd like to read something like that but you should always have in mind it's not so easy. Trust me, personal experience... If you decide to do it eventually, though, just keep Katniss and Peeta together. I'm sure everyone will just love it” (DandelionOnFire /r/7572849/0/28/).

“I like the idea of the rebellion but there has to be a peeta and katniss thing going on!” (elisemellark /r/7572849/0/28/).

“I don't really have an opinion on whether you should put a rebellion in it (although it would be cool) you should write with what is in your heart” (VriskaLee /r/7572849/0/27/).

With so many responses, she decides...not to decide until the new year. “Well, anyway, since I got so many different answers, I'm just going to leave the rebellion question unanswered till 2012. This way I have more time to think about it. Because I am the one who'd have to write it and it isn't easy to do. I hope you're not mad at me :) (Iam97 /s/7572849/10/New-experience).

And the final word on what became a community event is the strongest evidence that being an individual and community member is a constantly changing and fluid state of being when Iam97 informs the membership on her decision:

First I want to say that I spent several hours thinking about this question and I talked to some people about it. And here a special thank you to InLoveWithPeeta who helped me with her ideas. It really wasn't that easy, especially because I had good reasons for both options. But...oh god I'm talking too much again. So, I decided to write the rebellion. But not in this document. I'm going to let this end so everyone who wants to can quit reading. I'm going to write a sequel. This is

the decision I like the best. So don't worry, this story is going to have an ending which can be your ending, everyone who wants more can read the sequel.

Because the story won't be fully told if I didn't write that. Is everyone okay with this? I think you understnad me:D (lam97 /s/7572849/12/New-experience).

She decided to both write the rebellion and not write the rebellion thereby agreeing with the whole community. The fact that she asks if “everyone is ok with this?” demonstrates how lam97 negotiates both her own learning trajectory and the will and desire of the community. Wenger refers fleetingly to the idea of learning trajectories as part of negotiating “paradigmatic trajectories” (158). Where individuals and the group all have various ideas of the “right approach” for her story, lam97 shifts her own paradigm with the assistance of the group and goes in a totally new direction. Paradigm shifts and new trajectories are essentially the epitome of identity development.

4.7 Nexus of Multi-Membership

We are all members of many different communities and they all have varying degrees of influence over our identity. “Whatever (these memberships/communities) nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities” (Wenger 158). Like some of the other themes, the idea that we are the sum of all the different groups we are part of seems obvious and should be prevalent but surprisingly, these other associations, memberships, participations are not often brought in to conversations in the post and review part of the fanfiction forum. Here is a chart of the observed frequency of the sub themes of nexus of multi-membership:

Nexus Multi-Membership Sub Themes Frequencies	
Membership different rules & norms	20
Various forms of membership into one	12
Social bridges to private selves	7
Various identities / Constructs of ourselves	5
Various memberships into one	2
Lived and Shaped identities	1
Membership influence of different rules & norms	1
Various forms of membership into one / Various Constructs of ourselves	1
Reconciling Various Memberships	1
Various identities constructs of ourselves / Social bridges to private selves	1
Influence-social bridges to private self	2
Various forms of identity into one / Social bridges to private selves	1
Grand Total	54

Table 5 Nexus of Multi-Memberships Sub Theme Frequencies

4.7.1 Different Rules and Norms (of Different Memberships)

Memberships in multiple communities of practice all have varying effects on identities. “We behave rather differently in each of them [communities of practice], construct different aspects of ourselves and gain different perspectives” (Wenger 159). The most common observable sub theme of Nexus of Multi-Membership seems more like a decorum ritual but is actually related to the rules and norms of behavior in most fanfiction sites and part of multi-membership. Each participant must ensure copyright is recognized and articulated explicitly. This normalized behavior is an important link between the real world (of published for-profit works) and the fictional world this community of practice creates. But how each member fulfills this group requirement is as different and as individual as each writer.

In fact, observing how some writers fulfilled this requirement revealed some very amusing expressions of identity. For instance, lam97 meets her group's copyright expectations with varying degrees of humour and sarcasm as she posts her way through her multi-chapter story: "Disclaimer: I do NOT own the Hunger Games, and obviously, I don't own the story with the bread either" (lam97 /s/7572849/1/New-experience); "Disclaimer: I do NOT own the Hunger games, because if I did, Finnick would still be alive and Peeta would have recovered faster from his hijacking (lam97 /s/7572849/2/New-experience); "I don't own the Hunger Games!" (lam97 /s/7572849/4/New-experience); "Disclaimer: Still don't own them. (lam97 /s/7572849/5/New-experience); "Disclaimer: I don't own the Hunger Games. Happy now?" (lam97 /s/7572849/6/New-experience); "Disclimer: I'm not Suzanne Collins, so I do not own the Hunger Games. Damn. (lam97 /s/7572849/7/New-experience) "Disclaimer: All right, I think everyone knows I am not Suzanne Collins. So I obviously don't own the Hunger Games." (lam97 /s/7572849/8/New-experience); "Disclaimer: There are many things I wish I'd own. The Hunger Games, for example. But unfortunately, I don't" (lam97 /s/7572849/9/New-experience). lam97 fulfills the expectation to give credit for the original source material but in doing so reveals far more about her identity than the simple act of demonstrating she belongs to two different worlds. lam97 shows her plucky sassy self as she conforms to the expectations of both these worlds but with her own flare. Wenger refers to this reconciliation of multiple memberships as the "work necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries" (158).

4.7.2 Various Memberships

Because identities are not something we are able “to turn off and on” (Wenger 159), our various memberships sometimes spill over into other communities of practice. However, in the fanfiction forum, participants do not often reveal a lot of personal information about their world outside of the fanfiction community. When they do share information, they are often fairly direct. For instance, TwilightCakes reveals she is participating from work. “So sorry these reviews are so short and choppy- im at work reading on my iphone LOL” (TwilightCakes /r/9903005/0/9/). Similarly, fnur reveals she is navigating two different memberships as she is at her desk. “I’m sitting at my desk at work, literally bouncing up and down about this chapter. There may have even been an incident where I raised a fist into the air...” (fnur /r/8588974/0/6/). These two “workers” negotiate different memberships in order to participate in the *Hunger Games* fanfiction forum. Their “various participations are not merely sequences in time” (Wenger 159).

Other expressions of identity through multi-memberships occur when the participants mention their affiliation with other media. CharmChaser references *Harry Potter* (Rowling) when she posts her review. “Huff. I hate Gale with all my Hufflepuff heart. WE NEED MORE PEETA/KATNISS FLUFF!” (CharmChaser /r/7572849/0/27/) lam97 tells us in her profile she has an affiliation with *Harry Potter*. “Nope, my favorite author is J.K.Rowling. That is because I don't think anyone else has managed to come up with a world and a plot as amazing and unique as hers for *Harry Potter*” (lam97). Both of these posts reveal a connection to another media source, perhaps even another fandom and what could be yet another community of practice of

which they are participants. “An identity is thus more than just a single trajectory; instead it should be viewed as a nexus of multi-membership” (Wenger 159).

4.7.3 Lived and Shaped Identities-Constructs of Ourselves

“If a nexus of multi-membership is more than just a fragmented identity, being one person requires some work to reconcile our different forms of membership” (Wenger 159).

Lived and shaped expressions of identity were very revealing as a sub theme. The participants expressed how they have changed or how they reconciled different memberships into the construct of who they are at that moment. A.Rose.Love identifies several different aspects of herself and merges them together into her writing identity: “I'm an artist in a few different respects, I draw and paint, I play with odd hair colors and I love to write. I'm also a photographer and I've won a few local awards with it” (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/1/Tick-Tock). Her, “I'm a” statements reveal she sees herself as those different constructs of herself and they are not fragments; they are mutually existing identities.

Another revealing post comes from a student whose comment indicates how her participation in the community of practice as a fanfiction reader/writer affected another of her identities, her identity as a student:

3)I read your chapter yesterday night, so when I went to school the next day and was asked if I'd betray my country instead of starving to death I knew exactly what to answer. I referred to the instinct every human being has that tends to make them do whatever it takes to survive. Okay, not just that, but I based on

that! I actually remembered what Peeta said in your story! I got a bit more excited that normal afterwards, though... and I managed to earn a weird stare from my best friend lol..." (DandelionOnFire /r/7572849/0/29/).

DandelionOnFire notes what may actually happen all the time but isn't necessarily articulated. She notices how her membership in this one community changes or influences her membership in another. Wenger writes about how our different identities merge through our communities of practice but that such multi-membership doesn't "decompose our identity into distinct trajectories in each community" (159). What DandelionOnFire learned as part of her membership in the fanfiction site developed her identity, which she in turn brought to her student community. But that identity change did not take away from her identity in either sphere.

4.7.4 Social Bridges to Private Selves

"Multi-Membership is the living experience of boundaries. This creates a dual relation between identities and the landscape of practice: they reflect each other and shape each other" (Wenger 161). For examples of this form of identity expression, I searched for moments when a participant's private life created a bridge into the community of practice. As is the case for some other sub themes of identity expression, I suspect this occurs more often than is represented in these posts. Wenger suggests, "the work of reconciliation can easily remain invisible because it may not be perceived as part of the enterprise of the community of practice" (161) There were some fairly simple visible expressions. For example, "I'm sick, so I

have plenty of time to write”, (lam97 /s/7572849/3/New-experience); and, “I won't be able to write much in the next days, because I have to study. Latin. If you learn Latin, you'll understand when I say I have to study a lot. Argh, I hate grammar!” (lam97 /s/7572849/5/New-experience). Both examples demonstrate how the personal identity influences the writer's identity. lam97 goes further to explain how life conflicted with her posting responsibilities:

I'm sorry it took me so long to update but with Christmas and New Year and a family with too many cousins to count...well, I didn't have my laptop and even if I had had it, I wouldn't have had that much time to write, but I guess I said that before. This is even earlier than I thought. My grandpa lent me his laptop after on week. I'm sorry though. I hope you forgive:) Well...enough about that. On with the story... (lam97 /s/7572849/12/New-experience)

In these examples, the act of reconciling different roles and responsibilities from different communities of practice create a very “personal and unique nexus of multi-membership” (Wenger 161).

There are a few examples where the link between the private self and the community of practice was more nuanced. In the case of lam97, she describes how her identity as a sister influenced how she proceeded with creating a character in her story and ultimately with the membership when she communicates her thinking to Amanda332czx:

Amanda332czx (Sorry, it wasn't supposed to sound like that. She didn't find it scary that it was like a sibling hug, she found it scary that she felt two different things. And you're right about feeling protected in both hugs...now that you

pointed it out. But it's just that...I don't know, While writing it I thought of hugging my brother...and I don't feel protected when I do that. I feel like I'm the one protection.) (Iam97 /s/7572849/11/New-experience)

Iam97 draws on her own experience as a sister, weaves that into her story and expresses her resulting shaped identity to Amanda332czx.

4.8 Nexus of the Local and the Global

The Nexus of the Local and the Global was by far, the most difficult sub theme for which to find examples of identity expression. As in the case of some of the other sub themes, it isn't that there isn't interplay between the local community and a global perspective; it's simply that it isn't necessarily discussed at length in the post and review section of the fanfiction forum.

Wenger states that an important aspect of the work of any community of practice is to create a picture of the broader context in which its practice is located. In the case of this *Hunger Games* fanfiction forum, that would encompass other fanfiction sites including other fandoms, writers groups, and perhaps media and publishing. But in this particular community of practice, they are not actively engaged in particular outreach. The following is a chart of the frequency of the sub themes of the Nexus of the Local and Global:

Nexus of the local and global Sub Theme Frequencies	
Lived & shaped identities of various groups	15
Grand Total	15

Table 6 Nexus of the Local and Global Sub Themes

Because the context of the posts needed to reflect a global perspective, outside of the realm of this particular community of practice and be related to other groups, there were very few examples.

4.8.1 Lived and Shaped Identities of Various Groups

The only clear examples where the global met the local occurred when the language of the member was discussed. When a member's language or nationality was discussed, it could be interpreted as a link to a much bigger community of practice—one's nationality and first language. "Lovely chapter, but can I point something out? I know you're from Germany, so is English not your first language?... Other than that your English is pretty amazing. Kudos to you for writing this in English - I could never have the courage to do it in another language :)" (TheGirlWithTheSilverTongue /r/7572849/0/28/). The writer's first language and country of origin become part of the conversation, and in this case criticism, of the local community.

In this example, lam97 is asked to represent Europe by being able to answer a question a German person should know. "When's the Eurovision contest? I don't remember! I never was able to remember! That came to my mind cuz I was listening to the song that won in 2009 I think(Fairytale/Norway)and...since you're from Germany...could you answer me with a PM? It's not important but it won't hurt to know for the-what? Umpteenth time?" (DandelionOnFire /r/7572849/0/22/). DandelionOnFire assumes some global knowledge in an unrelated community because lam97 had previously indicated she was German, living in Germany. These examples represent this expression of identity. Neither is the kind of local global connection

Wenger referred to when he wrote about someone from the small claims department speaking against the company during a radio show thereby bringing the outside world (the global) into the business of the company (the local) (162). These local and global expressions of identity rarely seem to happen in the fanfiction site.

4.8.2 Final thoughts on the Coded Data

“Our identities are rich and complex because they are produced within the rich and complex set of relations of practice” (Wenger 162). If there was any doubt that the participants of this fanfiction site are engaged in identity expression and identity formation, by the end of this coding process and analysis, I was convinced there are so many layers of learning and personal development that it warrants further investigation. In the process of reading thousands of communications between members, I enjoyed watching what seemed to be participants developing their identities.

Overall, there were many instances of visible expressions of identities. There were also many examples where it seemed that identity formation occurred within this online community. Although all five of Wenger’s identities in practice characteristics were represented, the categories were not evenly dispersed with ‘negotiated experience’ and then ‘community membership’ holding the lion’s share of coded responses.

In the course of this chapter, I explained the data that was collected and also explained and outlined both the themes and sub themes found during the coding process. I gave examples of how each theme and sub theme could be interpreted as identity expressive or

identity formative and discussed the choices that I made during the coding process. And, I linked all the data together to show the basic patterns found during the coding process. By the end of this chapter, the reader should understand how this fanfiction forum is a community of practice and recognize the various expressions of identity that were coded.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I will discuss the data I collected in broader terms and highlight some of the main themes discovered during the research and coding process. I will also put the research in the context of other current research in the field. I will also discuss the significance of this research and its possible contribution to educational and online practices. I will also discuss possible application of this research and commentary. Included in this chapter is a commentary on the strengths and weaknesses of this research and finally, I offer suggestions for possible related future research projects.

5.2 Overall Analysis, Integration and Conclusions

When I started this project, it was with the perspective and curiosity of a teacher and librarian. Reading, writing, technology and most importantly, the relationships I have with my students as they grow and develop are at the core of my professional responsibilities. The connections that I am able to make with students as we talk about favourite novels are central in building connections with them and therefore, my ability to teach. By extension, understanding students' engagement with these popular novels in an online setting (fanfiction sites), is another way to strengthen my supportive role for students. Being able to see for myself what is happening for them developmentally when they are engaged online increases my professional expertise when deciding what online resources and activities to recommend to young adults. Happily, this curiosity brought me to the world of online fanfiction forums and

now, after completing my research, I have a much better understanding of what occurs within this particular fanfiction site. I hope it is representative of other similar youth oriented fanfiction sites so that I could recommend a young adult novel fanfiction site for my patrons and students who like to write. However, I would add the proviso that the students must first watch and read the postings to find out if the culture of the particular site they are interested in matches their comfort level.

For this research, I used one fanfiction forum based on *The Hunger Games*, chose three writers, picked six of their stories and pulled over one thousand comments posted within this particular forum. This may sound like a lot but it is actually a small sample of the millions of postings on an enormous number of online fanfiction sites. However, I believe the data collected gives a fair representation of the kinds of communications found on this particular forum. Overall, the data was not evenly distributed across the five identity themes. It's possible that I couldn't see more examples of Learning trajectories, Nexus of Multi-Membership and Nexus of the Local and Global simply because these kinds of conversations did not happen in the post and respond section of the fanfiction site and may have happened elsewhere. It could also mean that there are areas where the communications shared among participants are more sharply skewed towards certain kinds of exchanges. With some categories more dominant than others, it is possible this fanfiction site is not a high functioning community of practice in terms of Wenger's model, as it may have first seemed. In order to know if this particular data configuration is representative of other fanfiction sites, this same study would need to be replicated in other fanfiction sites for comparison.

5.2.1 Identity Expressions and Identity Formations-Yes!

The most exciting part of this research is in being able to say from my observations, that the members of this *Hunger Games* fanfiction site express and form their identities while participating in this community of practice. When I review my experiences with this specific online community, I intentionally hold back more effusive praise. It was a surprisingly positive experience to read how the members speak to each other. I was impressed by the quality of the writing and the care they seemed to put into many of the comments posted. I was excited to see what seems to be evidence of the shifting identities of writers and readers emerging throughout the post and respond process. This general finding of online communities as places of learning and development is in support of current research like that of Alvermann, Beals and Bers, Gee and Wenger. Although fanfiction and identity have not been previously specifically linked together by other researchers. I believe in this particular fanfiction forum, these self-selected participants shape their identities and that the general experience for members seems to be a positive one.

My underlying interest in the fanfiction site as a possible model for online educational communities of practice leads me to believe there are lessons to be learned for teachers of writers in process. Fanfiction sites can also help inform educators about what works in online learning communities. But when observing the lack of comments seen in the least represented three categories, (learning trajectory, nexus of multi-memberships and nexus of the local and global), it's possible formal educational practice could offer suggestions to help inform the fanfiction forum's practice. There are some promising educational and developmental

experiences happening in this online community. I will discuss the implications and some possible hurdles in the section on potential applications.

5.2.2 Analysis and Implications

My research questions asked, a) how do participants express their identities as readers and writers and b) how are these identities formed in an online fanfiction community of practice? There are myriad ways that participants expressed their identities that I analyze in detail in Chapter 4; however, there are a few essential ways they express and form identities that should be highlighted because of their implications. One powerful and the most common way participants express their identities is through their use of praise and encouragement in the sub theme, “celebrations-rituals of decorum and praise”. Through both giving and receiving praise, both as individuals and as writers, participants express identity. They communicate to one and another about the process of writing and creative self-expression. Writing and reading can be such solitary pursuits and often lack the encouragement and feedback that might be possible in classroom settings or workshops. Within this fanfiction community, the members consistently expressed their appreciation of the author and the writing, highlighted successes and offered gentle assistance for improvement. A writer with abilities who then works on her skill set is bound to gain in competency and receive more praise and in doing so, form her identity as a reader and writer.

The most common kind of “praising” comment was to tell the author she was doing a good job and to highlight the parts of the story she was doing well. The sub theme, “rituals of

decorum and praise” suggests that praise isn’t occasionally offered, it is part of the culture and expectations of participation and is “ritualized” praise. If praise is connected to healthy self-esteem and a positive sense of self, then being part of this community where the participants are routinely praised, celebrated and appreciated, can be seen as a positive identity experience.

The praise and encouragement in this realm is particularly powerful because the praise is peer to peer. The mentor / mentee relationship is far more fluid than in any classroom situation. Even within a physical-world book club setting where members choose to get together and talk about their connections to a novel, there are still some members whose voices are more strident, more persistent or louder than others. Particularly, there may be members who feel they should lead the responses. They may assume leadership because of age or experience or simply because they are able to get the group to follow them. The online forum with the post and respond method allows everyone an equal say in responding to the original source material and to the newly created work. Assumptions as to peoples’ differing abilities to help a respondent are not relevant in this context. No one member holds more power to post than any other member. The writer then chooses on her own, whose advice best fits her purpose. Jenkins refers to online fanfiction as “the democratization of the writing world” (92) in the context of giving women a stronger voice in male dominated writing but in this case, the fanfiction forum has democratized critics and fans alike.

Another example of identity expression highlights the participants’ connection to the original text. The members are invested in the stories participants create from the original source material, *The Hunger Games*. The members participate in this particular forum by

choice. They read *The Hunger Games* and cared about it enough to want to discuss it online and maybe even write stories about it too. Then further, they chose to look for a community and to begin the process of entry, participation, membership and competency. They grow as they share, write, respond and critique their stories and meanwhile they are all connected through their association to *The Hunger Games*. It is an ideal working community of practice.

As writers share their newest 'updates' of their works in progress, members express their opinions about the story's use of the original material. As an English teacher, if I could get my students to willingly have the kinds of in-depth conversations about what a character would or would not do in any situation or argue about whether a particular ending was true to the psychology of the characters, it would be a dream come true. These participants take ownership of the source material and have strong feelings as to its "legitimate use" (Jenkins 88). Members engage in detailed conversations referred to as 'subtleties of practice', a sub theme of "community membership". This deep engagement in the mutually agreed upon use of the source material demonstrates both expression of identity, as preferences and opinions are quite revealing, and forming identity, where we see them make decisions to conform or disagree with the group's opinion of the source material's use.

Within the community, the collaborative process was fluid and offered the authors many different viewpoints to choose from. One of my favorite exchanges that highlighted this group participation was when a writer asked the group if she should include a rebellion in her story and the group members all offered different suggestions, ideas and perspectives. These willing readers and writers open to feedback, all worked collaboratively to support each other.

Again, if only a teacher could get her students engaged in the same way, her classroom could also be positive and fluid. Her class could be a model of an ideal learning situation. These members help each other grow, both because of the feedback they may receive but also, the feedback giver actually grows by helping and mentoring someone else along their learning journey.

Another theme of identity expression and formation to highlight was in the mutual connections within the community. Many members had what seemed to be established relationships with other members. References to personal messages (PM's) and direct references to comments that were received and appreciated demonstrate that these members were friends and colleagues. They used their common interest to bridge working relationships in a social situation. Many times writers let respondents know they worked harder and faster to update their stories because of the encouragement they received. The importance in noting the relational aspect of identity is twofold. The first relational aspect has to do with the creation of a safe environment/community. If anyone has ever worked in a fear and criticism filled environment, not much risk taking occurs. Without feeling safe and supported, it is more challenging to try something new. And during the creative process and identity formation, taking risks is central to success. The many members who have joined and stayed and the extraordinary number of stories posted speaks to the inference that members feel supported.

The second relational aspect of the community connection has to do with belonging: belonging because of a shared interests, shared pursuits and because they support and care for each other through their writing. In terms of identity formation, belonging is central to

perceptions of self and the various constructs of our identity. Belonging occurs in several theme and sub theme areas and on multiple levels within the community of practice. Belonging occurs because of learning and competency; successes and competencies within the particular community reaffirm a person's place within that group. Belonging also occurs because of shared interests within that group. Finding others who share interests and passions helps to make a participant feel connected and therefore that she belongs. Belonging also occurs at the personal reification level. If a participant was not able to internalize some of these group messages of the shared interest, practice and connectedness, no matter how welcoming and affirming the group was to a member, she would never feel like she belonged. At some point, an individual has to construct the identity that informs her sense of herself as 'one of the group'. This reification of belongingness in different ways is identity formation.

5.3 Fanfiction Communities of Practice are Identity Influential

I am not the first to suggest that online practices can be influential. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield state: "For today's youth, media technologies are an important variable and physical and virtual worlds are psychologically connected; consequently, the virtual world serves as a playing ground for developmental issues from the physical world, such as identity (Beals and Bers 53). Beals suggests that playing [and writing] online offers cognitive, social emotional development and consequently "self worth, competence and acceptance". (Beals and Bers 59) The research found in this paper can be considered part of the growing body of text that recognizes there is far more going on in online communities like this fanfiction forum than members simply chatting about their favourite novel characters.

The evidence of identity expression and formation within this online fanfiction forum from this research will add to the body of research that recognizes the power and influence many online communities of practice have. Educators and parents alike should be keenly aware of what young people are doing in their online practices and be prepared to help young people navigate these complex, developmental relationships. Parents and educators need to become better informed. There has been a great deal of discussion about gaming and possible 'side effects' with its inherent negative connotation but it is the risk versus reward that needs to be part of the discussion and investigation when looking at online practices of all kinds.

During my time as an English teacher, I taught two different specialty classes, an honors English class which students had to compete for entrance and an advanced senior International Baccalaureate class that students could only select if they had a high enough achievement level from the previous regular IB class. In both of these classes, the students were engaged and passionate and there was a higher achievement baseline than in my regular classes. As I read hundreds of pages of stories and thousands of comments within my research fanfiction community, I was reminded of these two specialty classes. Even though there was no way to know what the academic level of the participants in the forum might have been, they were just as capable and passionate as my highly motivated and high achieving classes.

On the fanfiction website, there were some writers who were obviously very talented, but even new members with somewhat stumbling contributions were attempting some sophisticated elements of writing. One of the writers from this study, lam97, was writing in her second language (English) and doing so successfully. The link between these specialty classes

and this fanfiction site is in recognizing that the participants are already special in the first place. These online participants are reading by choice and selecting to write about their reading in their free time. Even though there is a spectrum of writing levels and creative abilities, they are all highly engaged, just like my students in my Honors English class. The implication for educators and parents is to encourage our young people who like to read and who might enjoy writing, to select a fanfiction site as a destination for them to see if that part of themselves could be further developed, supported or constructed online. As informed adults, we can guide students towards these communities of practice as a place that could be an invaluable resource for encouraging our young people.

5.4 Informing Educational Applications

With so many different communications and learning and developmental exchanges happening in the fanfiction forum, it makes sense to consider what lessons can be taken from these forums to apply in other learning communities. Elements that occur in this particular fanfiction site could be employed in educational communities, and conversely, practices from the formal education setting could help inform the online practice. For instance, I highlighted ‘celebrations ritual decorum and praise’ as an important aspect of the positivity of this community of practice. In translating this to other educational settings, such as classrooms, it is essential to note what an integral part of the expression of identity this practice is for many members. Teachers could model this ‘ritual praise and decorum’ by building into their class structure, time for positive feedback and opportunities to express and receive praise. This seems to be an important part of the community and possibly part of why I perceive this forum

to be positive for its members. If I could speculate as to why members posted and responded for years in this community, I would say the praise and encouragement members received was an integral reason. However from a constructive point of view, where writers were hoping to grow and develop, so many of the comments were the online equivalent of a 'pat on the back' or excessive 'cheerleading'. These comments lacked the substance of constructive feedback that is found more frequently in the teacher student relationships of a formal educational setting. The spread of this data set had far more comments found in the negotiated experience characteristic and far many less in learning trajectories, multi-memberships or the connection of local and global which could suggest, this is an area where the online community could learn from formal educational practices.

It is possible that there are far more constructive and instructive conversations happening that occur off page; however, a simple addition to the praising feedback would be to suggest members try the cookie sandwich form of feedback: Something specific the reviewer liked, a suggestion for a way to improve the piece and another element the reviewer enjoyed or appreciated. The 'cookie sandwich' refers to putting the constructive criticism between two outside layers of positive feedback but it should still be palatable to the recipient of the feedback. It is still meant to be a metaphorical cookie.

Another area I highlighted in 'analysis and implications' related to the use of praise, was in the power of the peer-to-peer dynamics. This is another area that could inform other educational settings. Peers giving each other feedback are important for two reasons. The first is the equality of power status of those particular relationships compared to school settings. On

the fanfiction site members write for and receive praise from like-minded equals. No person has a more influential voice than another though the community itself demands particular norms are maintained. This is unlike the relationship students have with their writing teachers in the formal educational setting where the power is unbalanced. The teacher holds sway over the student in many ways, not the least of which is determining the student's grade for the writing. Grades can hold tremendous power over the writers particularly at the senior levels where those marks determine entry to university and possible scholarship money. Finding a way to incorporate more peer-to-peer feedback opportunities and therefore more equal power levels between people giving feedback is one way formal education settings like a classroom could adopt aspects of the fanfiction community.

The second reason the nature of the relationships of peer-to-peer is so important to inform practice is in the realm of audience. When the fanfiction members write, they write for an audience of their peers. These peers are people who they believe are like-minded and at the very least a receptive audience for their stories. In contrast, when students write in a formal educational setting, the aim is often to write for the teacher. The style and form have to conform to the boundaries that the adult establishes and the adult's regard for what is written. Educators might keep in mind the importance of audience students are interested in when creating assignments. It is important for educators to acknowledge that relevance has to go beyond simply choosing topics that apply to our young adults. Relevance needs to be in whom these young people are writing for and why they are writing in the first place.

I also highlighted the members' connections to the original source material. The lesson for educators is in student investment. From my observations, it seems the members of this forum are devoted to the original source material. They each chose to read and then write about this particular text. Educators know that engagement ultimately speaks to a student's motivation. If the starting place for the reading, writing and developmental activities all happen because of a book of choice, it stands to reason that in the formal education setting, students need to have more say or even outright, the choice of what they would like to read as the basis for reading and writing activities. The fanfiction forum offers a model for a fully engaging learning environment, in part because the members choose the source material for learning.

Choosing the text may be one of many choices and perhaps one of the reasons why this fanfiction site works so well and seems to be a positive nurturing place for developing writers. For example, the participants have agency and make all the decisions. The members of *The Hunger Games* fanfiction site make every decision up to and including participation in this particular site. The participants choose to read the book in the first place, they choose to go online, and they choose to participate in a fanfiction site and specifically, <http://fanfiction.net/hungergames>. Members pursue their own passion for the source material, which members' stories they choose to read and respond to and what writing they do themselves. Even the decision on what to post, how often, who to post to and what they say in their posts is completely up to them. If educators are to model the level of engagement students have in this community into other learning communities then they would need to find

ways of allowing and encouraging students to have choice and agency over more of their learning as well.

Although there are educators who might like to replicate similar online communities of practice in institutionalized educational settings there are some difficulties to overcome. One of these hurdles is in the previously mentioned student's choice to participate. Even if we as educators say to students, "You can go to any community of practice you like, no matter what it's about", the students are not really there of their own free will. Participants need to choose to become a part of the community. For the community to work there needs to be investment. For such a positive community like the one I investigated, every member shares the common goals and interests and is free to stay or go at their discretion. If they are unhappy with what other writers are writing, they can go elsewhere or they can work within the community to change behaviors they don't like. But once students are required to participate, they lose agency over the decision to participate. As a high school English teacher, I can say from experience, the tone of the class, the fellowship and general success for the participants in a required, assigned, regular English class compared with the specialized, optional and selective English class is vastly different. In my Honours class, students may forget to do their homework but for the most part they aren't opposed to doing the assignment in the first place. In a regular class, there are more students who will question the validity of the assignment in the first place. They may want to know what will happen if they don't do the assignment at all, why they have to do the assignment in the first place and if it's possible to not do it and still pass thereby keeping them from having to do the course again. Even though there is the extrinsic "reward"

of completing the class and eventually graduating that does not make them passionate, engaged members of the subject area.

There are a few other areas of concern that would need to be addressed if a fanfiction site were to be used as a model for educational applications. Within the forum, there is an unlimited amount of writing however, what writers post to be read by other members is short fiction writing. Although writing short pieces of fiction is an excellent avenue to pursue and develop a writer's skills, as an educator I am responsible for teaching all different kinds of writing. For instance, writing fiction does not necessarily translate into capable non-fiction or business writing. The current fanfiction forum model would not support these other pursuits directly. However, if the teacher took advantage of the general principles that make fanfiction sites engaging and created assignments that employ peer audience, feedback, praise, they could introduce other styles of writing with an engaged class.

Within a fanfiction site a level of accountability is missing. With both the giving and taking of advice and producing stories themselves, the members can do or not do whatever they please. In an ideal world, every student would be able to pursue the things they love and leave the rest untouched. However, in the formal education realm, there are foundational skills that need to be practiced and assignments that need to be completed to show the students can meet the learning outcomes of the course. A student does not get to choose to not do the work without any consequences. In rethinking what educational practice looks like, this would be an area that would require some consideration.

I have mentioned a few times how positive and genial this fanfiction site is for its members. This occurs for a number of reasons. Choice is essential, of course but also, culture plays an important part of its success. If educators were looking at how to build similar positive, rich communities of practice online, a considerable investment of time would be essential in order to build a sustained practice with a culture that is encouraging and nurturing. A new community of practice could take years to get to the point where they have a clear charter of expectations that almost everyone follows. Even in the site I studied that had been going since the book came out in 2008, there are still occasional gentle reminders to participants of decorum like to give credit to Suzanne Collins for the source material. The sustained practice, with the group essentially moderating itself towards more positive acceptable behaviors will take time. It is possible that teachers might have to moderate the site themselves until the culture is promoted and maintained by the group itself. Unfortunately, when one member has more power or authority within the community the power dynamics shift, then consequently it changes the learning dynamics. It could be possible to mitigate some of these potential problems. If writing courses were linear instead of semester length, that would allow for a greater investment of time for creating a culture. The teacher could then invest time at the start of the year to teach students explicitly how to participate positively within the community and perhaps coach a few students to act as respectful moderators of the site.

In other fanfiction sites there can be the fractious and somewhat demoralizing practice of writing suckfic, stories written and posted specifically to mock and hurt one of the group members. Why does this site not seem to have any identifiable suckfic when it is a common

enough practice within fanfiction sites to have its own term? Again, this might be related to the culture of the community, which established a particular tone and was able to regulate behaviors until it became the norm not to respond to stories members didn't like with harassing forms suckfic. This particular group did not have the practice of 'flaming' other members either. Again, flaming is a common practice in many online communities where one member publicly criticizes someone and/or their writing in the review or comments sections of the community. I suspect it is related to the particular culture of this group. This particular group asks members to use a story rating system, which asks writers to label any graphic sex or language into a particular X-Rated category. Also, the source material for the fanfiction is from a young adult novel. Both of these qualifiers might dissuade older or perhaps more aggressive fans from choosing this particular community. Whatever the reason, it seems clear that there are many different factors why this particular community culture is positive and nurturing and educators cannot easily replicate it for mass consumption. For use by educators, the fanfiction community that they selected would have to have a way to filter the X-Rated materials or educators would need to create separate communities where they could exercise some control over what kinds of material the students see. If students happen upon inappropriate material during their own time spent on the Internet, it is an entirely different situation if their English teacher assigned them to go that site. This is not an insurmountable problem, just another area that would require forethought.

Despite the cautions I mentioned, if educators could replicate the best aspects of this particular online community of practice, there are some great advantages for students. For

many students living in remote communities or even just living in communities that are not necessarily like-minded because of “limitations in the physical world” (Beals and Bers 59), like geography or transportation issues that would make it physically impossible to meet, an online community of practice could provide virtual meetings. An adolescent who writes in English who does not live in an English speaking country would have access to native speakers without leaving her house or country.

Another aspect of this community that could help inform future online community design has to do with the possible value of membership. Although members use “online identities” there is some accountability to the membership. Visitors can read stories and posts anonymously, but at some point, if participants want to post more comments, write a story of their own or talk directly to any other member, they would have to create a representative online user identity and profile. Although these are not their ‘real’ names, there is more transparency when there is some sort of identity attached. Being known, having a reputation and having stories that people have been interested in reading in the past are the reasons that someone would visit another member’s profile to check out their stories. If a member were ‘flaming’ other members without participating in any other way they would soon find their profile being reported to fanfiction.net for abusive use. It seems that personal ownership through the investment of time and energy separates valued members from those with a proverbial axe to grind. Of course anyone who wants to say terrible things can still create an account and go ahead and do that but it would take them longer and if they didn’t have their own writing posted, members would be quick to dismiss their negative comments.

For adolescents who are developmentally at the stage of trying on different identities, an online community of practice could provide the participants a nexus, a pivot point where the different constructs of their different identities can be expressed in a safe environment. A safe, positive online community of practice like this *Hunger Games* fanfiction forum could provide adolescents with opportunities to explore in an open learning environment. Because adolescents are in such developmentally challenging times, some anonymity through the Internet adds another layer of comfort while they try and reify all the different pieces of themselves and their many different memberships in other communities of practice. Striking that balance between a safe place to try on new identities with some aspect of accountability and ownership instead of complete anonymity seems to be crucial for success.

5.5 Comments on the Strengths and Limitations of the Research

There are several areas where I feel this research provides inspiration and guidance for future researchers. The large number of coded and analyzed responses taken from *The Hunger Games* fanfiction site provides other researchers with a reliable sample of responses. Also, the coded comments represent a historical snapshot of what is happening in a fanfiction website at this time in the Internet's development. This information could be useful to future researchers who may want to look at how online communities have developed over time.

Using Wenger's model of identity in practice from his book, *Communities of Practice* allowed for specificity in the focus on the retrieved comments from the site. With so much data and so many layered conversations, narrowing the investigation to one aspect of what the participants can be seen doing provides researchers with a manageable context. In the future,

researchers could use the same data but look at a different developmental aspect of membership like Wenger's 'knowing in practice' (134-142) in a fanfiction site.

In addition, in terms of my analysis, my particular perspective of being both a teacher and a librarian allowed me to look at the online community not just from a media user point of view for my library patrons, but also from an educator's point of view, analyzing implications and possible educational applications. Other practitioners may find this perspective to be helpful.

There are some limitations to this study that should be taken into account by future researchers. Very early in the coding process, when I was copying conversations between members, some participants alluded to unseen PM's (personal messages) and conversations happening with beta readers that I was unable to see. Whatever conversation may have taken place off page, only those members or the specific intended recipient could see what was said. These conversations may well have been very revealing and a far more intimate look at identity in practice; however, that kind of research would have required the personal consent of every member whose comments I wanted to read and sample. It is possible that even with membership I would not have been able to gain access. If I had veered away from conversations that were fully public to conversations that were limited between members, I would have been ethically bound to both inform the members and gather consent. This would have been a huge undertaking and far beyond the scope of this master's paper.

Also somewhat limiting although common in research, even with reading more of the private postings that could be found between members, the onus is still on the researcher to infer what a writer or responder meant by what they said. Without being able to read the

minds of the members, there will always be at least some element of inference required on the part of the researcher.

Another limitation is in the scope of the research. Although 1200 messages from hundreds of pages of fanfiction seems like a lot, it is such a small amount in contrast to the millions of posts that can be found on the Internet right now. Further research will probably need a wider scope of websites and authors for a broader perspective.

Although it is tempting to consider using this research and this particular fanfiction site as a model for the creation of other education focused online learning communities, I am careful to remind myself that this online forum represents the ideal learning environment and although it may be representative of other fanfiction sites, potential educational applications may look quite different with the adjustments that would need to be made to facilitate formal educational use. There is much to be learned from this fanfiction community of practice both to help researchers understand identity development in online practices but also, to help inform practice in other educational settings both off and online.

5.6 Future Research Possibilities

This research represents a potentially useful contribution into investigating online communities for possible educational and workplace applications. Identities are expressed and formed in these communities and it is important to look into them further. The next logical step would be to inform and gather consent from fanfiction members and follow their private conversations and beta reader conversations. There could be much more intimate data collected regarding identity in practice. Data could also show the existence of conversations on

the mechanics of writing. A mild criticism I had of the fanfiction forum generally was that it didn't seem to be involved in any sort of depth in the scholarly practice of learning to write. Criticisms and suggestions, corrections and editing were not often apparent in the public part of the community. It would be very interesting to see, particularly from an educator's point of view, what kinds of academic writing conversations the members are engaged in while meeting less publicly.

Another recommendation for further research and the area I am most interested in would be an investigation into how members became involved with the fanfiction forum in the first place. If educators wanted to replicate the kind of positive identity formative and nurturing online environment, it would be crucial to find out who these members are and discover what brought them to become participants in the first place. As is the case with most successful ventures and successful cultures, it is always about the people who are involved.

One question that intrigued me is, why is this particular book the source of members' online explorations? It is fascinating to me that fanfiction itself is both a compliment to the book or source material and the author because so many people become invested in every aspect of the novel. However, there is also an inherent criticism of the novel, otherwise, why would anyone want to change or rewrite any aspects of the novel? Since the book is the starting link for participation in the community which then leads to identity development, why then, this particular book? Fanfiction can be about wish fulfillment. I can speculate that some of the allure for this particular book is strong believable characters that fanfiction participants can develop further. They see the characters and create the relationships they wished they could have seen

or go beyond the subtext of the story to create an outcome that pleases them. The dystopian world that the story takes place in mirrors some of the general fear and mistrust society has with governments. I also wonder if teenagers feel their lives are like those of the children volunteered for the '*Hunger Games*'. They may feel they too are pawns in adults' games because of the lack of control they have in their lives and this lack of control might possibly resonate with them. This research question would involve a deep analysis into the relationship a reader has with the book and how that leads to this further expression. It is a fascinating question and more research could provide some useful revelations.

Towards this goal of discovering what brought the members to the fanfiction site and what made them participate, it would be interesting to do a survey of a fanfiction forum and ask members to give feedback to researchers directly after the first time they create a profile, the first time they post a story and the first time they write a review asking them to help pin point the reasons or influences that brought them to those activities.

5.7 Final Thoughts

Although I answered my research question about whether it is possible to see expressions of identity and identity formation in a fanfiction community, the underlying question, can I as a teacher and librarian recreate this learning community in some way, I cannot answer definitively at this time. Other than directing promising young writers or young adults who share the love of a particular novel to a relevant fanfiction forum, educators have a great deal yet to figure out. Like, why young adults chose to go to the fanfiction site in the first place and why some sites seem positive and nurturing and others are less helpful. Before

educators intentionally send a young writer to a fanfiction site, it is important that they first vet the site particularly for X-rated materials. Again, it is one thing if a student happens upon sexually explicit stories during their free time and another entirely if their English teacher sends them there.

Even though I do not feel I can create my own online community of practice just yet, I feel there are significant lessons to be learned from this fanfiction forum that can immediately be put into action in my teaching practice. Ownership over the material, opportunities to share peer-to-peer, giving students choice and room to follow their own passions, bridging the power gap in some way and strengthening the relationships of all learners are just a few of the ideas that have been refreshed and made concrete through this research. These techniques are already considered good practice in teaching.

Though I am not a fanfiction writer myself however, I now have a great appreciation and respect for the community I investigated and for the many writers there who share their writing and their expertise within their community without pay and with only modest recognition. These young people display the wealth of creativity and flashes of brilliant writing that remind me how active, engaged young adults can be in the wide open world of fanfiction forums.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Coding Rubric Wenger's Identity in Practice-Negotiated Experience

Negotiated Experience	Explanations	Examples	Respondent
Performance Milestones	Completing stories, Particular Levels of Accomplishments	"I mean, I'm up to a 100 reviews, which is completely amazing, I never thought this story would make it this far so thank you, thank you, thank you." (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/13/Tick-Tock)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Markers of Transition	Changing from one level to another-noting a change in the relationships	Hello again, long lost land of fanfiction! Apologies for my long absence; I've been working on a screenplay and/or novel based on this fanfiction but I have terrible motivational block. I'm hoping that sharing my work in progress here will spurn me to work faster and get my research done. Love the subject matter and frankly, am tired of me holding myself back (DustWriter /s/9903005/1/A-Journey-North)	DustWriter https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3191722/DustWriter
Attaining Levels	Markers of progress or completion in writing	Chapter nine is now officially up (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/9/Tick-Tock)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Celebrations – rituals of decorum or praise	The group manners of giving praise and thanks, celebrating	I could not stop reading this story, it was so good (MockingjaysAndDandelions /r/8153095/0/3/)	MockingjaysAndDandelions https://www.fanfiction.net/u/4113909/MockingjaysAndDandelions
Reputation-how one is known	When others mention looking forward to seeing other works by the same author	I've been thinking about this story and your writing a lot lately. I went back and reread a few of my favorite stories while waiting for an update. You never disappoint. (emarina /r/9903005/0/2/)	emarina https://www.fanfiction.net/u/4118937/emarina

Appendix B

Coding Rubric Wenger's Identity in Practice-Community Membership

Community Membership	Explanation	Example	Respondent
Belonging through competence	Feeling included because they are achieving competence in writing	you are really the reason I'm writing this, and you guys make it worth it (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/10/Tick-Tock)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Belonging Familiar Territory	The group norms and practices create a sense of belonging and a familiar state	This story wouldn't be here without you guys, whether you've been here through the journey or just catching up now (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/15/Tick-Tock)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Mutuality of engagement	Both parties engaged in the common practice (Hunger Games)	I almost cried when peeta said sorry... (romanticunderworld /r/8153095/0/2/)	romanticunderworld https://www.fanfiction.net/u/4522749/romanticunderworld
Engaging in action with other people	Involving members into the practice	If you have any questions, message me, I'm willing to beta for anyone who requests it. (A.Rose.Love /s/8153095/1/Tick-Tock)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Play our part in relations of engagement (give + take)	When responding to a response	Thank you to micimic022, LivingReminder, Kari (Wouldn't think of it. I don't think she would take them anyway, so why do it? (Iam97 /s/7572849/2/New-experien	Iam97 https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3443764/iam97
Negotiability of repertoire-sustained engagement history of practice in practice	"expertise" length of membership, artifacts of past practice	Author has written 17 stories for Hunger Games. I'm back, readers. Slowly but surely publishing bits of a fic I started years ago and now plan to rework into a brilliant screenplay that wins Oscars and lets me get cut off by the Jaws theme as I babble on my acceptance speech. (DustWriter)	DustWriter https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3191722/DustWriter
Actions and Language	Actions and language specific to this community	OOO, POV	
Subtleties of practice	Giving advice/reflections on the story—a deeper engagement than mutuality of engagement	You're doing a wonderful job portraying the results of Prim's trauma and building the danger they're continuing to face. I also like the subtle references to Katniss' shifting feelings about he own mother. (Honeylime)	Honeylime https://www.fanfiction.net/u/4046046/honeylime

Appendix C

Coding Rubric Wenger's Identity in Practice-Learning Trajectory

Learning Trajectory	Explanation	Example	Respondent
Work in Progress	A story or writing in development	Part 12: Woot! Okay so I've finished up to chapter 14 and am currently working on 15. Which means the whole thing is almost complete. (A.Rose.Love)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Participation & Reification – becoming	they are becoming someone or something else by participating	I plan on becoming an author when I 'grow up'. Right now I'm working on my very first novel" (A.Rose.Love)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Social contexts-temporality of identity	Sense of self changes within the social setting (would they respond differently if a teacher gave writing advice instead of a member)	Part 13: Yah! Okay, so I love you guys really, seriously, honestly, I love you. I've never had a story go this far before, I mean, I'm up to a 100 reviews, which is completely amazing, I never thought this story would make it this far so thank you, thank you, thank you. I can't say it enough. (A.Rose.Love)	A.Rose.Love https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2587529/A-Rose-Love
Peripheral participation (not full but access)	Newcomers who are not members but who get to observe and learn and begin to tip their toe in the community water	"guest" feedback not members but still participating	
Inbound-newcomers invested in future participation	Newcomers (newbies) who are members (already identifying themselves as members)	I'm from another country and I've got NO IDEA what OC or OOC is so could you please do me a favor and PM me? (Zebras /r/7572849/0/25/)	Rainbow Zebras https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3514985/Rainbow-Zebras
Insider-new events, demands, inventions	Call outs, requests, events, a feeling of membership required to ask things of other members	Responds to query of whether or not to include a rebellion: "I like the idea of the rebellion but there has to be a peeta and katniss thing going on!;" (elisemellark /r/7572849/0/28/)	elisemellark https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3457503/elisemellark
Outbound-lead out, moving on	Moving toward other groups or different kinds of writing	A participant leaves the group-did not find an example	
Boundaries-spanning, linking communities of practice	Finding the edges of this group versus other groups	Did not find an example	

Appendix D

Coding Rubric Wenger's Identity in Practice-Nexus of Multi-Memberships &

Nexus of the Local and Global

Nexus of Multi-memberships	Explanations	Example	Respondent
Various forms of membership into one	Memberships in all kinds of worlds on and offline-including different media outside of this fandom	Yay! You watched Little Manhattan ! Maybe you don't have to worry that much about being so girly. (DandelionOnFire /r/7572849/0/24/)	DandelionOnFire https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2946326/DandelionOnFire
Various identities / constructs of ourselves	We work and rework who we are-the student is influenced by a story or writing of...	3)I read your chapter yesterday night, so when I went to school the next day and was asked if I'd betray my country instead of starving to death I knew exactly what to answer. I referred to the instinct every human being has that tends to make them do whatever it takes to survive. Okay, not just that, but I based on that! I actually remembered what Peeta said in your story! (DandelionOnFire /r/7572849/0/29/)	DandelionOnFire https://www.fanfiction.net/u/2946326/DandelionOnFire
Influence-social bridges to private selves	Community communication that leads to private revelations	I'm sick, so I have plenty of time to write. And while you wait, you could...let me think...oh yeah! Review! (Iam97 /s/7572849/3/New-experience)	iam97 https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3443764/iam97
Different rules and norms (of different memberships)	Navigating rules of membership-like disclaimers for copyright	Disclaimer: I do NOT own the Hunger Games, and obviously, I don't own the story with the bread either. (Iam97 /s/7572849/1/New-experience)	iam97 https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3443764/iam97
Local and Global	Explanations	Example	Respondent
Lived and shaped identities – of various groups	Different parts of who we are: a girl, a German, a teacher-who we've become	Languages: I speak English and German fluently and I also know Latin, it's just that...you don't really speak Latin. I know a little Spanish. (Iam97)	iam97 https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3443764/iam97
Broader perspective-context	a comparison of the outside communities to this communities	Did not find an example	