Framing the Future of Fanfiction: How *The New York Times*' Portrayal of a Youth Media Subculture Influences Beliefs about Media Literacy Education

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Abstract

This article discusses how online fanfiction communities, their members, and their literacy practices are portrayed within popular and news media discourses. Many media literacy scholars believe these youth media subcultures practice complex and sophisticated forms of "new media" literacy. However, when educators attempt to incorporate these practices into K-12 literacy programs, the public's reactions may be heavily influenced by the media's documented patterns of marginalizing, dismissing, and denouncing youth subcultures. This study employs frame and critical discourse analysis in order to examine how the news media's portrayal of fanfiction shapes and reflects the beliefs of teachers, students, and parents.

Keywords: fanfiction, new media literacy, K-12, discourse analysis

Many contemporary youth subcultures informally practice complex and sophisticated forms of new media literacy (NML). The members of "fanfiction communities," for example, take characters and situations from existing television shows, books, video games, and movies, and actively transform this material into original fiction or artwork (Jenkins 1992; Mackey and McClay 2008). Several literacy scholars and practitioners believe that classroom pedagogies should be changed to reflect non-academic, subcultural practices like fanfiction (Gee 2004; Gee and Hayes 2010; Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Lankshear and Knobel 2008; The New London Group 1996). Researchers like Black (2009), Thomas (2006), Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003) suggest these practices are much more "meaningful and engaging" than traditional literacies (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003, 557). However, when educators attempt to incorporate fanfiction into K-12 literacy programs, the public's reactions may be heavily influenced by the media's documented patterns of marginalizing, dismissing, and denouncing youth subcultures (Hall and Jefferson 2006; Hebdige 1979).

Literacy researchers generally regard fanfiction (or fan fiction) communities as safe spaces for children to critically explore popular culture texts, social dynamics, cultural norms, and their own identities (Black 2009; Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003; Thomas 2007). Yet, many of these scholars also claim that popular discourse widely dismisses fanfiction as non-academic, non-creative, subversive, or extra-legal (Black 2009; Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003; Kell 2009; Stein and Busse 2009). This article examines how the news media's portrayal of fanfiction subculture affects the public's expectations and perceptions of teachers who bring fanfiction into the classroom.

In a recent issue of the *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, Townsend and Ryan (2012, 4(2): 149-58) called for research exploring how media narratives influence "what the students in our schools, their parents, and the politicians and administrators who mandate public school policy expect of teachers" (156). Knowledge of educational expectations contributes to the "context of reception" which guides a teacher's decisions about classroom policies and practices (Davis 1997, 154). In order to answer this call for research, my study examined all articles from a popular news media outlet, *The New York Times*, which reported, analyzed, or discussed the fanfiction community, its members, and its practices. I employed a combination of frame analysis and critical discourse analysis techniques, designed to identify how *The New York Times* reflects and influences socio-cultural beliefs about fanfiction and fanfiction-based literacies. This process addressed the following research questions:

1. What discourses does *The New York Times* employ in its definition of fanfiction?
2. How is fanfiction culture characterized by the discourses?

3. What discourses does *The New York Times* employ in its characterization of fanfiction practitioners?

4. What is the purpose and future of fanfiction according to the discourses?

Fanfiction as Subculture

The term *fanfiction* describes specific patterns of textual production and consumption (Hetcher 2009; Stasi 2006). Fanfiction authors frequently rely on their readers' knowledge of established characters and stories in order to craft original works of fiction (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003). This source material "offers a framework of requirements which most fan writers choose to obey" to varying degrees (Stein and Busse 2009, 195), and fanfiction communities "define themselves around shared readings" of these intertextual connections (197).

During the 1960s, fans of *Star Trek* began exchanging original stories through fan-interest magazines ("fanzines") and science fiction conventions (Coppa 2006; Verba 1996). In Japan, amateur manga artists began circulating *dōjinshi*, self-published comic books frequently based on popular anime and manga stories (Leavitt and Horbinski 2012). Today, many young fanfiction practitioners gather in online communities, formed by common media preferences rather than demographics such as race, gender, age, class, or ability (Black 2009; Thomas 2006). These diverse environments allow participants (especially "marginalized" adolescents) opportunities to construct and maintain "thought, identity, and social position" (Moje 2000, 252) by exercising a range of out-of-school literacy practices (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003; Gee 2004).

Many fanfiction scholars refer to these communities as "subcultures" (Hadas 2009; Jenkins 1992; Lothian 2011). Henry Jenkins, the father of contemporary fanfiction studies (TWC Editor 2008), based his research on the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' "hegemonic" approach to youth culture. The CCCS's research defined "subculture" as the rituals, practices, and styles of those subordinate groups who are "alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons" (Hebdige 1979, 2). This conception of subculture was heavily influenced by several twentieth century sociological theories, including Roland Barthes' notion of second-level signification, Antonio Gramsci's conception

of hegemony as a moving equilibrium, and Claude Lévi-Strauss' definition of *bricolage* as science of the concrete (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts 2006).

These "hegemonic" researchers envisioned culture as a complex network of groups and classes, each competing to disseminate and naturalize their specific tastes upon the rest of society. Since some groups have more access to the distribution of ideas and information (i.e., the mass media), the power to produce and impose taste upon society is unevenly distributed between social groups. Several CCCS researchers examined how the media's most dominant discourses and ideologies reflected the interests and taste preferences of society's most powerful social classes (CCCS Mugging Group 2006; Clarke 2006b). For example, Dick Hebdige's (1979, 2006) case studies of British punk and mod subcultures demonstrated how society's dominant classes used mass media to frame subcultural styles as deviant, immature, or abnormal.

Jenkins synthesized these cultural theories with Pierre Bourdieu's (1979) assertion that "those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture" cannot tolerate alternatives to dominant media preferences (56-57). His own insider experiences as a fanfiction practitioner led him to conclude that marginalization was deeply engrained in the language of media discourse. Jenkins (1992) described several examples of this negative media discourse within non-fiction books, television programs, and films (12-15).

Jenkins also cited Ien Ang's (1985) survey of Dutch viewers of the television program *Dallas*. Ang found that respondents who disliked *Dallas* were far more comfortable articulating their taste preferences than respondents who considered themselves "fans." She also observed that fans struggled to define their appreciation of *Dallas* as innocent or unproblematic, while non-fans appealed to widely-circulated, negative portrayals of *Dallas* within "mass culture" (104-110). According to Jenkins, Ang's study illustrated how media stereotypes influence popular discourse, preventing fans from defending or articulating the merits of their preferences and practices.

Fanfiction and Discourse

Many fanfiction scholars share Jenkins' view that fanfiction practices are marginalized within popular discourse. Several scholars suggest these prevalent cultural sentiments complicate attempts to implement fanfiction-based classroom literacy practices: according to a MacArthur Foundation white paper, despite the

pervasiveness of fanfiction among youth, "school arts and creative writing programs remain hostile to overt signs of repurposed content, emphasizing the ideal of the autonomous artist" (Jenkins et al. 2006, 33). Since fanfiction frequently incorporates narrative and creative decisions that challenge prevailing cultural notions of "successful writing," it is a form of text "privileged by students but marginalized by teachers" (Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003, 564). These teachers have a tendency to dismiss their students' informal learning experiences as "frivolous" or "leisure-time pursuits that have little relationship to academic content" (Black 2009, 76, 79).

Stein and Busse (2009) cite their experiences with "students introduced to fan works in introductory media studies courses" and a professional author's anti-fanfiction "rant" as evidence that "fan authorship triggers broader cultural anxieties surrounding threats to originality and idea ownership in the age of digital media reproducibility" (205). Angela Thomas (2006) bases her claim that "writing fan fiction in the classroom was once considered inappropriate (and possibly still is)" on her own personal experiences in a teacher education program (229). These scholars use specific examples of negative discourse to describe "the ways people (including teachers) have traditionally dismissed fan fiction" (Thomas 2006, 229). Yet, when addressing or examining these dismissive perceptions, researchers have never conducted extensive empirical studies focusing on the reciprocal relationship between public and news media discourses.

"The news" is a critical site of popular discourse; it produces meanings, symbols, and messages, which perpetuate and influence public opinion (Cooper 1989; Fairclough 1995; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Schudson 2011). These messages also reflect society's existing beliefs and values. For example, newspapers adopt the speech patterns and modes of discourse which encode their readers' attitudes, providing ordered and categorized accounts of events and information which meet their audiences' needs (Fowler 1991). By analyzing a typical newspaper's speech patterns and modes of discourse, researchers can determine how the news media represent and influence cultural beliefs about education (Fairclough 1995; Richardson 2007; Schudson 1995; van Dijk 1997).

News reports are an increasingly influential component of the wide array of policy and media discourses that provide a context for beliefs about educational change (Davis 1997; Thomas 2003; Thomas

2002). This "context of reception" includes a number of contradictory news media and academic narratives which "influence and construct the thoughts and actions" of policy makers and implementers (Davis 1997, 154). When teachers and administrators craft and implement educational reforms, their contexts of reception frequently include academic analyses of public perception; for example, many school districts gravitate towards policies that have the greatest potential for positive public reception (Stager 2006).

Intertextual linguistic research techniques, such as critical discourse analysis, show policy-makers and practitioners how educational reforms are interpreted, presented to, and received by the public. Discourse analysis is particularly useful, because it indicates how "the newspaper medium selects, develops and presents for public consumption what the discursive themes of policy will be" (Falk 1994, 11). Despite the benefits of discourse analysis, no reception-based media discourse analyses appear to have been conducted by fanfiction researchers.

Teachers benefit from research that examines the relationship between media narratives and beliefs about education (Thomas 2002; Townsend and Ryan 2012). Teachers who bring fanfiction into their classrooms will also benefit from research that examines the relationship between media narratives and beliefs about fanfiction. This study synthesizes frame and critical discourse analysis methodologies, in order to examine how one of the most popular news media outlets, *The New York Times*, contributes to these beliefs.

Frame Analysis

According to Normal Fairclough (1995, 1989), every discursive event involves a text or speech act, the (re)production or interpretation of this act through discursive practice, and any socio-cultural practices related to such discursive practice. These discursive events often convey messages and representations concerning cultural identity and relationships. I chose to begin my examination of *The New York Times* by identifying its discursive events' most dominant messages, or "frames."

Frames can be determined by analyzing language within and across a collection of discursive events (Menashe and Siegel 1998). Robert Entman (1993) suggests that frames serve four possible functions: they present or reflect culturally prevalent problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations. Frame analysis

can also indicate which parties are considered to be "causes" of societal problems, and whom society considers to be "experts" on particular topics (Entman 1993; Goffman 1981).

In this study, I employed frame analysis techniques based on the work of Yuqion Zhou and Patricia Moy (2007), who coded a selection of news reports for common terms, themes, and passages. Zhou and Moy sorted each article by its "primary function" (based on Entman's four functions of frames) then identified the frames that each article used to fulfill this function. I made several changes to Zhou and Moy's methodologies; instead of identifying each article's "primary function," I examined how each article fulfilled each of Entman's functions. I also slightly modified Entman's categories to fit my study: "problem definition" became "conceptual definition," "causal" became "purpose," "moral" became "legal/moral" to accommodate a more functional interpretation, and "treatment" became "prescription/prediction."

This frame analysis provided the foundation for my subsequent critical discourse analysis. Since critical discourse analysis examines discourses in or as close as possible to their original contexts, it is essential to employ an interpretive lens that preserves the frames' contextual ideology (van Dijk 1997; Wodak 2001). Many of these frames concerned fanfiction's role in shaping future citizens, and the ability of fanfiction to fulfill society's pedagogical needs. Since none of these articles questioned whether the needs of society corresponded to the needs of its citizens, I decided to employ a functionalist sociological lens to process my frame analysis. The functionalist approach identifies how an institution serves the interests of society and its citizens; unlike many other sociological lenses, functionalism assumes these interests are identical (Sadovnik 2007). For example, education serves society by conditioning "individuals to fit existing social practices and requirements" (Feinberg and Soltis 2009, 6). By applying this lens to my frame analysis, I was able to preserve *The New York Times'* socio-cultural ideology.

Critical Discourse Analysis

While my frame analysis focused on how *The New York Times* presents fanfiction-related topics and issues (Price and Tewksbury 1997; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007), my critical discourse analysis examined the presence and absence of particular topics and issues from the narrative. I employed Teun van Dijk's model of critical discourse analysis (or CDA), which

focuses on how these patterns of inclusion and exclusion enact and reproduce "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality" between socio-cultural groups (2003, 338). This conflict theoretical approach shows how "mainstream" news media represent or marginalize fanfiction subculture by identifying the narrative's inconspicuous qualities: orders of discourse, communicative events, and the strategies and options which dictate the media's production of meanings, symbols, and messages (Fairclough 1995; Jager 2001; van Dijk 1997).

For example, informal rules about what is considered "newsworthy" govern the news media's production of "reported speech." When newspapers choose to report certain events and issues, and not report others, they create categories of morality for events and information. Over time, patterns of inclusion and exclusion add legitimacy to the public's views and perspectives on certain issues. By consistently choosing to frame certain parties as "experts," the news media influence readers' views about who speaks with authority on issues like education policy (Fairclough 1995; Fowler 1991; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1998; Schudson 1995). These media narratives often reinforce inconsistencies between academic and public conceptions of education (Rogers et al. 2005; Thomas 2003; Thomas 2002).

The media's choice of frames is also greatly influenced by existing socio-cultural beliefs, creating reciprocal relationships between media and public discourses (Richardson 2007; Rogers et al. 2005). For instance, society's gradual shift from production to consumption culture precipitated similar shifts in media narratives; these narratives then perpetuated and reinforced society's pro-consumption sentiments (Abercrombie 1991; Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 259). Van Dijk's model (1993, 2001, 2006) interprets these reciprocal relationships in terms of power and domination. When "mainstream" socio-cultural groups control news media access, the language of news media acts to universalize "mainstream" socio-cultural beliefs across the whole of society (note the similarities between van Dijk's theoretical lens and the "hegemonic" lens of cultural scholars). This study employs van Dijk's approach to investigate whether the media's portrayal of fanfiction reflects, perpetuates, or reinforces any existing socio-cultural patterns of marginalization.

Data Selection

My data set consisted of articles published in *The New York Times* between 1969 (the year the *Star*

Trek fan community first produced fanfiction in its contemporary form) and 2011 (Hellekson and Busse 2006). I conducted three searches ("internet" + "student" + "enthusiasm," "fan fiction" or "fanfiction" or "remix culture," and "fanzine") which generated an initial set of six hundred and twenty-five articles. I immediately realized that my search criteria had "cast too wide a net," resulting in many articles that were unrelated to my study.

One hundred and seventy-eight of the one hundred and eighty-eight articles produced by my search for "fanzine" (a medium commonly used by pre-internet fan and fanfiction communities (Ebert 2005)) referred to an alternate, non-applicable definition of the term (product mailings put out by industries for the benefit of consumers). My search for "internet" + "student" + "enthusiasm" also resulted in a staggering amount of articles which were wholly unrelated to education or online fan activity. After removing a number of other articles, including obituaries of fanfiction practitioners and articles that contained a single mention of fan activity without explanation for unfamiliar readers, I arrived at a final data set of fifty articles.

Although my initial data set extended back to the 1960s, my final data set's earliest article is a 1986 piece by Camille Bacon-Smith (who later became a prominent scholar of fanfiction). Most articles were published in the 2000s, with a low incidence of author repetition. Twenty-nine authors published only a single article, and five authors published two articles. This suggests that *The New York Times*' narrative of fanfiction represents a healthy variety of author voices, rather than a large quantity of articles penned by a small group of editors or experts on staff.

Frame Analysis Findings

After I determined which articles were suitable for inclusion, I coded each article's key terms and themes. I then analyzed these codes, determining how each article might fulfill each frame function category. For example, I examined Julie Salamon's (2001) "Teenage Viewers Declare Independence: When it Comes to TV, Coveted Adolescents Prove to be Unpredictable," and asked how the article answered each of my four research questions.

Salamon describes Lily Rothman, a teenage fan of *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*. After every episode, Lily "gets on the phone or the Internet to analyze the episode with other fans" (2001, 1). Lily creates fanfiction in an online community, which Salamon characterizes as an extension of youth culture. Salamon's article discusses how Lily and other teenage members of the fanfiction community share their experiences and interests. In Lily's own words: "[I have] so much in common with the people I meet through 'Buffy'... I can't pinpoint why, exactly, but we tend to like the same music and the same books and the same movies" (1).

Salaman uses the story of Lily to frame fanfiction as a creative, identity-producing activity for teenagers (conceptual definition frame). Salamon uses the "participatory" and "interest sharing" purpose frames to describe Lily's desire to participate in a community that shares her own interests; these frames are contained within quotes from Henry Jenkins, who is presented as an expert on fanfiction. Salamon also employs the "self-branding" purpose frame, describing how teenagers make a television show "part of their identity" by writing fanfiction (2001, 1). She employs the "adolescent" evaluative frame to describe Lily's behavior as typical for her age. Salamon refers to this behavior as "unpredictable" (1) and repeatedly mentions that television executives seek to understand and control it (implying the "co-opted" prediction frame).

After completing my frame analysis, I grouped frames that were ideologically linked through similarity or opposition (for example, "extends life" was linked with "extension of show," and "youth" was linked with "adult"). Appendix 1 illustrates this frame distribution.

Conceptual Definition Frames - What Is Fanfiction, How Do the Media Depict It, and What Language is Used in This Definition?

The New York Times almost always defined fanfiction by its subject, and almost always framed the subject of fanfiction as "existing/favorite characters." Most articles portrayed fanfiction as additional, if unofficial, extensions to existing intellectual properties. Fanfiction offers new stories and alternate plots that fill in the gaps between official fiction or extend the life of cancelled franchises (Bazelon 2007; Kakutani 2010; Kirkpatrick 2002; O'Connell 2000).

These articles framed fanfiction writing as artistic, creative, and active, at least when compared to "traditional" forms of media consumption. However, even the most pro-fanfiction articles drew sharp distinctions between the professional works of media creators and the unprofessional "reshaping of a creator's product by the user" (Leland 2002, 1). For instance, Harmon (1997) described fanfiction as creative "scribbling" (1) while Mirapaul (2001) referred to "amateur" media cre-

ated by "impatient" fans (2). These frames ensure "fan" remains inseparable from "fanfiction" in news media discourse.

Purpose Frames - How Did Fanfiction Come into Being, Why Does It Exist, and What Purpose Does it Serve?

Many science fiction and fantasy fans feel frustrated by their passive role in traditional media culture. Fanfiction communities coalesce around the common desires of media fans to enter into a more participatory interaction with their favorite characters and stories (Heffernan 2008; Kakutani 2010; Walker 2008). Articles by O'Connell (2000), Mirapaul (2001), and Kakutani (2010) describe how this desire to influence and engage with media results in a "vast body of shared commentary and speculation that often seems to overshadow" discussion of the original media (Kakutani 2010, 1). Members of fanfiction communities share far more than their stories; they share intimate references, context-specific knowledge, and inside jokes about their favorite media (Heffernan 2007; Scott 2002).

Several articles positively depicted fanfiction as a diversionary, enjoyable recreational activity (Powers 2000; Wortham 2010). Fanfiction was also described as a tool for correcting fictional injustices perpetrated by the source materials' authors. For example, a doctor accused of criminal negligence on an episode of *Chicago Hope* had been exonerated within the narratives of many *Chicago Hope* fanfiction communities (Business/Financial Desk 1997).

Legal/Moral Evaluative Frames - How Is the Legal and Moral Status of Fanfiction Depicted by the Articles, What Language is Used to Describe Fanfiction Authors, and What Judgments Are Made about Practitioners and Their Subculture?

Many articles described fanfiction authors as dedicated (Nussbaum 2003), but the specific language used to frame their "zealous" (Stelter 2008, 5) or "marginal obsessive" (Manly 2006, 1) behavior varied. The normalcy of fanfiction appeared largely dependent on the fan's age. Adult fanfiction authors were portrayed as perverts playing out their media-inspired sexual fantasies (McGrath 1998; O'Connell 2005; Orr 2004), whereas children and adolescents used fanfiction as a creative form of literacy and self-expression (Aspan 2007; Kirkpatrick 2002; Salamon 2001).

Almost every article that mentioned the legality of fanfiction always did so from a cautionary perspective, arguing that allowing fans to produce fanfiction and fan films was free publicity and always within a copyright holder's best interests. Clive Thompson (2005) suggested that the popular *Halo* fan-film *Red vs. Blue* contributed to the *Halo* brand by granting the video game "a whiff of counterculture coolness, the sort of grass-roots street cred that major corporations desperately crave but can never manufacture" (21). Articles frequently condemned intellectual property holders who chose to assert their rights as "going after their own consumers," suggesting it was far better for companies to work with their fans than against them (Walker 2006, 22).

Prescription/Prediction Frames - What Should Be Done about Fanfiction, What Is Going to Happen to Fanfiction in the Future, and What Is Going to Be the Relationship between Fanfiction, Copyright Holders, and Educators?

The New York Times generally presented fanfiction as a financial opportunity for the corporations that own the intellectual properties copied by fanfiction. Many articles asserted that franchises benefit from, and in some cases rely on, their fanfiction communities. For example, Harris (2008) ties the box office success of the *X-Files* film to the continued health of its fanfiction community, while Heffernan (2008) depicts a lack of homoerotic fanfiction as problematic for the success of any show with a large, attractive male cast. Thompson (2005) reports on the lucrative partnership between the *Halo* fan-film circle Rooster Teeth and *Halo*'s copyright holder Microsoft. This "co-opted/encouraged by industry" frame presents a view of fanfiction's future as a marketing tool, rather than a fan-driven culture. The frame is frequently associated with the "self-branding" purpose frame; teenagers who desire to become part of their favored franchise show their solidarity with the product and fan subculture in ways which are extremely beneficial for intellectual property holders (Hitt 2008; Scott 2002).

Several other articles described the educational potential of fanfiction. Emily Bazelon (2007) reported on the use of fanfiction writing as creative therapy for autistic teenage girls, James Warren (2011) described how Chicago public libraries employed fanfiction in extracurricular literacy programs, and Mokoto Rich (2009) presented a report on fiction reading statistics, referring to fanfiction as virtually indistinguishable from print fiction in evaluating literacy rates and childhood reading frequencies. Each of these frames advo-

cated for the increased use of fanfiction in educational settings. For example, Rich (2009) cited fanfiction's use by parents as an alternative to television for their children's entertainment: in one parent's own words: "I'm just pleased she reads something anymore" (1).

Functionalist Interpretation of Frames

From a functionalist perspective, fanfiction communities benefit society in two ways: they offer marginalized, youth-safe, creative outlets for expression and participation; and they instill the value of reading, creative writing, and peer critical interaction in youth populations.

The New York Times frames fanfiction writing as a healthy and culturally monolithic teenage activity, practiced by traditionally marginalized science fiction and fantasy "geeks" (Bazelon 2007; Scott 2002). Recall how Salamon (2001) employed "participation," "identity construction," and "interest sharing" frames to depict Lily Rothman's interest in writing *Buffy* fanfiction. Lily's fanfiction practices are motivated by a desire to participate with like-minded *Buffy* fans, so she uploads her work to an online fanfiction community.

Since a large portion of fanfiction writing is "romantic," fanfiction communities are particularly appealing to female fans of science fiction and fantasy who typically lack a critical voice, peer interaction, or sense of validation within other, more male-oriented fan subcultures (Business/Financial Desk 1997; O'Connell 2000). Fanfiction provides girls like Lily with a chance to express themselves, by modifying genres and stories that have "all but excluded" their perspectives (Bacon-Smith 1986, 2).

The New York Times validates the literary merit of fanfiction writing. Articles assure parents that their children's dwindling literacies are simply being replaced by equally viable alternatives: their children are not reading and writing less, they are simply reading and writing differently. Fanfiction is framed as a healthy literacy practice, employed by local kids in public libraries (Aspan 2007; Warren 2011). For example, Salamon claims that Lily's media consumption and production practices "reflect her generation in many ways" (2001, 1). Overall, this functional interpretation reflects a positive, non-marginalizing view of fanfiction as practiced by technologically savvy teenagers.

Critical Discourse Analysis Findings

If "marginalization" only concerns negative portrayals of social groups, then *The New York Times* does not marginalize youth fanfiction subcultures. However, cultural research indicates that the mainstream media can dominate youth subcultures in a variety of ways, including: the incorporation of subcultural aspects back into dominant culture (Hall 1977); the conversion and re-appropriation of subcultural signs, effectively reducing them to commodities (Hebdige 2006); marketing products or services to specific subcultures, to exploit group affiliation for profit (Clarke 2006a); labeling or redefining subcultural groups and practices as deviant or leisure pursuits (Hebdige 1979); converting the members of subculture back into dominant culture (Geertz 1964); pathologizing subculture (Clarke 2006b); and pitting subcultures against one another for resources (Murdock 1974). By applying Teun van Dijk's power and domination-centered CDA approach to the data, I was able to identify several of these media responses (most notably labeling and marketing) within the narrative. These patterns of subcultural disempowerment revealed a deeply troubling account of the future of fanfiction as an autonomous creative practice.

The most common frame identified by my study was "interest sharing"; out of fifty articles, thirty-two described fanfiction subculture as a community where fans meet to create and discuss shared cultural experiences. Out of these thirty-two articles, none included any meaningful discussion of how these shared cultural experiences are determined by commercial media exposure, evaluated by "devotion" to commercial media, or solidified through additional media interests that many fans suspiciously seem to share. Recall once again Lily Rothman, who had "so much in common with the people I meet through 'Buffy,'" but couldn't determine why (Salamon 2001, 1). Salamon mentions that Lily and her peers liked "the same music and the same books and the same movies," but does not question why all of these "common interests" involve media consumption (1).

According to childhood consumer culture scholars, these "common interests" are generated and manipulated by corporations, who take advantage of globalization and digital distribution to create an increasingly diverse range of branded media franchises (Prout 2005; Sekeres 2009). When communities of "fans" form around particularly viable franchises, companies create (and heavily market) new products designed to capitalize on "self-branding" behavior. For example, *Twilight*'s tale of characters with secret supernatural powers living incognito in the present-day world closely resembled *Harry Potter*'s core premise, and was heav-

ily marketed towards self-described *Harry Potter* fans (Sekeres 2009, 403). This marketing extends beyond the confines of the brand to related media; by selecting a moody Radiohead song as the climactic ending theme to the *Twilight* film, producers introduced young, moody *Twilight* fans to a perhaps unfamiliar band. One wonders whether members of *Twilight* fanfiction communities now "mysteriously" share an appreciation for Radiohead.

Many articles frame fanfiction as yet another aspect of these media brands. As Stuart Elliot (2005) notes: "[I]f you like the TV show, why not buy the fragrance? Wear the jewelry? Read the book? Join other fans online to help write an episode?" (7). Due to corporations "co-opting" and "encouraging" fanfiction, participants in fanfiction communities have become "brand ambassadors" (Elliott 2005, 7), similar to the walking billboards of brand name clothing and logo-as-fashion (Stelter 2008).

Throughout these narratives, media executives and market researchers are consistently privileged as authoritative voices on the future of education, as well as primary stakeholders in the future of fanfiction communities (Bosman 2010; Harris 2008; Stelter 2008). Most articles frame excited fans as those who welcome the chance to participate in "official" fanfiction; far fewer articles discuss whether these partnerships will cause fanfiction communities to lose their creative autonomy and become inseparable components of the brands they once sought to emulate (Hitt 2008). Corporations no longer need to sue fanfiction communities; rather than being litigated into submission, authors now give up their rights willingly.

Although Salamon's (2001) article is not the strongest example of marginalization within the data set, or even the most detailed description of the fan fiction community, her depiction of Lily illustrates *The New York Times'* overall portrayal of adolescent fanfiction practitioners. Salamon uses Lily as a market research "survey sample of one": a "coveted adolescent" with "fiercely loyal, opinionated, even obsessive, but also unpredictable" patterns of media consumption (1). Corporations are framed as stakeholders by Salamon; she cites market research that describes how teenagers like Lily "spend a lot of money" (1), but excludes any frames that concern the morality of industries that capitalize on the excessive consumption of Lily's generation. When all is said and done, the only "disturbing fact of life" is that television executives cannot predict what Lily is going to watch or buy next (Salamon 2001, 1).

Implications

This study provides little evidence that the news media bias parents and administrators against the use of fanfiction in the K-12 classroom. Throughout the narrative, fanfiction is depicted as an increasingly normal (Bazelon 2007), "mainstream" youth practice (Manly 2006, 1). These frames reduce the subversive nature of fanfiction subculture by equating it to other, safe commercial hobbies (this is extremely similar to society's response to punk subculture; for an example, see Hebdige 1979, or visit any "Hot Topic" retail store).

The New York Times uses glowingly positive language to describe the educational benefits of fanfiction. For example, Warren (2011) refers to Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's publicly funded "YOUmedia" fanfiction writing program as part of the Mayor's "impressive legacy when it comes to culture and literacy" (27A). Other articles assert that fanfiction represents a new paradigm in literacy and learning (Rich 2009, 2008). These frames suggest that teachers need not "wonder how an average parent might respond" to classroom practices based on youth media literacies (Hobbs 1998, 21). However, before teachers adopt these literacy practices, they should first consider "what is being taught" and learned by the members of youth subcultures (Gee and Hayes 2010, 186).

Although many teachers believe that fanfiction communities offer non-commercial tools for critically understanding media, *The New York Times* portrays fanfiction as an extension of branded children's media. Educators should acknowledge the most frightening implication of this frame: that fanfiction communities are becoming sites "of cultural hegemony in which people are socialized into dominant values (of capitalism, for instance)" (Gee and Hayes 2010, 186). Every literacy practitioner must question whether these values belong in the K-12 classroom, and whether *The New York Times'* depictions of commodified fanfiction are compatible with the basic tenets of multi-literacy pedagogy.

For years, fanfiction has been a predominantly non-commercial activity (Hellekson 2009). Recently, scholars like Scott (2009), Pearson (2010), and Noppe (2011) have suggested that fanfiction communities should embrace consumerism in order to "ensure that commodification of fan work ends up benefitting fans first" (Noppe 2011, 1.4). For example, Noppe (2011) discusses how integrating "fan work into the broader cultural economy could be both socially and economi-

cally desirable," drawing comparisons between American fanfiction communities and Japan's commodified *dōjinshi* subcultures (7.1). Noppe (2011) also calls for further research investigating whether corporations will "seize the initiative toward commodification at the expense of fans" (5.1). Unfortunately, *The New York Times* implies that commodification will disproportionately benefit these corporations, resulting in the reduced creative autonomy and increased societal marginalization of fanfiction subcultures. Based on these findings, I suggest that fanfiction communities should safeguard themselves from external commodifying pressures, in order to preserve their successful gift economies.

Conclusion

Since *The New York Times* does not negatively frame fanfiction literacy practices, why do so many fanfiction scholars and practitioners report that negative discourses about fanfiction hinder classroom literacy initiatives? One possible explanation is that fanfiction scholars have relied too heavily on isolated examples of negative discourses, and have not considered the overall ratio of these negative discourses to positive discourses. For example, Jenkins (1992) refers to several films, television shows, and non-fiction books that negatively depict fans, but Jenkins never provides the size of his entire data set or information about positive depictions. Since Jenkins only presents eleven films in his findings, and does not provide his data collection methodologies, it is difficult to determine the implications or transferability of Jenkins' study. A parent might view fans negatively if they were to watch all eleven of these films, but what if they were to watch eleven random films that depicted fans?

Based on inconsistencies between this study and other fanfiction research, I recommend that other fanfiction scholars attempt to reproduce these findings by analyzing the discourses of other news media outlets. *The New York Times* represents just one particular cross-section of news media discourse. Since newspapers reflect the language and ideology of their target audiences (Fowler 1991), educators should investigate whether teachers and parents in their districts are consumers of *The New York Times* or ideologically similar media. Local newspapers, cable news television, and social media aggregation websites might each convey distinct messages about fanfiction. Each contains an as-yet-unexplored set of discourses, which certainly merit future analysis.

The New York Times describes fanfiction as a normal adolescent activity, and a powerful tool for media literacy education. It also frames fanfiction communities as financially lucrative extensions of children's branded media culture. By critically examining a collection of *The New York Times'* discursive events, this study has shown how news media portrayals of fanfiction are situated within broader cultural contexts, revealing a positive, if ultimately troubling, account of fanfiction and fanfiction-based literacy practices.

Appendix 1: Frequency of Dominant Frames

Conceptual Definition Frames (how is FF defined?)	Purpose Frames (why does FF exist?)	Legal/Moral Evaluative Frames (how are authors and practices depicted?)	Prescription/ Prediction Frames (what should be done/is the future of FF?)
Existing/favorite characters 24	Interest sharing 32	Dedicated/obsessive/ unhealthy/ devoted/normal 19	Co-opted/encouraged by industry 19
Extends life/extension of show/supplement 14	Participatory 22	Adolescent/youth/age vs. Raunchy/adult/erotic (sex) 9	Gains own fans/becomes genre/replaces source material 7
Non-passive (fandom) 12	Art creation 15	Illegality/subversive 6	Embraced by teachers/ parents/ as a tool of therapy 7
Creative/original/ non-formulaic 12	Self-branding/tribute 9	Embarrassing/worthless/ no appeal 3	Becomes legitimate/ mainstream 6
Scribbling/ unprofessional/amateur/ non-creative/marginal 9	Protest/criticism/ correcting injustice 6	Empowering/gender enabling 3	Discouraged 3
Artistic community/form of expression 3	Self-amusing 4	Private 2	Grassroots/becomes organized 3
Literacy 3			Bridge to legitimacy 2
Kids/Youth/Accessible 3			Political expression/ experimental art 2
Users 2			

Appendix 2: List of Unreferenced Artifacts from the Data Set

This data set is entirely composed of print news artifacts taken from *The New York Times* and its supplements (ex. *The New York Times Magazine, The New York Times Book Review*).

Author	Date	Title
Bosman, J.	Oct 11, 2006	A New Writer Is Soaring On the Wings of a Dragon
Corrections	May 12, 2002	Comment on May 5th article
Hale, M.	May 21, 2010	In "Lost," Mythology Trumps Mystery
Heffernan, V.	Apr 27, 2008	Sepia No More
Heffernan, V.	Dec 24, 2003	Critic's Notebook: Santa Before His Beard and Some Bad-Boy Cheer
Jurgensen, J.	Sep 16, 2006	Rewriting the Rules of Fiction
Kennedy, R.	Feb 4, 2009	Poster Boy Is Caught, Or is it a Stand-In?
Kennedy, R.	May 28, 2005	With Irreverence and an iPod, Recreating the Museum Tour
Kowinski, W. S.	Aug 31, 2004	A Salute to James Doohan, Who Beamed People Up as Scotty
Lee, L.	Oct 21, 2001	Film: Up and Coming - Hayden Christensen: Life as the Latest Bearer of the Force
Letter to the Editor	Nov 2, 2003	"The Flying Nun": My Mary Sue
Nussbaum, E.	Dec 21, 2003	A DVD Face-Off: The Official vs. the Homemade
O'Connell, P. L.	Jun 17, 2004	Online Diary: New Realm for Rowling
O'Connell, P. L.	Jun 19, 2003	Online Diary: Start Your Broomsticks
Pogrebin, R.	Feb 13, 2011	This Week Ahead Feb 13-Feb 19
Ryzik, M.	May 30, 2008	Spare Times: Previously on Lost
Schussler, J.	Feb 22, 2009	I Was a Regency Zombie
Taylor, C.	Nov 12, 2006	Baker Street Regular

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