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Remake it, Remix it, and Queer it Up

Queer Comfort and Community Through Fanfiction and Queer Stories

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[O]nce a text is released into the world, audiences gain power to have their way with it – remake it, remix it, and queer it up for their own viewing pleasure.

(Jennifer Duggan)

DISCLAIMER: I do not support JK Rowling's disgusting transphobic views.

(MsKingBean89)

Abstract

This thesis analyzes fanfiction and the community surrounding fan made media as a source of comfort for queer youth. A large majority of those who read and write fanfiction are queer and include their own relationships with queerness in their writing. The people writing fanfiction spend their own time and energy to share stories about their favorite characters for free, giving anyone access to read their works. I argue that queer youth who lack representation in mainstream media turn to fanfiction in order to find characters and narratives they relate to and that fanfiction helps build communities. Using *All the Young Dudes* as a case study, I examine how queer youth read and respond to works of fiction written about characters they already know, but through the perspective of queer people. I will be using research that has been done about queer mental health (Duggan, Andreassen, Dajches and Llewellyn) and more general research that has been conducted about the impacts of relying on fiction for emotional regulation (Benko, Hill & Hum, Risch) to inform my analysis throughout this thesis. Additionally, I will be using comments left on the fanfiction by readers to support claims I make about how *ATYD* can – and has impacted queer readers.

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Terminology

As the world of fandom and fanfiction exists primarily as a rather niche online world, there are several terms that are used when describing and talking about it that are not commonly known or are used in ways that don't correlate with their original meaning. Due to this, I have included a brief explanation of essential fandom terms that are used throughout this thesis. When defining these terms, I will be referring to a comprehensive list of terms created by Tumblr user Moonbeam and posted on their website. The list is by no means comprehensive, but it is a collaborative effort between Moonbeam and their audience and was updated consistently until 2017.

Ao3 is the shortened version of the fanfiction website Archive of Our Own, which is run as an archive, thus the name. The logo for the website is shown as Ao3 and this has become a shorthand for the site when talking about it both online and in conversations (Archive of Our Own, About the archive).

Fandom refers to the community of dedicated fans of “a particular TV show or other cult-inducing medium, including movies, books, music, comics, and any other canon source material” (Moonbeam).

Slash fiction or *slash* refers to the inclusion of a queer, traditionally male/male relationships. The name comes from the “/” that separates the two characters in the story. Queer female relationships are indicated with the same slash but are usually referred to as femslash (Moonbeam).

Angst refers to a genre of stories where the characters experience large amounts of physical or, mainly, emotional torment. These types of fics may also be designed to elicit the same emotions in the readers (Moonbeam).

Ship is the wish for two (or more) characters to be in a relationship. While this is not always romantic, the most common *ships* don't tend to be platonic. The word *shipping* also comes from this definition, but describes the person who wants the characters to be in a relationship (Moonbeam).

Headcanon refers to the term for a personal belief or interpretation someone has about a certain situation or character that, while not proven by the canon of the original work, is not necessarily disproven by canon either (Moonbeam)

Kudos, in the world of fanfiction is “a quick and easy way to let a creator know that you like their work” (Archive of Our Own, FAQ). Leaving *kudos* on a fic can be compared to liking posts on social media sites and people can use the amount of *kudos* on a fic to gauge

the opinions others in the fandom had to reading works.

Tags are the labels used by writers to categorize their works on Ao3, this is usually single words or short phrases that describe the mood of the work. E.g. characters included, ships, or more fanfiction specific words like *fluff* – for sweet, non-angsty works, or *crack* – for funny, unlikely scenarios.

Fanon refers to plot points or characterizations that are widely accepted within the fandom but that have not been established within the original source material. These are usually concepts that have become so ingrained in the fandom that people struggle with separating it from the actual contents of the source material (Moonbeam). An example of this is Orion being Sirius Black's middle name. This was never established in the original books, though its prevalence in the fandom is enough to make one think it was. It is important to note that *canon* refers to the original source material.

CisHet is a term used to describe someone who is both cisgendered and heterosexual.

AFAB/AMAB are acronyms used to describe someone's assigned gender at birth.

AFAB means Assigned Female At Birth and *AMAB* means Assigned Male At Birth.

While writing this thesis, I will be referring to the LGBTQIA+ community with the umbrella term *queer*. This is a term that has previously been used as a slur against people attracted to the same sex, however it has in more recent years been reclaimed by the community as an umbrella term that refers to anyone who does not fit in with the societal standard of being cisgendered and heterosexual (Clarke). When referring to queer readers or queer writers of fanfiction, this will therefore include both same-sex attracted people, and trans- or non-binary people. *Queer* will be used exclusively when referring to the larger community, whereas when referring to single parts of the queer community where this is relevant, they will be referred to by their sexual orientation or their gender identity.

1 Introduction

Fanfiction is a form of creative writing that takes already established characters or worlds to develop original stories. These types of creative writing communities have existed since the 1960s but have grown and developed massively since the inception of the internet. The fandom space is not unique in forming connections with already established characters. However, most consumers of fiction will not summon the enthusiasm needed to write stories that are in many cases significantly longer than the original work the characters are taken from. This is the level of devotion that fanfiction writers have, and that they are willing to share with anyone who wants to read. Unlike most forms of traditionally published writing, fanfiction is written by fans, for fans without the existing motivation of monetary gain. It is done solely for the benefit of the community that surrounds the fandom. Fanfiction itself doesn't fit into a single genre; the genre of the fanfiction will often be dictated by the original work it is based upon. Unlike traditionally published works, fanfiction has the freedom to focus on purely character driven stories, building on the characters that exist in canon without having to introduce them as the readers are already familiar with the work it is based on. For writers of fanfiction, the ability to write purely for their own enjoyment and to get positive feedback often serves as a motivation, making writers want to continue developing their skills.

While the legitimacy of fanfiction as literature has been up for discussion, Archive of Our Own's Hugo Award win in 2019 is evidence for the recognition of "alternative model[s] of authorship (...) that [operate] outside the publishing world or academia" (Jenkins). Additionally, the use of already existing works of fiction as a starting point for creative writing is a tool that can easily be related to the development of English writing and vocabulary skills both in and out of fandoms. Fanfiction provides a treasure trove of written works by and for queer people and for researchers who want to study media that is almost exclusively catered to a queer audience, fanfiction could be a valuable resource. Additionally, fanfiction provides a look into how a lot of queer youth use reading and writing as a form of self-expression. It is a tool a lot of queer people use to deal with mental health issues, or simply as a comfort in times of loneliness. The community surrounding fanfiction thrives despite the complete non-profit nature of the medium, relying on the users to keep going and the success of this aspect of fanfiction is seen clearly through the crowdfunding initiatives

taken by Archive of Our Own.

I have chosen to analyze the fanfic *All the Young Dudes (ATYD)* as it is one of the most widely recognized works of fanfiction within the *Harry Potter* fandom. The *Harry Potter* fandom is the second largest franchise on Archive of Our Own with over 500 000 different works tagged as being related to the fandom (Archive of Our Own). Due to the sheer size of the *Harry Potter* fandom, it is not unexpected that the fandom is split into several different sub-genres, and out of these, the one that relies most heavily on original invention from the fandom is the genre focusing on the four Marauders: James Potter (Harry's father), Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew. This whole fandom has sprouted from only a couple of lines and brief characterizations in the original *Harry Potter* books, and has over the years, through fan works and widely accepted fan theories, established its own form of canon, independent of J. K. Rowling and her books in everything apart from the origin of the characters (Hill & Hum). The author of *ATYD*, MsKingBean89, has through what little information we are given in canon about this entire generation of students managed to turn these names mentioned only once or minor characters we are told very little information about into the main characters, and has written a fanfic compelling enough for the fans that there are countless guides online about how the fic should be read along with the canon books "to get the full story" (bilexia). The amount of originality present in *ATYD*, and the wide acceptance in the community of facts and characterizations created by MsKingBean, makes this fic particularly interesting to analyze at when investigating the importance of fanfiction for community building, especially for a majority queer audience.

ATYD has set the standard for countless other fanfictions within the fandom. It has become the basis for a lot of the accepted characterizations, trivia, and events that are further built upon by the Marauders fandom. At the time of writing, the fanfiction has been read over 12 million times, has racked up nearly 200.000 kudos and has been translated by other fans into at least 50 languages, all linked in the original version by MsKingBean89 herself (MsKingBean89). The story is written from Remus Lupin's perspective, and we follow him in all his years at Hogwarts, all the way up to the end of the third *Harry Potter* book. MsKingBean89 has focused on the journey he goes through discovering his queerness and getting into a relationship with Sirius Black, as well as finding a family who accept both this and his lycanthropy. While the author claims her story sticks as close to canon as possible, there are several points in her story where the characterizations of the Marauders differ from

the little information that is given about them in Rowling's original books, particularly in terms of their sexualities and relationships. Although there are hints and references that can be used to infer their queer identities, the reality is that Rowling's works are largely based on cisgendered, heterosexual, white people, despite what she may have said after facing backlash about these characterizations.

Throughout this thesis, I will be arguing that fanfiction as a genre and the community surrounding it are valuable tools for queer to accept their own queerness and as a place where they can find experiences and characters they relate to. Because fandom and the fanfiction community are largely made up of queer individuals writing about their own experiences and the experiences of people close to them, readers of fanfiction have a space where they can explore themselves and their identities without having to put themselves in situations where they have to make choices they are not yet ready – or in a safe place – to make. Additionally, after Rowling's controversial opinions on the trans community became public knowledge, fans have used fanfiction as a way to reclaim the wizarding world and the fond memories many still have with it by queering her characters and in their own way, protesting and going against the opinions Rowling has shared by using her own characters and world against her. I will argue that fanfiction is one of the main ways that fans of the original series are fighting against Rowling's opinions and creating their own version of *Harry Potter* that actively distances the world from the original. I will show how MsKingBean uses the trust built between the Marauders to illustrate the importance of having a group of people who can be trusted completely, and how the Marauders' relationships are developed from friendship into a found family. I will discuss how Remus and Sirius' physical and mental scars are integral to their queer identities and how sharing these with each other brings them together in spite of everything happening around them. Lastly, I will examine how queer youth use stories like *ATYD* that rely on sadness and angst to tell the story as a way to deal with their own negative emotions and how this sense of communal sadness can work as a form of comfort for queer youth.

Due to Rowling's controversial and bigoted views towards trans people, I have made the choice to not discuss her original works in this thesis. This is an active choice I have made because in my opinion, the world of *Harry Potter* is much bigger than the author and there have been so many additions and changes made to the world by fans. I will be discussing Rowling and her relationship with the fandom briefly in the background chapter and she will

also be mentioned when discussing the idea of “death of the author”, but both these discussions are done with the explicit purpose of adding context and defending my choice of focusing exclusively on fan-works and not on her original books. The discussions relating to Rowling throughout this thesis will all be to justify the legitimacy of fan created content. While any fanfictions made within the world of *Harry Potter* will have some ties to her, the fandom has taken her stories and characters and have expanded on them to the extent that several characters are unrecognizable when placed next to the canon depictions of the same characters from her books.

The world of fanfiction is an inherently collaborative space, consisting of fans who are willing to spend their time and effort to write and post their own original stories to the world for free. Writing and posting fanfiction, while it can be described as “free labor”, is for many authors paid back with reader interactions, comments, and what is known as kudos, which is equivalent to a like readers can leave on a fanfiction they like. Fanfiction being freely available and free to access is essential for the continued existence of the medium. Although many authors welcome fans’ creativity and their wish to use already established characters in their own stories, there have been several cases where the legality of the medium has been questioned. Archive of Our Own, currently the most popular site used for accessing and posting fanfiction, even has a team of lawyers they work with who provide fanfiction authors with legal advice regarding their works due to the frequent questioning of the legality of the medium. According to Larissa Gordon, “fanfiction is fair use as long as the work is ‘transformative,’ meaning that the new author added content with new meaning and value to the original work”, and as long as the work is “noncommercial” meaning the author of the fanfiction is not making money off the work (Gordon).

Throughout the years, the presence of fanfiction has changed and evolved with both the internet and popular culture. No franchise of books, and later, movies, grew along with the increasing online presence of fandom quite like *Harry Potter* did. While it is an undeniable fact that the Marauders fandom, and therefore the creations that exist within this fandom are linked with J. K. Rowling due to them being her characters, very little of what is accepted by majorities of the fandom comes from her writing. In many cases, only the character names are truly accurate to how the characters are written in the canon of *Harry Potter*. The world does belong to Rowling, the characters are hers in name, and the situations depicted in fanfictions may be based on something that happened in the original books; however, at some point the

fandom – and especially the Marauders fandom – deviated from her original intentions and found its own canon with the fans. This became especially clear after Rowling’s controversial statements about trans people. While the immediate fandom reaction to her statements was for many to completely distance themselves from the world of Harry Potter, this has also developed into fans using Rowling’s own creations as a way of undermining her opinions through fanfiction, fanart and other creations based in her wizarding world as referenced in Jennifer Duggan’s *Transformative Readings*.

Disclaimers about Rowling have become common throughout the fandom, whether they are posted in author’s notes of fanfictions or underneath TikToks, fanart, or through longer form videos posted on platforms like YouTube. Even MsKingBean89, the author of *ATYD*, has made it clear that she does not support Rowling’s views, posting a disclaimer in the author’s note at the beginning of her fic: “DISCLAIMER: I do not support J. K. Rowling’s disgusting transphobic views” (MsKingBean89, author’s notes). Duggan, in her article about transformative readings within the *Harry Potter* fanfiction community, discusses the fan reactions to Rowling’s statements and claims that “while the explicit ideology of the Harry Potter series is progressive, the implicit ideologies are, in general, rather conservative” (*Transformative Readings*, 151). This implicit conservativeness is chipped away at by fans through their own works based in Rowling’s world by making the characters who, in most cases, are cisgender, white, and straight, queer in any way they identify with themselves, or in ways that the fans feel fit better with the characters. Using fanfiction, which is produced by queer or otherwise minority people, as a form of communal protest against Rowling’s views has worked as a way to take back ownership of the characters and world that provided so many queer people with comfort. The resilience of not letting the author completely destroy something that meant so much to so many through the use of non-profit writing has created a stronger sense of community for those who want to continue enjoying aspects of Rowling’s world without supporting her directly.

The world of fanfiction and other fan creations is as vast, if not more so, as the stories they are inspired by. Depending on how the term fanfiction is defined, the number of stories that can be classified as fanfiction varies greatly. Going by the most widely accepted definition of the term, the first example of “modern fanfiction” was published sometime in the 1960s and featured the characters Kirk and Spock from Star Trek (Morrison). Star Trek, both by virtue of being the first modern fanfiction and because of the science fiction setting is to

thank (or blame) for many widely popular fanfiction tropes that are as good as synonymous with the fanfiction space today. Morrison points out that the idea of *slash fiction* was first seen in the Star Trek fandom when the fans of the show started *shipping* Kirk and Spock. The beginning of fanfiction as we know it coming from a queer ship is likely not a coincidence as the world of fandom seems to be incredibly diverse. A study by Jennifer Duggan looking at who actually writes fanfiction found that the space is overwhelmingly queer, going as far as saying “no fans in the data set explicitly identified as straight” (*A Space Where Queer is Normalized*, 23). While her research focused exclusively on the Harry Potter fandom, it is not unlikely that the conclusions she drew are true, at least in part, for fandom spaces in general.

Fandom in its entirety is community based, and one of the ways this community can find common ground regardless of the media the fandom comes from is through the queering of relationships present in the original source material. Generally, popular media has a tendency to consist of straight pairings, cisgendered characters, and in many cases overly white characters as well. Fandom is often a place where queer people need to go in order to find people or relationships that look like them and like what they wish for. This is true whether the relationships that are being queered by the fandom come from repeated queerbaiting, intertextual references that do not go farther than referencing, or queercoding. For many, writing or reading about queer characters in fanfiction is their first exposure to the queer community. Especially for youth who are questioning their own sexuality, having a space like fandom to explore and ask questions to other people who are presumably queer, or who at the very least have some experience with queerness creates a sense of camaraderie, deepening the bonds within the fandom community. *ATYD* is one of the fanfics that fit into several of the above-mentioned themes. Remus and Sirius’ relationship was, to queer people, so clearly hinted to in the books that many assumed they were canonically together. MsKingBean has through the fic developed their relationship from something that ended up being merely another instance of queerbaiting into a friendship that grew into a loving relationship and she has developed the found family relationship between all the Marauders from something that was assumed by the community into something that queer people can recognize and find comfort in.

This thesis will start out by giving some brief background on fanfiction and the community surrounding it, including the history of fanfiction and the grey area fanfiction as a genre lives in when it comes to legality. Then, I will go into the queer history of fanfiction

from its inception in science fiction zines to the widely popular online presence it has today. Following that, I will zero in on the *Harry Potter* fandom and the complicated relationship with J. K. Rowling following her controversial statements and actions towards the trans community. I have chosen to focus specifically on the *Harry Potter* fandom and the fic *All the Young Dudes* by MsKingBean89 because of its prominence in the fandom and the almost universal acceptance of Remus Lupin and Sirius Black's queerness from the *Harry Potter* fandom. In this thesis, I will be analyzing queer community building online, queer labor and the importance of found family to a group of people who historically have had to rely heavily on each other for comfort and belonging. I will be using research that has been done about queer mental health (Duggan, Andreassen, Dajches and Llewellyn) and more general research that has been conducted about the impacts of relying on fiction for emotional regulation (Benko, Hill & Hum, Risch) to inform my analysis throughout this thesis. Additionally, I will be using comments left on the fanfiction by readers to support claims I make about how *ATYD* can – and has impacted queer readers.

Fanfiction and the community surrounding fanworks are built up by a majority of queer people. MsKingBean89, as well as all other authors of fanfiction take time and effort out of their own days to create stories and character relationships that queer people can relate to for free. Their writings about characters that usually meet a tragic end in canon are used as a source of comfort and something to relate to for queer youth all around the world and is instrumental in creating a community of people who share both interests and experiences.

2 Background

2.1 Fanfiction and its Queer History

Throughout its history, fanfiction and other fan communities have been a place where the exploration of queerness has been both accepted and encouraged. Finding queer subtext in popular media, which, historically, has been devoid of queer representation has become a formative experience for many in the LGBTQIA+ community. Finding and developing the relationships between characters in books, movies, or shows who have queer subtext is a common practice in fandoms. In certain cases, the characters who are being shipped have never even canonically talked to each other but according to the fandom they have the potential to have a good or interesting relationship. Using fanfiction or other types of fan-created media in order to develop positive queer representation is not a practice that developed with the online branches of fandom that exist today. Rather, fans have queered characters in popular media since the release of *Star Trek* in the 60s. The fandom around *Star Trek* created their own zine based on the show which was first released in time for the show's second season in 1968 (Aitchison). The term "fan fiction" has existed in the science fiction sphere since the 30s, but at that time, the term was used to describe original science fiction stories written by fans of the genre. *Star Trek* is credited with the changing of the term from original stories with original characters to stories that were related to an already established world or with already established characters. According to Aitchison, these works were "related to/in celebration of Spock, from poems about the character to essays breaking down Vulcan culture" (Fan's Fiction to Fanfiction). These stories, usually released and spread through the zines published were the beginning of what fanfiction is today. Because of the massive impact the *Star Trek* fandom had on fan culture, tropes and established "rules" that were implemented by the *Star Trek* fandom are still being followed today. Most recognizably and most followed is the rule of slashes, which has become a way of describing gay pairings in fanfiction and comes from the slash that is placed between the main characters in the fic (e.g. Krik/Spock). This has developed further and today the slash between character names, regardless of gender, indicate a romantic relationship, whereas "&" placed between character names indicate a platonic relationship. While fanfiction has developed into the diverse space it is today, its stories encompassing all kinds of relationships, what started it all was fans writing about queer relationships. Anna Llewellyn emphasizes the importance freedom in

online spaces has for queer youth and their ability to express themselves and fanfiction is one of the places this expression can be seen clearly. Llewellyn echoes Aitchison's statements about the importance of fanfiction's beginnings coming from writing about queerness and further states that wish for inclusiveness might have been part of the motivation for these first fanfiction writers as they "enable LGBTQ people to tell their own stories" (2352).

The importance of Star Trek fan works, and the foundation laid by Trekkies cannot be overstated when it comes to the development of fanfiction, both from a queer perspective and for fanfiction in general. However, nothing blew up fandoms and gave them a space to express themselves quite like the internet did. The first website dedicated exclusively to fanfiction, fanfiction.net, went live in 1998 and is still in operation today, 26 years later. The first fics that were published on ff.net were based on the TV show *The X Files*. However, no single franchise had such an exponential growth in terms of fan works as Harry Potter (Aitchison). As fanfiction and the popularity of fanfiction sites exploded online, both fanfiction.net and Archive of Our Own were mentioned in different lists relating to the best or most visited sites in 2007 – fanfiction.net – and 2013 – Archive or Our Own (Benko). While these lists aren't accurate to today's fanfiction environment, they contextualize the explosive popularity of fanfiction on a global scale. While ff.net is still operational, a series of crackdowns on slash fics, especially explicit works made many flee the website. Due to the website's disallowance of explicit fics, the site's popularity has dwindled in recent years, especially after Archive of Our Own was launched in 2007. Unlike other fanfiction sites, Ao3 functions as an archival site, disinterested in censoring any type of fan-work, almost regardless of the content. While the previously mentioned potential for legal aid is one reason for Ao3's popularity within the wide fandom community, this lack of censorship and the easy-to-navigate tagging system in place has made the site the most popular site for reading fanfiction.

Looking at the history of fanfiction and of fanfiction authors, the wish for an uncensored space to develop and share creativity with others becomes clear. While there are no exact numbers, three research projects into who writes fanfiction by Duggan, Llewellyn, and Anselmo, all found that a significant majority of both writers and readers of fanfiction were queer or AFAB. While the importance of an uncensored place to explore interests for cis het women is not to be belittled, the historical importance of fanfiction is closely tied to queer people. Queer readings of popular media and the development of these readings into

alternative storylines where the queerness is explicit as opposed to just alluded to is one of the cornerstones of fanfiction. According to Duggan, early works of fanfiction was primarily written and consumed by women, but through her research, she found that more recently, the world of fanfiction has become a more diverse sphere. This shift, according to her happened largely as fanfiction moved from zines to the internet and that “the digitalization of fanfiction has diversified and democratized fanfiction-centered communities” (*Who Writes Harry Potter Fanfiction*, 2.2). Though there is an agreement between researchers that fandom is more diverse than was first assumed, there is an air of anonymity connected to the online world that is prevalent in fandom spheres as well. This ability to stay anonymous while still being able to share experiences and thoughts with others who have common interests would likely be seen as a positive for people who don’t fit with the society around them.

Leah Dajches, in her dissertation, highlights the importance for queer youth to have a place where they feel included and where they don’t feel different from their peers. Having a space like fandom and being able to find fanfiction that does not only mention issues most queer young people face at some point in their lives but knowing that it is written by someone else who has gone through the same experiences often serves as a comfort. As Dajches points out, because “heterosexuality is presumed at birth, feeling different or atypical is ever-present for youth developing a non-heterosexual sexual identity” (16). This feeling of not fitting in leads many young queer people to look for community and belonging in places where their queer identity is not as atypical. Due in large part to this wish for a community, the online world of fandom has become a gathering point for people who don’t fit in. Due to the history fanfiction has with queering already existing stories and the openness towards anything that “doesn’t fit in,” finding the safety to explore within fanfiction is easier and – for many – safer than exploring in real life. Having sites like Ao3, fanfiction.net, Wattpad and any other site that enables creativity and exploration for queer youth in a safe environment is a resource that should not be overlooked. Note that even though I say that it is a safe environment, these spaces are online, and due to this and the intentional lack of censorship especially on Ao3, the safety of the environment is relative.

One of the biggest draws of fanfiction is the ability to search by tags, essentially enabling the reader to find the exact type of story they are interested in, with the added benefit of the story being set in a world or with characters they are already intimately familiar with. This means that readers are able to find specific interest in the tags of a fic, being able to work

through and identify feelings within parameters that they are already familiar with. Readers have the ability to choose what they want to read in such detail that while the plot and details of the story may be a surprise, the details and character relationship as well as the nature of the ending in most cases won't be a surprise. These specific bits of information readers are given regarding the content of the story they are about to read provides a good example of how the rules of fanfiction vary greatly from the rules of published fiction.

While in traditional publishing there is a sense of separation between the author and the readers, the separation between writers and readers in fanfiction is practically non-existent. I have mentioned *kudos* as one of the ways fic writers get response from their readers, and while this "like-button" is an important part of the relationship between reader and writer, people's ability to leave comments underneath each chapter of a fic as it is posted is a far more valued form of interaction. Reader's ability to leave comments for each chapter of a fic as it is posted is one of the parts of fic writing that separates it most clearly from traditional publishing. Writers are able to take comments into account in their future writing, creating a more communal experience. Another community aspect of fanfiction is the plethora of themed months or weeks within fandoms, anything from fluff-week, and femslash-February to kinktober are created to encourage authors to write and participate in a community-wide collaboration. Even Ao3 themselves organize events like these. For ten years now, the site has organized what they call "International Fanworks Day" where writers are given prompts and themes. The most recent International Fanworks Day had 55 000 people participating in different events organized by the Archive for both readers and writers (Archive of Our Own, Thanks For Participating). These officially organized events, while important for the wider fanfiction community are few and far between when compared to the collaborations that happen within individual fandoms. Fanfiction authors and fanartists often collaborate to illustrate scenes from fanfictions and in cases where a fic has become widely popular within the fandom, some artists create whole animatics based on the fic. These types of collaborations are usually organized through social media sites like twitter or Tumblr, where fandoms come together to share their interests and their ideas. Additionally, these sites are used to workshop fics and ask for the community's opinion, either on where the story should go or to gauge interest in a fic someone wants to write. These posts and discussions about fics that are in process of being written further separate the experience of reading fanfic from the experience of reading traditionally published fiction. Readers can in many cases

have conversations with the author and interact with them through their shared interests. This connection that is enabled with both the author and with other readers is a part of the community built around having common interests. For queer youth especially, having these spaces where they can find others through comments or through the content of the stories they are reading who have similar experiences to them can create a sense of belonging. Queerness and queer stories are underrepresented in mainstream media, but through fanfiction and sites like Ao3, queer people have an abundance of representation and a community that willingly share their experiences with others.

2.2 Online Forums and Legal loopholes

Throughout the time of fanfiction's existence, writers of these works of fiction have operated in a form of legal gray-area. Where and how to find fanfiction is in many ways an artform in itself, with the multitude of websites and archives where works of fanfiction are published by the immense number of fans participating in fandom culture. From the zines of early fanfiction to the ocean of possible places fanfiction can be found today, there is one site that has developed into the preferred site for works of fanfiction today. Archive of Our Own was launched in 2007. The website was established by fans and is, to this day, run exclusively by volunteers. Since its launch, the popularity of the website has skyrocketed. As of 2023, the site hosts over 11 million works of transformative fiction according to their LinkedIn (LinkedIn). Archive of Our Own and its moderation is completely non-profit. The money needed to run the site is crowdfunded once a year, when a goal is set for the fans who use the site. In the spirit of fandom and the community mindset many have, Ao3 has never failed to hit their crowdfunding goal, usually far exceeding the goal within the first 24 hours of the fundraiser. While much of the money that is crowdfunded through Ao3's fundraisers is used to keep the site running and to pay for the maintenance of the archive, there is also a significant portion of this money that goes into helping fanfiction authors should they face legal trouble due to their writing.

Legally, people are within their rights to both write and publish fanfiction online, regardless of what piece of media they are writing about as long as there is no monetary gain for the writers. The existence of fanfiction is dependent on the authors' understanding of the works they are creating being free and publicly available. There have been several cases

throughout the history of fanfiction where the original creator of a piece of media has tried to sue fanfiction authors. Because fanfictions rely on material that is already copyrighted, the transformative nature of fics can be questioned by the copyright holders and these are the types of cases where Archive of Our Own's legal team are able to provide the fanfiction author with legal counsel or with other forms of legal advice about what can be counted as transformative works and what would infringe on the copyright of the original creator (Riley). Lawyer Jarrod Easterling has written a blog article regarding the legalities of writing fanfiction where he highlights the legal "loopholes" that must be navigated in order for a work of fanfiction to be seen as legal. He points out the importance that the work of fanfiction exist somewhere the fanfic author cannot profit from it, as well as the need for a significant enough change to either the original characters or the original story for the fanfiction to count as a transformative work.

Archive of Our Own is the only fanfiction site that is actively willing to help its authors should they get unjustly caught in legal trouble with the copyright holders of the original works, but the site is far from the only site used by fans to publish fanfictions. Fanfiction.net was the more popular site for a long time, but due, in large part, to issues with copyright holders, the use of the site decreased. Another site that is widely popular with a more general population is Wattpad. While Wattpad is used by people in fandom and people who are familiar with fan-culture, the excessive advertising and difficulty finding specific fic content makes the site less popular with people who are more actively participating in fandoms. Wattpad is often seen as a first step for people who are getting into fandom due to its popularity in pop-culture. The site has a largely negative reputation with fanfiction authors due to the previously mentioned ads that pop up in the middle of fics as well as the disorganized user interface. In a thread on Reddit where the original poster asked whether Ao3 or Wattpad was better, the comments are filled with people sharing their grievances about Wattpad, one user with the name Crayshack going as far as saying "I'd post by leaving sticky notes on a bus before posting to Wattpad." Others in the same thread make the distinction that Wattpad is created for profit, using algorithms to recommend fics to their user base, whereas Ao3 was created by fans as a completely non-profit archive, has stayed ad-free since its inception, and gives fans the agency to categorize and find their own content through tags. The non-profit nature of Ao3 and the website's inception as something created by fans who wanted a place to post and share their own works of fanfiction illustrates the appreciation

the community have for sites that are based around the community itself and not around money making. Ao3 has never had issues exceeding their fundraising goals. The site itself is used by all types of fandom communities, but they all come together as one larger community in times of fund-raising and in times where the archive itself holds site-wide events.

2.3 Queer Labor

Queerness in fandom can, as mentioned, be traced back to the very beginning of what we know as fanfiction. Looking at the types of fanfic that are written, especially in the *Harry Potter* fandom, it is not a stretch to assume that a lot of the writers are speaking from experience, especially considering the reactions from other characters to the queerness that is being portrayed. Especially reactions to characters coming out often seem to be taken from personal experience or they are written in ways that make it clear to other queer people that these are situations that have happened or that the authors have imagined in detail. These types of imagined scenarios of coming out happen for most queer people, whether the scenarios imagined are positive or negative. Additionally, most Ao3 authors have their Tumblr or Twitter in the bottom on their works for readers to ask them questions or to just talk to them and from these socials, the queerness of the authors is often quickly confirmed.

Writers of fanfiction put their own time and effort toward creating character dynamics, sticking to certain canonical facts, whether that is character relationships or rules of the world they are writing fic for, but in writing about these (usually) tragic characters, they are either drawing from their own personal experiences or doing extensive research into how someone might react to traumatic situations. The importance of emotions, both awareness of one's own emotions and the ability for the author to imagine character's emotions is, according to Brit Kelley at "the forefront of fan communities" ("The 'Emotional Fan'?") thus, writing fanfiction can be seen as a form of emotional labor performed by fic authors. These authors, most of whom are queer and writing about queerness in one of the many different forms draw inspiration from their own experiences or from the experiences of those around them.

While writing in itself is a form of emotional labor that authors of fanfiction go through, Diana W. Anselmo's article goes further into the types of emotional labor that are exclusive to queer fans in general, namely the constant vigilance of looking for and identifying queer coded characters. Anselmo uses BBC's *Sherlock* as an example of a fandom

where the main characters are explicitly queer coded, but any time fans of the show would ask the creators questions about this or the idea of John and Sherlock's relationship (Johnlock) came up, they would be made fun of by the creators (Anselmo). Being presented with characters that are explicitly queer coded and having the creator of these characters blatantly ignore their own coding is an experience that is shared between the Sherlock and Harry Potter fandom – among many others. In both these examples, one part of the main queer ship is abruptly placed into a straight relationship. The dismissal and erasure of queer fans and their attachment to certain characters that are so clearly queer coded only adds to the emotional labor queer fans go through in order to find representation in spaces where relatable characters are already few and far between. These characters and several others whose queerness has been alluded to, then later dismissed, all have thousands of fics written about them, where fans try to “fix” the mistakes they feel the original creators have made, so called “fix-it fics.” These types of fics are not exclusive to relationships and will often write alternative endings to characters who have been killed off in canon, or characters the original creators write out of the story in other ways. Although not exclusive to queer characters, there is an overwhelming amount of fix-it fics created to give queer coded characters the story the fandom think they deserve whether this is them ending up in a happy relationship, or simply that the character survives the story.

Fanfiction and the fandom space has always relied on fans doing the work for free. This is true whether it is fanart, fan writing, cosplays, podcasts, or any other creative or analytical venture. As previously mentioned, the work needs to be free because of the copyright held by the creators of the original works. According to Cixous there is a freedom that comes from writing for yourself and not being held back by your own or anyone else's judgement (1872). Throughout her essay on the inclusion of female writers, she stresses the importance that women

Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man, not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not yourself. (1870)

While Cixous is talking about writing in general, and her focus is on female writers, I think her ideas about writing are especially applicable to the sphere of fanfiction. Authors of fanfic write for their own and their readers' enjoyment without expectations of monetary gain. Additionally, her focus on inclusion for writers can easily be applied to queer writers as well. Fanfiction exists due to people writing for their own pleasure and not being held back by the "capitalist machinery" as Cixous puts it. Cixous' focus throughout her essay is female writers, but the context is female writers as a disadvantaged group, therefore her ideas can also be related to fandom writers, especially in the Harry Potter fandom where not a single person in Jennifer Duggan's article about who writes *Harry Potter* fanfiction describes themselves as straight (9.8). In a space where the majority of participants, both readers and writers, are queer, encouraging writing and self-expression through creativity with the sole purpose of creating content for free is the definition of not being held back by the capitalist machinery. Cixous points out that by writing herself, "woman will return to the body that has been confiscated from her" (1873), implying that writing about one's own experiences means taking a step towards reclaiming oneself. The same, in my opinion, holds true for queer people writing about themselves and their own experiences. By no longer relying on the lackluster representation that is presented in mainstream media, fanfiction takes a step towards reclaiming the queer experience. Although writers of fanfiction don't create their own characters, they recognize themselves in already established characters and further develop these characters into someone that more accurately depict the reality of queerness and the struggles that come with being different.

2.4 Community and Found Families

Community is particularly important for queer youth and one of the many ways to find community is through found family. According to Greg Curran, participating in "queer youth groups and queer community events" (223) and interacting with other queer people alleviates the sense of loneliness that is often associated with growing up queer. While Curran's focus is on interaction with other queer people in person, I would argue that the same positive results would be present through online interactions through fan communities. I would also argue that, while not as effective, reading about other queer people in fanfiction and being able to witness a variety of queer experiences through the medium of fanfiction could alleviate the

sense of loneliness for queer youth. While I acknowledge that reading about the lives and loves of different fictional character is a far cry from experiencing things as an individual, the familiarity with the possibilities of happiness and the possibilities of different relationships – especially queer ones – might provide a sense of comfort for queer youth.

The concept of alternative families, or found families is a staple in queer people's lives, both for those who have loving and accepting biological families and for those who don't. For queer people who are accepted by their biological families, the need for people who understand their situations and the unique struggles becomes the main draw towards found families, whereas for queer people who don't receive acceptance and love from their biological families, found families become a comfort and people they can rely on in place of their biological relatives. Rikke Andreasen writes in a study of these alternative families that "chosen families often constituted closer ties than families of origin" (14), due to the participants in a found family having the active choice of whether to stay with the people around them or not. Because of shared experiences or traumas, the bonds between individuals in found families are often stronger and provide "stronger support networks (both emotionally and materially) than families of blood relatives" (Andreassen). A lot of the research that exists on queer family dynamics is centered on parenthood and the idea of raising a family together, based on the "heteronormatively gendered nature of kinship categories themselves" (Dahl and Gabb), but the reality of alternative queer familiar structures, especially when it comes to found families is that their diversity transcends heteronormative structures. Most instances of queer found family have nothing at all to do with raising a family together and is instead centered on the individuals who have come together in order to create their own form of kinship with someone who understands them. Found family is centered on the idea of choosing family and choosing to stand with each other through the hardships of life, whether in a platonic or romantic sense.

A point of pride and a unique aspect of fandom and the fanfiction community is the ability and wish to have as much diversity as possible represented. The existence of canonical queer characters in pop culture, or in media in general has vastly increased in recent years, a vast increase from nearly zero still isn't enough for most queer people to find characters with queer experiences they can relate to. Fanfiction gives its mostly queer readers the ability to choose exactly what they want to read about without worries that the queer characters included in the story will be reduced to harmful stereotypes. Queer youth having to find

themselves and their place in a heteronormative society, when they are forced to do this without anyone like them to look up to is bound to lead them to places where they can feel a kind of community. The increasing trend of queer representation in popular media usually comes as adult queers and a lot of “LGBTQ young people are frequently characterized by instability, vulnerability, and victimization rather than resilience or self-efficacy” (Craig, et al.). There is a distinct lack of stories about queer youth that get to experience happiness and to have the normal issues that come with growing up, as opposed to only facing challenged based on their sexuality. Having a coming of age story that centers around queer teens where the central theme is something that is relatable to all queer teens and that shows both the differences and similarities of having a first crush, regardless of sexuality is something that queer people have wanted for years.

Most, if not all characters in popular media – *Harry Potter* in particular – are cis het and usually white, and it has become a point of pride and protest towards the author in the community to make the characters as diverse as possible. In the case of *Harry Potter*, fans have put in labor and time in order to shift characters and motivations from how they were presented in canon to something that, while not disregarding the canon, vastly changes character motivations. Examples of these changes that have happened in more recent years, especially after Rowling’s stance against the trans community is headcanoning Regulus Black as trans, Harry and James as being desi, and Sirius as non-binary. Though none of these headcanons are as widespread as Remus and Sirius’ relationship, they are gaining traction, especially on TikTok where the hashtags #regulusblack and #trans appear together in thousands of videos.

2.5 Queer Mental Health and Reliance on Fictional Characters

Identifying with characters in stories is not an experience that is exclusive to the queer community, but identifying with characters while knowing that the relatability to this character only goes so far is. The difference between queer people identifying with a character and heterosexual people doing the same comes from queer people only being able to relate to certain aspects of the character’s journey and having to turn to things like fanfiction for actual representation. The experience of growing up queer in a heteronormative environment instills queer youth with problems and stressors that are unique to them, and

these stressors grow exponentially with every minority group someone is a part of (Dajches). This stress – and, for many, the feelings of loneliness that come with being different – is the reason many queer teenagers turn to the internet to find friends. Many end up finding others who have similar experiences to them for the first time, or they find that someone has written about a character they related to who has gone through the same problems they are currently facing.

Queer stories, both those created for the mainstream media and those written and created by individual fans for other fans, tend to be riddled with negative emotions the characters experience. Queer sadness and the lack of happy endings in queer narratives is such a widespread phenomenon that the term “bury your gays” has been in use since the end of the 19th century (Hulan). This term refers to storylines where the queer couple die or are otherwise separated immediately after confessing their love for each other. The tendency to bury your gays was born from necessity in a time when queerness was outlawed or seen as a mental illness. As Haley Hulan puts it, the trope “was ‘put in place’ as it were to allow LGBTQ+ authors to tell stories which featured characters like them” (17). Usually, one of the parties in the queer relationship would end up in a heterosexual relationship by the end of the narrative in order to hammer home to the audience that the queer relationship was not present in the story to “promote” queerness or queer relationships, it was “just a phase” or a brief period of insanity (Hulan).

Although the “bury your gays” trope is no longer needed for queer authors to tell stories about people like them, the trope is still in use in a lot of media that represents queerness. It is particularly prevalent in media that represents queer people but that is created by cisnet people. Modern popular media is not dependent on giving queer characters unhappy endings; however, the trend seems to persist in modern queer media, with a particularly relevant example being the ending of the previously mentioned TV-show *Supernatural*. In the penultimate episode of the fifteen-season-long show, one of the characters admits his love for another man and is immediately dragged to – what the show refers to as – Super Hell. This ending for a pairing that had been queerbaited to the audience for nearly ten seasons was met with massive backlash from the entirety of the fandom and, as is tradition when a fandom is displeased with the ending of a show, sparked an explosion in fanfiction, memes, and think pieces spread on various social media websites. Tumblr especially was ablaze after the revelation of Castiel’s canon queerness and banishment to Super Hell and pictures of the

scene where Castiel confesses his love as well as the reaction to this have become an inside joke on Tumblr, being used as a way to deliver news, usually political news or other internationally important news, inspiring posts like that from user too-many-plants saying “you know some shit is going down when 3 of the trending tags on tumblr have the destiel breaking news meme as the top post.” Fanlore, a website created as a type of encyclopedia for fandoms claims that after the “confession episode” of *Supernatural*, fittingly called *Despair* “more than 4,000 Destiel fanfics were posted on Archive of Our Own between November 6th, 2020 and January 2021” (Destielgate).

Burying your gays is only one of the ways queer media tends to skew towards tragic tales of love and romance. Fanfiction as a whole is, as previously mentioned, a space that is overwhelmingly queer and the tags that are used on fics, as well as the fics on Ao3, with the most kudos all have overwhelmingly angsty content, meaning that the fics tend to be sad or depressing in nature. This is the case for most fandoms, but for the purpose of this thesis, it’s relevant to note that *ATYD* is full of angst, misunderstandings, and sadness, both in terms of the characters’ physical and mental suffering. I have briefly mentioned some tags and warnings used in *ATYD*, but for the purpose of illustrating the prevalence of sad queer narratives, the most relevant tags to note are the warnings of Angst, Fluff and Angst, Major Character Death, and Graphic Depictions of Violence. Coincidentally, all these tags are ranked as some of the most used when it comes to the fanfiction on Archive of Our Own (Archive of Our Own, Tags). These are all tags that are general, meaning they can be related to any and all fandoms, which is in part why they are being used so frequently. However, when looking at all the general tags on Ao3, there is an overrepresentation of negative tags. The fact that a large portion of the most popular tags on Ao3 are describing negative emotions and negative experiences, and that generally a lot of fanfiction is centered on sad or negative events, may be a symptom of the prevalence of negative emotions experienced by queer youth who participate in fandom and their use of fanfiction to confront these emotions.

So how does negative fanfiction affect queer authors and readers? A study conducted by Sydney K. Haulenbeek about the impacts of participating in fandom where she interviewed nearly 1000 fans of the fandom connected to the k-pop band BTS suggested that there was a positive correlation between the amount of time spent participating in online fandom and the mental health of the fans, saying that fans who spend a large amount of time “experience a high positive mental health impact and low negative impact” (16) and that they are more

involved in their physical communities as well. However, Haulenbeek states that the impact of fandom on mental health requires more research. Interestingly, Anderson et.al. found in their research of women who participate actively in science fiction fandoms online that women “were drawn to those communities due to the nonjudgmental nature of that fandom culture and the relationships that they formed” (84). The women who participated in the research conducted by Anderson et.al. were asked questions about their mental health, and several of them reported that they were struggling with their mental health before joining the fandom. With the prevalence of negative tags and emotions written about in fanfiction, especially in fics that center around queer couples, it becomes natural to question whether the people who write and read these fics have bad mental health because of the subject matter included in the narratives they choose to engage with, or if they choose to engage with dark and potentially depressing subject matter in fanfic as a way to cope with the negativity they are already experiencing.

Queer youth who cannot find accurate representation in mainstream characters might turn to fanfiction to find characters they relate to. In her article about self-expansion through fictional characters, Randi Shedlosky-Shoemaker points out that relationships and characters in fictional stories feel real to the reader and that “the desire to engage in parasocial interaction appears to be motivated in part by the need to belong” (557). Wishing to find a sense of belonging is often one of the reasons queer youth get into fandom in the first place. With the amount of time the youth today spend online or interacting with various forms of media, them using the internet and interests they already have as a springboard to making new connections with people all over the world becomes a natural step. Fandom provides a space where people share the same interests, allowing an easy way to make connections with others. The connection readers feel to fictional characters is, psychologically, as real as real relationships, and the psychological results of interacting with fictional characters “parallel those incurred as a result of social interactions” (557). Knowing this, it is remarkable that so much of the fanfiction written by queer people for queer people is centered on the characters being put through traumatizing situations. This is especially remarkable since mainstream queer narratives have a tendency to be about doomed romance, still adhering to the trope of bury your gays. The fact that even in fanfiction, readers seem to seek out fics that are filled with sadness and angst raises the question of why queerness and sadness are so closely related in fiction.

As established, queer youth use fanfiction as a way to realize aspects of their identity and safely experiment with their preferences from the comfort of their own home. The positive experiences and situations characters are going through have an emotional impact on readers, meaning the negative experiences impact readers too. While using fictional characters as a vessel for one's own emotions is not something that is unique to people in fandoms, participating in fandom, especially in fanfiction culture, allows readers to search for very specific situations or relationships they want the characters in the story to experience. When reading fanfiction, the use of tags and the ability to zero in on specific tropes or emotions lets the reader use fictional characters as an outlet for their emotions. Searching for specific tags allows for almost pinpoint accuracy for which emotions they want the character, and therefore themselves, to feel. Susanne Mathies talks about this relationship between fictional characters and the self in her article about the "Simulated Self," where she says that people are using fiction and fictional characters as a way of "escaping from their usual troubles and imagining a different life, experienced through a fictional person in a story" (326). Through the use of fanfiction, queer youth are able to read about characters experiencing life altering problems that may make the problems of everyday life seem irrelevant, choosing to focus on the problems this fictional character is experiencing instead of their own problems. Another important factor that may draw people to fiction, fanfiction especially, as their way of coping with reality is the safety it brings. The element of surprise that comes with life and having to experience things firsthand is removed from the equation by the searchable tags, allowing readers of fanfiction to decide what level of engagement they chose to have with both their own feelings and with the feelings of the characters they are reading about. In a study by Rain and Mar into how different attachments styles interact with engagement with fictional characters, they note that "self-soothing avoidance strategies may be especially damaging when used to cope with the strong needs for intimacy" (2795) and that people with this strong need for intimacy are more likely to become attached to fictional characters. Queer youth using fictional characters as vessels for their emotions has its advantages, but as shown by the studies above, there are potential negatives.

2.6 *Harry Potter* and life outside of J. K. Rowling

The stories of Harry Potter and his friends touched so many with their canonical existence that it is not surprising that the characters have managed to live on outside of the books. They live through the work of fans as well as through mass amounts of merchandise, theme parks and the sale of “Harry Potter experiences” throughout London. In the time since *Harry Potter* was released, the character has been encountered by millions of children and teenagers around the world who grew up believing in the magic that came from this story. Rowling herself has several instances of adding to her own lore years after the release of the last book in the series. Though the popularity of Rowling has decreased significantly in recent years, *Harry Potter* is still beloved by millions.

The *Harry Potter* property has been a massive piggy bank, not just for Rowling but for anyone who owns parts of it. The previously mentioned theme parks exist both in the United States and in the United Kingdom. In the US, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is only one part of larger theme parks in several countries, and according to Forbes, the attendance at these parks jumped, on average with 32% after the opening of the *Harry Potter* portions of the parks (Reid). In the same Forbes article, Reid talks about the importance the *Harry Potter* franchise had for Warner Brothers Studios in the UK, stating that after the parks’ reopening after the Covid lockdown, the various *Harry Potter* themed attractions and tours generated a profit of around 93.5 million dollars in 2021 (Reid). As for the franchise as a whole, *Harry Potter* was, in 2023 estimated to be worth a 47.19 billion dollars (James), its revenue coming from the mentioned theme parks, merchandise sales and book and movie sales. In addition to the already beloved movies, there is an adaptation set to come out in the coming years from HBO, where the original seven books will be remade into a TV series this time, instead of movies. The choice to remake the movies is one that has been met with a lot of mixed feelings from the fans, with some being excited about the prospect of getting to relive the magic of *Harry Potter* in a different medium, while others are saying that there is no need for another adaptation of the books and that the show as a whole is a cash grab by greedy Hollywood producers and by J. K. Rowling herself.

Despite any disagreements fans have with Rowling about her opinions, especially those related to the trans community, there has long been a wish for more *Harry Potter* content. Fans of the franchise have for years been asking about an adaptation of the first wizarding war or about the Marauders’ time at Hogwarts, only to be met with silence. This

has given rise to the fans themselves creating an agreed upon canon for these characters and events. While there are still requests for a show or a movie series depicting this, the dwindling approval of Rowling within the fandom has made many fans change their tune, warning that a canonized version of the Marauders' time at Hogwarts would not be what has been imagined due to the author's refusal to include even what little queerness she has canonized herself. Instead of using any of the many possible storylines already present in the books to expand the canon universe, Rowling and HBO have decided to readapt the seven original *Harry Potter* books. The new show is supposed to be a "faithful adaptation" (Rowling, via the Independent) of the original source material and HBO have ensured fans that Rowling herself will be an active part of the development of the show, which is set to premiere in 2026. The show is planned to be released over a ten-year period and each season will be based around one of the *Harry Potter* books (Parkel). The Independent wrote an article about the criticism the new teaser trailer for the TV-series faced upon release where they quoted several tweets by fans, where one of them stated "What's the point? (I know the point is to make money.)" (Chilton), which, in my opinion sums up a lot of the issues fans have with the plan of creating a new adaptation. The movies that have already been made are still wildly successful and both the movies themselves and the cast are beloved by the fanbase.

A large part of the community surrounding the *Harry Potter* franchise have in recent years taken an active step back from financially supporting Rowling and anything officially licensed related to *Harry Potter*. While there are fans that have shared excitement about revisiting the world of *Harry Potter*, these opinions are far outweighed by the negative outcry from fans who do not want to support Rowling anymore. Creating a new adaptation where one is not needed at all, in most fans' opinion, cheapens the franchise as a whole and exposes the hunger for money from both the producers and from J. K. Rowling herself. Fans also criticized the trailer itself for claiming that the new adaptation would be an original take on the series and that it would be different from the movies, while using the same theme as the movies did as well as using the same font for the title card. Rowling herself is, according to the press release by Warner Brothers, actively involved with the creation of this new show and the choices made in the adaptation. On the Instagram post where the teaser trailer was released, while there are over 700 000 likes, a large portion of the 12 000 comments left are sharing their frustrations and concerns about the show. In addition to the concern and criticism about the new adaptation being unnecessary, fans are skeptical about the heavy

involvement of Rowling, who, as mentioned, has alienated a large portion of the original fanbase of the *Harry Potter* franchise due to her frequent and controversial opinions about trans people. These statements have made a lot of fans distance themselves from *Harry Potter* in general and there have been speculations made by fans on both Twitter and Tumblr that one of the main reasons for a new adaptation is her wish to draw in a new generation of fans who are less aware of her controversies. There have been frequent conversations within the fandom community about the reasoning behind the new adaptation and how fans should respond to the release. Discussions on the ethics of supporting Rowling have been happening in the community since her first public comments on trans people and while long-time fans understandably are curious about the new adaptation, the consensus is that any support of Rowling that gives her money is impossible to justify. Tumblr user akajustmerry summarized the argument by saying:

justify it to yourself however the fuck you want to, but no amount of lying to yourself will change that supporting this is providing financial and social support to someone who is actively using that support to harm some of the most vulnerable people in society.

While all fanfiction has an inevitable connection to the media they are related to, the relationships between the fandom and the original creator or the copyright holders are in many cases rather strained. J. K. Rowling especially has seen a clear shift in how the fandom interact with her throughout the years of *Harry Potter's* popularity. During the early years of popularity, while there was a brief spat between JKR and certain fans in regard to a fansite created to compile information about the characters and plot of her books which Rowling did not approve of (Obversa), the relationship between the author and the fandom was largely positive. It wasn't until Rowling started actively posting her opinions on social issues, specifically trans issues, on twitter in 2020 that a large part of the fandom started to turn on the author of their favorite book series. As mentioned in the introduction, it is due to these views shared by – and doubled down on – by Rowling that I have made the choice to not discuss her in this thesis more than giving a background on her relationship with the fandom.

Rowling's opinion on fanfiction related to her stories has gone through several changes throughout the time *Harry Potter* has been popular. As her books were starting to

release and the works based on them started to come out, she was apprehensive towards fanfiction in general, stating that she did not want her characters to be written about in ways that were “adult” (Waters). However, her stance on fanfiction has somewhat softened through the years. Last time Rowling publicly mentioned her stance on fanfic, she gave the works her approval, but with certain conditions, namely that they need to stay non-profit and that fans steer clear of writing fics with adult themes (Waters). However, the idea of what counts as “adult themes” to Rowling is vague. The *Harry Potter* books contain several themes that would be defined as adult such as war, torture, and death to mention a few. In the context of fanfiction and the stereotypes surrounding fanfic, Rowling’s definition of *adult* could be “pornographic.” Otherwise most fics that stick to the canon of her books would include adult themes.

Harry Potter’s release happened at a time when the internet was exploding. Due to the popularity of the book series and the wide age group of fans who got invested in the story, it has become one of the most written about works within fandom. Fanfiction, fanart, original characters, and alternative universes based on the *Harry Potter* fandom were one of the most popular on every side of the internet that contained fandom content. While Rowling’s popularity has plummeted, the popularity of her stories lives on and today there are nearly 500 000 fanfictions tagged as *Harry Potter* related on Archive of Our Own (Archive of Our Own, Search Results) making it the second most tagged fandom on the website, only beaten by the Marvel fandom. These nearly 500 thousand fanfics include anything that the fanfiction author thinks are inspired enough by the world of Harry Potter to tag it as such. This includes crossovers with any and all other fandoms, since putting your favorite characters at Hogwarts and having them attend the wizarding school has become such a popular crossover that you are likely to find it within any and all fandoms. The *Harry Potter* fandom and its immense size has for years had such a hold on the online fan community that most blogs on sites like Tumblr or Twitter include what Hogwarts house the fan feels like they are a part of. The Hogwarts house someone is a part of has become just as natural to include in an online “about me” section as one’s birthday or zodiac sign. The impact of Harry Potter on pop culture is not restricted only to fandom spaces, with the popularity of the *Harry Potter* books and movies. The story is a part of the childhood and teen years of an entire generation.

Due to the immense popularity of the franchise of books and movies, it is no wonder that *Harry Potter* has developed a life on its own outside the pages of writing from the

original books or the images on screen from the movies based on them. As mentioned, the amount of fanfiction related to this universe is the second highest on Ao3 where people have taken the base that was given to them by Rowling and have expanded the universe to degrees that would not have been possible without the community of fans. The degree of fanfiction and the amount of fans that are active within the *Harry Potter* fan communities across different platforms have created situations that started as headcanons within the fandom but have become so accepted by the fandom that even people who are not actively in the fandom assume this is part of the canon. Simple details like Sirius Black's middle name being Orion, or Remus Lupin's near obsession with chocolate are headcanons that have become so prevalent within the fandom that people are surprised to find that there is no canonical evidence for them.

The sheer size of the *Harry Potter* fandom has led to people within the umbrella of *Harry Potter* focusing on different generations. The three biggest subsections of the fandom currently, according to Ao3's statistics as well as the posts talking about them on Tumblr, are The Marauders (consisting of the generation of Harry Potter's parents), The Golden Trio's generation (consisting of the characters in Hogwarts with Harry), and The Next Generation (consisting of Harry's children and their time at school). Each of these sections of the fandom has their own interpretations of characters, character relationships and events that are present in many, if not most fanfics. Finding a reason these specific tropes became part of fanon or finding where the tropes originated is a Herculean task. Regardless of the origin or the inspiration for the content, the tropes have become so integrated in the fandom that fics that do not include the fanon content tend to face backlash from other fans. The parts of the fandom who have found their home within Harry's generation or the next generation both have canon events or canon content that take place specifically within their chosen part of the timeline. This is for the Golden Trio fandom the events that take place within the seven novels and for the Next Generation fans, it's the events of *The Cursed Child*. The Marauders fandom, however, only has the small references made to this generation within the novels.

3 All the Young Dudes

3.1 Queerness in *ATYD*

Remus' queerness is one of the main backdrops for the entirety of *ATYD*. Already in his second year, at the age of twelve, Remus finds himself fascinated with David Bowie and a music video he happens to see where Bowie is getting close to one of his guitarists. He notes that his "stomach had done an odd sort of flip" (MsKingBean89, Chapter 27) at seeing the two men be so openly affectionate towards each other. His fascination with the display of affection is cut short almost immediately when one of the workers at the children's home he lives at shuts off the TV, noting that Bowie and the guitarists are "*Nasty queers*, he had said, *disgusting putting that sort of thing on telly when kiddies might see it*" (MsKingBean89, Chapter 27). This is the first time Remus experiences homophobia relating to something he has a clear fascination with, which is an experience many queer kids had themselves, hearing comments and suddenly feeling like they are being said about them and their interests instead of simply about a music video or something similar. While the specific reaction of the St. Edmund worker is influenced by the fact that *ATYD* takes place in the 70s, Remus responding to being told that something was wrong with the display of affection he had just seen – that is immoral – is that he "thought about it more than he wanted to". This is a very common reaction for queer kids.

The comments on this chapter confirm this experience repeatedly. An account that is now deleted comments "oh wow... oh. wow. first of all i've never read such a realistic characterisation of the first meeting with queerness and the terror if [of] being told its bad", another commenter with the name plant-flwrs replied to this comment saying "the way u just voiced my exact thoughts perfectly". There are a total of 141 comments left on this chapter alone and a sizable portion of these comments are praising MsKingBean on her ability to explain the feeling of not being able to stop thinking about the first meeting with queerness. This ability to write characters that seem real to other people to the extent that people feel seen through the portrayal of experiences that are being written about ties back to why it is so important to write from experience. Another comment thread on this chapter of *ATYD* morphed from a discussion about the previously quoted scene into commenters giving advice to each other about the process of coming to terms with queer labels, ending with user Fredweasley reassuring another reader that being unsure about their sexuality is completely okay, stating "You're right, but it does show different for everyone, I didnt realise till i was

13,” in response to a question about whether it was okay to be 12 and to be unsure about their sexuality.

Although Remus’ childhood and his journey towards figuring out his sexuality cannot be described as a happy tale, there is still something endearing about the way MsKingBean describes his journey of realization, writing about the innocent ways Remus represses and refuses to realize his queerness through a lens of sympathetic pity. This is a type of journey that is rarely explored in queer media. Being able to relive the confusion of being thirteen and wondering why everyone has a crush on the opposite sex, with the knowledge that comes along with being older and already having at least a vague grasp on one’s own sexuality makes these experiences nostalgic. Having a crush on a particularly understanding younger teacher or being confused at the feelings that arise from someone always sitting next to that one friend you don’t even know you have a crush on yet are all experiences MsKingBean writes about. She does this particularly with the way Remus always notes Sirius’ smiles and the different variations of his smile. Throughout the fic, Remus always takes note of “[t]hat Sirius Black smile – nothing could ever ruin that” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 32). Remus particularly comments on that smile when something upsetting is happening around them and Sirius’ smile makes him feel better, hinting at the growing crush he has on his best friend. Although these are all experiences that, in the moment, are confusing and uncomfortable, reading about others going through them while being removed from the situation allows readers to see another perspective on it. Instead of being in the confusing situations themselves, seeing them through the perspective of MsKingBean’s explanations of Remus’ experience provides the perspective of an outsider and the comfort that comes from reading about other people going through something familiar. Additionally, reading the comments on the chapters where these situations are explored further confirms the normalcy of these experiences. Fanfiction alone can give different perspectives on familiar situations, but it’s through the comments and through these situations being talked about that the sense of communal understanding is developed.

It is easy for heterosexual youth to find familiar situations portrayed through a different perspective, especially situations related to growing up, but the same cannot be said for queer youth. Media caters to cishet youth and there are countless cishet coming-of-age movies, high school romances and other media that deals with problems cishet people may face at some point in their lives. Though queer youth may recognize themselves in some of

this media, the media that deals with their unique experiences barely exists. The queer experience, especially in adolescence when identity is being developed is vastly different from a cisgender experience. Fanfiction provides an arena that is unique in the sense that a majority of stories being told in this medium are queer. Leah Dajches theorizes that “queer readings may be a skill that help sexual minority youth to overcome a variety of marginalized experiences” (12) and she links queer readings to the ability to see queer coding in mainstream media and then being able to read or write about these experiences through fanfiction. The sense of joy at being able to read about queer people written from the perspective of other queer people is largely what the comments left on *ATYD* convey. Other than praising the fic and theorizing about what might happen in the upcoming chapters, commenters are sharing their own experiences and relating these experiences to what Remus or Sirius is going through in *ATYD*, furthering the sense of community that grows from sharing stories of coming out, both through fanfiction and in the comments.

In this version of the *Harry Potter* universe, queerness and queer self-discovery becomes a central theme that drives both the plot and the conflict. It isn't until the summer before their seventh year at Hogwarts that Remus comes out to any of his friends – apart from Sirius. His decision of coming out comes after a conversation with them all while they are on a camping trip. He has the realization that “Marlene was right – he *loved* these people. Every one of them” (MsKingBean89, chapter 114). Throughout the majority of the Marauders' time at Hogwarts, a lot of the main conflict in *ATYD* comes from Remus and later Sirius' journey realizing and coming to terms with their sexuality. Jensen Benko argues that writing fanfiction is a way for queer youth to take a stance against the highly stereotyped way queer characters are presented in mainstream media and something that enables them to “take a more active role in identity construction, as compared to being shaped by queer television” (74) and that the “content and scale of fanfiction allows for a more diverse queerness” (74). Leading up to Remus' realization that he can and will trust his friends enough to come out to them is a full chapter where MsKingBean has built up the feeling of warmth and comfort that culminates in Remus coming out.

The atmosphere of safety that is built up in Remus' coming-out chapter begins with the preparations for a camping trip the Marauders and their friend are taking. They are all freshly seventeen, the legal age for wizards, and Remus notes that he “was looking forward to a few weeks away from anyone older than him” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 114), giving them

all the opportunity to relax and be teenagers for one last summer before they finish Hogwarts and plan to join the war. The characters are at a point in this chapter where they all know each other well after six years at Hogwarts and have been joking around and setting up the tents all day. Around the warmth of a bonfire where they are all drunk and sharing stories, the theme of their love lives come up and Remus is asked if he has “*ever* had a girlfriend” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 114). While the question is not meant as something negative, it makes him feel awkward. The conversations from that day, the good atmosphere and possibly the alcohol makes Remus realize that he does, in fact, love the people around him so much that he feels comfortable coming out to them.

Having the scene where Remus decides to come out to his friends be one that is full of warmth and love between the group highlights the feelings of trust and love that have developed between them throughout the fic. Remus specifies that “[t]his wasn’t up to Sirius, this wasn’t up to anyone but him” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 114) and that he trusts these people enough to let them know that he is gay. For the readers, especially those who have yet to come out to their own circle of friends, having the coming out chapter be so full of love and relaxation can serve as a comfort and a reassurance. The chapter is the one with the most comments, with people sharing their excitement about Remus finally coming out to his friends. One commenter with the name pillowlava said that “The campfire scene really felt cozy and warm, it brought back memories of mundane things that get much more meaningful because you share them with people you love” (Chapter 114), and the thread of comments following their comment agree with this sentiment wholeheartedly. The love Remus has for his friends and his willingness to be vulnerable with them ties back to the other driving force of the plot in *ATYD*, found family.

ATYD shows the active role fanfiction can take in shaping the representation of queerness. MsKingBean89 chronicles Remus’ entire journey of realizing and coming to terms with his sexuality, from the beginning of the fic where he spends an excessive amount of time obliviously describing Sirius’ attractiveness to his first kiss with the fellow orphan boy Grant. At the beginning of certain chapters, MsKingBean will issue certain warnings to the readers about the content in the chapter. These simple warnings show immense awareness of the impact her writing can have on her readers: “CW for themes of domestic abuse” (chapter 81) or “This chapter covers some upsetting topics including the death of a family member and a funeral. Be kind to yourself, please!” (chapter 155). A commenter by the name

Aogera(EchoBerry) thanks MsKingBean for her content warning about domestic violence on one chapter of the fic, stating “Thanks for letting us know there would be domestic violence in this chapter I really needed that today. :(heartbreaking to see walburgas treatment of sirius. Another wonderful chapter <3” (chapter 67). MsKingBean encourages her readers to be kind to themselves and to not read certain chapters if they are in a headspace where reading about sensitive themes could be harmful for their mental health. Additionally, MsKingBean frequently adds in other warnings of “pretty gloomy subject matter” (chapter 51) and will warn her readers that mentions will be made of other potentially harmful ideas, exemplified by the frequent warnings about homophobia being included in chapters. This is an extra step of warning that is added in at the beginning of each chapter and is not necessarily reflected in the overall tags for the fic itself. These kinds of warnings are not uncommon in the fanfiction community and are added as a kindness from the author instead of something that is expected from the readers. This is a form of care for the reader that is exclusive to the fanfiction community and the inclusion of warnings, both for the fic as a whole and for individual chapters, shows MsKingBean’s ability to predict what themes could be harmful for her readers. In the previously mentioned tags for this fic, the tag “Period Typical Attitudes” is included, indicating the inclusion of the homophobic attitudes that were common in Britain in the 70s and 80s.

There are fans in most fandoms who write about queer experiences, both in terms of sexualities and genders, but the reason I have chosen to focus exclusively on the Marauders fandom and on *ATYD* in particular is the fandom’s insistence on the queer relationship between Remus Lupin and Sirius Black. These two characters were, both in the original books and in the movies, portrayed in a way that made their queerness seem intentional. This was until the author decided to kill off one of the characters and marry the other one to a woman. The queerness of Remus and Sirius, while perpetuated by the fandom, was not a phenomenon that started because fans of the novels wanted queer characters to identify with. The characters were written in such a way that the actors for these characters were told by the director of the third Harry Potter movie to act as if they were in love and it was a shock to the actor of Remus when his character ended up marrying a woman, as stated by David Thewlis at an Apple Store Soho Discussion Panel in 2011. The sheer number of fans who assumed Sirius and Remus were characters they could relate to because of their heavily implied

queerness shows not only that queer people have a need for characters to relate to, but also that assuming queerness in characters is not exclusively a fandom behavior.

3.2 When fanfiction becomes the canon

MsKingBean uses her fic to make jabs at characters or storylines in the original books she disagrees with or does not particularly like. One of these things started out as a mistake on the part of the author but became so integrated into the story that she wouldn't go back and change it: the way she misspelled Sirius Black's mother's name (Walpurga instead of Walburga). She also makes a pointed joke about Remus' eventual canon relationship with Nymphadora Tonks. Making fun of this relationship is not MsKingBean saying that queer people cannot be in straight relationships, but it's a comment on the frequency of queer coded characters being suddenly placed in straight relationships – seemingly as a consequence of the fandom headcanoning them as queer.

Remus' relationship with a woman seems to have been introduced to stop the shipping within the fandoms rather than as a natural part of his characterization. This is highlighted in *ATYD* during a conversation at Christmas where Sirius' cousin Andromeda Tonks is visiting, Andromeda and her husband are having a discussion about their daughter's future where Andromeda states “Dora can marry anyone she likes when she's old enough, and I can say with absolute certainty that it won't be anyone at this table” (MsKingBean89, chapter 51). In the context of the story, this is nothing but a teasing conversation between a toddler's parents, but for the reader, this conversation both pokes fun at the inevitable canonical marriage between Remus and Nymphadora and highlights the extent of the age difference between the two that is briefly touched on in canon. This brief conversation also pokes fun at the tragedy that is inevitable at the end of Remus and Sirius' relationship.

As with the passage in *ATYD*, coping with this type of erasure through comedy has become another staple within fandom communities. I already mentioned John Watson marrying a woman in the BBC's *Sherlock* in relation to this type of erasure. This case is complicated further by Arthur Conan Doyle's canon Watson being married to a woman and the BBC following this storyline. However, the fandom largely worked off the queercoded version of the characters shown on screen and used John's marriage as an opportunity to insert humor into the situation or to use similar situations as a point in a bigger conversation

about the issue. Several Tumblr posts touched upon this at the time, but user johnsheppard-assshaker talks about this issue on a wider scale in a post, stating,

Hey man sorry about your male co-star. Turns out you guys had too much sexual tension on screen so he was written into a lazy, heterosexual romance arc that lacks chemistry and depth and actually just makes him look even more queer tbh. Now he's off pretending to be happy with somebody else when the love of his life was right there all along. I'm so sorry dude. It will probably happen again :/

This post was tagged with several different queercoded relationships, including Johnlock (John and Sherlock), Wolfstar (Remus and Sirius), and Hannigram (Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham). This post, made in 2023, has as of today over 23 000 notes and comments where fans are discussing the issue and bringing up other characters or relationships that have fallen victim to the same trope. The post points out several problems that have been prevalent with queer coded characters, including the inherent laziness of many of the heterosexual romance plots that keep queer coded characters from becoming explicitly queer. Johnsheppard ends his post with an apology, either to the characters or to the actors he references, resigning himself to the inevitability of these types of queer erasure happening again.

The stories the fandom has about the Marauders – the friend group consisting of James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew – are mostly created by other fans through fanfictions, fanarts, and other fan creations. The whole generation of people who attended Hogwarts with Harry's father and his friends have nearly no actual textual evidence throughout the books, but these characters have a whole subcategory of the fandom invested in them regardless. There are currently almost 30 000 fics on Ao3 alone tagged as Marauders Era fanfiction (Archive of our Own, Search Results), Fanfiction.net has an additional 20 000 fics where the title mentions the Marauders (Fanfiction.net). Characters like Marlene McKinnon, Regulus Black, Dorcas Meadowes, Evan Rosier, and a plethora of others are barely mentioned in the novels, sometimes only by name and how they died, but within the Marauders fandom, these are fully developed characters with an agreed upon backstory, look, and friend group. While the mere fact that these characters have been further developed through their existence within fandom and fanfiction is not, itself, something that is unique to

the Marauders fandom, the agreement around the characters is more remarkable.

As there is no canonical explanation related to the looks or personalities of some of the main characters within the Marauders fandom, much of the fanon related to them has come from fancasts. Fancast is when fans online or fan editors have chosen actors or characters from other movies and in their own way, casted these people as the characters. Within the Marauders fandom, the most popular ones are unsurprisingly the younger versions of the marauders themselves. Aaron Taylor-Johnson as young James Potter, Andrew Garfield as young Remus Lupin, Ben Barnes as young Sirius Black, and either Dane Dehaan or Lewis Capaldi as young Peter Pettigrew. These fancasts have been widely accepted since the early days of Tumblr, theorized to date back to as early as 2010 (Masie Pettifer). While these have been accepted by the fandom since then, there has been certain discussions regarding them all being white and regarding the fancast of Dane Dehaan erasing Peter Pettigrew's canonical description as plus sized. The critique of Peter's looks being erased is the reason that Lewis Capaldi has been fan casted as him in more recent years. The development and explosive popularity of the Marauders fandom didn't start until after the movies, largely due to the way the actors of Remus and Sirius portrayed them in the movies. As this is a fandom that chronicles characters that have very little canonical inclusion in Rowling's books apart from the fact that they are all dead, much of the accepted lore about them is made in the fandom, by the fandom. It is also an accepted fact – and inside joke – that there is no happiness in the Marauders fandom. Several Tumblr users, among them user fox-marauder have gone as far as referring to the Marauders fandom as “The people who cry too much about a bunch of dead gay wizards,” and searching the term “dead gay wizards” on Tumblr brings up exclusively Marauders posts.

While there are thousands of stories chronicling the life of the Marauders, none are as known and as close to being accepted canon within the fandom as *ATYD*. Due in part to the lack of information we have about the Marauders from canon, MsKingBean and other fanfiction authors have almost free reins when they include mentioned characters in their own writings. Characters that are only mentioned by name in the original books could have been counted as original characters if they had been given a different name. However, they have developed through the tens of thousands of pages of writing from the fandom and gotten their own version of a canon description.

Remus' lycanthropy is a big plot device used throughout the fic and it is one of the

bigger reasons his queerness is such an accepted theory throughout the fandom – even, as previously mentioned, by the filmmakers and actors. Rowling herself talked about his lycanthropy being an allegory for AIDS in her book *Short Stories of Heroism From Hogwarts of Heroism, Hardship, and Dangerous Hobbies*. This comment has been met with quite a bit of backlash due to the way Remus was turned into a werewolf in the books – being bitten by an adult werewolf who was intentionally targeting children – which, deliberately or not, furthers a harmful stereotype about queer men. In an interview quoted in an article by Peter Kispert, Rowling talks about the parallels she saw between lycanthropy and HIV/AIDS. She is quoted saying that “The wizarding community is as prone to hysteria and prejudice as the Muggle one” and that Remus’ affliction gave her the chance to examine “those attitudes.” However, Rowling’s refusal to make any of her implied queerness explicit takes away the possibilities she had for examining the attitudes surrounding queerness and the HIV/AIDS pandemic in an effective way and leaves readers with a half-hearted attempt at representation without any real effort being put into examine the pain queer people went through during the AIDS crisis.

3.3 Fanfiction and representation

The labor of fanfic writers has clear benefits for their readers. One of the most frequent comments on the early chapters of MsKingBean’s fic is a reader recognizing themselves in the experiences Remus’ character is going through with his budding crush on Sirius. Remus and Sirius’ journey of sexual realization is written in a way that makes it clearly recognizable for the readers of the fic. There are countless comments left on each chapter of *ATYD* by readers recognizing the feelings MsKingBean is describing and relating these to their own experiences with being insecure about their sexuality or their confusion at how their heterosexual peers were talking about crushes. Throughout the entirety of *ATYD* there are several occasions where Remus experiences certain things that are common for queer people who have just – or are just starting to – realize their sexuality experience. The more recognizable these experiences are to the readers of the fic, the more they tend to be commented upon underneath the chapters where the experience has happened. For example, on the chapter where Remus finally comes out to his friends, there are as of writing 1129 comments left by different users. The chapter where Remus and Sirius first kiss has 917

comments and the chapter where Remus and Sirius finally tell some of their friends that they are together has more than 400 comments.

In one passage of the fic that has received a particularly large amount commentary, Remus is faced with the realization that most of his friends have crushes or are showing interest in girls, and he is unable to understand the appeal. Remus' inner thoughts while pondering the girl problems everyone around him faces summarizes the experience many queer people have been faced with at some point in their lives. While he does not understand the appeal of girls, he decides that

If a girl liked you, you pretty much had to kiss them, wasn't that the case?
Was it awful if a girl didn't like you? If Sirius now liked Mary, and James liked Lily, ought he to pick a girl too? Marlene was ok. A bit shy, like him.
Maybe Marlene, then. (MsKingBean89, Chapter 50)

Though there is nothing in this quote that explicitly reveals Remus' queerness to the reader, the action of deciding which person one should have a crush on in order to not be different is particularly recognizable for queer people who have not yet realized their queerness. While there have been certain signs of Remus' queerness in previous chapters, this chapter in the Marauders' third year is where the reader is first made explicitly aware of the internal conflict Remus is experiencing due to his differing feelings towards girls. Remus' queerness is not a surprise to the readers, it is confirmed in the tags of the fic that Remus and Sirius will get together eventually, but MsKingBean is going through Remus' entire journey of realizing and coming to terms with his sexuality.

This passage is the beginning of Remus' journey of discovery and MsKingBean explains a feeling a lot of her readers recognize. A user with the name CupidsQuill comments "I read that part and I was like 'meeee'" (Chapter 50). Many of the over 200 comments on this chapter express similar sentiments. Another comment left by user Quill Parker suggests that they are "convinced every gay just lives the same life. I just picked some guy and thought everybody was doing the same thing" (Chapter 50). This comment, like several other commenters on this chapter, uses the hashtag #justgaythings to share their recognition of Remus' experiences and to add their own explanations of these situations. Remus' inability to understand what he is supposed to do when a girl likes him is both a testament to how little he

has thought about relationships in general and to how out of place he feels in the discussion about liking someone. He has the idea that everyone else likes someone so he probably should pick someone to like too, then chooses someone he already has a platonic relationship with because that will take away the feeling of being different. Remus later has a confidential late-night conversation with Peter's older sister and states that "he definitely had no desire to get that close to any other girl" (MsKingBean89, Chapter 51). Despite this, Remus has two sexual encounters with female characters throughout *ATYD*. One with Mary and one with a friend of Grant, although Remus has these experiences, they don't define or alter his sexuality and could serve as reassurance for queer youth that their previous sexual encounters do not define their sexuality. Being able to follow Remus' journey with his sexuality throughout all the phases he goes through provides an arena for queer people, regardless of age to recognize themselves in, whether it is where they currently are in their journey or being able to look back and realize that they had similar experiences.

The *Harry Potter* fandom as a whole has been asking for canonical queer representation since before the books were finished, and Rowling, instead of including queerness within the story itself, later revealed on Twitter that Dumbledore is and always has been gay, but there was no need for Harry to know this information, so it simply was not included in the books. This form of quasi queer inclusion is not enough to count as actual diversity within her story and even in the *Fantastic Beasts* movies where Dumbledore and his supposed lovers both have a significant role, their relationship is still kept vague and the possibility of it being platonic is still present. This insistence on keeping even canonical, confirmed queer relationships vague enough for it to barely count as subtext is, in my opinion, motivated by Rowling and the studio's reluctance to potentially make homophobes angry, thus costing them money.

ATYD is driven by the queerness of Remus and Sirius, they are both explicitly stated as being queer and their relationship is explored throughout the story. MsKingBean states in the tags that this is a Wolfstar fic, but that the relationship is "so slow" "seriously" "its slow", meaning that the readers of the fic will have the reassurance that even though things in their relationship is taking time, it will happen eventually. This gives the readers the enjoyment of being able to see the relationship between these two characters grow and develop, as well as seeing them go through rough patches in their friendship without worrying that they are being queerbaited. Adding the reassurance that readers are not being queerbaited – it's just that the

fic is slow and that MsKingBean wants to spend time developing the characters' relationship as friends before they are romantic – is likely a symptom of queer audiences being used to accepting queerbaiting as the only form of representation they can get. The slow burn of the romantic relationship also naturally becomes a part of the narrative because the characters are eleven when the story starts. Readers go to media like fanfiction for the reassurance that they will not be deceived when it comes to the content they are reading. Tags are in place as a reassurance or warning that what is in the tags will happen at some point throughout the fic.

Throughout *ATYD*, readers are introduced to several different examples of queer people finding community outside their own family. The flat Remus' orphanage friend Grant is living in on Mile End is an example of one of these communities. Here, Grant and several others have created their own little commune in an abandoned building. Remus notes that “it was a squat, shared with several young men and women” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 93) who are living with only the absolute bare minimum. The squat used by Grant and his friends is explicitly stated to be lived in by exclusively queer people, with Grant noting that the “[c]oppers leave us alone if we leave them alone” and explaining to an outraged Remus that being queer is, in fact, against the law if the queer person is younger than 21, as that is the age of consent for “us deviants” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 93). This whole chapter where Remus is introduced to the way Grant is living serves as a reminder of how many queer people are forced to exist. Throughout the chapter, Remus is introduced to their way of living, noting several things that stand out to him about how much these people, who have little in common except their queerness, take care of each other and have learned to live together even though their conditions are rough.

Going back to the amount of labor and research that goes into writing fanfic, MsKingBean has done copious amounts of research into the queer scene in the UK in the 70s. She said in a message to me on Tumblr that “finding all of the information about a community that tried to stay hidden took so much time” (MsKingBean89, March 24, 2024). The comments on this chapter of *ATYD* have been able to pick up on the amount of research that has been put into accurately portraying the realities of the queer squats that existed in and around London at the time. A user with the name CoinToYourWitcher recognizes some of the things MsKingBean writes about, stating “I love how knowledgeable you are about UK cultural history. My uncle stayed in one of those squats when he was thrown out,” (Chapter 93). By showing the community queer people are able to find or create even in times where

the wider public was very hostile towards the existence of queerness, MsKingBean highlights the resilience of queer people through the years.

3.4 Secrets, scars, and trust

Because the prejudice against Remus' lycanthropy is one of the few facts we know, MsKingBean has included this in her fic, but she has used the plot point as a vehicle to show the love between the Marauders from a young age. Already in their first year at Hogwarts, the Marauders bond by sharing their scars, both the physical and mental ones. This is especially true for Sirius and Remus, as they are the ones who, despite coming from completely opposite circumstances, have the most similar home life. While Sirius comes from a wealthy pureblood family, Remus has grown up in a children's home, but they're both so used to experiencing cruelty at the hands of the adults in their lives that while Remus considers Sirius' family problems, he notes that "there were the scars Sirius had shown him back in September, obviously, but as far as Remus knew, those were perfectly normal" (MsKingBean89, chapter 18). While the boys have received their scars under very different circumstances, Remus from The Wolf – as he has nicknamed his werewolf form – and Sirius from his parents, they both have physical scars because they are different. While Sirius happens to see Remus' scar, he willingly shows off his own. However, while the characters being vulnerable with each other is important for the progression of the story, there is greater thematic importance in the physical scars they have because they are different than what is expected.

These characters are the main queer representation within *ATYD*, and their intimate moment of sharing their physical scars with each other is an important building block for their relationship with each other. While the physical scars are an important part of their stories, the origin of the scars is tied to their identities. They have both been scarred because they are different in some way from everyone else around them. Remus because of his lycanthropy and from having grown up in the muggle world, where his condition has been dealt with by locking him away, and Sirius because he has failed to live up to the bigoted expectations from his wizard family. Their physical scars represent only the visible consequences of their differentness. While they don't share anything about the deeper trauma that is tied to the scars in this first conversation where they were willing to be vulnerable with each other, the importance of the mental and physical scars are mentioned several times throughout *ATYD*.

Whenever Remus's scars are at the forefront of his mind, his foremost thought is his wish to hide them, or his idea that they make him less desirable. Examining himself in the mirror, he notes that "In the dim light, he couldn't see his scars. Would a girl ever like him if he looked the way he looked?" (MsKingBean, chapter 51). While Remus' thoughts are centered around wanting to change the way he looks and wanting to hide the scars for aesthetic reasons, the use of the scars as a metaphor for both Remus and Sirius being different from what is expected enables the reader to draw parallels between wanting to remove the scars and wanting to remove the reason why the characters are different, in this case, wanting to remove – or hide – their queerness. The portrayal of queerness in *ATYD*, while being presented positively, with queer characters allowed to thrive, doesn't shy away from the painful aspects of growing up queer. For queer teens, it is common to wish that they weren't different and want their queerness to not be a defining part of them.

Secrets play a big part as Remus and Sirius get to know each other. Remus doesn't trust Sirius' ability to keep secrets when they first meet, noting that he and James "were constantly telling Remus and Peter other people's business," (MsKingBean89, Chapter 8). Throughout the course of chapter eight and nine, Remus' perception of Sirius changes from someone he is particularly wary of to someone to whom he is willing to admit that he can't read. This revelation comes after they show each other their scars, and Sirius confronts Remus with the fact that Remus can't read. Remus only admits to his dyslexia because, as he thinks, "[h]e had enough secrets to keep as it was. And Sirius had shared one of his" (MsKingBean89, Chapter 9). Even after the Marauders find out about Remus' biggest secret, his lycanthropy, there are still so many things he keeps hidden that Sirius comments that "you're not Moony if you don't have a secret" (MsKingBean89, Chapter 48). This comment is, fittingly made in a conversation where Remus is being asked about his relationship status, tying it to his queerness, the other big secret Remus is hiding from his friends and it is yet another secret he is scared will ruin his friendships.

The support from the other Marauders in relation to Remus' lycanthropy is one of the first instances where Remus allows himself to think of them as proper friends. Though the revelation puts all four boys on edge for about a week, they get over the wariness quickly, and as one of the comments on chapter 24 says, "It's really believable that at first they were awkward about Remus's condition instead of all accepting it at once. (...) I still hope that they would talk things out" (Daledesu). Having shared this secret with them and having his friends

support him through the days after the full moons by visiting him in the hospital wing quickly makes their friendship grow into something closer, making the three other boys the family Remus never had but always wanted.

The fifth year, while it is the year that his friends are finally able to be an actively helpful presence during the transformations, is also the year that the biggest argument within the friend group happens. “The Prank” is another one of the events that are canon to the original *Harry Potter* books and is mentioned once in a conversation between Harry and Remus. However the fandom has taken what little information is canonically available about it and spun it to one of the defining moments within the Marauders fandom and the lore connected to them. The Prank refers to a full moon when Sirius, as a prank on Severus Snape – a long time enemy of the Marauders – tells him how to get into the shack where Remus is supposed to be locked in for his werewolf transformations. This leads to Snape seeing Remus when he is transformed and lets him put the pieces together about Remus’ condition. This event, while something that canonically happened in the *Harry Potter* books, is not explained as something that had a profound effect on any of the people involved, however, MsKingBean uses the limited information available about it and develops it into one of the more integral parts of the story, the results of The Prank briefly threatening the friendship between the Marauders and hinting to The Prank being one of the reasons that Remus, as an adult would be capable of believing that Sirius could betray James and Lily.

The Prank is an event that impacts all the Marauders, the main people involved are Remus and Sirius. With the way lycanthropy has been compared to queerness and with the amount of trust Remus placed on the other Marauders to ensure that his secret was safe with them, the betrayal of Sirius leading Snape directly to Remus during a full moon is described in *ATYD* in a way that draws parallels between this and outing someone as queer. The hurt and betrayal Remus feels when he finds out what has happened has been compared to feelings of being outed by commenters on the fic as well. Ao3 user Arrabellabarbarella left a long comment on this chapter sympathizing with Remus’ characters and telling her own story of being outed by a best friend. They end their comment saying that they “hope atleast this will make other people with similar experiences feel less alone” (Chapter 91), and talking about how hard it was for them to eventually forgive their friend.

The forgiveness is something MsKingBean spends a long time on in the fic. Remus’ first thought after having recovered slightly from the trauma of the full moon is that he

“would never, ever forgive Sirius Black,” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 91) and it is not until four chapters and several in story months later that Remus and Sirius even have a proper conversation. Sirius revealing the secret entrance to the Shrieking Shack and thus revealing Remus’ lycanthropy to Snape is a breach of trust Remus is convinced he will never be able to get over. Having trusted someone with a secret of that size and having that trust be broken is a betrayal that stays with Remus for a long time even after he forgives Sirius. The forgiveness for the betrayal doesn’t come easily, but when Remus does decide to give Sirius another chance he notes how “Forgiveness would be such a blessed relief” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 95). Even as Remus decides to forgive Sirius, it is not described as something that fixes everything but that it is a start and that they can move on from it eventually.

While Remus has dealt with his lycanthropy since childhood, it isn’t until the summer between his fifth and sixth year that he realizes how many people will automatically distrust him due to his condition. In chapter 94 of the fic, Remus has been taken in by the Potters and will be staying the rest of the summer with James’ family, along with James and Sirius. At this point in the story, tensions from the coming war are high and Remus is faced with how much his lycanthropy is going to ostracize him. As accepting and open to Remus as James’ parents are, their acceptance is not the common reaction Remus is going to get from the majority of the wizarding world. The Potters themselves welcomed Remus with open arms but there are others on their side of the war who are immediately suspicious of Remus’ allegiances due to his lycanthropy. Mad Eye Moody, one of the wizard cops who are at the Potters to ensure that their house is safe has a conversation with Remus where he reveals that there are very few “dark creatures” on their side and this revelation is why he comes to the realization that Remus being a werewolf could be “why Dumbledore kept him so close? (...) why he hadn’t alerted the ministry as soon as Remus was reported missing? (...)At least someone thought he was useful” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 94). This conversation takes place before Remus has turned seventeen and in addition to making him realize his potential role in the war, makes him realize that when he can no longer keep his lycanthropy a secret because of the laws surrounding werewolf registry, his life is going to get a lot harder.

As the story progresses and Remus and Sirius grow closer, sharing secrets with each other becomes a way to both bond and spend more time together alone. It has been a way for the two to be close to each other since their first year and as they grow up and eventually get together, the secrets shared and the nature of their conversations change. Neither boy likes

having secrets kept from them and Remus sharing secrets with Sirius becomes a nightly routine for the two during the summer between their sixth and seventh year at Hogwarts.

“Tell me a secret,” Sirius would whisper, late at night - every night, he came to Remus, “Tell me something no one knows.”

And Remus would tell him - because it made Sirius happy, and that was a very worthwhile pursuit - in fact, Remus was realising, making Sirius happy might be the only thing worth doing, for the rest of his life. (MissKingBean89, Chapter 117)

After the first year when Remus decides that he can trust Sirius with secrets, they slowly become the people who know the most about each other's secrets and having Sirius so openly ask for Remus to share more of them whenever they are alone in bed shows the development of their trust in each other. Additionally, in this passage, Remus' realization about wanting to make Sirius happy for the rest of his life is one that has received many comments under the chapter. The chapter itself currently has 117 comments and between the comments talking about other things that happened in the chapter, namely James being overprotective of Remus after he came out to his friends, several people have made comments along the lines of the comment left by user intotheshadowz talking about how

[t]here is too much tragic foreshadowing like him wanting to make him happy forever and wanting to be protective and Sirius wanting to know all his secrets and feeling like there is something being hidden from him. (Chapter 117)

The comments similar to this one are all excited about the relationship between Remus and Sirius continuing to develop and deepen, but as the fic gets closer to the end, the awareness of how things will inevitably end for all these characters becomes more real. Every time MsKingBean makes any references to the future readers know these characters won't live to see there are comments pointing it out and comment threads talking about their hope for an alternative ending to the fic, not wanting to see the characters go through everything they do in canon.

3.5 Fandom as a way of finding communities and the importance of found family

Found family is central to *ATYD*. Along with Remus' and Sirius' issues with coming to terms with their sexuality and growing feelings for each other the bonds of found family are, in my opinion, the most important part of the fic. The biggest change of canon is the change in Remus' family. Removing his loving parents shifts the dynamics of the Marauders' friend group: instead of having one person (Sirius) who is in desperate need of a loving family, there are two. While the found family dynamics within the core friend group would be present even if MsKingBean had kept Remus' canon family life intact, there is an increased sense of desperation that comes from this change. Additionally, for the queer readers of this fic, seeing multiple people have strained or non-existent relationships with their family could serve as a source of comfort. Both Sirius and Remus find a family with the Marauders and to an extent – especially for Sirius – with James' parents. MsKingBean shows and explains and expands upon these dynamics all throughout *ATYD*, giving her readers an insight into different ways of finding the people who will choose you no matter what.

For Remus, the power of found family can be seen in the ways James, Sirius, and Peter are willing to break laws and learn magic that is far above their level of advancement in order to turn into animals and be there for their friend during the full moons. The idea of choice is also important in Remus' journey of finding family with the Marauders. For Sirius, while he is also in a situation where he is forced to rely on a found family rather than on his own family, the focus is more on the ways in which his biological family are mistreating him and how he finds escape with James and his parents. MsKingBean gives her readers two very distinct versions of found and chosen family with these two characters, both in terms of situation and in terms of how they react to and interact with their found families as well as how they both eventually come to terms with their queerness.

ATYD, in its simplest form, is a story about finding a family when you don't have one or you don't fit in with the family you have. While all the Marauders find their family with each other, it's not coincidental that our two main characters, Remus and Sirius are both the ones who rely on their found family the most and the ones whose story we are following. Even in canon, these two characters are written in ways that mirror many queer people's

experiences. Sirius Black has been disowned by his traditional family for not agreeing with their views on blood purity. He runs away from home to the family he has found with the Potters and ends up relying on his friends exclusively. MsKingBean has stated that she wanted to keep her story as close to the canon events of the books as possible, but there are certain changes made to characters and character motivations (MsKingBean, Summary). Out of the characters we know as more than just a name and cause of death, the one that has gone through most changes from canon to fanon is Remus Lupin. Remus has a family that loves him in canon and both parents have been said to actively do whatever they can to make his lycanthropy as painless as possible. In *ATYD*, however, he has grown up at an orphanage with a father who killed himself due to Remus' lycanthropy and a mother who felt unable to take care of a young child who turns into a werewolf once a month. These changes, while large, are used as a way to make Remus' character more reliant on the people around him and his need for community with his friends a larger part of the story.

Although the readers of *ATYD* already were aware of the eventual relationship between Remus and Sirius that will develop, comments indicate that they found it healing to read about Remus' journey of coming to terms with his sexuality and to recognize themselves in his story. According to some comments reading these types of fanfic and finding recognition in the story is a rite of passage for all gay kids. Going to places like fandom where queerness is accepted and talked about to a larger extent than it is in mainstream media opens the door to exploration and self-acceptance. Due to the nature of fanfiction and the tagging system that allows readers to meticulously choose what kinds of stories they want to read and what characters, character relationships, and more general content tags, it is unlikely that anyone would go into *ATYD* not knowing they are reading a queer story. This being said, having the choice to read about queer characters growing up, reading about someone realizing their sexuality, finding a family that accepts them for who they are – lycanthropy and all – is, according to the comments left on MsKingBean's fic, a healing journey for many readers. User SmellyKelo comments on chapter 94 that "Mrs. Potter is such a wonderful person! Every queer kid needs a Mrs. Potter in their corner" (Chapter 94), and this love for the Potters for taking in both Remus and Sirius is continued throughout every chapter that mentions James' parents. Even after the Potters' first introduction, a majority of the 110 comments on chapter 30 is talking about how their presence is a comfort in an otherwise sad chapter. User blou_wildflower summarized their feelings simply by saying "the potters are absolutely

amazing and otherwise i am sad” (Chapter 30). In the comment thread following this comment, several people share their feelings of sadness for both Remus and Sirius for not having a family like the Potters, but also their excitement that Mr. and Mrs. Potter so willingly open their house to James’ friends.

While the Marauders’ friend group are the main players in the found family plot line, James’ parents also play an important part in this, stepping up to take in Sirius when he’s thrown out by his biological family, and repeatedly offering to take in Remus as well. Sirius’ cousin Andromeda, who, like Sirius has been disowned by the Black family goes as far as proclaiming the Potters “Protectors of outcasts and defenders of black sheep everywhere” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 51) at a Christmas party during the Marauders’ third year, where the Potters have gathered all their friends. The importance of establishing the Potters’ house as a safe haven for “outcasts and black sheep” parallels the experiences many queer teenagers have gone through with finding one trusted adult or family in their lives that they look to for advice and for comfort. Following this first Christmas where the Marauders are gathered at the Potters’ house, the home becomes a gathering place and a safe environment for both Remus and Sirius. Sirius, as previously mentioned, ends up moving in with the family after he is disowned by his own family at 15. The comments underneath this chapter confirm the importance of having adults like the Potters present in the lives of queer youth, with one commenter with the name buttercream23 sharing that “...the potters remind me of one of my friends parents, they were just welcoming to everyone and no one had to worry about hiding things from them <3”.

Sirius’ family life is explored throughout ATYD in ways that clearly parallel queer experiences. While none of the Black children have a particularly good relationship with their family, the lack of acceptance for anyone different is an experience shared by many in the queer community. Around the time Sirius turns sixteen, he ends up getting disowned by his family, finding a new home with the Potters. Sirius’ character, both in canon and in fanfiction is one that is frequently written about in scenarios that are full of angst. Sirius’ journey of discovering his sexuality, while happening along with Remus’ throughout ATYD is shown exclusively through Remus’ perspective, giving the readers the opportunity to view his struggles from an outside perspective. While Remus’ coming out story centers on his realization that he is completely uninterested in girls, Sirius is faced with the confusion common to many bi/polysexual queer people: knowing that there is a definite interest in the

sex that you are expected to have an interest in, while also knowing that there is an attraction to the other sex.

Sirius goes through large parts of *ATYD* justifying his attraction to Remus as something different from sexual attraction, because the feelings he has towards his male friend are different from those he has towards women he is interested in throughout the story. Interestingly, the only time throughout all of *ATYD* where the word “bisexual” is mentioned is in relation to a friend of Grant Chapman, an original character created by MsKingBean. The character who happens to be bisexual is only mentioned in this one interaction, but through the interaction between Grant and Remus the readers are informed that Remus knows both that bisexuality is a label for one’s sexuality and how bisexuality works in terms of relationships. As bisexuality is mentioned only this one time, the reader is taken on the journey of Sirius’ sexuality and are left to come to their own conclusion about whether Sirius uses this label. Such fictional journeys can be of help to young queer people. According to The Trevor Project, 28% of queer youth in the United States lose significant relationships with family members or experience housing instability as a consequence of coming out (“LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness & Housing Instability Statistics”). Seeing characters like Remus and Sirius go through experiences that are so common for queer youth and still be able to find stability with their found family may provide some sorely needed hope for queer youth struggling through housing instability or strained family relations.

There are several types of community introduced and explored throughout the course of *ATYD*. The family Remus finds with the Marauders and the one he ultimately chooses to stay loyal to is just one of them. There is also the squat in London where Grant and the other queer young people are staying. The conditions they all live in are less than ideal but there is a sense of care the people there have for each other shown in the few scenes that take place in the run-down apartment. The people living there have created their own rules and they are clearly prepared to take in others who need it. The squat is introduced as a space where the queer people who stay there can be themselves and where they don’t have to hide from each other and as something that was created out of necessity. While staying at the squat, Remus has the time to think about what it would be like to just stay there with them and live as a muggle with other queer people. While Remus seems annoyed with how the people living with Grant are being treated for their queerness, he quickly finds comfort in the squat and finds that he enjoys the simplicity of being able to exist without the worries that come with

his lycanthropy and the war that is brewing. He is realizing that staying in the squat with Grant “was so simple (...) It could be very easy to disappear, if you wanted to” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 93) and Remus briefly entertains the thought of just staying with Grant and disappearing.

In the same chapter that the queer squat is introduced, the theme of community and found family is further emphasized with James, Peter, and Sirius showing up to get Remus out of there and take him back to the Potters’ for the rest of the summer. While the squat is an example of a type of living Remus would have been able to escape to if it hadn’t been for his lycanthropy, the appearance of the rest of the Marauders represent the family Remus can still have, regardless of his magical affliction. This is one of the many situations where Remus finds himself pulled between the wizarding world and the muggle world. He wants to stay with Grant originally, wishing for the normalcy and comfort Grant is able to offer, but he eventually decides to go with the Marauders to James’ house, in a way embracing his magical side and choosing the Marauders as his family. At the time he makes this choice, he is very unsure about the Marauders, Sirius especially, due to The Prank that essentially outed Remus as a werewolf to Snape. Despite this tension, Remus is willing to join the other boys rather than staying with Grant.

This moment is, in my opinion an important step Remus takes in his acceptance of himself. While Grant is willing to provide Remus with anything he can, there will, for Remus always be that fear about Grant not understanding the magical side of his life. The Marauders, and by extension, James’ parents welcome him with open arms, unconcerned about where or how he has grown up, only wanting to help in any way they can. While the squat Grant lives in would have been able to provide a form of community for Remus, I believe it is significant that, despite the tension in his relationship with the Marauders when he makes the choice to join them, he still chooses the people and the community he has found himself, not the one that is offered to him by someone else. A consistent part of Remus’ character throughout *ATYD* is his wish to be independent and his difficulty accepting help, so when he decides that he isn’t actually able to stay on his own and that he requires the help the rest of the Marauders are offering him, he is taking a large step forward in his trust for them and in his acceptance of the Marauders as a permanent inclusion in his life.

While the mentioned time in sixth year when he decides to go with the Marauders instead of staying with Grant is perhaps the time he makes the most conscious choice

regarding his found family, there are several occasions earlier in the fic where Remus has been showed that the Marauders have chosen him and that he can safely choose them as well. The first time Remus has some sort of realization that these people are there for him regardless is after they have found out that he is a werewolf during their second year. It takes about a week of slight uncertainty on all parts before the friendship goes back to normal and although there are definitely parts of the others knowing that scares him, “Remus could not have been happier with the outcome” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 25). Remus’ realization that his friends won’t leave his side because of his lycanthropy and that there are people willing to stand up for him regardless is – in my opinion – a feeling that a lot of queer kids can recognize. However, as Remus in this fic is both a gay man and a werewolf his story has double the situations in which queer kids can recognize themselves. He is hiding large parts of himself from everyone and even though he is given the relief of having someone know about his lycanthropy in his second year, there is a whole other part of himself that he hasn’t even fully realized himself yet: his queerness.

There is an interesting dynamic playing out regarding Remus’ willingness to accept that those around him know things about him. In the original *Harry Potter* books, lycanthropy is, as mentioned, supposed to be a metaphor for HIV/AIDS and the treatment of werewolves is meant to be an allegory for attitudes tied to queerness. While Remus’ lycanthropy is figured out, it takes him several more years to eventually come out as queer to his friends, and I think it is noteworthy that it is easier for him to come to terms with the fact that his friends accept him as a werewolf than them accepting him as a gay man. Even the comments seem to equate the lycanthropy to queerness, one comment on the chapter where the Marauders find out about and accept Remus’ condition stating “the allyship i didn’t know i needed!!” (soliloquys), presumably referring to the Marauders’ immediate willingness to defend Remus from Snape even though there is still some tension between the boys from them finding out about Remus’ lycanthropy. It is this immediate willingness to jump to Remus’ defense, as well as them promising to keep his condition secret that allows Remus to trust them again.

Despite his initial reaction to them finding out being fear and distrust, Remus is willing to give the other Marauders a chance to show that they will keep his secret safe. He starts out “not allowing himself to entertain the idea – to even hope. Hope never got you anywhere; if he knew anything, he knew that. It was a rule written on his skin in thick silver lines” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 24). The other boys are made aware of the dangers it would

pose for Remus should they reveal his secret to anyone and they take this to heart immediately. Remus describes the initial time after the Marauders finding out about his lycanthropy as “agony, at first, every moment filled with awkwardness and a new kind of shyness that hadn’t been there before” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 24), but he also points out that as soon as the first hurdle of getting over their uncertainty is passed, everything quickly goes back to normal for them. Having Remus go through this change within a single chapter, from not even entertaining the idea of having hope, to the interactions with his best friends being “agony”, to everything going back to a relative normal at the start of chapter 25, highlights both how important the other Marauders are to Remus and how insecure he is about himself and his place within the group.

Throughout the years at Hogwarts, Remus gains more confidence in his role within his friend group, and as with most people, becomes surer of himself as he grows up and gets more comfortable around the other Marauders and their relationships with each other. The next realization Remus has that shows him how important he is to the other Marauders comes when they show him that they have been able to complete the magic to turn them into Animagi – wizards who are able to turn into animals at will – in order to keep Remus company during the full moons. After he is first told,

Remus was still speechless. He watched them all as if they were strangers.

Had they really done this - some of the most difficult magic, which required skill, concentration and - above all - patience , just for him? (MsKingBean89, Chapter 76)

Remus’ shock at his friends caring about him deeply enough to become Animagi for him leaves him so speechless he makes the others think he is angry with them. The shock of being cared for after not having had anyone to call family most of his life is a feeling that is, according to the comments, shared by many queer kids who grow up in a family where they are not accepted. While Remus’ lack of acceptance comes from his lycanthropy, applying his situation to queer youth and their need for both found family and stability becomes natural in this context. This chapter marks a turn in the entire fic. From here on, Remus is no longer alone at the full moon. He doesn’t only have his friends with him after the fact, they are there to make the transformations easier. This change ensures that he doesn’t hurt himself as badly

when he's in the wolf form, but it also heals the part of him that is scared that he will never truly be accepted by his friends due to his lycanthropy.

Chapter 76, the chapter where the Marauders reveal that they have become animagi is one of the chapters in the entirety of *ATYD* with the most comments. On this chapter alone, there are, as of writing, 529 comments, and while some of them are talking about the joy of the characters finally becoming animagi, a large portion of them are commenting on a specific phrase Sirius says after Remus has turned back to a person and Remus asks him how it was – how he was – during the moon, worried he might have scared his friends. Sirius replies, in a way that Remus notes is more serious than the other usually ever is that “You were beautiful” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 76). Comments on this moment all include a variation of “my heart”, “oh my god” or simply the commenters informing the author of their incoherent screaming at the undeniable step forward in the relationship between Sirius and Remus, including more than one person declaring that they were flapping like chickens after reading. The commenters’ reactions go back to the previously mentioned *slow burn* of this fic, and with the reassurance that the two will end up together in the end, any small step forward is met with massive enthusiasm from the readers.

While the comments on this chapter are largely focused on the step forward in the relationship the fic is based around, the Marauders being able to be there for Remus during his transformations at the full moon also furthers the found family relationship between all four boys and ties them together in a way that they weren't before. Several comments have specifically taken note of the line “This was his pack - and he was no longer alone” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 76) with user `geeks_are_meant_to_be_freaks` simply quoting the line and saying “Im gonna cry, this was so wholesome and holy fuck i love chosen family tropes” (Chapter 76). This chapter marks a change in the fic, both in terms of the way Remus thinks of Sirius and their friendship and in the way the full moons impact him. If readers relate Remus' lycanthropy to queerness, not being alone during the moons and being able to move around freely with the support of his friends resembles the immediate sense of freedom that comes with the acceptance from friends and family after coming out.

After a full moon during his fifth year, when the other three Marauders have already gotten into a routine with Remus' transformations, Remus takes a moment to himself and realizes that “All things considered, he thought to himself, other than the Sirius problem, life was going pretty well” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 84). While the “Sirius problem” still deeply

bothers him – this being his ongoing crush – Remus is able to have a time of relative peace and contentment from the worries related to lycanthropy. Though Remus’ lycanthropy is related to queerness both through Rowling’s writing and the fandom’s, it is important to note that when Remus is finally feeling a sense of peace about his lycanthropy, the “Sirius problem” still bothers him. When one roadblock on the road to Remus’ happiness and relaxation is passed, the next one hits him with full force. His friends now know he is a werewolf and are doing all they can – even if it is illegal – to support him, but his crush on Sirius is still keeping him from relaxing completely.

Even as the characters and story move into the more canonical sphere of the war and the buildup to it, MsKingBean has leaned into the small slivers of information that have been confirmed as canon, especially when it comes to Remus’ role and the way his lycanthropy is being used as a tool for the war. Since werewolves are described as dark creatures in the *Harry Potter* books, there is an assumption that they will join Voldemort, and this is something Remus is confronted with in his fifth year after having spent most of the summer in the muggle world. When he returns to the wizarding world, he is faced with another form of discrimination relating to his lycanthropy through the revelation that there are very few werewolves on their side of the war and the possibility that Dumbledore only kept him close as an asset. While this comes as a shock and is something that sticks with Remus, he eventually decides that “[a]t least someone thought he was useful,” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 94).

MsKingBean has developed both the way werewolves are treated and the relationship between Remus and Greyback – the man who turned him into a werewolf to play a larger part than they did in the original books. She emphasizes the way Remus’ lycanthropy is used as an asset throughout the war, both before he leaves Hogwarts and when they graduate and officially join the fight. This leads to Remus’ lycanthropy being an integral part of spying on and figuring out what is happening with Greyback’s pack of werewolves. Remus is tasked with infiltrating the pack full of other people Greyback has turned into werewolves and already at the introduction of Remus’ mission, it is made clear that Remus has a different view on them than the others in the room.

Already from the introduction of Remus’ infiltration mission into the wolf-pack, it is introduced as a type of family unit. Greyback has a reputation for biting children and turning them to werewolves so they will feel a sense of familiarity to him and eventually join his

pack. Through previous interactions with people in the pack and with other wizards who have been investigating Greyback, he has been told that

“They don’t hurt me because Greyback told them not to, I think. They do everything he says, they’re loyal.”

“Like an army.” Ferox said, nodding, as if he understood. Remus gave him a long stare.

“No.” He said, “Like a family.” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 151)

Remus’ experience with the wolf-pack introduces him to a different type of found family and community, juxtaposed with the experiences he has with both the squat where he considered staying with Grant and with the Marauders. The first time Remus meets the whole pack, he takes notice that he feels a sense of belonging with them and that he can understand why they want to stay together. However, he also notes that it reminds him of how he feels around the Marauders.

People spent their whole lives in search of a feeling like this; it was a feeling he knew well. He’d had it ever since the marauders became animagi. Pack. Family. Home. (MissKingBean89, Chapter 152)

The immediate relation Remus makes between the feeling he gets around the wolf-pack and the one he has when he is around his own pack further solidifies the family he has found with the Marauders. They have become his home and the people he can rely on in the same way one would rely on family.

Remus quickly takes notice that even though the pack seem like a family, there is a distinct hierarchy with Greyback at the top being referred to as their father. Remus has an altercation with one of the other werewolves that happens because he is told that he must prove himself worthy of being a part of their pack. This is one of the clearer differences between his experience with the pack versus his experiences with both Grant and his friends, and the Marauders. Though most importantly, with both the wolf-pack and with Grant, Remus has to hide or change a part of himself to properly fit in and be accepted. The werewolves

want him to let go of his attachments to other wizards and fully lean into his wolf instincts, relying on them over everything else, whereas with Grant, he has to hide both the fact that he is a wizard and that he is a werewolf.

The Marauders are the only family Remus has fully found on his own and they are also the only ones who accept him just as he is, with no demands of him changing or altering any part of himself. This family he has found with the Marauders serves as his ties to the magical world in many ways and when the war is finally over, Remus is alone with everyone he truly cares about in the wizarding world either dead or in prison. This loss and the pain of being reminded of the family he lost pushes Remus to make the choice to disappear from the magical world at the end of the war. He goes back to Grant and lives a life with him for years where he completely pushes away a part of himself. His ties to the wizarding world died with the Marauders and he no longer finds that he has any wish to continue living in the magical world without his family. The comfort that comes with Grant and the normalcy of a muggle life allows Remus to ignore his grief for a time until he is offered the job at Hogwarts. As soon as Sirius returns to his life, he is willing to return to the wizarding world.

3.6 The queer experience and the prevalence of negative emotions

The Marauders fandom gives readers thousands of opportunities to find fics that fit the specific emotions they want to read about. There are over thirty thousand fics on Archive of Our Own tagged either “Marauders” or “Marauders Era” and out of these fics, the two most popular additional tags are “Angst” followed closely by “Fluff”. *ATYD*, which as previously mentioned is the most popular fic within this fandom – maybe within the *Harry Potter* fandom as a whole – includes both of these tags. Additionally, the chapters of *ATYD* that receive the most interaction in terms of people leaving comments are the chapters that include either heavy angst or that include a lot of fluff developing Remus and Sirius’ relationship. Apart from the heavily anticipated chapters where the relationship between the two characters takes clear steps forward, the chapters that are especially commented on are the chapters that include both heavy angst and heavy fluff. There are a lot of chapters in the fic that heavily feature angst and depressing themes, but a few chapters in particular seem to spark both special recognition and rage in the readers.

Whenever Sirius’ family life is being mentioned there are comments stating that they

recognize certain ways he is treated at home for being different and for not living up to the standards his family has set for him. From the very beginning of the fic, it is made clear that Sirius' family is abusive towards both him and his younger brother. This abuse comes to a head in chapters 80-81, when Sirius shows up at the Potter house unconscious. He reveals that he has been tortured and when asked who did it, he reveals that it was his parents and that "[t]hey took turns" (MsKingBean89). From the comments, it is clear that a lot of the readers of *ATYD* come from families where they are not accepted for who they are. Reading about and sympathizing with Sirius throughout the course of *ATYD* may be a way to deal with the problems in their own family. After all, Sirius gets out of it and gets adopted by the Potters. User glowingmarauders is one of many examples of this, commenting "the way this is my comfort chapter and i've read it at least four times a week for the past three and a half months. if sirius can get out i can too" (Chapter 81). The comfort experienced by users like glowingmarauders and others in situations where their friends and family may not support them – or situations where they are experiencing domestic-abuse – may come from fictional characters, but it is a comfort, nonetheless.

Whether it is healthy for queer youth to place all their emotional stability on fictional characters is a different question entirely. But if there is comfort to be found in reading about the Marauders and the fact that Sirius is able to get out of his biological family's house and find a family with his friends and with James' parents, then that is a comfort that should not be overlooked. On a LiveJournal post from 2004, user hmpf has written an analysis of Sirius' canon character and they talk about why they find him such a compelling character to write angst fics about. They also go into why they like writing angst fics in general,

I think what I really like about reading and writing angst fic is not so much the angst itself but the idea that you can work through it. Come out the other side, alive and... well, maybe not well, but at least *better*. I think there's something of myself in there. I was never traumatized as badly as most of my 'heroes', but I did have to struggle, and I came out the other side, alive and... better. And I know that the 'scars' don't really go away, but you get better at living with them (hmpf)

Apart from the possible comfort that can come with reading about character in similar – or worse – position than the one you are in yourself, media is also frequently used to manipulate moods. Dillman Carpentier et al., clarify that although there is a lack of research relating to youth and the impact of their media consumption, studies on adults have found that “negatively valenced media, for example, might help the consumer cope with a negative experience or state of life,” (145), and they say that while adolescents and adults respond differently to media, it is safe to hypothesize that this is the case for adolescents as well.

For queer youth especially, having access to something that connects them with others their age, even though its online can become a safety net that can help them through hard times, whether in their home life or with the peers around them. There is a much larger concentration of queer people in fandom, especially the *Harry Potter* fandom, compared to the general population. It is natural for queer people to make connections, especially when they come together around shared interests. Many queer writers choose to share their experiences and struggles through writing fanfiction, having the characters they are attached to go through the same struggles that they themselves are or have been going through.

By sharing their experiences with an audience of other queer youths, authors may provide both comfort and a sense of safety for readers. Twitter (X) user galacticidiots posted a tweet that has gotten over 44 000 interactions where they say “Books shaped me, raised me, but fics comfort me, keep me company, get me in simpler, more relatable ways and I think that’s why I reach for them more and more.” That tweet is perhaps the best summary of the difference between picking up a new book and being able to go back to familiar characters or familiar settings over and over again. Fanfiction, unlike traditionally published books, allows great freedom for the authors, not having to consider publishing in any way and giving them the ability to play into already established relationships, either from canon or from fanon. While, as mentioned, the access to queer representation in traditional media has increased in recent years, “LGBTQ youth utilizing new online media (...) have greater access to a diversity (...) [and] are less bound to the stereotypical or limited representations available in offline media” (Craig et al.). As stated in a study by Dillman et al., adolescence “is a critical period for the onset of mental health problems” (146) and queer youth are, as previously mentioned, more likely than cis het youth to face mental health problems. Having the choice in which forms of media to engage with is a good thing. However, when the same study has shown that media can intensify already existent emotions it is worrying that so much of both

traditional and online queer media is overwhelmingly negative.

ATYD, while having a relatively happy ending, despite the eventual tragic ending for characters it is written about, is not an exception to queer media being riddled with sadness. The characters in *ATYD*, Remus and Sirius in particular, go through immense trauma throughout the story, even without the canonical war that is looming in the background of most of the fic. Comments are testaments to the fact that while reading about the pain characters are going through hurts, a lot of readers are excited for the angst and enjoy the pain that comes from reading about characters people have an attachment to suffering. For example, user missvega observes “the angst in the previous chapters hurt so good I loved every moment of it” (Chapter 82). Between Remus and Sirius, the two characters experience almost every form of discrimination queer people face in real life, though the reasons they are facing the discrimination isn’t directly tied to their sexuality, at least not explicitly.

Remus and Sirius both experience stereotypical issues and traumas that are often experienced by queer youth, the nature of their issues are vastly different, making their characters – and *ATYD* – a piece of media that can be relatable for a wide variety of queer people, regardless of age. Sirius’ problems are largely centered on his family and not being accepted by them for being too different. He is thrown out at fifteen, but the issues in his family have been present long before that, both relating to how different Sirius is compared to the rest of the Black family, and more generally relating to his family being abusive. The issues Sirius faces in the fic are so obvious, even to people outside his immediate circle that in a conversation between Dumbledore and James’ father, Fleamont Potter states that the Potters are prepared to take Sirius in as one of their own and that the offer still stands “[a]s much as it did when he was twelve” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 82). This indicates that Dumbledore and James’ father had conversations about the Potters taking in Sirius already when he was twelve years old.

The discrimination Remus faces, on the other hand, is more mature in theme and are problems that might be easier for older readers to connect with, especially the discrimination Remus faces due to his lycanthropy, and more especially when Remus gets older. Several times throughout the fic, Remus makes comments along the lines of him being unable to get and keep a job due to his condition. At one point, he says that he

wasn't sure whether the wizarding world had its own version of Section 28 - if he started confessing to stuff like that, could he get in trouble for corrupting young minds? It was bad enough he was a werewolf (MsKingBean89, Chapter 184)

This comment refers to the legislation from 1988 prohibiting teaching or publishing of anything that “intentionally promote[s] homosexuality” (Prohibition on Promoting Homosexuality). Remus is not only hard to hire due to his lycanthropy, but his queerness as well, especially in the teaching position he has been hired in at Hogwarts.

Although Remus is not sure whether the wizarding world even has any rules against queerness, there are, at the time of the story, rules in place prohibiting teachers – or anyone in a public position – to talk about queerness in a positive light. While this quote is from a late chapter when the characters who are still alive are in their thirties, the first time Remus mentions that his lycanthropy will make it difficult for him to get a job is in his first year at Hogwarts, where he is researching lycanthropy and reads about all the legislations about werewolves and what they can or cannot do due to their condition. He says already here that “his job prospects might be no better in the wizarding world than they were as a muggle” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 15). The lack of job opportunities caused by something he has no control over is one of the more direct parallels between queerness and lycanthropy, to the point where the story features explicit legislations against both queer people and werewolves working certain jobs.

The story is told through Remus' perspective as he is growing up, and readers follow him both as he comes to terms with his sexuality and as he realizes the depth of the discrimination he will be forced to face due to his lycanthropy. While the issues Remus faces in terms of his lycanthropy are more mature in nature, often relating to societal issues and closer related to how queer people were and still are treated by the wider population, his issues with his sexuality and the struggles he faces regarding his own queerness are more personal and internalized. One way this internal struggle is shown is through the conversations Remus has with “imaginary Grant”, who Remus decides to talk to instead of reaching out to any of his other friends when he is panicking about having kissed Sirius at a party. He has a conversation with this imagined version of Grant where he blames the other boy for the panic Remus is feeling in the moment, saying “If you hadn't snogged me last

summer, I'd still be... – Oblivious? Confused? – Normal,” (MsKingBean89 Chapter 87). The following awkwardness surrounding Remus and Sirius as they dance around each other, neither wanting to talk about the kiss or really to each other is something intimately familiar to many readers of the fic. However in the following chapter there is also talk about the future and what each of the Marauders want to do after school. This conversation is highly commented on due to the inherent angst attached to it considering none of them are able to have a future, but there are also several comments similar to the one left by Lavender_SaysHi, who commented “No not future talk pls- im reading this to escape making decisions about my fucking future” (Chapter 88).

While the inclusions of the war already from the time the Marauders are at Hogwarts is not directly linked to the queer narrative in *ATYD*, it is another factor in the fic that develops the angst and the promise that regardless of how happy things seem at certain points, there is no happy ending for these characters. Readers of the fic know that James will be killed at 21, that Peter will betray his friends, that Sirius will be blamed for it and spend twelve years in Azkaban, and that Remus will end up alone, with none of his friend – his family – around him, trying to make sense of a world without them. So, when James declares that he's “going to fight” because “Dumbledore needs as many people as he can get,” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 88) already in his fifth year at sixteen years old, the readers already know the tragic outcome. This conversation between the Marauders where they all talk about their plans for the future happens in the Shrieking Shack during a full moon while they wait for Remus to turn, and by having the chapter end with Remus not being able to tell the others what his potential plans for the future are, MsKingBean is further highlighting the fact that Remus' character has never really thought about his future due to the limited options he has because of the lycanthropy.

The chapter ends with the line “The last thing Remus saw clearly was his three friends, standing together, thinking about their futures,” (Chapter 88) and despite the line being uplifting and nice within the context of the story, for the readers, it's an ominous reminder of the future none of them will be able to experience. A guest user using the name E comments “It's disturbing reading and knowing they're all slowly marching towards their deaths. (...) James says they mapped out the moons for the next 10 years, when he dies before 10 years are up” (Chapter 88). While this is only one of the many comments that have said something about the ominous feeling surrounding the characters' conversation about the

future, there are also a lot of others who are begging MsKingBean to make the story an alternative universe fic instead of a canon compliant one. Despite readers being aware of the fate of the characters from the moment they start reading the fic they want the characters they love to have a happy ending. It is unlikely someone would read a *Harry Potter* fanfiction without being aware of what happens in the original works, in addition to the warnings in the tags stating that it is an angsty story.

Although the inclusion of the war and the devastating aftermath feature prominently in the later chapters of *ATYD* and the readers are aware of the inevitable deaths of all the characters, MsKingBean has made the choice to end her story on a hopeful note instead of having it continue to the end of Remus' life. After Remus makes the choice to rejoin the wizarding world after years of living with Grant as a muggle, Sirius eventually comes back into Remus' life. This sets off a chain reaction that ends with Remus and Grant breaking up. As soon as Sirius entered Remus' life again, the two find that their feelings for each other are have been complicated by years of distance and years of Remus thinking Sirius was the traitor responsible for James and Lily's deaths. The second to last chapter of *ATYD* is written from Sirius' perspective and takes place after he has moved into the apartment Remus is now sharing with Grant. Sirius notes that Grant has "[i]nfected Remus with his mundanity; made his Moony quiet and cautious. No better than a muggle himself" (MsKingBean89, Chapter 187). Remus' way of dealing with the grief of losing the only family he truly had when the Marauders were torn apart was to completely distance himself from anything magical and live his life exclusively as a muggle apart from the one night a month where his lycanthropy haunted him. Remus, like many queer people chooses to run away from his problems instead of facing them when he no longer has his family around him to provide comfort and support.

The reemergence of Sirius is, unsurprisingly, what makes Remus decide to rejoin the wizarding world and to rejoin the war that plays out in the canon *Harry Potter* books. When Grant leaves, Remus admits to himself that he "had already decided to re-join the Order, he had decided the moment Sirius returned" (MsKingBean89, Chapter 188). After thirteen years of feeling like he had no connection with the wizarding world, meeting Harry while working as a professor at Hogwarts and having Sirius come back and clearing his name to the people that matter, Remus' will to fight is reignited. The idea of people tying Remus to different aspects of himself is mentioned in the text when he starts using magic to do simple tasks around the house. Grant was Remus' tie to the muggle world and "he was getting back into

the habit of using magic again now that his last ties to the muggle world had been cut” (MsKingBean89, Chapter 188). These ties Remus has between his grief and the people around him who help him deal with and work through the grief he is feeling show the importance of community when dealing with negative emotions. Remus’ ability to rely on the people around him and find support in his friends and family draws parallels to how queer youth rely on the fanfiction community in order to find comfort when dealing with their own negative emotions. As hmpf said in their LiveJournal post, the comfort is that it “is not so much the angst itself but the idea that you can work through it” and come out on the other side alive – damaged – but alive.

4 Conclusion

Fanfiction is a source of comfort and an arena where queer youth can both realize and deal with their emotions. Because fanfiction tends to be written by queer people and readers can choose exactly what kind of stories they want to read and who they want to read about, fanfiction can be used as a tool to work through complicated emotions. The sense of safety that comes from being able to return to familiar characters and reading about them in situations the queer readers can relate to. The relatability and comfort that stems from these characters, while originating in the canon portrayal of them is often vastly changed and developed by the fandom and their fanon personalities. In the *Harry Potter* fandom especially, taking the already existing characters and queering them has become a way for the fandom to protest J. K. Rowling’s opinions and statements about the queer community. Fanfiction has given fans of *Harry Potter* a place where they can continue to enjoy the characters many have grown up with while at the same time showing their distaste for the original author. The sub-fandom focused on the Marauders are in the unique position where the characters are so rarely mentioned in the original books and barely have a canonical presence that the version of the Marauders that fans have grown attached to is almost exclusively a fanon interpretation. Several characters who feature prominently in fanfiction about the Marauders are mentioned only by name within the canon works, but the community have come together and agreed on personalities and looks for them. The community have also made the decision that everyone is queer – potentially because so much of the fandom itself is queer and want to write and read about things they can relate to.

Surrounding fanfiction is a whole community of people who share interests, art, analysis, and writings. This community find both comfort and relief through reading and writing fanfiction. Fanfiction provides a space where queer youth can explore and figure out their own emotions and explore their preferences through reading and writing. It helps them use writing to explore themselves and find a space where diversity of gender and sexuality is prioritized. The wide use of angst and sadness in fanfiction signals that queer youth find a sense of comfort and healing through their ability to both read and write about these feelings. The popularity of the Marauders fandom as a whole developed around the inherent sadness that surrounds all the characters. Readers go into Marauders fanfic knowing that these characters are created almost exclusively by the community and knowing that their ends in canon are inevitably going to be sad – with most of them dying before they reach the age of forty. The community getting attached to these types of characters and in many cases rewriting their endings into something more hopeful, while still staying true to the inherent sadness of their canon interpretations can provide a sense of catharsis. Reading about these types of sad and complicated emotions with the knowledge that other queer people are writing about them provides a space for youth who don't have anyone around them that understand the unique stressors that come with growing up queer can find comfort and understanding. While the sadness and angst are things that draws in queer readers, the community surrounding fanfiction and the queer understanding within the pages of writing provides a unique form of comfort that only comes with communities where such a vast majority of participants are openly queer.

Fanfiction authors spend their own time and effort producing content and researching for their writings, publishing it for free. While this is an awareness all fanfic authors have when they start writing about already existing characters and franchises, there is a growing issue of people not respecting the legality of fanfiction. Several fanfiction authors who have written fics that have become viral in certain communities on apps like TikTok have felt forced to completely remove their works from the internet due to the masses of unauthorized and unwanted sales of their works. These sales come from fans of the fic binding them into books and selling the bound version to others who want physical copies of their favorite fanfic. Wanting a physical copy of a fanfic is not the problem, but due to the legal grey area fanfiction operates under, these unauthorized sales place the authors of the fanfiction in danger of being sued by the original creators even though the authors themselves are not the

ones making money off their work. Additionally, the people reselling bound versions of fanfiction are intentionally taking something the authors put time and effort into and making money off someone else's intellectual property. The popularity of fanfiction exploded with the internet, but though it became easier to access fan made writings, it has up until recently been a niche interest. That was until apps like TikTok introduced a wider audience to fanfiction – an audience that, due to the manner of their introduction, are not aware of the rules and “fandom etiquette” that has taken shape over the years of fanfiction's existence. Because of the legal grey area fanfiction operates within, the lack of knowledge from new consumers and their willingness to buy bound versions of fics from sites like Etsy is threatening the very existence of the medium.

Further threatening the future of fanfiction and the safe space queer people have where they can express themselves freely is the increased push towards wanting to censor certain aspects due to their uncomfortable subject matter. Fanfiction, Ao3 specifically, has no rules for what can and cannot be posted to the archive and operates under a “don't like don't read” policy, which leads to there being subsections of the archive that contain less than tasteful stories and plot lines. While wanting to make fanfiction a safer space for people, the rules of Ao3 are very clear about tagging fics that have subject matter that may be triggering or offensive in order to minimize the readers unintentionally being subjected to themes they don't want to read about. Wanting to censor a medium that is largely used and created by queer people raises several issues; among others, who should decide what content is offensive and where the limit goes between something that is acceptable to write about and something that is morally reprehensible. Censoring queer spaces is a slippery slope, especially in a time where queer rights – especially trans rights – are being threatened.

Studying fanfiction and its impact on queer youth has been an eye-opening experience. Through going through the comment threads left under *ATYD* and seeing all the people who have found a sense of community through reading about their favorite characters I have seen how fanfiction can be used to find community, representation, and finding a place where queer youth can be themselves without worrying about the opinions of people around them. For both readers and writers of fanfiction, these stories become a safe space where they are allowed to explore and work through negative feelings and find – or create – characters that represent them. Finding community through common interests where queerness and exploration is encouraged is a priceless resource that should be studied further.

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