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Out of the Shadows:

LGBTQ+ representation in the Television Show *Shadowhunters*

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Impossible only means try again
- Alec Lightwood (Shadowhunters)

Glossary

Binge = When you watch a lot of episodes after each other and go through all the season in a short amount of time.

Bisexual+ = The umbrella term covering all orientations attracted to their own, two, multiple or all genders.

Canon = In fanfiction it refers to the original work.

Cis/Cisgender = Identifying with the sex one was assigned at birth.

Clace = The relationship name for Clary and Jace.

Fanart = Art made based on someone else's work.

Fanfiction/Fanfic = Fiction written based on someone else's work.

Fanvideos/Fanvid = Scenes cut together, often accompanied by music.

Handle = Another word for username.

Hashtag/tag = The symbol # in front of a keyword then categorizes it and makes it easier to find in a search. It adds metadata and connects messages to the same space.

LGBTQ+ = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer.

Malec = The relationship name for Alec and Magnus.

Shadowfam = The name Shadowhunters fandom was given by one of the actors, and they themselves took to heart. Short for Shadowhunters Family.

Shipper = A person who wants two people to be in a romantic relationship.

Shipping = Wanting two people to enter a romantic relationship.

Showrunner = The person who has overall creative authority and management responsibility for a television show.

Slash fanfics = Fanfiction focusing on a relationship or sexual encounters between members of the same sex.

Smut = A tag used to signal erotic content.

Trending = Currently popular or widely discussed online.

Twitter Chains = something you retweet with your own answer and tag other people so they might do the same.

Queer = An umbrella term for gender and sexualities outside the norm.

1 Introducing Shadowhunters

I cannot quite recall the first time I ever watched Shadowhunters. I do, however, remember the moment Alec met Magnus, how he stuttered, and we saw him smile for the first time. My heart skipped a beat, sealing my fate as a fan.

Shadowhunters aired for the first time in 2016, only a year after same-sex weddings were legalized in the United States. The show which was racially diverse, included several LGBTQ+ characters; among them were bisexuals, lesbians and asexuals. When it came out, it was even rarer than it is today to have such a diverse line-up of characters. Diversity suddenly meant more than adding a white gay man into the mix. In this regard, the show was a trailblazer. The showrunners and writers went out of their way to respect the LGBTQ+ community and shatter harmful stereotypes. Showrunners are the ones who has overall creative authority and management responsibility for a television show. They chose to listen to their fanbase and interact with them, they took their assignment seriously, and this thesis will show how.

The show starts off with protagonist Clary who, up until her 18th birthday, have been living in the mortal world, finds out by accident that she belongs to a line of Shadowhunters. Shadowhunters are descendants of angels tasked with protecting the world from demons. She meets several Shadowhunters and other beings belonging to the Shadow world; one of them is Alec. A Shadowhunter who came from a traditional line and had to navigate his own identity while at the same time being a warrior. He fell in love with an out and proud bisexual man, who also were from another race- warlocks. Along the way, we meet Raphael, an asexual vampire who falls in love with Isabelle, Alec's sister. Meliorn a bisexual Seelie warrior, Olivia, a cop who is in a relationship with another woman, Andrew, who thanks Alec for paving the way for gay Shadowhunters like him. Aline and Helene two Shadowhunters falling in love. I will come back to the plot of the show in chapter 5.

The cancellation sparked an unprecedented engagement amongst fans to save it. People from across the world came together on social media ready to fight for their show, gathered under the *#SaveShaddowhunters* tag. Even though the fandom was in shock, they did not deter them from springing into immediate action, and what a marvellous spectacle it was. The amount of stunts this group of people pulled off leaves me both impressed and humbled.

One of my informants phrased the fandom's efforts well in an e-mail to me;

We made our voices heard, and got press coverage for what was going on and the injustice of it, in multiple countries, including in print, which in 2019/2020 is pretty bloody impressive. We promoted the airing of the last season, after Freeform decided they weren't going to bother spending any money on a cancelled show. The fandom created, organized, booked, and paid for a really impressive advertising campaign, and many of us should proudly put this work on our CVs as it was done to a very professional, high impact standard -
Paisley

On the twenty-second of June, only nineteen days after the cancellation announcement, a plane flew by Netflix headquarters with a Save Shadowhunters banner being dragged behind it (see photo 1). This act was the starting point for what was to become a vast campaign, a campaign drawing attention from media across continents. Other big stunts such as billboards on New York Times Square, posters on double-deck buses in London and billboards on the underground in Seoul were commented on by Swimmer in an article about the cancellation. "We know our fans, and how loyal they are to the show... but we were blown away by the size and force of it. It was very inspiring to us" (Sarnier, 2019). Other stunts consisted of sending #SaveShadowhunters merchandise to networks to have them notice and maybe pick up their show. There was a billboard outside Constantine Film AG¹ headquarters in Munich as well. A truck with a giant screen playing a fan-made promo drove past the People's Choice Awards, attracting the attention of Kathrine McNamara, the actor playing Clary on the show, who took a selfie with the truck.

A video by boat next to the New York Comic-Con and billboards on bikes and pedicabs at the San Diego Comic-Con was other stunts noticed by many, and they were handing out merchandise as well. Not to mention nominating the cast and crew to awards making People's Choice having to make new categories. Last but not least, they also started a good old-fashioned petition that currently has gathered over 207 000 signatures.

Shadowhunters has over a million followers on Twitter and over two million on Instagram. It has been the talk on Twitter, meaning Shadowhunters had a large engagement in Tweets and tags. When the last episode aired in May 2019, the show's tag #Shadowhunters rated number four on Nielsen Weekly Top 10 for social media, with over a million engagements (Franklin, 2019). The fans often point out they promoted the show more in those few months after the cancellation than Freeform did throughout three seasons. Freeform in addition to a lack of

¹ They own the rights to Shadowhunters.

advertisement, chose to give Shadowhunters horrible airtime, too early in the day for people who had daytime commitments.

Even now, two years since the last episode aired, #Shadowhunters and #SaveShadowhunters are still trending. The Twitter account @FanScreening is keeping track of Tv-show tags that are being used most frequently. Shadowhunters has been on the top 10 list almost every day since then. Furthermore, on the eleventh of May 2021, five days after the last episode had its second anniversary, Shadowhunters were again number one.

The campaign not only gathered money for stunts across the world, but they also collected money for charities. The Trevor Project, an organization “providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ) young people under 25” (The Trevor Project, w.y), was the primary recipient. The fundraiser was initiated by ‘Basic Shadowhunters Stuff’, a Twitter account with over eleven thousand followers, in the name of Save Shadowhunters. They managed to put Freeform in a position where they chose to double the amount the fans themselves had donated, making the total amount over 50 000 American dollars.

The media wrote about the fandom’s dedication on several occasions; Life Daily dubbed them “the largest and most impressive fan campaign” (Roberts, 2020), as well as the “most organized and resourceful” (Franklin, 2019). Fans were interviewed and Shadowhunters representation was described in articles from Germany, the UK, and worldwide, photos of Magnus and Alec, the two male characters, kissing were also common. The fandom attracted a lot of attention.

Life Daily wrote, “(...) networks have failed to understand the value of some of their best shows and cancelled them, despite sizable and passionate fanbase begging for them to be saved” (Roberts, 2020). And that perhaps networks “should finally straighten up and take notice of factors beyond the archaic viewership measure” (Franklin, 2019).

According to the network Freeform, it was cancelled because Netflix withdrew their financial backing, making it too expensive to keep producing. The cancellation came about “simply because two big corporations couldn’t negotiate, and instead decided to have a pissing match,” as one of my informants phrased it. The fans were not pleased with the way the cancellation was handled by Freeform and Netflix.

Shadowhunters tackles important issues such as family, addiction, mental health, and finding oneself. Perhaps most importantly the show boasts a wide array of LGBTQ+ characters, and

plays with and challenge gender norms. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters in media will be the central issue of this thesis. I will focus on representation, its impact on the fans, and how fandoms talk about the topics brought up in the show to gain new insights.

Shadowhunters was a television series that held incredible importance to many people around the world – this was made quite clear after the cancellation announcement in June 2018.

Three years later, the fans are still going strong on Twitter, though the focus has shifted a bit. They are still talking about the show and create content surrounding Shadowhunters, but they are also supporting Matthew Daddario and Harry Shum Jr., the actors playing Alec and Magnus. In fact, many fans expressed that the actors' love for the characters have made the show even more special.

1.1 The Focus of this Thesis

When TV shows embrace marginalized people like those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, it has an impact, as it communicates an alternative to the norm, and lets people who might feel isolated know that they are not alone

As someone who found out they were bisexual at a mature age, someone who learned about their sexuality and what it meant through fandom and social media, I hold a personal investment in this thesis. It gives me an insight into the personal impact media has on sexual identity, both on how one view oneself and how one thinks others view you. Of course, it also means that I have a bias that I need to be aware of so I do not overlook facts that may challenge my arguments, thereby the conclusion.

It is also important to note that I came into the fandom after the most intense period of trying to save the show, many fans had already left. I've been lucky enough to come across a few people who were there when it was at its peak, but many I've talked to are new fans. Since I conducted fieldwork on social media, it was made harder to come in-depth as I've not been able to immerse myself entirely amongst fans; still, I think I will show significant evidence as to the benefits of representation and fandom.

This thesis aims to discover why a show like Shadowhunters gained such a powerful engagement amongst its fans, which led to the considerable movement we saw after the cancellation. However, more importantly, I want to show the importance of representation in

mainstream media and the role of fandoms in working to change attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community, on both a personal level, as well as on a societal level.

I want to pay homage to the exceptional work that the fandom has done these past few years for their dedication and stubbornness—not giving up and showing those in power that small series such as these have value. I want to show that even if the general public might dismiss the #SaveShadowhunters movement as “fanatics” and “nerds” the Shadowfam are in fact a significant part of a social movement to change the world.

2 Social Media as ‘The Field’

What is ‘The field’? How do we define and frame it? These questions have been a part of the anthropological discussion since the research focus moved outside the scope of closed-off geographical sites like tribal villages. This process becomes even more challenging when we add the dimensions of the Internet and social media. The boundaries can seem blurred, weak, or non-existent.

Online ethnography is the gathering of qualitative data through online research, including participant observation through being present and observing conversations in chatrooms and social media platforms, researching online archives, and interviews through digital media. The field might, for instance, be a social media platform, a specific topic, or a community. *Netnography* is a method developed by Robert Kozinets in 1995 and adapted for social media in 2019; this method is designed specially to do ethnography online. It is a cookbook of sorts with specific guidelines to follow. These guidelines helped me structure my fieldwork.

My research field is a community residing in a particular space that is hard to define, but in some ways can be framed by the topic of the Tweet, the tags used and/or which account posts the Tweet. Kozinets describes it like this; “As ethnography becomes native to online worlds, concrete field and demarcated cultural boundaries dissolve into movements, socialites and practices.” (Kozinets, 2020). The community I have done my Netnography on does not have any physical boundaries but is instead recognized by practices, symbols, and movements. They occupy a particular ‘corner’ of Twitter where they interact and socialize. Nationality, gender, orientation, class, ethnicity or race do not play a part in identifying at all; unless they choose to share these markers, in which case it will add a layer. The main factor that binds them together is the love for *Shadowhunters*, at least at first. Twitter has become an essential locale for fans to meet and exchange opinions, art, fanfiction, friendships, and gathering over the fight to save the show. Keeping this in mind, it becomes important to understand how Twitter works and how people interact on this platform. Twitter is not as popular in Norway as it is in other countries like the United States. Norway has only 8% daily users compared to Facebook, which has 69% (oktan:oslo, 2019). Because of this, I will give a short introduction to how Twitter operates.

2.1 *Twitter*

Twitter is a microblogging service founded in the United States in 2006. The idea is that one makes a user account to be active; even though this is one of the few social media platforms, one does not need an account to read other people's *tweets* – as the messages that people post in public space are called. When users want to post something, they have 280 signs to write a *Tweet* to post on the *Timeline*. The *Timeline* is the main page where one sees updates from the accounts one follows; the algorithm chooses what one sees first based on the *Tweets* one interacts with. One can press *like* on a tweet, this signifies support or agreement to what is being written, or simply that one likes what it says. In addition to this, one can post photos, short movie clips or sound clips. If a user has an account, they can *Direct Message* someone; usually referred to as *DM*, this refers to private messages sent through the *Twitter* platform. - Such messages can be private, or one can join a *group chat*, which is a *DM* with more than two people, and a maximum of fifty. The *bio* is the profile page where one writes a small text and put in a profile picture; all the written tweets and *retweets* will appear on this personal page. *Retweets* are tweets written by someone else that one chooses to share; if one retweets without adding a text, all the likes go straight to this account. If one writes a quote, the tweet will get the likes and comments, and the original will not be able to see them unless they look at the post.

In fandom spaces, it is normal to be anonymous because one rarely uses their given name but rather a *handle*. The handle often has something to do with the fandom which may signal that it is a *fandom account*. These are profiles that people often have in addition to their official account where they might use real names and follow friends and family. On the fandom accounts, the main topic is the fandom and fandom-related material, fanart, fanfiction or just gifs, memes and photos of *Shadowhunters*. Some incorporate their fandom in their official account so that the fandom stuff becomes a part of their everyday tweets.

2.2 The #Shadowfam Community

Twitter is the platform in which the research took place, but not the focus of the thesis. The focus was the self-proclaimed fan community #*Shadowfam*. In other words, *Twitter* is the locale and serves as context. However, I am not seeking to understand the processes of interaction on *Twitter* in particular or social media in general. I am interested in who the #*Shadowfam* is, what they post, the power they as a collective wield, and social media

happens to be the place they meet. I am also curious to find out the effects this community has on itself.

To declare one belongs to the fandom, a person will usually refer to Shadowhunters or some of its characters in their bio, their profile picture being of the actors or characters from the show. The same goes for the handle; often it will refer to the show in some way. Using these symbolic markers, they are recognized by others, creating a sense of belonging. “These forms of fellowship and belonging are intrinsically contextual and therefore often ephemeral (...). But some of the personal links that arise through these experiences carry on.” (Amit & Rapport, 2002:64). There has been much talk of fans who moved on after the show ended; the ones left are the people who genuinely love the show and feel a close connection to the actors and the other fans. This connection was six years in the making. However, one of my informants who has been in the fandom since the beginning, pointed out in one of our interviews that the fandom’s focus has changed. Where the focus was mainly on Shadowhunters are now talking more about the actors themselves. They follow their acting careers as well as their personal life on social media. The main object of interest in the fandom seems to be the actors playing Alec and Magnus, who were two essential characters in the show. Others come in as new fans as the show keeps streaming on Netflix. These fans still post tweets about their reactions to the plot of each episode. They want to talk about the show, and older fans still partake in those discussions and share in their excitement.

In Amit & Rapport’s book *Trouble with community*, Rapport (2002) writes about an ideal world where we do not put people in categories; instead, people are free to feel connections to whichever group they want based on their own preferences, not by gender or skin colour. I want to point out that social media is the perfect platform for this as one decides what parts of the self are highlighted or which groups one connects with. #Shadowfam is one of these self-chosen groups. One is a part of it as long as one says one is and one is a fan of the show. It does not matter where in the world one comes from, what gender one is, or sexual orientation one has. All that matters is the love of Shadowhunters. Still, most of the fans view some values as standard to the fandom. The ones that have come up most often is “open-minded and accepting”—words often associated with the LGBTQ+ community.

3 Methodology

This thesis is based on almost a year of Netnography from June 2020 to May 2021; most of it is through the Social Media platform *Twitter*. In addition to this online ethnography, I conducted fieldwork at several online conventions, I was supposed to go to several offline ones, but covid-19 made it impossible.

Since the world drastically changed in March 2020, people could no longer be in close proximity to each other, making it harder to conduct ethnography and participant observation, an anthropologist's preferred methods. As a result, I had to look at other approaches to collect the data I needed to answer my research questions. *Netnography*, the method developed by Robert Kozinets, became the solution. Traditionally ethnography means total immersion amongst the group of people one wishes to study; it is an in-depth form of research where one gains access to everyday lives and relationships, including observation of the relation between the informants. It is done over an extended period of time and gives the researcher complex and multifaceted data. Netnography is similar but adapted to online media.

Netnography today is on a qualitative research approach to social media", and it encompasses "interviews, data scraping, archival work, online observation, active engagement with new forms of data collection, visualization, thematic analysis, and field-level rhetorical representation (*Kozinets, 2019 p.5*).

Netnography is divided into three operations:

(1) *Investigating*, where the researcher looks for and observes relevant data by unknown others. By unknown others, I mean one does not know the person behind the username. However, they are interesting for the project and might also prompt further investigating. (2) *Interactive* data, where the researcher becomes active and interferes by, for instance, writing a tweet. The responses then become collected data, which can be done through DM, interviews, e-mail or other forms of communication. (3) *Immersion*, where the researcher evaluates and filters what is to become ethnographic data. We can compare it to the anthropologist's fieldnotes; we write down which leads we followed, our own thoughts and reflections, our experiences and context. (*Kozinets, 2019 p.193-194*). These three operations

will often be an ongoing process where one switches between the stages and go back and forth as the data is gathered.

During the netnographic research, I became part of a community, made friends, and participated in several Twitter phenomena like Twitter Chains, retweeting and tagging people to do the same, and using the Save Shadowhunters Tag to interact with other fans. I was a member of several group chats and direct messages, which allowed me to communicate with informants in a group as well as one on one. It also gave an insight into the relations between them. We met online as we would meet at any other social arena. Several participants were talking about a subject, and one could even get the feeling that we talked over each other since there was a mess in the dialogue where several people talk about sometimes separate topics. I will circle back to the issue of group chats later in this chapter. I will illustrate how I applied different methods and tools to gather the data needed to write about LGBTQ+ representation in Shadowhunters and its effects on fandom, as well as some ethical considerations I had to keep in mind.

3.1 Investigating and Interaction on Twitter

I often scrolled through the Twitter Timeline to keep myself updated on the content posted on the Save Shadowhunters tag and the Shadowhunters tag. Mostly there were photos from the show, the actors and fanart. It was important to see who posted and what they posted to figure out their motivation and aim. I could also interact by commenting with questions that let me come into contact with people of interest.

Not only did I like tweets and write comments, but I also authored my own tweets and used the tags. As a result of those tweets, I met several people that were interested in becoming informants as well as gaining access to group chats. The Tweets I posted were often questions, and, in a way, they acted as a survey. I observed that some Tweets got more responses than others; even though all of them were retweeted several times, the comment rate was low. At the end of the fieldwork, it seemed there were more interest in my Tweets than before, and the first ones to answer were often people I knew from my private handle. The more interaction, the more visible the Tweet became, and others felt more comfortable in replying. Still, when the question became too open, where they had to think and reflect over an answer; the answer rate was lower. The restrictions forced upon us by the number of signs allowed to use might play a part, even though I encouraged people to contact me through

DM- nothing. Other factors might be the cancel culture being strong on Twitter; this could make people afraid of saying something wrong and be viewed as problematic. It might, of course, be as simple as people not taking the time to think it through and word an answer.

Another important aspect of me being active is that, by using the Shadowhunters and Save Shadowhunters tag, I also became a part of their fight to keep Shadowhunters relevant on Twitter – a feat they accomplished several times as the tag trended within the TV category every day with minimal pauses. I suspect that is why my Tweets were constantly retweeted at least a couple of times, as it always contained the hashtags. Many of the accounts retweeting me were seldom writing their own tweets, which strengthens my theory.

This interaction I have described is the online equivalent of participant observation— being present, observing, and interacting with people through liking tweets, writing tweets, and commenting on others tweets. It is not as rich as it would have been in the physical world as I cannot ‘read’ body language and compare it to what they are saying. Neither can I observe the context their physical body is in. Doing online participant observation gives less and has to be done over a more extended period of time because the information is more scarce than it would have been in the physical world. Although one cannot use all of one’s senses, I will still argue that my interaction with the informants and my presence on Twitter has given essential data.

3.2 Interaction through Twitter Group Chats

This section of the chapter will explain how I used group chats to communicate with Shadowhunters fans through both a private and a professional *handle*, which is another word for a username. Before I move forward, it is essential to understand how these handles are used and perceived differently by those surrounding me online and how that affects them as I had two different handles. My private handle was created in 2009 but not regularly used before 2019 when I became interested in Shadowhunters fanfiction. Through this handle, I post tweets related to my personal life, share fiction recommendations, news and other things I find interesting. In other words, I interact with people on a personal level. They perceive me as a private person and not as a researcher collecting data. Because of this, I am acquainted with several people from the fandom, and I was a part of groups relevant to the thesis before I announced the subject. When I made it known several people in these groups volunteered to be a part of the research and to let themselves be interviewed.

The professional handle was created for the sole purpose of this project. From this handle, I only post tweets relevant to the thesis as a way of coming into contact with potential informants. The bio clearly states what I am after, and the interactions are strictly formal. I post questions on the Timeline, schedule zoom meetings or skype chats with informants, and comment on others tweets. Even though the private handle is primarily used in private, I would sometimes see tweets relevant to the topic. When I did, I would contact the author through the professional handle.

The central aspect that differentiates the two can be seen as formal and informal interactions that ignite separate sides of the informants. By interacting through the private handle, I get valuable insights into their everyday lives, and they share thoughts, feelings, struggles and challenges, as well as their joy and achievements. I get to know them better, and we become comfortable with each other. Everyone in these groups knows I am an anthropology student researching the Shadowhunters fandom but that I am not there in that capacity. We talked about my two roles, and I told them that I was bound by ethical rules to inform them if I used anything they wrote in the chats in my research. This way they knew I would never use anything I learn without asking them first, but of course this is a matter of trust. The informal chats I am a part of varies in memberships from three members to thirty-five members, and we talked frequently.

Attending these chats gives valuable insights into the fandom, as we often discuss Shadowhunters. Some of the members I have reached out to in private to ask if they could answer some questions regarding a topic that arose in the group chat. I mention these private chats because we came together because of Shadowhunters and some of the people in them are informants. In this context, I got to know them on a personal level and occasionally be made aware of something interesting that I could delve into deeper. Some of the people in the chats are not informants since they have not explicitly agreed to let me use them as a source of information; they are just members of the group. They knew I would not use any of the information in this setting without explicit consent. If I wanted to pursue a topic or use something interesting that emerged in these groups, I would always ask first. I would usually refrain from writing fieldnotes from these groups unless it is about something I wanted to ask in private later or something I needed to research elsewhere.

In the private groups, there would be extended use of emojis (a small image or symbol used to convey a feeling or idea), and gifs (a series of images or soundless videos that will loop continuously). These are used to portray moods and body language; they use these signs to keep the tone casual and relaxed. They are not as frequently used in the professional handle. On the other hand, the informants talking to me when I used the professional persona knew that it would be written in my fieldnotes and used. The dialogue resembled interviews where only the topic of Shadowhunters or other relevant material was discussed. In this setting, I acted strictly in a researcher capacity. It was mainly used to schedule zoom meetings or skype chats.

By separating these two spheres, I mean to draw boundaries between informal and formal participation, making it more structured for myself as well as my informants. As we became closer in the informal chats, the different handles helped to separate the two worlds by clarifying expectations. They knew that whatever they said in the professional chat might be used as data in the thesis unless they explicitly asked it not to be. They had given their consent before we started our conversations. Whereas the private chats, everything was off the record unless I explicitly asked for consent to use something in particular. There are clear advantages to socializing in these private chats with the informants as we get to know each other better. It would give me insights into what was going on in the fandom and tips on what to bring up in the professional chats. We also became more relaxed and more comfortable, making it easier to share and ask questions. To illustrate, I will give an example from my fieldnotes

One of my first informants, Delta, contacted me through the professional handle after posting a tweet about my project. They offered to be an informant and would gladly let themselves be interviewed. We had some sessions through zoom that, to me, felt a bit formal and forced, and I did not feel comfortable asking the more personal questions. We did not talk much between these sessions unless it was to clarify something we had discussed during the interview. I pictured us using a long time to get to the level of trust where I would gain a deeper insight into Delta's views and experiences. A few months later, a mutual friend set up a group chat where we were both invited. The invitation came to my private handle and gave us a shared arena to talk in a more relaxed environment. During our next meeting, I found myself more relaxed and perceived them to be the same as we talked about topics brought up in the private chat.

Not many meetings later, Delta told me their coming out story. Because I had a feel of their boundaries, I felt comfortable enough in our relationship to ask personal questions. I was also secure in my belief that Delta knew me well enough to know that I meant no harm should any of the questions be poorly worded or easily misunderstood.

The process would have taken longer if we were not put in that group chat together because we would not have had the opportunity to get to know each other in a more informal setting. We use ourselves as tools in our research; therefore, it becomes vital that we are as comfortable as possible in our interactions. Nervousness and anxiety will make one lose vital information in a worst-case scenario and make the interaction a terrible experience for the informant and the researcher.

3.3 Unstructured Interviews through Video Calls

Zoom was one of the platforms I used to perform unstructured interviews through video calls, and it allowed me to talk to people face to face without having to be in the same room. Some of my informants contacted me after I posted the pinned tweet about my research, showing an interest in the project and wanting to participate. Others learned about me through the informal group chats and volunteered to be interviewed. Each informant had periodic meetings with me during the timespan of the research period. Before the meeting, I had prepared a general topic of conversation, for instance, representation, the fandom or the stunts performed to save the show. Usually, the interviews lasted for about 45 minutes, including 15 minutes of small talk.

I made sure to start our conversations by asking how they were doing and everyday topics. The reason I did this was to try and set a casual tone for the conversation, in addition to getting to know each other better and become relaxed in each other's company. Later on in our conversations, I would find a natural transition to the opening question to get the discussion going. By using this unstructured form, the interview became less asymmetric and more akin to a dialogue, and I often asked them to elaborate on answers they seemed eager to talk about. Through this, I discovered new questions to raise or build upon to other informants as well.

Video conferences have the advantage of reaching people from across the world, people one would not have access to otherwise. On the other hand, it also has a considerable disadvantage. One relies heavily on the visual and audio senses alone. Since the only thing one sees is the face and upper body, most of the body language disappears, and vital information is lost. I found it hard to orchestrate casual conversations through a lens precisely because the body was not shown. I could not see the coffee mug being held nor smell the aroma. I could not feel the room temperature or see how it was decorated. The lighting and the sounds surrounding the informants became a mystery. All these sensory inputs were lost, and as a result, it became hard to pick up on the discrete cues and reactions. The ‘feel’ you get from another human being in an interaction from subtle body language cues disappears. The same goes for the surroundings in which the conversation occurs, impressions that might give valuable insights.

Following these sessions, I would feel very drained; I was suffering from what I later came to know as *Zoom Fatigue*. In their article “*Zoom fatigue is real – here’s why video calls are so draining*” by Libby Sander & Oliver Bauman (2020) writes about several things that may be the cause for this. Our subconscious is always trying to pick up on the subtle cues of others body language, and when we cannot pick up on it, we become exhausted by the effort. In addition to this, they list eye contact and the distraction of our own image as we become acutely aware of how we look to others. Personally, I had a problem with where my gaze went. I became self-aware every time my eyes would “look into the distance,” even though this would generally happen in a real-life interaction as well. No one looks each other in the eyes through a whole conversation. However, I was afraid they would think I looked at something else in the room and, as a result, would come across as uninterested in our conversation. I would once again use an example from my fieldnotes, this time to illustrate zoom fatigue.

I had a zoom meeting with one of my informants from France; we have had a few talks in the past in addition to being in the same informal group chat. We were primarily comfortable in the presence of each other; still, I would feel drained after our conversations. One time they had difficulty with their computer, leading to me only being able to hear them without seeing them. My shoulders dropped, and I could feel the tension leaving my body. Even though our conversations usually were relaxed, I was tense during our zoom meetings. When we talk through the phone, we are not

expected to pick up on non-verbal cues, and we will not automatically search for ones. Neither are we confronted with our own image that can seem distracting because we are constantly concerned about how we present ourselves. When I could no longer see them, it became like a phone call, leaving me to not search for clues in body language.

3.4 Unstructured Interviews through Skype Chats

Several informants were not comfortable with meeting through video calls and preferred to communicate through the chat function instead. In other words, we were writing to each other in real-time and could neither see nor hear one another. Skype was the preferred platform for conducting these interviews as they were automatically recorded and secured through the university's account. Using Twitter for this could be risky privacy-wise; I do not have a comprehensive insight into their privacy policy, and they could end up owning the content, and it can be easier hacked.

Instead of body language, we used emojis that became quite effective to convey the meaning behind the text. For instance, if the informant added a laughing emoji, then the text was meant to be perceived as funny. Even though they helped keep the conversation casual, it seems prudent to keep in mind that it also makes it easier to manipulate the feeling behind the text. Because we miss out on the discrete and impulsive non-verbal cues that we pick up on in person, it is easy to portray oneself as happy even though they are, in fact, angry. Communicating through chats like these makes it harder to judge how the person actually reacts. Not to mention the meaning of an emoji might differ between us. An emoji winking might be perceived as flirty but also condescending. A regular smiley is often used passive-aggressively, but the older generations do not always know this. These factors make it easy to misunderstand the intention of the message, but, luckily it seemed like the informants, and I had the same usage of emojis- as far as I know.

Compared to video calls, I did not feel the same pressure in trying to interpret body language or hidden cues; as a result, the conversations could last longer. Moreover, what I perceived as trust and a willingness to share made it easier to ask sensitive questions about the informants.

Even though the Internet has made it easier to reach people from across the world, my pool of informants has mainly been from Europe and The United States. Earlier research into fandoms like this has indicated that they mainly consist of white, middle-class women

(Jenkins, 2013), and I find it to still be valid. I will, however, be careful in claiming this as I have only reached a corner of the fandom, and one can never be a hundred per cent sure about where a person comes from when meeting them online.

Although online participant observation and the plethora of online tools cannot replace the complexity of real-life ethnography, I nevertheless hope to have argued convincingly that I have gained enough multifaceted information to base this thesis on.

3.5 Language

As I just mentioned, most of my informants came from the United States and other countries in Europe, and since there are fans from across the world, the Shadowhunters fandom primarily communicates in English. My native language is Norwegian, which none of my informants knew how to speak, and only a couple of my informants had English as their native language. This means that our vocabulary might be a bit restrictive, and it is easier to misunderstand each other as the deep meaning of a word or phrase might be unknown to us. It never came up as an issue, and as far as I know, it never caused any harmful misunderstandings. It is still worth noticing that most of us were communicating in another language than our own.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Throughout Kozinets methods guide, ethical concerns are imbued because doing research online presents different ethical challenges than traditional, in-person interviews and other research methods. It is essential always to be mindful of how the participant perceives the space they are in. Social Media is often viewed as being part of the public sphere as it is easy to gain access to what one posts, Twitter especially so because one does not need an account to look up Tweets². Regardless of this, I have chosen to conduct myself as if it were a private sphere because people often behave like it is. In practice, that means I always contacted the author of a tweet to get consent before I used it. Similarly, I made sure that everyone knew in what capacity I was there and what I would use the information for. Total transparency was of the utmost importance as sensitive and highly personal information that could be easily misused, and stereotyped were discussed.

² Unless they have a locked profile, then only approved accounts can view the content

I have several informants and will not use their real names or handles, as a handle often is chosen early, and one uses it on several platforms. If I used a handle, it would make it easy to track the individual through that name. There is a disproportionate number of women in this fandom, and it would be too easy to recognize male or non-binary informants. Therefore, I keep the informants as anonyms as possible by excluding the use of gender altogether and will use gender-neutral pseudonyms.

As a researcher, it is important to legitimize oneself and to justify what is being done. Because I did the preliminary research and interactions through social media, I had to find alternative ways to validate myself. I first made a Twitter account with an informative bio that contained a link to the University of Tromsø's homepage and the information pamphlet posted there. In addition, I used my full name and a photo that hopefully conveyed the impression of me as a serious researcher in training. To give further information, I pinned³ a Tweet with supplementary information about the project and what my goals were and whom I hoped to come in contact with.

However, as I was a part of the fandom before it was the subject for the thesis, and I made friends who later became my informants and informants who later became my friends, it was vital that we had an open dialogue about boundaries and expectations. Since I had thought this might happen, we made sure to use the professional account whenever we talked in an informant/researcher capacity, and if they ever said something I found interesting in private, I would ask permission to use it.

One last thing I always had to consider was that I never knew who the participants I only chatted with actually were, they hide behind handles that are often connected to the characters in the show, and the profile photos does the same. I had to rely on them telling the truth about themselves. One can, of course, argue that stripped of expectations or stereotypes based on our bodies, we show our true selves. To quote Marley, one of the informants, in a discussion about the fandom, "(...) and kind of the permission to be myself, Shadowhunters is like a safe space". Marley does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and have not yet told their family but felt safe enough to be themselves in Twitter fandom. Even in real life, we

³ A Tweet that sticks to the top of your profile page so it's the first Tweet ones sees when entering that page.

put up a performance trying to influence how other people perceive us, so why should it be any different online.

4 Literature Review

We are a society dominated by mass media, and it has become a part of our socialization, our learning and understanding of reality. Media has power over us; it moulds us and guides us in our everyday life. It takes us outside our bubble and shows us other worlds. It is our common ground and our meeting point. Audiences are no longer passive, and fandoms are proof of that. They are, in fact, self-aware consumers who wield what power they have to fight for what they want to see in their show, or to save it from cancellation.

This literature review will give an overview of topics such as representation in media, fandom activism and resistance as well as change. These topics will help to give a better insight into why *Shadowhunters* fans are so dedicated to their fight to save the show and how a byproduct of that fight might be of individual or social change regarding LGBTQ+ attitudes and rights.

According to the Nielsen Report published for August 2020, the average American over the age of 18 spends 3-4 hours a day in front of the television (Nielsen Global Connect, 2020), not including streaming services such as Netflix. Taking streaming into account, the number of hours used to watch shows and movies were probably higher than 3-4 hours. These are numbers concerning the United States only, and other parts of the world will have a different result. It is also important to point out that this report was published based on numbers gathered under one of the first peaks of the covid-19 pandemic. It would be reasonable to assume this affected the viewing numbers.

The amount we spend watching television matters. According to research conducted by communication professor Larry Gross and associates in the United States, a person spending more time in front of a TV was more likely to give “television answers”. They chose to call this phenomenon; Mainstreaming, by which they mean a “sharing of commonality among heavy viewers in those demographic groups whose light viewers hold divergent positions” (Gross, 1991 p.23). The commonalities they speak of are the common outlooks and values television seems to highlight and emphasize. In other words, the media plays a significant part in portraying and upholding the dominant norms by producing and reproducing them through media content. The media sets the agenda, and it decides what we talk about, who are represented, and which viewpoint is the reigning one. Not everyone and everything is represented equally.

4.1 Media Fandom – The magic and intricacies of community

A fandom is a group of fans who actively interacts with other fans, produce or consumes fan-made products. These products interpret and often create strong parallels between their own lives and the events in the series. Their interpretations bring them beyond what is explicitly shown to a meta-text far richer and complex. Fans meet to discuss these interpretations and to share fan-made products, and it also becomes a base for consumer activism where fans talk back to the networks and producers; they assert the right to express an opinion and a right to judge (Jenkins, 2013). There are, however, probably as many ways to be a fan as there are fans, and not all fans are part of a fandom.

According to Sandvoss, Gray and Harrington (2017) fandom research has undergone three waves starting with “Fandom is Beautiful”, a phase where academics were trying to move away from the negative stereotypes and othering by the mass media. By *negative stereotypes*, I mean those that cause harm in any form to how one sees oneself and others. These academics wanted to show fandoms as a way of finding community and extending diversity. Fans were the disempowered fighting the media producers and industries’ power by interpreting, bending and altering the material presented through media. Henry Jenkins, a Communication, Journalism and Cinematic Arts professor, called this process textual poaching (1992). Fans created their own meaning and distributed them to other fans through fanfiction, fanart, amongst other things. Fans became producers themselves, actively interacting with parts that held the most significant interest to them. It became a space to articulate concerns with sexuality, gender, racism and forced conformity. Fan-creation challenges the media copyright to the narrative and creates an alternative universe based more on humane and democratic values. (Jenkins, 2013). These spaces and their effects on individuals and society are an essential part of what I am looking into in this thesis.

The second wave moved its interest to Pierre Bourdieu and his theory regarding taste and social hierarchies. Scientists now looked to the habitus

as a reflection and further manifestation of our social, cultural and economic capital, such studies were still concerned with questions of power, inequality, and discrimination, but rather than seeing fandom as an a priori tool of empowerment, they suggested that fans interpretive communities are embedded in exciting social and cultural conditions (Grey et al., 2017 p.5).

Viewing fandoms, one might get a critique of the norms as fans discuss the content of the shows. In the case of *Shadowhunters*, the fans discuss how a same-sex couple was portrayed compared to a straight looking couple. Through these discussions, one gets an insight into societies norms and structures.

The third wave has micro and macro dimensions; on a micro-level, it looks to the individual fan, intrapersonal motivations, and relationship with fan objects. On the macro level, however, they look to “the overreaching social, cultural, and economic transformations of our time” (Grey et al. 2017 p.7). It looks to the fandom as a community, “they tell us something about how we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to how we read the mediated texts around us” (Grey et al. 2017 p.7). But also how this connects to our society at large.

Fandom often describes themselves as communities, which is the case for *Shadowhunters* fans who call themselves; ‘Shadowfam. Amit & Rapport writes this about communities in *The Trouble with Community* “(...) the notion of collectivity or community has served a fundamental purpose in the anthropological zeitgeist as the medium for cultural process, mediating between the individual and larger political and economic systems while also framing ethnographies” (Amit & Rapport, 2002 p.3).

Anthropologists and other scientists have worked on defining the notion of community for ages; it is hard to set boundaries as they can be limitless, abstract, and unclear. Often, these boundaries are blurred and intersect. Amit refers to what Appadurai calls a ‘community of sentiment’. It seems to be highly relevant in this case as social media has made it easier to read, watch and experience together and, by doing so, begin to imagine and feel together (Amit & Rapport, 2002 p.18). The sense of togetherness that the #Shadowfam feels transgresses boundaries like race, gender, ethnicity, and orientations. “These forms of community which are conceptualized first and foremost by reference to what is held in common by members rather than in terms of oppositional categories between insiders and outsiders” (Amit & Rapport, 2002 p.59). What matters is what the ingroup have in common and not the them/us distinction. It is the show that they gather around, and often it transcends these circumstances to become real friendships independent of what got them together in the first place. A phenomenon Amit also describes when she writes about the ‘soccer moms’.

“Modern fandoms are ‘imagined’ communities fostered by technologies that enable geographically dispersed people to overcome time and distance in forging virtual communities of affect” (Morimoto & Chin, 2017 p.174). Household technologies and the Internet has become public property, especially in the western world, and more people are online. Twitter, the platform where I did my Netnography, is an excellent example of how social media facilitates communities to connect and interact through time and space. Social media has become a way for the industry to see how a show or movie does amongst fans. An example of that is how CW president Mark Pedowitz’s renewed the Tv show ‘*Hannibal*’ over a higher rated show as it was a fan favourite and had higher social engagement (Napoli & Kosterich, 2017). This decision goes to show that fans have some power to wield.

Highfield, Harrington and Burns (2013) explain how people watching Eurovision were using Twitter as a platform for ‘*audiencing*’ where they used a second screen (mobile, computer or tablet) to tweet back at their TV in real-time. Participating in communal discussions relatively unmediated is facilitated through the use of hashtags which makes it easier to find and follow. They separate between fans and ‘*audiencing*’ in that fandom communities will go beyond mere real-time tweeting to a show. Fans will be establishing communities, plan activities and share fan knowledge. Fans will make and use key hashtags more often, as well as tweet and retweet each other. Harrington et al. analysis shows how Twitter’s positioning facilitates both long-term fandom and ‘*audiencing*.’

Similarly, Dayna Chatman (2017) looks at live-tweeting to the Tv-show “*Scandal*” to see how Black Twitter fans and anti-fans reacted to the representation of Black people. By anti-fans, I mean someone who continuously voices a strong dislike towards something or someone. The show generated a vital conversation in how the main character was portrayed, where anti-fans were disappointed in how the protagonist was the mistress of the president. They voiced concerns about how this could potentially perpetuate stereotypes and influence Black Womanhood. Fans, however, were more engaged in the escapism, immersion in the show and discussing it with other fans. Nevertheless, they did express disappointment when the protagonist was called a ‘whore’. What Chatman tries to prove is how “the politics of viewing demonstrate the negotiation between pleasure and representational politics” (Chatman, 2017, p.312). She argues that online spaces are practical spaces to fight such politics. It has been argued by Jodi Dean (2005) that these are not valuable due to not being able to facilitate

political resistance because they have no direct receiver. Their Tweets are directed at a community of viewers and non-viewers, in any case. By doing so, they build a political thought that is a part of constructing “meaningful political worldviews” (2004, referred by Chatman 2017, p.313). Concluding the chapter, Chatman argues that Black Women fighting for representation online should not be brushed aside as inconsequential, “but rather must be situated along a continuum of practices of ideological development, which serve as the building blocks for political consciousness and action” (Chatman, 2017, p.313).

These articles argue that technology and social media facilitate interaction between people around entertainment media and community building. Fandom discussions are important distributors to the politics of representation, not only for Black women but also other minority groups such as the LGBTQ+ community.

4.2 Fandom activism and resistance

Henry Jenkins defines *participatory culture* as a culture with a relatively low barrier to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (Jenkins, 2009). Jenkins theorizes that participatory culture is connected to acts of resistance through, for instance, feminism and queer appropriation of material from mass media, which I will mainly look into as it challenges both patriarchies and gives alternative sexual politics. Jenkins makes a good point when he highlights fandoms role in resistance and activism.

Even though it is not the fandom’s primary intention, their acts are still countering the norm, their fight to save a show that clearly offers an alternative to the heteronormative. Researchers have moved their gaze to how fans take their experiences in analysis, mobilization, networking, and communication to fight for civic matters outside the fandom. “These investigations of activist collectives echo the progressive and celebratory orientation of early fan scholarship, where studies of active readers argued have the ability to rewrite, repurpose even the most sexist and racist components of a beloved text” (Chatman, 2017, p.317). With the rise of social media, these fights have a far greater reach and may influence more people. I believe it would be interesting to see how social media has contributed to fan activism not outside their fandom but through it. How through making space to discuss these issues in the language of their fandom fits into the overall fight for LGBTQ+ rights.

Something happens to representation in a show when it enters the fandom, traditionally the audience has been viewed as passive consumers, but fandoms are alive with movement. They interpret, discuss, and make their content based on the material they received from the show, and they poach, mould, and alter the content to fit their view. These acts of adaption might be seen as acts of resistance in altering what the producers have given them to give a more nuanced representation. Slash fanfiction, for example, give us an alternative to the heteronormative as it focuses on same-sex relationships.

The power relation between fans and producers has made fandom a breeding ground for movement. Fans have been fighting to keep their show, keep their characters, and include representation and the like for decades. Well-known examples include the Star Trek fans who made a movement for the revival of their show in the 1960s, and the saving of *Cagney and Lacey* (which I will write more about later in the thesis) in the 1980s. If it had not been for fans writing letters to the network as well as many nominations to the Emmy awards, the show would have disappeared into oblivion. Instead, it made history regarding the way women were portrayed on television. Fans are not passive at all, but a “self-aware consumer movement” (Cavicchi, 2017, p.122) wielding what power they have.

James C. Scott writes about everyday acts of resistance (1985) and the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless people. Even though his main focus is social hierarchies such as class, we can apply it to all groups with a power imbalance. In this case, the power is the producers, and the disempowered is the audience who poaches from mainstream production to make their own interpretations or alterations in fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, and I would also add tweeting and the use of hashtags to be such weapons as well. According to Scott, acts like these are more often than not hidden, but as Gutman (1993) points out, this does not need to be the case. The challenge of the Shadowfam is to find the means that makes them the most visible.

With the Internet and social media, fan activism has increased (see Earl & Kimport). It has made it easier to meet online and coordinate forces. There are designed web pages to sign petitions and ‘go fund me’ sites where one can collect money for the cause. Never has it been easier (or cheaper) to participate in activities like these. The world has evolved since people

were dragging their feet and these small actions and performances online are the new and modern weapons of everyday people.

Fan activism lies in the intersection of cultural and political participation. Analysis of social movement has seen a change in people's engagement in social and political matters. There has been a move from electoral politics, government or civic organizations to personal interest, social networks, and cultural activism. These forms of engagement are often through non-institutionalized networks online, and they are political in the regard that they are out to change the power dynamics (Brough & Shresthova, 2012).

Jenkins goes on to describes the fan identity as an embattled one as it often engages in movements to save shows from cancellation, keep their favourite character or add diversity. Fans have a history of rallying forces and organizing themselves, making petitions, finding the people in charge, and sending letters, actions often associated with activism. Jenkins talks a lot about the fans using the infrastructure that fandom provides to fight for other civic causes; this research paper will, however, look more to the civic outcome as a byproduct to the fight to save their show. They are simultaneously fighting for the right to be well represented; they are fighting for acceptance, love, and the right to be who they are. Through their struggle, they also show that there is a place for the marginalized, that they have the right to exist, that there are other people like them, that accepts who they are and that will fight for equality and acceptance.

4.3 Representation– Tell me who I am!

Representation in media has gotten more attention in the last few years as it is believed to be crucial in how mainstream population view minorities. Many people have no firsthand knowledge of people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, for instance. They are, therefore, more receptive to believing what is presented by the media, which goes for any group we have no personal interaction with. "Social representations communicate, for example, that this is how a certain kind of person talks and behaves, this is how to interact with this kind of person, and this is what this kind of person can achieve" (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez & Fryberg, 2015 p.42). It, therefore, becomes problematic when groups of people are not represented or are represented through harmful stereotypes because "mass media plays a substantial role in the way social groups understand themselves and are understood by others." (Leavitt et.al, 2015 p.39).

Even so, called positive stereotypes can become negative as they deny a variety of atypical identities, invisibility and one-sided portrayals can cause the perpetuation of prototypes. As prototypes are given higher status in an ingroup, it gives even more incentive to act accordingly (Leavitt et.al, 2015). Furthermore, we can assume it might also lead to gatekeeping for the ingroup, which then would not allow for various ways of being. An example of a positive stereotype is that Asians are good at math, which sounds positive enough. However, it might put unhealthy pressure on an Asian person to be good at math. As stereotypes disregard individuality and put people into boxes, they should be challenged in media portrayals; by showing a variety of characters with a high diversity rate, one can combat the harmful results of stereotyping.

Not only in media are minorities being marginalized, “Queer identities are being erased and misrepresented in formal information resources, including sexual education materials, library cataloguing and classification systems” (Floegel & Costello, 2019) as well. Several Library and Information Science researchers argue that Entertainment Media should be a part of knowledge workers, such as librarians, awareness so that they are able to see the gaps and fill them. They argue that because LGBTQ+ people experience gaps in their knowledge about queer identities, they turn to entertainment media representation that positively impacts their well-being and can represent topics obscured or inaccurately by more formal channels. However, this positive potential educational experience can be cancelled out by the recurrent harmful stereotypes and lack of intersectional diversity (Floegel & Costello, 2019), such as portraying a bisexual man of colour. There has been a tradition of mainly gay white men being represented. According to GLAAD reports, this is changing as more LGBTQ+ people of colour find their way to the screen. I will come back to this later. When there is little to no representation of a group in media or consistently harmful stereotypes are portrayed, it is called symbolic annihilation, a concept associated with sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978) but presented by George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1972, 1976).

4.4 Symbolic annihilation

Communication researcher Rebecca Ann Lind explains it very well in her book “Laying the foundation for studying race, gender and the media”:

The concept is rooted in two assumptions: that media content offers a form of symbolic representation of society rather than any literal portrayal of society, and that to be represented by the media is in itself a form of power- social groups that are powerless can be relatively easily ignored, allowing media to focus on the social groups that really matter. It’s almost like implying that certain groups don’t really exist- even though we can’t go out and actually annihilate everyone who isn’t straight, White, middle- to upper class male, we can at least try to avoid them in our mediated versions (Lind, 2009, p.5).

In other words, the media may seem to present us with a gloss-imagery of what society should be like, and by doing so, they reveal a culture’s core ideology. Since gender and sexuality are ground pillars in our moral order, the media might try perpetuating the cisgender/heterosexual norms, and LGBTQ+ people become an invisible minority.

By not representing or negatively stereotyping minorities in mass media, these groups are denied recognition and respect. Since media is one of our primary sources of information, they are more likely to be devalued (Raley & Lucas, 2006). Charles Taylor wrote about the importance of recognition in his article “The Politics of Recognition”. He claims “*that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others*”. He claims that being denied accurate recognition for their felt identity can cause actual harm and be a form of oppression causing real self-hatred (Taylor, 1994, pp.25-26). Fouts & Inch points out that the absence of LGBTQ+ characters may even serve as a metaphor to hide one’s own sexual orientation (2008). The media reinforces that it is something to be ashamed of and should remain hidden.

We do not have to move far back in time to find symbolic annihilation of LGBTQ+ people. When they finally were portrayed in the 1960s, it was in negative stereotypes such as funny clowns, flaming queers, queens, flirts, criminals, mental patients, and victims of violence (Raley & Lucas, 2006). Though we have come far regarding LGBTQ+ representation there

are still parts of the community who suffer from symbolic annihilation. Asexual people are a good example, there is not many asexual characters on television, Shadowhunters played an important in stepping forward when they included Raphael, as an asexual person, but I will discuss this later.

4.5 Gays on television

There has been an evolution of how LGBTQ+ people have been shown on television, from not at all to today's spectre of characters belonging to the community in some way or other.

One of the earliest depictions of a gay man was showed on prime-time television was in 1971 in a show called "All in the family", and for the time, this was groundbreaking. An explicitly gay man on television was shocking and unconventional. A very conservative middle-aged man, Archie finds out that a friend he looks up to is gay. Archie then denies it because Steve⁴ is a former football player and a 'real man'. The episode follows the standard of how to deal with gay characters at the time; it mainly revolves around the straight characters dealing with it, in the words of Henry William's a critic of the eighties:

When TV does deal with gays, it typically takes the point of view of straights struggling to understand. The central action is the progress of acceptance – not self-acceptance by the homosexual, but grief-stricken resignation to fate by his straight loved ones, who serve as surrogates for the audience. Homosexuality thus becomes not a fact of life, but a moral issue on which everyone in earshot is expected to voice some vehement opinion. (1987, Gross, 2001, p.83)

LGBTQ+ characters were not shown as whole human beings with a faceted identity; they were the gay character- and not the character that happens to be gay. A trait in one's personality becomes all that one is and becomes the defining factor. They were usually the supporting character as well; the gay best friend trope ruled the nineties. Their function in the story is to help and support the main characters in finding love which reduces them to "play a supportive role for the natural order and are thus narrow and negatively stereotyped" (Gross, 1991, p.26). Continuing the comment from William Henry:

⁴ The gay character

Just as black characters were long expected to talk almost exclusively about being black, and handicapped characters were expected to talk chiefly about their disabilities, so homosexual characters have been defined almost entirely by their “problem” (1987, Gross, 2001, p.83).

For women, acceptable representation was even harder, the first lesbian kiss was not shown on American television until 1991, but the scene was so dark it was hard to see anything at all (Gross, 2001). The scarcity of lesbian representation as well as diverse and rounded female characters can be rooted in misogyny. In the eighties, an unnamed CBS programmer was caught saying; “(...) too tough, too hard and not feminine.... They were too harshly women’s lib... We perceived them as dykes” (Gross, 2001, p.86) about the two female characters in the television show called *Cagney and Lacey*, which I mentioned earlier in the text. The show was cancelled, but devoted fans managed to save it. However, one change was made; one of the main characters were switched to a woman described as; “blonde, single and gorgeous and very much heterosexual” (Gross,2001, p.86). The show was controversial because the characters worked as detectives, an occupation that was seen as highly masculine.

According to Raley and Lucas (2008), representation has moved from symbolic annihilation to stereotypes. They found that gay male and lesbian characters were often subject to ridicule, not by heterosexuals, but as the butt of their own joke. Further, there was no noticeable difference in the number of times straight, gay and lesbian showed affection; however, same-sex characters were more likely to perform non-sexual acts of affection (Raley & Lucas, 2008).

“(...) LGBT’s mainstream movies show that studios prefer to ignore or insult LGBT people, rather than produce rounded, complex characters” (Allen, 2017, p.1). She refers to the GLAAD⁵ index of representation in her article, criticizing that major releases in the film are lagging behind independent films and series. Even though millennials are the most openly queer generation in history, one would think one lived in the nineties by watching blockbuster films (Allen, 2017).

⁵ GLAAD- Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation, founded in 1986, works with entertainment media, amongst other things. Monitors film, television, music and related entertainment media to ensure inclusive, diverse and accurate portrayals of the LGBTQ+ community.

GLAAD published their newest “Where We Are on TV” in 2020, the fifteenth report since they started twenty-four years ago. They included shows that were aired between June 2019 and May 2020, which means that *Shadowhunters* were outside the scope of their report. Even so, they were mentioned twice. In her opening words Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, wrote that 10,2 percent of broadcast characters were LGBTQ, “in addition they were exploring a wider variety of identities and experiences” (Ellis, 2020). The report also shows an increase in LGBTQ+ women represented as well as LGBTQ+ people of colour, women outnumber men, and LGBTQ+ people of colour outnumber white LGBTQ+ people and shows progress; sadly, only a handful of influential creators stands for fourteen percent of representation. Ellis demands that diverse and accurate inclusion must be “institutionalized value at every studio, network and production company” (Ellis, 2020).

GLAAD goes on to report the death of several lesbian and bisexual+ female characters, meaning the show wrote in the death of the character in the plot; leading to a decrease in bisexual+ characters. They now make up only twenty-six percent. Perhaps it might be connected to earlier research suggesting bisexuals are not often shown in entertainment media because of their fluidity, making it harder to classify their character. A great example of this bi-erasure was shown when Joss Whedon, the creator of the widely popular Tv-show “*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*”, were interviewed by *Gay Times* last year. The series was a young adult show like *Shadowhunters*, and also supernatural. It was about the teenager Buffy and her friends who fought vampires and demons. One of Buffy’s closest friends Willow who were a core character, fell in love with a woman and started a relationship with her in season four, after being in a relationship with two guys previously. Willow identified as lesbian from here on out. Whedon told *Gay Times* that:

There are things you can’t do, thanks to [the society at the time] (...) It [was] like, OK, you can’t make Willow bi, you can’t say this is a phase, because that’s what people do to deny their existence. So, if I did it now, I’d be like yes, she can be bi. Because some people are! But back then it was like, no we’re not ready for that (*Gay Times*, 2020).

This statement clearly reveals harmful stereotypes connected to bisexual people, that we are somehow confused, that it is a phase or just a step in our coming out as gay or lesbian. According to GLAAD’s report from 2006, most of the LGBTQ+ community portrayed on television were gay white men. It means that a whole range of people was subject to symbolic

annihilation, like bisexuals, who are actually the majority in the LGBTQ+ community. At least there are some bisexual representations in media, asexuals however have little to none. Which is sad as many of my informants identify as asexual.

Interestingly, GLAAD started tracking asexual representation only three years ago, and when *Shadowhunters* were cancelled, fifty percent of this representation disappeared. This means *Shadowhunters* were groundbreaking in this regard. They gave asexuals representation, which is still sorely lacking today—making asexual people a subject of annihilation.

We can track progress from total symbolic annihilation to stereotyping to a more nuanced portrayal of LGBTQ people. However, it is important to remember what I stated earlier, not every part of the community is as well represented. Though the gay representation in ‘*All in the Family*’ was nowhere near good enough, it was still groundbreaking for its time. Finally, a gay man could see himself reflected on screen; they went from being invisible to being right there for all to see. The show was progressive in the seventies when it aired; a barrier was breached. Still, a range of people under the LGBTQ+ umbrella finds little to no representation today. For instance, though several of my informants identify inside the asexual spectrum, there is almost no representation. Bisexual+ occupy twenty-six percent of all LGBTQ+ people represented in media when in reality they make up fifty-two percent of the LGBTQ+ community. *Shadowhunters* were progressive as well, portraying an asexual character, bisexual men of colour, and several LGBTQ+ characters in one show. It will be interesting to see which barriers are shattered next.

Seeing series like *Shadowhunters* show more than one LGBTQ+ person has proven to be popular (GLAAD Report, 2020). These shows mirror society better as we see a variety of orientations and genders socializing and orbiting around each other. However, higher numbers do not necessarily mean acceptance and tolerance. There is still a lot of destructive and harmful representation connected to LGBTQ+ people, the annihilation of asexuals, trans people and other self-identifying Queers.

The media holds power and is a source of information for so many. Youth’s may identify with the characters they see on the show, and it will help them in “finding themselves” and in their own “coming-out” story. We are not only stereotyped, but we also self-stereotype based on the representation we are presented with. Often one chooses harmful representation because it

is better than no representation at all as it provides an answer to the “who am I” question we all ask ourselves, it gives a reference point around how to negotiate one’s identity (Leavitt et al. 2015).

Positive representation, which positively affects how one sees oneself, has also proven effective on resilience amongst LGBTQ+ youths. Resilience is the factor that keeps one strong and mentally healthy in the face of stress and risk. There are individual conditions as well as contextual conditions, and the ones mentioned above are important factors. Good self-esteem, creativity, community, network, and support are crucial (Skre, 2021). Media provided them with the opportunity to feel stronger and empowered through the positive representation of resilient characters, fighting back, and finding community. Offline media such as television gave them a sense of shared experience, something to talk about, to connect with others belonging to the same community. Online media were used to comment and create content in response to homophobia (Craig, McInroy, McCready & Alaggia, 2015).

4.6 Toxic Masculinity

Toxic masculinity, a term coined by Shepard Bliss in the 1980s, has become a well-known term, though its meaning is not always entirely understood. He used the term to characterize the militarized, authoritarian masculinity (Harrington, 2021). In her article Harrington warns against using toxic masculinity as a shorthand because it gives way to the generalization of a specific type of men. The media have popularized it through the discussion of former President Trump and the #metoo campaign. Media use the term to describe the destructive behaviours of powerful, white elite men. She writes that feminism has adopted the term as a shorthand for characterizing homophobia and misogynistic speech and violence by men. Through her research in academic databases, she finds that of all the academic papers she read not many adequately defined or discussed the term. (Harrington, 2021). She expresses that the term might be too generic, and without ample discussion of the meaning.

I will continue using the term in the feminist tradition as a shorthand for masculine traits such as not showing emotion, showing homophobic and/or misogynistic traits. The typical macho man that the media constantly peppers us with is similar to how Bliss intended it when he coined the term. Even though the term traditionally has been connected to men, I want to point out that other genders may show similar traits. As men in a patriarchal society is viewed as the default and desired gender to be, others will aspire to behave in the same manner.

4.7 The Media's Role in Change

We as a society are dynamic; we are ever in motion and constantly changing. These are processes that are hard to observe and measure. Do we look at two points in time and compare the changes that have been made, or do we look at the processes, how people live and navigate their lives in an attempt to find change? Change is like ageing; it happens so slowly that one cannot really notice it before it is different. An event may be the cataclysm for change, the ball that sets things in motion, or it might be a series of events. A gay man being shown explicitly on TV for the first time might lead to personal change – he might decide to come out to his colleagues at work, and maybe this inspires others to do the same. They band together and start a movement against discrimination in the workplace. Or maybe it is the young person seeing a vampire not interested in the sexual content in a relationship, it is discussed online, and they learn the term asexual. This person now knows nothing is wrong with them, that they is not alone and that they is seen and validated. This young person will go on to spread the knowledge so that others will not feel alone. Maybe this sharing of knowledge will lead to a validated place for asexual's in our society and no longer be seen as a libido problem. These are just two examples of a chain of events that might lead to some kind of change.

Change is hard to measure, and often we only see it in retrospect. To quote Fredrik Barth, “there is no way to observe and describe an event of change” (Barth, 1967, p.662), but we can look to what triggers them. Media might be one of those triggers; the problem is to prove the connection between media output and change and quantifying those links. Communication theorist Denis McQuail (1979) writes that we need to distinguish between effect and effectiveness. The first one refers to any outcome given by the mass media, while the other looks to the ability to achieve given objectives like influencing opinion or behaviours. We also need to look at which level change occurs; individual, institutional or societal. Societal change takes longer and are harder to prove but is more likely to persist, and personal change is often short-lived but easier to attribute to a source.

Some factors help a message reach through to an audience; they must at least be a bit accessible, they have to understand the message as the sender intends, and it needs to be from a trusted source. However, when it comes to forming norms, what we learn is often incidental and not intended by the sender, which often happens when we watch entertainment media.

We may adopt versions of reality, the reality of facts and norms, of values and experience. It

is a selective interaction between the media and the self which shapes individuals' behaviours and self-concept. Media has become a platform where we learn about expectations to societal roles and their order and structure; for instance, by showing mainly white heterosexuals, we learn that these are the groups that hold more value. "Media establishes an order by publicizing according to an agreed-upon scale of values that are determined elsewhere, usually in political systems" (McQuail, 1979, p.16).

An example of this is the 'Hays code', which prohibited showing so-called immoral actions such as interracial kissing, and of course, LGBTQ+ people were included on this list. It was officially dismantled in 1968. McQuail goes on to quote Gerbner; "the key to the effects of mass media is in their capacity to take over the 'cultivation' of images, ideas and consciousness in an industrial society" (as seen in McQuail, 1979, p.20). What we see on television, those stereotypes, they might be accepted as truth.

Let us look to Gross' theory on mainstream and Leavitt's research on how we model our behaviour based on what we observe in our surroundings, which includes television. We see that the media's symbolic images and ideas do indeed play a part. We use media as a means of learning, and it would be prudent to assume that change might be based on what we observe and learn. People are producers as well as products of self and society, and social systems are created, implemented, and altered by human activity (Bandura, 2004). We learn based on what we observe, but we are also conscious agents in our own lives, and we do make decisions based on our environment. Pierre Bourdieu writes, "the public visibility of new (particularly homosexual) models of sexuality help to break the doxa and expand the space of what is possible in terms of sexuality" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.89). So merely being visible on a platform that reaches so many people will significantly change our society by expanding role expectations and giving us leeway to act out our sexualities.

4.8 The Western Perspective

Most of the scientists cited in this section, as well as the research subjects, are from the United States. It has been hard to find relevant data from other parts of the world. Whether this is because it is not a focus of interest, it is not available or merely because most entertainment media comes from the states, I am not qualified to tell. I will not be looking into it as it is a bit out of the scope for this thesis, but it is still important to notice that most of

the research and empirical data is from the western perspective and might very well be different in other places. However, a small research paper sought to find out if others from Europe found their LGBTQ+ experience represented; they referred to the notion that the West has the monopoly on Queer identity. The data was collected among self-identifying Queer people in a town in Spain. They found that they often felt more represented by entertainment media coming from the United States rather than products made in Spain (Lopez, 2018). It seems the United States has a strong hold on this genre as well as on the LGBTQ+ research. Hopefully, other perspectives will be made prominent to understand better the nuance of the human experience regarding LGBTQ+ matters.

This literature review has given an insight into what previous research has told us about the power media wields, the benefits and importance of representation and how it has facilitated and distributed through fandoms. These things are all a part of a process of change, be it individual, institutional, or societal. Going forward, I will be attaching empirical data to these theories. It will show what made this series so popular amongst fans, the relationship between the fans and their fan object and lastly, their fight to save the series and how this affects the bigger picture regarding representation and change. Fandom has a long tradition of making spaces for people not fitting into the norm, fighting for their shows and by doing so pushing the limits of representation. In recent years, after the dawn of social media, fans have taken their knowledge of resistance and movement to reach outside their fandom to fight for civic causes such as Black Lives Matter. It is interesting to see how this is the new force to be reckoned with and should be shown due respect instead of the many stereotypes we meet today.

5 Shadowhunters 2016 - 2019

Shadowhunters is a fantasy/sci-fi series based on Cassandra Clair's "*The Mortal Instruments*⁶" series. It aired on the channel Freeform (previously ABC Family). As the show was being aired, the network was going through some change, and it went from being a "family-friendly" channel to focus on a more mature demographic. Shadowhunters was a part of that.

The show is about a young woman, Clary, who finds out she belongs to the so-called Shadow world on her eighteenth birthday. She finds out by witnessing three other Shadowhunters (usually invisible to the mortal world), warriors tasked with killing demons, in a sword fight with these creatures. Clary's house later comes under attack, and her mother sends her through a portal to the precinct where her stepfather works as a cop. Later she crosses paths with the three Shadowhunters once more; she learns that their names are Jace, Alec, and Isabell. She soon becomes close with Jace.

As the show progresses, we learn that Alec is closeted and struggling to handle his crush on Jace (as Jace is not their biological brother, but rather one their family took in when they were kids). Other characters are introduced as we go along; Magnus, a warlock, becomes interested in Alec at first sight- something that seems mutual. Through scenes where Magnus lists his lovers and a conversation with a friend where he proclaims to be a one soul at a time kind of guy, we learn he is bisexual.

These two men circle each other throughout season one. Alec and Magnus are not the only ones growing closer, Clary and Jace are attracted to each other as well, but complications come in their way. The season ends with the famous wedding scene where Alec is to marry Lydia, a fellow Shadowhunter. Magnus storms the church, saying nothing- just looking at Alec. Alec, in turn, makes a life-altering decision. He walks down the aisle, past his shocked mother, who tries to stop him, only to grab Magnus by his lapels and kiss him in front of the whole church.

⁶ Interestingly enough, the Mortal Devices series started out as Harry Potter fanfiction.

In season two, the network has hired new showrunners, Todd Slavkin and Darren Swimmer, as well as new writers. This translates into a darker atmosphere and a more 'grown-up vibe'. It also leads to the relationship between Magnus and Alec slowing down. They go on their first date and grow closer. We see them being there for each other as the tension between the Shadowhunters and the rest of the Shadow-world grows. The tension between their two worlds results in their break-up. Alec's sister Isabell gets hooked on vampire blood after a severe injury; as a result, she initiates a relationship with the vampire Raphael. The relationship is never shown to be sexual; in fact, as Isabell tries to kiss him, he pulls back and says he is not interested in that kind of thing.

In season three, Alec and Magnus get back together after the break-up. Clary and Jace become a couple as well, but he is acting weird after being awakened from the dead. In an attempt to free Jace from the villain of the season's control, Magnus trades in all his magic to his demon father, Asmodeus. The loss of magic leads Magnus into a depression that Alec sees no way out of- except contacting Magnus' father to reverse it. In return, Asmodeus demand Alec break-up with his son. After Alec tells Magnus he wants out of their relationship, he and the other Shadowhunters go to the capital of the Shadowhunters world to save it from being destroyed. Magnus comes to their rescue after Maryse (Alec's mother) explains to him why Alec broke-up with him. In order to save their world, Magnus has to go to Edom, a hell dimension, but not before Alec, and he proposes to each other.

Alec is consumed by the idea of getting Magnus out of Edom, and Clary helps him by making a rune that allows them to travel into Edom. They rescue Magnus from the hell dimension, and they go back to New York. They start to plan their wedding. After a series of events, Clary is being told she can no longer be a Shadowhunter. At Alec and Magnus' wedding, her runes start to disappear. She leaves the Institute, forgetting all about the past few years of her life, including the people in it.

The series ends with an insight into the gang one year after the wedding. Alec and Magnus are still happily married, and both are in powerful leader positions in Idris. Isabell is the head of the New York Institute, and Jace trains with members of the Shadow-world who have previously been discriminated against. He looks in on Clary regularly, well aware that she can no longer see him as she belongs to the mortal world. However, the last time he looks in on her, she sees him, and it ends as it began.

The show contains several members of the LGBTQ+ community, something that reflects our society more accurately. A diverse lineup like this was not very common and still is not. In fact, GLAAD encourages others to follow Freeform's example and introduce series with multiple LGBTQ+ characters, these shows have "paid off with passionate viewers, social buzz, and critical praise alike, and other networks have an opportunity to bring those eyes to their network by including nuanced and diverse LGBTQ characters and stories" (GLAAD Report, 2020). The representation being diverse and nuanced is vital because, as Gross puts it, "In truth, even the most sophisticated among us can find many components of our "knowledge" that derive wholly or in part from fictional representations" (Gross, 2001, p11).

6 Falling in Love

This chapter will focus on what attracted the fans to Shadowhunters in the first place, what piqued their curiosity towards the show. Then, after that first taste, what hooked them? What got them so passionately invested? Their attachment to the characters, as well as cast and crew, will also be examined further. In doing so, I hope to give the reader a better insight into the meaning and importance of the show for the individual person.

Through the thesis, I have interviewed sixteen people from different parts of the world; even though most of them came from Europe, a few live in the United States and Asia. Their age ranged from the early twenties to the late fifties. Of the sixteen people, nine identified as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community and the last seven as straight but allies.

At the beginning of this project, I was curious how a TV show could become so important to some and inspire such a massive engagement. I was new to fandom, so I had never encountered anything like this before. To broaden my understanding, I began each interview with three trivial but telling questions.

1. How did you come across Shadowhunters?
2. What got you hooked?
3. Who is your favourite character?

Their answers regarding these questions gave me a sense of their interests regarding what would catch their attention, what matters to them, why Shadowhunters spoke to them. Through our conversations around these three topics, I learned what was important to them, what they valued, and how they saw themselves, as they often felt they shared some characteristics with the characters. In addition to learning to know them on some level, it was a pretty good icebreaker into a subject they loved to discuss.

6.1 The Meet Cute - Discovering Shadowhunters

My very first informant reached out to me after I posted my introductory tweet. During our first zoom conversation, Delta told me they read an article about the show, which made them curious enough to give it a try. Later they add, "I remember thinking I liked the wardrobes and styling of the cast- they were attractive, cool and sexy. I liked that the genre was fantasy; it mentioned there was a gay couple, and I liked storylines with gay characters and gay romance." Even though they thought the first season was not too impressive, they kept watching because the cast was lovely. Their spouse Gene came into the room while they were watching and decided to join them. Together they binged, meaning they saw several episodes consecutively, they watched all three seasons while they were on holiday as well as on rainy days.

Some informants were recommended Shadowhunters on Netflix because they had watched similar shows earlier. One informant came across a film of Magnus and Alec kissing at the wedding in season one; they have no idea why it was recommended to them but consider it fate. Two of my other informants came across Malec gifs or videos on Twitter and were intrigued enough to look it up. Malec is the Magnus and Alec's names combined, a so-called ship name. The video of that scene which was posted five years ago by the official Shadowhunters account on YouTube, has eleven million views so far. Others had come across the movie a few years back or read the books, so they had an early attachment to the characters and this fictional world. Marley told me they stopped watching the show at first for varied reasons, but when they came back to social media and saw all the Malec content, my informant decided to give it another go.

None of my informants has told me they started to watch the show because of the network's advertisements, which coincides with statements that they were not doing an excellent job of exposing it to the world. The fans, however, did an exceptional job in spreading Shadowhunters content across a variety of social media platforms; be it photos, movies, or gifs, it got people's attention. Many fans came into the fandom after the show had announced the cancellation or after it had aired, which leads me to believe they were attracted to fan-made "advertisements." What they all seem to have in common, though, is the interest in Alec, Magnus, and their relationship.

In a world where information is the highest form of currency, the algorithms will show what it thinks one will be interested in based on previous searches on the Internet. When Netflix, YouTube, Twitter, and similar platforms show them Shadowhunters, it means they are probably into Sci-Fi and/or fantasy, and through several conversations with them, I have found this to be true. It means they have a disposition for liking the show based on the genre; still, all my informants focused on Alec and Magnus and their relationship.

In answering the second question, what got you hooked, they shared some of their values, struggles, and hopes, and it never ceased to amaze me how a TV show could have such a significant impact on someone's life. How they can find support in the characters, courage to keep on, inspiration for change as well as belonging.

6.2 Catching Feelings – Getting Invested

For Ariel, someone living in a strictly patriarchal society that keeps tabs on LGBTQ+ activities, the character Magnus Bane was the deciding factor for what got them hooked. "He is too awesome not to watch, he is so open in his feelings towards Alec, and he wears great clothes and make-up without thinking what others can say". This statement speaks of the desire for freedom to be who you are, to not care about the judgement of others. To be able to choose how to express oneself or be open with whom one loves. It becomes even more evident as they go on; "I live in a country where it is prohibited by law even to speak about LGBTQ. You can easily go to prison because of that." Magnus represents something which is prohibited where they come from; they tell me even social media is monitored by the government. "It is dangerous to be 'gayish' because other men can beat you because of long hair or 'girly face'", not only is the government out to get you, but the general attitude towards LGBTQ+ people are hostile. Living in an environment like this must be very tough, not being able to express oneself or live freely without fear of persecution. Ariel reveals that they are asexual and not at all interested in sex or a relationship. Not being interested in starting a family is very frowned upon as it is expected of you. What it must feel like to see an openly bisexual character, wearing make-up and fancy clothes, being unapologetically themselves. Of course, it would have an impact. To Ariel, the show represents hope, hope that also their corner of the world can change for the better.

A common statement heard amongst Shadowhunters fans is that the show saved them somehow, and they came across it during a challenging period in their life. A particular strong

story was the one regarding Avis, a person barely 30 years old with years of chronic illness behind them. Life had become too much of a struggle, and they considered ending their life, even came close once. As they slipped into a heavy depression, they kept looking for something that would spark some joy and perhaps even get them back into drawing. Shadowhunters became that something, an escape from the real world, from the pain. Casually they added in a conversation, "it's pretty much why I've been fighting for it, in hopes of getting that magic back." For them, it was an active search for an escape from the pain they were living in every day and finding that clip of Magnus storming into Alec and Lydia's wedding became that lifeline they were searching for.

Avis was not the only one experiencing health issues. Casey who has kids, work and is mostly on their own, were struggling with their health as well. For them, Shadowhunters and Alec, in particular, served as an inspiration. Alec's quote on the show became a mantra; "Impossible only means try again." This mantra got them through their everyday life with all its ups and downs. Whenever they felt like giving up, they thought about what Alec would do.

Maddox, a brave and adventurous person site the exact quote as Casey, they have said that they borrow courage from characters. Even though they promised themselves to be like an anime character and never give up before Shadowhunters ever aired, they also connect it to Alec's quote. While going through a tough time, living in a country they hated- the Shadowhunters community and conventions became something to brighten up their existence for a bit. They kept fighting.

Through a couple of zoom talks with the very passionate Quincy, I learned that this was the case for them as well. Shadowhunters became an escape; they were living away from home in a strange city and were having a hard time of it. Shadowhunters and all its content on social media became something to look forward to. Through the characters and actors, they learned to find strength and security in themselves. Especially Matthew Daddario, the actor playing Alec in the show, was an inspiration. Through his public appearances and interviews, Quincy found a role model. They listened to him when he said to be kind always, to choose one's battles and be secure in oneself.

Several of the fans I talked to seemed to be as attached to the actors playing the characters as the characters themselves. Since they were at the time relatively unknown or new to acting

and had a smaller fanbase, it was easier to connect through social media. They often communicated directly with the fandom through tweets, comments as well as participating in conventions. Through a tweet I posted, I found out that the majority of the over thirty fans who answered did not want Shadowhunters to be revived if it meant the cast and crew would be different.

The show was a perfect storm of magical cast, directing, location, visual effects, costume and make-up, music, and loyal and passionate fans. You can't replace your true love. – C

No, I wouldn't watch it if it's a different cast. It's the cast that makes it special and it's one of the reasons I kept coming back to it – A

For me there is only this cast, this family, they made our show so special. I would be over the moon if there was a Malec spin-off, but if someone other than Harry and Matt were playing the lead roles, I wouldn't be interested at all. - P

These are some of the replies I got, and they all blur the lines between character and actor- they are both equally important and part of the 'package deal'. The way the cast and crew involved the fans through communication on social media had an impact. Some of the fans had met them at conventions as well, but after the pandemic hit, more people got the opportunity to meet them. Companies that had previously arranged physical conventions started to make digital ones. Suddenly one could meet one's heroes online, time and space no longer being in the way. Cast and crew alike came to these gatherings.

During my time in the fandom, there were many conventions, and fans would go in groups to be able to talk to the actors in zoom video calls. There were panels where one could see them interact with each other; there were cooking classes, games, and one-on-one talks. Fan Twitter would light up whenever there was an online convention; my group DM's would run red hot with messages from all its members. It was invigorating, and the enthusiasm spread like wildfire. This interaction between fans and the cast and crew played a part in growing closer, dedication and loyalty increasing.

6.3 Why are we attracted to fictional worlds?

There are several theories as to why one might become so attached to TV shows and characters. One theory might fit with Avis experience of escape from everyday life and struggles. Another is the earliest theory which stems from Aristotle; he believed it was a way of catharsis. In other words, by watching entertainment that inspires emotions would help clear our own built-up emotion. Others suggested that it is a way to flex our empathetic muscles through the safety of fiction. It might explain why we not only seek entertainment to cheer us up but also watch drama, horror, and the like to elicit negative emotions. Even though these theories have their flaws, watching violent entertainment has shown an increase of violence, not a decrease, so the catharsis theory falls flat. Sometimes we seek entertainment mainly to be entertained and hold our attention, not to exercise our empathy.

Through transportation theory, we can understand media enjoyment and how it becomes an 'escape'. We watch TV because we enjoy it, and transportation into narrative worlds is "an experience of cognitive, emotional and imagery involvement in a narrative" (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004, p.311). It might be both pleasant and necessary to experience enjoyment through escaping the self; through immersion into the show, we leave the real world behind, including our troubles. They do distinguish between merely enjoying a show and transportation, as transportation is "thought to leave the experiencer's beliefs and perceptions changed in some measurable way" (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004, p.313).

Transportation is the desired state because, in some cases, it opens the viewer up to appreciate themselves and the world they live in, which plays into Sophie Moskalenko and Steven J. Heine (2003) article about *watching your troubles away*. They suggest that we seek entertainment like television because it serves as a distraction from the self. They base their research on the theory of self-awareness, which states that we are at our happiest when we are in a state of subjective self-awareness. We are not focusing our awareness inwards, which leads to us noticing the discrepancy between our ideal self and the authentic self, which usually gives us a negative self-view. Research has shown that "people who were unhappy and could not structure their free time tended to watch more television than people who were happy" (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi as quoted in Moskalaenko & Heine, 2003). These theories are rooted in escapism, a distraction from our own thoughts and lives, but that is not all Shadowhunters represents.

To Ariel, Avis, Casey, Maddox, and Quincy, Shadowhunters meant different things; it was an escape in a challenging situation, something to focus on outside themselves. The characters became role models, someone to look up to and draw inspiration from. People are especially likely to be inspired by positive role models who represent the desired self when they are bent on pursuing success (Lockwood, Jordan & Kunda, 2002). It means that they had to be open to these kinds of role models to make it easier to connect with them. All the informants had a favourite character in the show, someone they related to. Through conversations about those favourites, I learned how they viewed themselves.

6.4 Getting to know you - Favourite Characters

Several of the informants cited Magnus and/or Alec as the source of their dedication. In understanding how a show could become so important, I believe that looking at how fans relate to the characters gives important clues. The characters must be relatable, and people need to see parts of themselves in them or, at the very least, something they might strive to become.

I had several conversations with River, a bold, intelligent, and reflected young person. They told me about their teenage years (when they first came across the Shadowhunters books) and the feeling of being on the outside. Friends and classmates often excluded them, maybe because they had other interests than them. River remember feeling a connection to Alec as he was also a side character in their own life. Someone who was often overlooked, but they found Alec's strength and reactions an inspiration, and at this age, they desperately wanted a big brother. When the series came out several years later, they still felt that connection to Alec and was positively surprised that there was more focus on him as a brother. He was still a "sassy outsider with a big heart", traits I also came to see in River.

Ember from France, a country considered to be pretty liberal concerning sex and gender, found themselves attracted to the representation Alec and Magnus provided. Especially Magnus as they themselves is bisexual. They also loved him for his generosity and selflessness. Seeing oneself reflected in a character on TV translates into not being alone; it might give a sense of belonging, as well as validation. Delta found themselves in Alec, as they have gone through a lot of the same troubles in coming out to a conservative family and becoming comfortable with themselves.

Milan painted a picture of Magnus as unique, confident, and beautiful- inside and out. As a person who loves helping friends but feeling lonely at the same time. When I asked if these were qualities they saw in themselves as well, they confirmed. But also added that the person they used to be were more like Alec, "They are like a combination of myself, my past, my present, and a hopeful future."

Nova was the only one I interviewed who saw more of themselves in Maryse as they are a parent as well, even though they found Magnus' story interesting. Malec was still what drew Nova to the show; they liked the chemistry between Harry and Matthew. Nova tells me they like to see LGBTQ+ represented but do not know why. Almost a year after this conversation, Nova discovers that they might be asexual and starts to question themselves. This realization will be elaborated later.

Avis talks about Raphael, the asexual character on the show: "(...) well, yeah, Raphael is basically me as a man. We're both fed up with people's bullshit and have no patience for their drama." Avis discovered they were asexual through the show, but I will come back to this later as well.

Casey, on the other hand, emphasizes the inspiration Alec has been to them; he becomes an inspiration to cope with their hardships. They see themselves more in the struggles he faces than in the character's personality. Alec goes through a lot, the way he chooses to overcome these troubles is what Casey wants to imitate.

6.5 Why are we attracted to fictional characters?

Elly A. Konijn, a professor in media psychology, and Johan F. Hoorn, a professor in humanities with a focus on fictional characters, wrote an article (2005) about how we perceive and experience fictional characters. Many of the results they found through their research coincide with what I have learned through talking to the fans of *Shadowhunters*. Seeing themselves in the characters and their lives significantly impacts their immersion and connection to the story. Their article argues that similarity to the characters is not the only factor at play. They wrote about phases of establishing an appreciation of a fictional character; Encoding, which means we look to a character's goodness or badness and aesthetics. Are they beautiful or ugly? The second phase is comparison; what is relevant to us and our own goals and concerns?

Characters were perceived as more fascinating if they combined good and bad features. The conversations I have had with informants backs up this claim as they have told me that the characters are relatable because they have their flaws and struggles as the rest of us; they mess up but always tries to make up for it. Delta mentions Alec's grouchiness, for instance. In River's opinion, it is easier to relate to Alec than Jace because Alec is more human, sassy, brave, and a good brother.

Furthermore, relevance plays a part; is it relevant to our own lives? When we look at Avis and Casey, the struggles of the characters resonate with their own. Not necessarily that they are going through the same thing, but rather that the characters are having a hard time. It becomes relevant to Ariel's life because they see a representation of something they want- freedom of expression, freedom to be who you are.

The show may also serve as informative for encounters with real people, and Delta's spouse Gene put it so well when they explained how, in their opinion, the show worked as an excellent example of how we should treat each other.

It is no secret that Hollywood prefers beautiful people, and from an early age, we are socialized into connecting beauty with goodness. The look of the characters plays a part as aesthetically pleasing people will increase likability. The actors playing Magnus and Alec are no exception, they are extremely beautiful people, and their looks are often commented upon on Twitter. "I mean, have you looked at him" Is a statement uttered more than once in my conversations with fans on Twitter. When I asked River about the transition from books to series, they told me it was an easy one, as they fell in love with the actor playing Alec. Since they do not know Matthew Daddario personally, one can only assume that looks are vital.

Ethics is a crucial factor, even though a character's likability seems to increase when there is a mix of good and bad rather than purely good or bad. It plays into what I have discussed earlier, that the characters with flaws are more relatable, as well as "evil" characters having some redeeming quality.

Konijn and Hoorns research confirms that the reason we like a character is complex and depends on a myriad of factors, the biggest one being what it triggers in us as viewers.

Fans of *Shadowhunters* became attached to the show because they saw something of themselves in its characters. Something they strived to be, or a struggle they could relate to. Maybe even see some negative trait that challenges to self-reflection or self-evaluation, which challenges the way we think of and see the world. All these things are a part of the socialization we as humans goes through our whole life. Fictional characters are just as important as the people that live around us. It gives us templates to follow, challenge us, teach us, and someone to connect with.

These factors, the relatable characters, and the escapism from everyday life draws people in. It is what makes them engage in fandom and take heed of the messages the show tries to convey. Engaging in criticism and analysis is what makes them active. It is what leads to being a part of making LGBTQ+ friendly spaces. In forging this relationship with the show's characters and the actors, the show became an essential part of their life. As a point of identification, as an inspiration, an escape, hope. When this was taken away, they felt actual loss and grief. The connection they felt to the characters, the forty-five-minute episode of distraction, the discussions online, interviews with actors- all this would disappear. They mourned the show and the characters they grew to love.

The next chapter of the thesis will investigate the dynamics of the fandom, how they present their identities through the show, how they made space for exploring different aspects of their identity, and as a source of education on LGBTQ+ matters.

7 Out of the Shadows- making LGBTQ+ friendly spaces for sharing and learning.

Throughout the next few chapters of the thesis, I will lean on research done by media scientists Larry Gross and Henry Jenkins. Gross investigates LGBTQ+ representation in media and Jenkins researches fandoms. When discussing social identity and community, I will also benefit from Richard Jenkins work.

“When groups and perspectives do gain visibility, the manner of their representation will reflect the biases and interests of those powerful people who define the public agenda” (Gross, 2001, p.4). In fandoms, people can come together from all walks of life to challenge and even reject these stereotypes.

When Shadowhunters fans meet online and create a fandom, they make space for themselves, and since the show contains LGBTQ+ representation, the normal assumption would be that the people in the fandom would be of similar minds, my interviews with fans also indicates this. Magnus and Alec, who are such a big part of the show, are naturally discussed in these spaces. Their relationship is well represented, accepted, and loved, which implies this fandom is a safe space. The shared Tweets often contain Alec, Magnus or both together, which furthers the visibility of this LGBTQ+ space. Representation on television tends to attract people from the communities represented, making it a natural place to have conversations about stereotypes. Many fans feel the show shattered a lot of stereotypes, and often talk about how Alec and Magnus got to have a healthy, normal relationship. They even got to marry in the end.

Marley described Shadowhunters fandom as a ‘safe space’ where they have permission to be themselves, which is especially important as they are not out to their loved ones yet. “I think one big thing Shadowhunters does is validating your existence. It is practically telling you that whoever you are, whatever you identify as, however you represent yourself that you are valid and that is ok.” Marley experienced being able to experiment, talk, and figure themselves out in an accepting environment, an environment that knew the language and perhaps had similar experiences. Because Marley is not out to their family yet, this community is essential.

Maddox needed the community because “everyone was basically crying, and I felt the need to cry too.” To them, Alec’s struggle resonated because they rarely talk about their bisexuality, is not out to loved ones, and never will be; they come from a conservative country where LGBTQ+ acceptance is not very high. In the Shadowfam, they knew that there was acceptance and many other people who were bisexual as well. Even though they did not talk about their own sexuality easily, they knew there was nothing wrong with them and that they were not alone. If they ever needed to talk, there would be people to listen who understood.

The fandom has often used the word *family*, and it is something that plays a central role in the show; actor Isaiah Mustafa (who played Clary’s stepdad) gave the fandom the name Shadowfam. The idea that one can choose one’s family holds particularly strong in LGBTQ+ communities because many belonging to it have been rejected by their blood relatives when they come out, or there is a fear of this happening. When a fan asked Katherine McNamara (the actor playing Clary) what she gained from Shadowhunters, she answered, “*a family*.” Showing that even the actor themselves found a family working on the show.

Avis called the fandom “*full of angels*” after the first time they posted a tweet with the Save Shadowhunters tag; “People who I never talked to before have sometimes replied to my more depressing tweets that if I wanna talk, I can talk to them.” *What* Avis implies through this quote is a perception that the fandom is an understanding and inclusive family that takes care of each other in times of need. They wish to live by the values the show tries to teach—a sense of community to sometimes vulnerable people.

I have mentioned that Avis had suicidal thoughts and were looking for a distraction, which they found in Shadowhunters. Both the fandom and the community played an equal part. “The feeling of finding your place and a group that took me under their wings.” Durkheim writes about suicide and community in “*Suicide: A study in Sociology*.” He argues that the decision to end one’s own life is affected by social factors such as a lack of community. “Suicide was more prevalent where social ties were eroded, boundaries were uncertain, and meanings were under threat” (Lindholm, 2007, p.60). This quote speaks to the importance of finding one’s community, a sense of belonging as it increases resilience. The Shadowfam has been a place for several of my informants to find this community and understanding.

7.1 The Self-Definition of Shadowfam

So, what defines the Shadowfam then? Most important is how one sees oneself. Does one see oneself as part of the fandom? By the sheer act of recognizing oneself makes it real. Often those who consider themselves fans are in some way participating in the fandom, be it interacting with other fans, reading fanfiction, making fanart or just read about the show. As long as one self-identifies, they are, in theory, a part of the fandom. Some are active on social media, and some are not. It is tough to make a list of concrete characteristics that show belonging to the Shadowfam as its very individual.

I asked fans on Twitter to comment with adjectives they felt described the Shadowfam, seven people answered. Some of the adjectives were repeated by several, and all were exclusively positive. *Open-minded* and similar words like *accepting*, *tolerant* and *supportive* were the words most used. This corresponds with the topics and values being brought up in the show. Another word sticking out were the words *fierce*, *persistent*, and *never giving up*, words probably connected to the struggle to save the show, them banding together over a common cause. Others were *welcoming* and *friendly*. These words play into shared values brought up by the show and perpetuated by fans in the fandom. Bringing back what Amit wrote in ‘Trouble with community’ these kinds of communities are conceptualized by what they have in common. In this case the love of Shadowhunters, and the notion of bringing the values of the show into the fandom. To form a community, that community needs these shared values to make its members feel similar and connected.

Richard Jenkins writes: “Group identity is a product of collective internal definition. In our relationship with significant others, we draw upon identification of similarity and difference, and, in the process, generate group identities” (Jenkins, 2014, p.107). Furthermore, he refers to Anthony Cohen and his notion that community is created and experienced in the ‘thinking’ about it. He argues that symbols generate a sense of belonging, using the same words to describe Shadowfam as a community also implies that the persons inhabiting this community share the same traits- “community membership means sharing with other community members a similar sense of things” (Jenkins, 2014, p.138). Since this community is dispersed across the Internet and not in the physical world, these words to describe themselves holds immense importance and becomes what they connect over, next to the show itself. Richard

Jenkins has suggested that by identifying others is often a part of our process of identifying ourselves (Jenkins, 20014).

The fans in Shadowfam will have different views on the meaning of the words they use to describe their community and thereby themselves. The community might come off as collective and gathered to the outside world but have inside disagreements. They have an image of shared values, but that does not mean they interpret them the same. The fandom contains fans from all over the world and from different backgrounds; this will, of course, affect their worldview and attitudes. Because of this, there will be tensions and different points of view, experiences, and opinions.

7.2 Toxic Fandom and the Threat to Safe Spaces

Fandoms can create space to meet like-minded people, find community and forge friendships; however, it can also be toxic. Fandoms do not belong to any one type of people, but are as diverse in its compositions as the rest of the world. There will always be toxic people, misogynistic, homophobic, racist people in fandoms advocating and nurturing their point of views. *Toxic* environments are harmful to one's wellbeing and mental health, so it is important to acknowledge this; because even though fandoms can be an ideal environment for growing acceptance and diversity, we have to address what can be problematic as well. One has to be aware of the problem before anything can be done about it.

In a toxic fandom, there will be low support between the members, and fans will attack each other and argue amongst themselves. Toxic fans might even serve as gatekeepers, proclaiming to be the true fans, and others are just posing. A toxic fan is the equivalent of the abuser in an abusive relationship. They often use harsh language and act superior to others. They create an environment where people are afraid to voice their opinions in fear of being verbally abused for it. Even though safe spaces are being threatened in an environment that becomes polarized and sometimes harsh, the discussions and arguments also serves as educational. In this tension, behaviours, opinions and attitudes are being challenged.

Not many of my informants came into the fandom at such an early stage, but those who did remember it as being full of toxicity, up until the point where they did not want to be a part of it anymore. An informant who was a veteran in the Shadowhunters fandom, told me all about how toxic they felt the fandom was and how close they came to leave it altogether. What kept

them there were the good times whenever actors would post something on social media, act in another project or be in a magazine- something to connect over. “Everyone put aside their differences” and just enjoyed the time together, fawning over their favourite character or actor. Even though *Shadowhunters* is not airing anymore, the fans gather whenever one of its actors posts anything on social media.

What I have been able to gather from informants is that these disagreements were very complex and contained a number of elements. It was like a snowball rolling down a hill, starting small then gathering momentum and size as it went along.

I will try to give a short recap of what the strife was about, but it becomes simplified because the complexity could be a thesis subject on its own. In the *Shadowfam*, there were factions between Clace shippers and Malec shippers. *Shippers* are people who want a romantic relationship between two specific people. The characters and their flaws were, to an extensive degree, dismantled and analyzed. It is believed to have started with Malec shippers, constantly criticizing Jace. The Malec shippers spoke to how Jace chose Clary over his family, that he was being unsensitive towards Alec. Then Dominique Sherwood (the actor playing Jace) were caught on tape uttering a slur used against gay men, which amplified the situation. Then you add the dimension of the books, where Clace is the main couple, but in the show Malec got the most attention, there were fights on how much screen time each couple got, that Magnus and Alec got a wedding while Clary and Jace ended up being apart. There were a lot of toxicity that might have caused fans to leave the fandom altogether. After the show ended the ‘shipping wars’ died down as there was no more content, the fans still remaining slowly shifted their attention towards the different actors. Some chose to focus on Matthew Daddario, others on Katherine McNamara and so on. It helps in preventing drama, when one does not comment on something one is not a fan of

Why this becomes such an emotional issue might have several reasons, I have not been able to talk to enough informants from this time, as many have left the fandom. Which makes it hard for me to come with anything other than a guess. Perhaps Malec shippers needed to feel superior because LGBTQ+ couples have been wronged for so long, perhaps there is an intense feeling of wanting to protect Alec. Maybe it has nothing at all to do with LGBTQ+ matters. Maybe it is the urge to call out toxicity, or even cancel culture rearing its head to criticize everything that comes across as problematic. Or a combination of all of the above.

During this tension, a sense of how one should behave, the difference between right and wrong were discussed. The argument and bad blood between these two groups was a part of “normalizing an abusive narrative and language that included death threats.” When this happens, it makes it harder to have an open and inclusive community, which fans said was the foundation of the fandom. The comfort they drew from the content they got and when the fandom gathered in peace around it kept fans in the fandom. It was a turbulent time in my informants physical life, and Shadowhunters was an escape, as it was to so many others.

Despite this inner war between shippers, they still came together in the most spectacular way when they were faced with the cancellation of the show. Even though there were disagreements, the love for Shadowhunters came front and centre.

There is still the occasional dispute, even though the topics have changed from the Alec/Jace debacle. What is discussed now is not exclusive to Shadowhunters, but all fandoms in which fanfiction, and other fan-made content is produced. During my time in the fandom, there was some disagreement revolving around the fetishizing of Alec and Magnus in fanart and fanfiction. Some fans uttered discontent in the oversexualization of Malec, often by people not being in a same-sex relationship themselves. They stated that this made the fandom’s space feel uncomfortable because it made LGBTQ+ people feel fetishized.

7.3 Who are allowed to tell the LGBTQ+ Stories?

Most fandoms have fanfiction writers, and often characters of the same sex are paired together in romantic or sexual relationships and explored through the writing. Fanfiction writers often explore the sexual aspects of the Malec relationship, some with a storyline and others containing mostly sexual content. Which sparked some discontent amongst some fans, stating that it made men interested in other men feel uncomfortable and objectified in circles where Malec was being discussed in a sexualizing tone. The reason they gave was that the people writing these stories were often written by women and not men interested in sexual relations with the same sex, they stated it added to the (in this case) fetishizing of men in same-sex relationships.

The opponents, however, argued that fanfiction was a free space to explore one’s fantasies and share them with others of similar minds; censorship was not the right way to go and that

there is a difference between fiction and real life. There did not seem to be a clear line as to what was an ok context in which to write about sexual content, and who could do so, making matters more complicated. Where was the line between describing everyday life, which involves sexual relations and what they called “fetishism”? Were only people interested in romantic or sexual relationships with the same gender as themselves allowed to write about same-sex couples? If we are to follow this logic, the LGBTQ+ content will be severely decreased everywhere. If only people belonging to the community or being in a same-sex relationships are allowed to tell these stories, there will not be much content left as the majority of the entertainment industry are straight and cisgender. Also, if we do not include sex, we will only widen the gap in how same-sex and straight relationships are represented.

Through this exchange, who have the right to tell LGBTQ+ stories were discussed, as well as how far should we go to make sure others do not feel uncomfortable. There will always be disagreements, but in this tension, important subjects are being raised and challenged, such as the objectification of LGBTQ+ people in fanfiction and how we talk about those characters. Attitudes and behaviours are being discussed. Sadly, the argument became so heated that they lost objectivity and stopped listening to each other. As often happens when the discussion becomes too polarized.

7.4 How do we know what we do not know?

Knowledge of language alters the way we see ourselves and our place in the world around us. Finding out one’s feelings has a word, and that others feel the same way has a considerable impact. It is a perfect example of entertainment media being used for educational purposes. Even though it is not directly addressed in the show, the fandom knows and shares that knowledge.

Loving Shadowhunters is the doorway into the fandom, and fans use the language and symbolism learned through the show to explain, further develop, and examine their lives and identities. It is a part of making the space where we safely can play with identities and reflect on ‘the self’ in ways that do not fit the norm. Twitter as a platform plays an integral part in facilitating this as one can stay anonymous. What has only been scratched at the surface in the show is being analyzed and thoroughly discussed in the fandom. Because the series has such good LGBTQ+ representation, one might assume it will be an open and accepting community as well.

Furthermore, because fandom often overlaps with other interests since people are members of more than one group, information will circulate across boundaries. For instance, my Twitter Timeline has often shown discussions surrounding subjects outside the fandom. Especially discussions and information containing LGBTQ+ content, often it challenges gatekeeping and encourages us to be validating of each other. I have come across much art revolving around the different LGBTQ+ flags and their meanings- it has been quite educational.

It is a space that knows the language, and one does not have to explain to people who do not understand. An example of this is Marley who expressed exhaustion when they wrote how tired they were of explaining themselves to people who did not understand, or even respect what they said. If Marley came out to a friend that they identified as trans, Marley had to explain what it meant and how to relate to this respectfully, only to have it disregarded and trivialized. The people Marley told did not understand, and having to explain took its toll. Being in a fandom where LGBTQ+ were clearly represented made it easier as the community knew the language and understood the importance of being validated through using this language.

In this space, what one sends out is recognized and validated before it is sent back. This recognition is a necessary process; it is a part of what shapes our identity, as both Charles Taylor (1994) and Richard Jenkins (2014) have argued.

To have room to recharge one's energy is essential because having to constantly explain or even defend oneself is draining. Being in an understanding environment gives that energy as well as more resilience and perhaps even the gumption to keep educating others. Spreading the knowledge and making it widely known is a part of change.

It is not only the words to describe themselves which is being shared in these spaces. Fans get together after an episode to discuss what happened and its meanings. Even though *Shadowhunters* never used definitions such as gay, bisexual, lesbian, or asexual in the show, they are mentioned and discussed in the community. Language is being shared, challenged, adjusted, and distributed. We gain knowledge through language; this means we learn about ourselves and the world we live in. According to Hegel, knowledge is a cultural construct and "can't be seen as external or internal to human action. The same is true of the self: The quest

for authenticity is wholly a product of a particular worldview” (1967, referenced in Lindholm, 2007, p.50).

Language can often alter how we see or perceive the world around us. If we are to follow this train of arguments, then if language shifts our worldview even an inch, so will ‘the self’. Identity becomes fluid and changes based on the language we use to describe and understand ourselves. As an example of how language alters the perception of self, I want to mention Avis again.

Avis found out they were asexual through watching Shadowhunters and joining the fandom. They had faked attraction to people earlier in their life by nodding when their friend talked about it. They remember asking themselves what was wrong with them. Often, the discourse they were presented was “*you just haven’t been fucked right*” or “*you’re too picky*”. Avis has never been interested in relationships, never pictured their wedding or having kids, and people do not seem to understand this. People tell them it will change when they meet the right person. Up until watching Shadowhunters and the vampire Raphael, the asexual character they did not know there was a word for how they felt.

Raphael was discussed in the fandom, and Avis came across some fan art with him and the asexual flag and its term. Avis then decided to do some research on google and found that there was nothing wrong with them, and there is a whole community surrounding asexual people. They told me through our chat one day, “I guess it’s just easier to be when I actually know what I am and that there’s a word for it.”

One word changed Avis’ perception of self, finding language to explain their feelings, finding community and kinship. Knowledge is shared through language; what we feel in our bodies has to go through this needle-eye; sometimes, we do not have the vocabulary to express ourselves. That is one of the reasons language is dynamic; we are constantly trying to find the words to explain what we feel, what we see and perceive. One word then, can change our worldview and sense of self.

After the show, Avis talked to their mother and sister because they finally felt comfortable talking about it. Also, having the language to explain and the validity of the term and definitions might have helped.

Ariel, who has known for a while they are asexual, explained it as validating- finally having the representation that said, “We exist.” My informant Nova found the language revolving around asexuality after a while in the fandom. Their perception of self changed, leading to a lot of other questions regarding their identity and sexuality.

Through fandom spaces, Milan became acquainted with many people; some became closer than others. Through conversations with one of their acquaintances, Milan learned about asexuality and found that this fit them very well. After a while, talking with this person in private, Milan decided to come out publicly. Milan wrote a tweet where they informed the community about the asexuality spectrum and that they identified as asexual. This spiked a conversation in one of my DM groups, which led to two things. One was about what asexuality was; several members believed it was simply not being interested in sexual relations. The other was another one of my acquaintances questioning themselves. The conversation became an informative one, as well as challenging the boundaries of asexuality in peoples minds.

I asked Milan if they thought they would ever have found out they were asexual if it was not for the fandom, the answer was: “no”

Shadowhunters being a show containing diverse characters makes it clear that they will be friendly to this particular community. There is knowledge to be found here because other LGBTQ+ people will be attracted to the representation and share experiences, wisdom, thoughts, and struggles.

I have had several informants who figured out that they are asexual after joining the fandom, and I believe it is because asexuality has, up until recent years, had very low visibility. There has been little to no representation in media (as noted earlier, Shadowhunters were fifty percent of the existing representation), making asexuals symbolically annihilated.

The character who was asexual had a small part, and the term was never used. Information about asexuality is harder to come by unless one knows what to look for. If one searches the Internet for “I like all genders”, there will be information about bisexuality and pansexuality on top of the search page. However, if one writes “I do not want sex”, there would be many pages with how to increase the libido, that there might be health issues or articles on why the

passion in the relationship has faded. The narrative has for a long while been that if one did not want sex, there was something wrong, and one should take steps to increase the sex drive. After a quick google search, I have found a positive change; there are now more articles on asexuality; although it is evident that this is a new evolution, as they date from between 2018 until the present. Shadowhunters was first aired in 2016, even though they never used the term asexual in the show- the fandom discussed it and it was here fans learned about asexuality. I will elaborate on the importance of using terms and labels in media as some informants brought about the issue.

7.5 Identity and Labels

Some fans put to my attention that there was some discontent in the fandom when the creators chose not to use the LGBTQ+ terms in the show. Ali worded it to me in a conversation we had through a chat. Coming from a time when there was even less representation on television, they told me why it is so important to use the terms. They are bisexual themselves, though they make it clear they cannot speak for anyone else, just from their own perspective.

Circling back to the use of the terms, they noticed the words gay, bisexual, lesbian or asexual were never uttered in the show. It was always implied using euphemisms like “I’m not like that,” “who is dating a guy.”

“If someone didn’t know about asexuals they never would have gotten that’s what Raphael was alluding to. Magnus rattles off the genders of his past lovers, but never use the word bisexual. I thought it was the worst part of the show.” When I ask them why the use of the terms is so important, the answer is quite clear:

None of those words are offensive, except to homophobes of course. They should be used freely and openly. Queer people don’t want to be special, they just want to be. Until the words are just an everyday part of speech it sets us apart. And to people who may not have been raised with a lot of knowledge it gives names to what they may be feeling. It’s hard to believe, but a kid struggling to understand why they are attracted to both genders may not know that it’s bisexuality. Granted I’m a lot older and things have changed, but at fifteen I had no idea there was such a thing as bisexuality, hell, I was in my forties before I knew anything about asexuality.

After receiving this answer, I asked some of the other informants about their feelings regarding this issue. Milan had not noticed and therefore not given it any thought. However, they did add that they were surprised by it, and it felt “maybe cowardish.”

Delta also commented on the use of labels; they had noticed that Matthew Daddario used them only twice in interviews where he talked about “Alec’s struggles.” Delta found it weird that one cannot talk about it with the words needed. They know that some reject labels, but to them, they are freeing. When asked about it in a later conversation, Delta explained how there are pros and cons to them, but they mostly like them.

Fighting against homophobia and your family and societal expectations is hard, and when you realize you’re different [and] have to accept yourself, you have to think – well what am I? For me, it was gay. I took the label as a hard-won battle against my own fear and others to stake the ground and be proud of what I feel/who I am.

The language we use is imbued with meaning, and labels like this play an essential part in our identity-making. For us to understand ourselves through these words, we need to know of them and their meaning.

Casey, a parent, feels that representation is important because their kids need to see that it is ok to love whomever regardless of gender. They reflect around the usage of labels; on the one hand, they imagine it would be freeing to use them, but on the other hand, heterosexuals never have to “come out” or proclaim their sexuality because it is the default. One is heterosexual until proven otherwise.

It becomes clear that labelling is vital to many people, and it plays a big part in how one sees oneself and presents oneself to others. I want to mention Avis again; considering how important it was to find the label asexual, finding this term changed something for them. The feeling of not being ‘wrong’ somehow and that others out there felt the same things.

I wrote to creator Todd Slavkin, one of the showrunners, with questions surrounding this topic. I wanted to know if it was a conscious choice to keep the terms out of the show, and if so, why? I must admit I was surprised when an answer ticked in my DM a couple of weeks later. I have been permitted to quote him: “Hello! Your thesis sounds interesting. Not sure it

was a conscious decision not to use those terms, but I never like to put labels on anyone” (Todd Slavkin, November 28th, 2020).

Sexual labels have met a bit of controversy over the past few decades as more and more youths have rejected labelling because they find them restrictive. Research points to identity and sexual identity to be more fluid than previous understanding, and people change through the course of their life. Labels and stereotypes go hand in hand, and LGBTQ+ people will often find themselves pushed into a box that does not fit and is defined by others. People who avoid using labels, like Todd Slavkin, might not want to put people in these boxes, making them feel restricted. Labels might be subject to gatekeeping, leading to people feeling excluded or having to “perform” in a certain way to be accepted. Understandably, one would want to avoid this. Maybe Slavkin didn’t want to draw attention to this characteristic simply because their sexual orientation is not important, they are not the gay character, but a character that happens to be gay.

Still, these labels are being used, challenged, and redefined in spaces where people discuss them, such as fandom spaces. Russel, Clarke & Clary (2009) posted their findings in *Empirical Research*; they found that some people still identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Further they found that only “nineteen out of 2500 chose a more fluid label such as pansexual and/or curious/flexible”. (Russel, Clarke & Clary, 2009, p.888). As they point out, their studies have some limitations as they have used questionnaires on a small sample in the United States.

Labelling seems to be a part of the sexual identity process, which ends in it being integrated into our identity as a whole. We use terms to make sense of who we are and how to ‘explain’ ourselves to others. We use labels to identify our belonging to groups or categories. Sexual identity is, as Gross said, a ‘self-declaring’ one (Gross, 2001); it is not visible to us like race or gender.

Labelling may give us a sense of belonging, a shared history and culture, according to Delta. Nevertheless, to use these identity markers, one needs to know them, even though one chooses to reject them. To discuss and redefine their meaning, we need to use the terms, and perhaps this is why many feel it is important to use the words in the show. If one is not in the fandom where these things are being discussed, one will never know.

Nova said it best; “I never thought about those labels cause I was not raised that way, it’s a slow process of getting to know all about it. But it helps me to understand myself better.”

It is fascinating to see how asexual people have found these terms and their meanings after *Shadowhunters*, as they traditionally have not been talked about much inside the LGBTQ+ community either. What seems to be the common knowledge of the term asexual is a person not interested in sex at all. This is not the case, asexuality is a spectre, and the terms have become broader and more visible in later years.

Milan, who has known they were bisexual “since forever”, as I mentioned, only recently found out they were asexual as well. “Bisexuality is something that is widely understood and accepted. I didn’t know until this year that I am asexual, I just found out recently and thought I’m just weird (...).” If it had not been for *Shadowhunters* fandom, they might never have figured it out, Milan “thought as many others, that asexuality means not liking sex. So, I didn’t even consider it. I’m really happy I got to learn more about it and found myself not feeling ‘wrong’ anymore.”

Avis, who only found it in the fandom because someone else had recognized Raphael’s euphemisms and made fan art out of it. To all these people, it had a significant impact on the way they saw themselves.

To Nova, it meant a whole reevaluating of their sexual identity, “Once I was so sure I’m straight and all but not anymore. Figuring out what makes you love a person, that it’s probably not the gender nor the looks, it’s confusing to put it mildly.” In the fandom, Nova, amongst others, found people to learn from, to talk to about their feelings.

Ariel is another one that wished the show used the terms, to them having knowledge of them and what it means is vital. They state pretty clear their feelings about the subject; “it’s really dangerous to be asexual and to not know about that.”

This statement puzzled me because I did not understand how this can be a matter of safety; I have grown up in a society that talks openly about sex and a narrative that focuses on how women must find ways to protect themselves from sexual assault. Ariel asks, in an attempt to explain, “do you remember the first time, you looked in the mirror and thought, ‘Am I

beautiful? Am I attractive?’ This would be the time something changed, and one started to look at people not only as “somebody with a mind and soul, but somebody with a mind, soul and appearance.” Through this, one also learns that one can be desirable to someone else.

They continue;

You are 14-15 and everybody around you are thinking about sex and trying to have sex with you, but in your head, they are still boys with whom you were climbing up trees. You are still a child in your mind. You don’t read about that because you didn’t even think about that. You’re not afraid to go into an elevator with a random man.

According to Ariel, one will potentially put oneself in harm’s way because one does not understand that someone could be after sex. It is also an essential part of the context that Ariel comes from a highly patriarchal country where a common saying is “if a woman says no, it means yes.” Ariel did not start to think about the risks until they were fourteen and were invited to a friend who stated they were happy they dared visit them for tea.

Their mom told them nothing about sex or even menstrual periods, and after understanding that “sex is practically running the world, I forced myself to think about sex, about men and their danger.” They explained it as living in a fairytale where mind and soul meant everything, and they found out that it is actually sex that means the most, the pink glass walls came down. “I didn’t know I must protect myself. I was wandering through a battlefield without armour.”

These experiences can also be caused by a lack of education on how to keep safe from sexual assault. However, I find it important to point out even though it is beyond the scope of this thesis that the focus should be on men not committing sexual assault, this change in narrative has become slightly more common in western countries. Women should not be responsible for keeping themselves safe from sexual assault. Instead of teaching young girls how to wear bicycle shorts to make it harder for a potential rapist, we teach boys not to rape.

Ariel’s story made me think, nonetheless. My knowledge of how people around me perceive my body is based on how I myself ‘watch’ others. I am always aware of my body and where it is placed in its surroundings. To me, it is the default setting to keep myself safe. I was taught from an early age that others would desire my body, and some would not take no for an answer. If I lived in a society where it was not talked about and I did not have these sexual

feelings for others, I might be as naïve, innocent, and trusting as a child. Ariel, not being aware of sexual desire because they were asexual and felt non themselves might have led to them ending up in possibly dangerous situations. By choosing to put asexual representation on screen, *Shadowhunters* were a part of informing people about it through the fandom. But not everyone becomes part of a fandom and could miss out on the information when it is not explicitly used on the show itself. People who prefer no labels can easily denounce them. Not knowing and feeling “wrong” would be worse. In extreme cases, knowing about asexuality might even be vital to someone’s safety.

Using the labels, it becomes even more critical to portray more variety, be more accurate, and not fall into the trap of using only stereotypes. We know that stereotypes might be harmful and limiting. We know that entertainment media is used for educational purposes and viewed as a reflection of the world. As Gross reminds us: “How much do we really know about the world beyond our immediate surroundings that doesn’t come to us via the media?” (Gross, 2001, p.1). Representation is crucial in so many ways, but most of all, it helps us to know ourselves, finds role models, gains recognition, and learning empathy. A show that provides this knowledge would be worth fighting for, no? A show that helps one learn new things about oneself, challenges and represents you. Even though some issues still need working on, fans love Magnus and Alec and the relationship they share.

I have mentioned earlier the benefits representation has on a person and how we gather around media entertainment to create a community; even though the LGBTQ+ representation plays a considerable part, other fans have different things that mean more to them. Paisley wrote, that to them, the fact that *Shadowhunters* flipped the gender norms in many ways was what made it stand out to.

7.6 Gender Roles and Portrayals in *Shadowhunters*

Julia Wood (1994) states that of all the influences, media is the most powerful and persuasive one regarding how we see men and women. Many of the images we are shown “perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical and limiting perceptions” (Wood, 1994, p.231). The most obvious is that women are underrepresented. According to research done by the Geena Davis Institute in 2015, only twenty-three percent of protagonists were played by women. They accounted for twenty-one percent of the dialogue, and “for every one visible woman, there were 2.24 visible men” (Ford, 2019, p.81).

Women have had a tradition of being portrayed as sex objects, and they are thin, beautiful, passive, and dependent. Whereas men are portrayed as active, adventurous, powerful, sexually aggressive, in charge of every emotion, and above all, in no way feminine (Wood, 1994). I want to bring up the eighties' TV-show *Cagney and Lacey*, which I mentioned in the literature review, as an example again. These two women were initially written as independent and as taking their job seriously. It took the writers six years to sell the show – and then only after they had “subdued” the characters. The Producer complained that they were not soft enough; they were not feminine enough. Male executives kept forcing writers “to make the characters softer, more tender and less sure of themselves” (Wood, 1994, p.233).

This show aired several decades ago, and the portrayal of women has changed somewhat. However, according to Ford (2019) strong female characters today are two-dimensional. She writes that for a female character, “her strength is all too often about hitting the right notes to make male viewers desire her and female viewers feel validated by her” (Ford, 2019, p.82). But at some point, the female character will need her male counterpart to save her and remind her its ok to get help. One of my informants tells me this is not the case when it comes to *Shadowhunters*, quite the contrar. Clary saves Jace. She gets to be the one who drives the plot forwards, who acts- sometimes without thinking about the consequences. According to Paisley, she gets to have characteristics usually reserved for the male character.

Even though it has changed a bit for how women are portrayed, the portrayal of men has stagnated. They are often portrayed as having control over their emotions and seldom get to show their softer side. Paisley explained it well in a message to me:

Jace Herondale who is the ultimate hero. He is the whitest of white saviors, on paper. Except that's not what the show praises him for. In fact, multiple times that's his biggest downfall. Simon⁷ jokes that he's Captain America and again in season one he was because in the books he is. But then the show found its feet and guts and realized the strength Jace has comes from being vulnerable and broken beyond belief. Beyond what you think he is able to deal with or repair. But he does because he asks for help. Because he doesn't give up. And because he allows his female companion to be his strength and his savior. Again, that does not normally happen on television, because

⁷ A side-character in the show, Clary's best friend.

it's always the male that saves the female. The male that's strong. Shadowhunters didn't do that.

This character was allowed to be in contact with their emotions and finds support and strength in vulnerability. Something Wood claimed were seldom showed; she wrote that men were portrayed as being "largely uninvolved in human relationships" (Wood, 1994, p.232), and men are rarely presented caring for others. Delta has a similar opinion as they pointed out that Shadowhunters fought toxic masculinity in that it showed two men who are best friends, soldiers to boot but still allowed to cry, hug, and show love for each other.

Delta shares their thought around the subject, as women and men are often told it is impossible to be friends because there will always be sexual tension, so has the gay/straight male friendship. In their experience, single straight men are seldom friends with gay men, which is why Delta loves Jace and Alec's relationship. It is this close friendship; they are soulmates, and never does their sexuality come between them.

Paisley had a similar thought. Jace and Alec who are typical alpha male, leader-type men; and they are allowed to cry and show emotions and they hug each other and be there for each other in a completely platonic way that I can't think of a single other show that would allow this, without either having them end up together, or drift apart because the sexual incompatibility is JUST TOO MUCH.

The representation we are presented with through media limits our perception of human possibilities and have us live up to unattainable standards. In some regard fans feel that Shadowhunters has challenged the typical gender roles. Men who often are portrayed as super macho, emotionally unavailable and cold are allowed to show vulnerability.

According to Paisley, Alec gets to be the heart of the story; something men are seldom allowed to be.

The fact that Alec, Jace and Magnus have some of the most in-depth emotional arcs on the show is amazing and simply not something we see very often. The fact that Jace turns to Alec for emotional support even before he turns to Clary is beautiful and so different from anything most media has taught us

It is interesting to mention that the main protagonist who drives the plot forward is a woman. Paisley is very passionate about this and has given it some careful thought:

Male characters are allowed to be headstrong, they make rash decisions to achieve their goals, they fight monsters, and all of their decisions and actions are what moves the plot along. Female characters give them emotional centres and give them a reason to fight. Male characters are celebrated for making rash decisions taking action, throwing themselves headfirst into danger. If a female character acts the same way, she is vilified for it.

Through my conversations with several fans, I have seen that some do not like Clary, the show's female protagonist. She has been described as a "spoiled brat", "doing what she likes without a care in the world", "selfish", "not respecting the rules" Some found her more likeable after as she grew as a person.

The show is talking to a generation that emphasizes their feelings and mental health, a generation that wants to keep smashing the patriarchy and toxic masculinity. To be given examples of gender and sexuality that differ from the norms gives youth and adults examples of other ways to be; it may even lead to some soul-searching and questioning of one's own identity, as I have seen happen several times. It is interesting to see not only youths are attracted to the show, but older people as well, and several of the ones who have started questioning themselves are at a more mature age.

By showing men being allowed to be vulnerable and showing emotions, showing healthy friendships across sexualities and genders would change attitudes among people and hopefully make a more accepting environment. By shattering toxic masculinity, we would have more acceptance for LGBTQ+ people. The root of toxic masculinity is that they should in no way or form show any feminine traits, which emotions are categorized as. They are not allowed to relate to their emotions or show them.

7.7 Learning from Past Mistakes

Even the mistakes become important as fans discuss the differences in the portrayal of straight people versus LGBTQ+ people. I have previously written about disagreements within the fandom but will now focus on the fans challenging the show itself.

Ali had some strong opinions on this subject. First off, they criticize Freeform for how they handle LGBTQ+ people. Even though their slogan is “a little bit forward”, it does not make itself visible in how they portray Queer characters. “On most of their shows, there are mostly the same tropes. The cheating bisexual, the promiscuous gay and the masculine lesbian. They are simply side characters that is only used to drive a plotline forward then shuffled off until needed again.” If this is the case, the network responsible for *Shadowhunters* has not come much further since Larry Gross wrote about this in his book in 2001.

According to Ali, *Shadowhunters* broke this mould, but they believe it was thanks to the creators and showrunners more than the network itself. Still, Ali found some concerning differences between how Malec was shown as a couple versus the straight couples such as Clary and Jace. The lighting contrast between Malec intimate scenes versus the straight couples on the show was noticeable. Malec was often filmed from a distance, with inanimate objects coming in front of the shot. In my literature review, I mentioned this ‘trick’ being used on the first-ever lesbian kiss shown on television in 1991. According to Larry Gross, it was so dark in that scene it was barely noticeable. Avis, however, pointed out that it is a fantasy show after all, and the lighting pictured the atmosphere, so it is not a consensus in the fandom even though it is a running joke that the true villain of the show was the lighting.

Ali noticed we rarely see Alec touching Magnus in any intimate way or below the upper chest. In contrast, we often see Clary and Jace softly stroking each other up close. For example, Ali bring up the Malec balcony scene; they sit out on the balcony on a couch, the only parts touching are their lips. Ali describe it as ‘awkward looking.’ They do not understand why physical contact was such a problem; “I guess they wanted a queer couple but did not want people to think of them as sexual.” This statement coincides with the research done by Raley and Lucas (2006), where there was still noted a reluctance to same-sex couples in a sexual setting. LGBTQ+ people are portrayed in fewer sexual encounters than their straight counterparts.

Through my interviews, I learned that the writers of the show chose to listen to their fans. Fans pointed out Shadowhunters had already shown explicit sexual scenes between Clary and Jace, as well as Isabell and other male presenting characters, so why not Magnus and Alec? The first time Malec were to have sex, the scene only saw them kissing before they went into the room, and it ended with the shot of a closed door. This feedback gave Slavkin and Swimmer something to think about. Later in the show, there is a throwback scene where Magnus reminisces about their first time, which is now more explicit. They also include another training scene with some heavy kissing. The fans wielded what power they had, used their voices, and came out loud and clear.

Todd Slavkin wrote a book on his time working with Shadowhunters; he wrote that he decided against Alec cheating on Magnus because he was made aware of the fandoms rage should he choose to do so.

After his nasty fight with Magnus, Alec would get drunk and bump into Underhill at - where else- the Hunters Moon⁸. There was much discussion about how far their flirtations should go. My instinct was that drunken Alec should make a grave mistake and lock lips with the man, but I was luckily persuaded by my colleagues that the Malec fans would riot (Slavkin, 2020).

Slavkin once again showed that he was sensitive to the fandom and the responsibility representation brought with it.

Through interviews, I learned that the showrunners` respect and sensitivity towards the fans opinions increased their loyalty and love for the show. The majority of people working in television are straight and cisgender, making the authentic experience of LGBTQ+ people harder to come by. When a person with power, such as Todd Slavkin, chooses to listen to the marginalized voice this has an impact. There becomes less use of stereotypes and adds more complexity to the characters when people with real lived experiences are being heard. Not to mention the distinction between how LGBTQ+ people and straight people are being showed on screen lessen.

⁸ The the name of a bar in the show.

8 Fandom Activism and Staying Relevant

Henry Jenkins has focused on fan activism in recent years. In 2016 he published a book in collaboration with Mizuko Ito and Danah Boyd, where they discuss civic and political engagement through fandom.

In the book, Jenkins defines *Civic Imagination* as the relationship between “acts of the imagination and the origins of the political consciousness” (Jenkins, 2016, p.152). To be able to make a change, we must see making change as possible and feel empathy. These factors increase through watching popular media, and even if the movie or show fails to live up to its own values, it sets a “context where fans could debate what it would mean to live in a more diverse society” (Jenkins, 2016, p.153). We have seen this happen in the Shadowfam fandom, challenging the creators in the way they showed a same-sex couple versus a straight couple.

They found more and more young people express their political visions from the language in popular media, using the same symbolism from their favourite show. For instance, would the Malec ship be a symbol for gay rights and normalizing LBGQTQ+ relationships. For example, they chose to show Alec and Magnus getting married – something which only became legal in the United States in 2015, the year before *Shadowhunters* was released on television.

They go on to list five ways to conduct participatory politics that were worked out by the YPP network.⁹ Cohen and Kahne define it as “interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence forms of participatory politics” (as cited in Jenkins, 2016, p.155). Their tools consist of sharing information on social media, being active and engaging through social media, blogs, podcasts, and the like. They also mention creating content such as online videos or memes that comment on a particular issue, using social media such as Twitter to rally communities to act, and building databases to investigate a concern (Jenkins, 2016).

⁹ The MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics formed out of the recognition that youth are critical to the future of democracy and the digital age is introducing technological changes that are impacting how youth develop into informed, engaged, and effective actors (Youth participatory politics network, w.y)

Good examples of this are when Shadowhunters fans use their platform to engage their followers in causes such as Black Lives Matter, and joining the #ProudBoys action in order to flood Twitter with LGBTQ+ friendly content. At the first presidential debate in 2020, the current president Trump told the Proud Boys¹⁰ to “*stand back and stand by*,” when he was asked if he would condemn white supremacists. In a creative protest, people posted photos of gay men in romantic embraces or similar images flooding Twitter using the hashtag Proud Boys. The actor Luke Baines¹¹ tweeted Malec kissing in the season one wedding, writing “drown the noise” and the tag #ProudBoys (see photo 2).

The fandom picked this up, and both shared this tweet and made their own. Baines’ tweet was when I checked it on October 5th shared 1,9 thousand times as well as being liked 14,5 thousand times. The comments were overflowing with supportive comments and the Shadowhunters tag, often accompanied by a photo or gif of Malec (see photo 3). This act is an example of how the fandom used the symbols from Shadowhunters to show their political views. It was an act of activism where they took Malec outside of the boundaries of the fandom—putting them as galleon figures for the cause.

They were also active in the #BlackLivesMatter campaign, which hit social media again full force after the killing of Georg Floyd. There was no Malec on my Twitter timeline, and many of the stan accounts tweeted about what happened in the United States. The fans also demanded that the actors use their platforms to talk about the movement and share how one could help the cause.

They use these tools in their fight to save the show as well, which is their primary goal. Nevertheless, by doing this, they also push LGBTQ+ acceptance by using the language from the fandom, which is diversity, family, and acceptance.

As I have mentioned earlier, fans engage in other matters that will show up in their tweets, and through that, the fandom learns that there is still much discrimination against this

¹⁰ A far-right group for white men who engages in political violence. They are known for anti-Muslimism and misogynistic rhetoric. The Proud Boys stage frequent rallies around the United States. Many have descended into violent street riots where members openly brawl with counterprotesters (SPLC Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016)

¹¹ Played one of the villains on Shadowhunters

community in the world. When Hungary passed the law banning LGBTQ+ promotion, several fans from the country spread the word on Twitter, encouraging the fandom to act in solidarity, sign petitions and spread awareness.

When the campaign to save the show was at its highest, social media, Twitter primarily, were used to keep the fans informed and engaged in the stunts planned and executed. Artists used their skills to draw cartoons to accompany campaigns and design banners and make videos. Avis was one of the artists who drew the characters and put them out to the fandom in an act to collect money.

They would donate to a cause such as The Trevor Project, take a screenshot of the donation they made, and then receive a drawing or be in the pool to be picked. A fanfiction writer also used this method to collect money for causes such as Black Lives Matter and other charities or civil matters. A very popular fanfiction writer posted on their Twitter profile that they would write a new chapter in a Malec fic when someone sent them a screenshot of their donation to the selected cause.

Henry Jenkins himself puts it like this; “One of the things that experience within participatory culture provides these young activists is an understanding of how to get attention for their causes and how to circulate content effectively so that it reaches the right people and enter larger conversations.” (Jenkins, 2016, p.170). Fandoms are often a gateway into activism, and through campaigns to save their shows, they gain much experience that can be used later.

Several of the Shadowhunters fan accounts have thousands of followers, and they reach out to many people, trendy fan artists, and fanfic writers also have a lot of followers. These accounts often use their platforms to spread awareness of causes that they themselves engage in or the actors they fan over. Harry Shum Jr especially engaged in political issues, and he encouraged people to vote and work against Asian hate. When his birthday came around, a handful of fans raised money for one of his charities as a birthday present. Not only do fans support issues of the actors they follow, but they also demand they use their platforms to engage in current events. It goes both ways.

Making spaces for LGBTQ+ content to be discussed has a massive impact on the individual life. Ariel and Ali point out representation in media are important because it spreads

knowledge. They keep expanding the Shadowhunters space by gaining visibility, drawing attention, and gaining new fans with their continued campaigning.

8.1 Twitter Tags and Visibility

It has been over two years now since Shadowhunters aired its last episode; still, there is an impressive engagement in the fandom. Even though many of the people remaining has changed their focus from Shadowhunters to the actors, there is still much content around the show.

The Twitter account '*Fan Screening*' keeps track of what is trending in the TV category; they post their findings every day with a 'top ten list'. On April 4th, the Global Shadowhunters account posted a tweet stating the hashtags have been trending every day in the twenty-five months after the official cancellation announcement. On July 31st this year, Shadowhunters were on top once again as #1, to the excitement of the fans who retweeted *Fan Screening*'s list saying, "We did it again," "we're *still here*."

At the beginning of 2021, the Marvel franchise released a string of high-budget shows that topped the trending list; still, Shadowhunters remained. Other shows have come and gone on that list, usually, series that are still airing, none have been as consistent as Shadowhunters. On July 9th, *Loki*, a highly acclaimed show, is #1, Shadowhunters is at #2 and *Save Shadowhunters* on #3. Not only are they trending with one tag, but with two, and seeing Shadowhunters side by side with several Marvel shows says something about the dedicated fans and their reach.

Accounts are doing hashtag boosts by encouraging fans to tweet. One account has started collaborating with other cancelled shows to sign each other's petition and use the tags. Fans add the tags to their tweets, as well as retweeting other people using them. I often found the tweets where I asked questions retweeted but not commented upon.

Most of the time, the tweets contain photos from the show, and even though the other characters are represented, I have found that there is a majority of Alec and Magnus photos. This signalizes an acceptance of LGBTQ people and signifies safe spaces for the community. It shows a lot of support and love for these characters who do not necessarily fit into the norm for gender and sexuality.

There is not much activity surrounding these tweets used mainly to boost the tags; they are often just liked or retweeted. Nevertheless, if someone posts their art and uses the tags, there will be more praise and support for the artist. I believe this is because these kinds of tweets are not only meant to boost the tags, but they are also personal and something to connect around.

Additionally, someone who is out to boost the tags will post many tweets consecutively. Twitter has a maximum number of tweets one can post over a certain period, something Delta was made painfully aware of. Their competitive instinct kicked in, and they wanted Shadowhunters to trend, so Delta did exactly that. This tweeting spree resulted in Delta being banned for twenty-five days. Even though they still tweet photos and does their part to keep the tags trending, they never reached that limit again, fearing being banned once more.

Every so often, a Network or streaming service will Tweet a question of which show people would like to see revived; Netflix was one of those streaming services. Eight months ago, Netflix Life posted a list of eleven cancelled shows fans wanted to be revived. Shadowhunters were explicitly mentioned as “one of two shows the fans are most interested in” (Olin, 2020). They write about the massive campaign to save the show, but Netflix sadly passed on saving it. When a question like this is posted on Twitter, fans will usually retweet it with the tags to spread the word and leave a comment. Still, there would be some discontent when the question was asked again and again without anything being done about it.

There are still Tweets that encourage networks and streaming services to ‘save’ their show and use any opportunity they get. When Freeform was trying to motivate viewers to vote in the 2020 United States elections using the tags #FFingvote and #Kick2020InTheBalls, fans would retweet them and add a quote demanding they save Shadowhunters. They would add the Shadowhunters tags as well as tagging Freeform, Netflix and Constantin Film.

By retweeting tweets with other tags, they would reach a larger audience outside the usual Shadowhunters tags and perhaps get more attention and interest around the show. It will also stretch the bounds of the Shadowhunters space, perhaps leading to curious people looking into these spaces. Since tweets often are accompanied by photos of Malec, it shows they are LGBTQ+ friendly.

Another byproduct of all this tweeting is the visibility a same-sex relationship gets; it normalizes it. The more we see something, the more used to it we get and the less sensational it becomes.

The fact they kept two tags alive for so long is quite impressive, but I noticed a slight decline in the Save Shadowhunters tag as it always were under the Shadowhunters tag on the top ten list. I decided to write a tweet in the hopes of figuring it out. I was soon made aware that it was connected to what I have mentioned earlier; if the show were to be revived, they wanted the same cast and crew as before. Some of the fans felt like they had moved on to other projects and would not be available to return to the show.

8.2 Campaigning

Amory, someone who has been a part of a couple of group accounts working to save the show, told me they are fighting for the show and changing the industry. To be able to have more of an influence on what is being shown, there should be more consideration to the impact show has on people. “Emotions can’t be measured in money.”

Scientists have also begun to suggest that the traditional Nielson ratings might not be the best way to measure viewers. Napoli and Kosterich (2017) advocate for a change in their article on the subject.

An exposure-focused approach to television audiences produces a narrower set of hits, allowing fewer types of programs, from a more limited range of sources, to emerge as successful. When, however, a hit is redefined in terms of the amount of social media conversation and activity that it inspires, the diversity of the types and sources of hit programs expands significantly (Napoli & Kosterich, 2017).

In other words, the diversity of shows is a lot narrower when we use traditional ways of measuring viewers, and since most networks are out to make money, they cancel shows that do not score high on the ratings. This means that we might lose shows that engage viewers more on platforms such as social media, like Shadowhunters. Nielson and Kosterich conclude:

(...) if social TV analytics establish themselves as an influential source of information in decision making related to programming and (perhaps most important) the

allocation of advertising dollars, then this alternative, more fan-centric approach to audience measurement could have a diversifying effect on the industry as a whole (...) (Napoli & Kosterich, 2017).

In changing the way we measure viewers, such as adopting social TV analytics¹², fandoms would wield more power over decisions, and which shows we value.

The groups Marley were a part of targeted the media; in particular, they wrote to networks, managed to set up a massive billboard outside Constantine Film's offices in Munich with the text "What are you willing to risk to save the world." Something they felt spoke to both the campaign to save the show and what the show itself was about. The other group had another angle; they wanted to gather money to make a movie or a renewal. They saw this would be hard because of the rights of the show and the difficulty in obtaining them. Even though many members have moved on, both accounts manage to keep active and boost the tags. Marley's groups were not the only ones gathering to organize themselves to impact the fight more significantly. All over the world, fans were organizing to develop ways to make themselves visible in the hopes it would make the executives see the show's potential.

The most momentum was straight after the announcement of the cancellation. Fans immediately started to organize and think of ways to fight the decision and have their show saved. There were gatherings of small groups worldwide throwing out ideas and collecting money for those ideas. It soon became apparent that a unified front would have the most impact, and I contacted one group that worked towards this goal.

They were in contact with other groups advocating targeting key locations, as it would be the best way to go. Highlighting a random city would lead to less payoff than focusing on Toronto (where they were filming), New York and Los Angeles. "Our mission was to hit with the most bang for our buck, and also that it was from the entire fandom."

Not only did they aim to coordinate the fandom, but they were a part of several stunts themselves. A lot of time and planning went into these events, and they even had a "plan to

¹² Social Tv analytics utilize a form of 'web scraping' in which the conversations posted on a wide range of social media platforms are aggregated and classified via language processing and classification algorithms and/or the use of program-specific hashtags. (Napoli & Kosterich, 2017)

post about them, graphics and pre-written tweets, we'd manage the social media channels in shifts." One of the group members said, "I definitely spent more time with [another group member] at 3am than I saw my own family."

Research, time, and dedication fans put into this work were monumental. Their actions clearly stated how much they loved their show, and it meant a lot to them. The New York Comic-Con 'takeover' alone took much planning, designing the merchandise, buying them, and having them shipped to New York, then they had to find someone to hand it out, all of this work they managed in shifts. At San Diego Comic-Con, they had organized bikes and handouts, one of the members of this group messaged me a fun fact:

"Fun fact about the SDCC, we only had the pedicabs and bike posters, no panels etc and we were one of the top five talked about/tweeted about shows during the weekend."

The San Diego Comic-Con is a huge convention and can boast of attendees such as A-list actors Angelina Jolie, Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman, Selma Hayek, Ted Danson- and that was just for the line-up for the 2019 comic-con. It is pretty impressive to have Shadowhunters as the most talked-about show. It also reflects on the amount of effort the fans have put into promoting it.

They took Shadowhunters with visible and important LGBTQ+ representation and made it huge—again, expanding and even advertising an LGBTQ+ friendly space with Malec at the wheel.

During our chats representation did come up, "they called themselves an inclusive network and LGBTQ+ friendly, but they cancelled the only show that actually was LGBTQ+ friendly and promoted ones that showed negative portrayal." later, they added; "Shadowhunters actually had characters (and cast) that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual and straight and has amazing representation not usually seen in media." To this, another member comments:

I'm bi but growing up had zero understanding of what that meant. There was no representation anywhere in mainstream media, except fetishized version of cheaters and threesomes. While my life is my life now and has many positive aspects, I will always wonder how things would be if I understood myself at a younger age."

This conversation attests to what I have been writing earlier. Representation in the show is a huge deal to the fans, especially since there are so little of it to find in the media entertainment business. It is not only important to people identifying with the LGBTQ+ community but also to allies.

I'm straight but have been a supporter of equal rights since the early 2000s. I support our local community and the Trevor Project personally. I've had friends die from aids in the early 90ties and hated the whole world a little during that time.

The representation seems to play a direct part in why they were fighting so hard to save Shadowhunters. One of the members writes, "I don't think we would have gone as far as we did for just a show. I've loved and lost many TV shows. There are very few tv shows on the air which bypass stereotypes, and while Shadowhunters wasn't perfect in that respect, it was better than most."

Imagine the message this dedication sends; a series with good representation is worth fighting for. It goes to show that there is a demand for a more diverse casting in our entertainment. Characters who do not fit the norm are loved and accepted. Networks need to take heed of this strong message.

8.3 Acts of Resistance, Social Change and "*the Power of Malec*"

Resistance is a term widely used, and its definitions varies. What is viewed as resistance is often actions of some kind, be it through our words and advocating, educating ourselves and others, or simply signing a petition or walking in a demonstration. Of course, there must be some kind of power imbalance, and in this case, the fans are the so-called 'powerless' while the networks and executives are the power.

Even though some scientists (see Rubin, 1996) claim that resistance needs to be recognized as such in order to be legitimate, it does not necessarily matter if it's recognized or not. As long as they are in some form opposing or challenging the status quo, be it through education, fictional worlds that doesn't play into the heteronormative or gender roles, or proudly making and displaying LGBTQ+ inspired artwork. The result is the same, acceptance for people not fitting in the norm, be it recognized or not. Posting artwork where same-sex couples are in a hot embrace is in and on itself resisting heteronormativity, regardless of intention. Fandoms,

especially *Shadowhunters*, who have several canon LGBTQ+ characters, are flooded with creations like this

Those acts “that chip away at power in almost imperceptible ways” (Hollander & Einwöhner, 2004, p541) are just as important when it comes to change as the big collective acts. Change takes time, especially when it comes to norms. Engaging in these small actions, eroding the structures, and making them wobble, one will have a better chance of tipping them over with those big actions.

Fans educate themselves through fandom, meet others who have lived those experiences, ask questions, challenge terms, and spread knowledge- all these small actions are part of a bigger picture. Evolving how we see gender and sexuality and making it ‘mainstream.’ Fandoms also traditionally create and consume fan-made products such as fanfiction, fanart, memes, gif’s, fanvideos and the like; through this, they challenge the norms by writing diverse stories about the characters.

The fandom’s main objective is saving the show, but a byproduct of these actions is making *Shadowhunters* visible, attracting new viewers and fans. Once inside the fandom, engaging in discussions, producing, or consuming fan-made products is not mainly to educate, or in any other form, partake in resistance. Nevertheless, it happens non less; no matter the intent, the result is the same.

The *Shadowhunters* fandom engages in two kinds of resistance, overt resistance where the act is intended as resistance, it is recognized as resistance by the target and observer. And unwitting resistance, which is not intended as resistance, and is recognized as resistance by both target and observer. (Hollander & Einwöhner, 2004). The campaign to save the show was recognized both by the target and observer and intended as resistance, thereby classified as ‘overt resistance.’ The education, sharing, and consumption of fan-made content that defies norms are not intended as resistance, and there is no tangible target. However, some will still feel threatened as they defy gender roles and the heteronormative. As it is also visible to observers such as social scientists, this type of resistance can be classified as ‘unwitting resistance.’

The goal of the resistance is social change, and hopefully a positive one. A huge advantage in working for change is to be able to visualize it, see it, and imagine it. As Henry Jenkins points out, this is one of the strengths of entertainment media and fandom. Jenkins claims that civic imagination, which he defines as “the capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions” (Jenkins, 2020, p.5). It is necessary to be able to change the world, as one cannot change it without imagining an alternative first. A television show can reveal to us how an inclusive, open-minded and diverse society might look like. We know youths` especially those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, use this form of media to learn because other sources are not available to them. Through education and knowledge, small shifts towards a more understanding world become more attainable, and what influences us more than popular media? Genders and sexuality become more visible in the public debate; the language evolves in open and free spaces where they are challenged. We use this language to better understand and explain ourselves, from making space to share and discuss, expanding those spaces, opposing and challenging the norms, and finally making more extensive societal changes. Making the alternatives to the norms widely known and accepted- recognized.

Even though the goal was to save Shadowhunters, the mere act of advocating for an LGBTQ+ friendly television series, is a part of the more significant LGBTQ+ cause. By campaigning for the show, it reaches many people and new fans.

9 Conclusion

Shadowhunters has meant so much to so many people, it has been an escape, an inspiration, a source for community and knowledge, and hope for a better world. Shadowhunters was a trailblazer as well when it put more than one LGBTQ+ character in the plot, when it showed LGBTQ+ people of colour, by having a bisexual man, by shattering significant stereotypes, and by casting actors who belongs to the community. Fighting with all they got, the Shadowfam showed that there is a place for LGBTQ+ television; there is a dedicated audience out there ready to pledge their loyalty and love.

The fight of the past has been to surpass symbolic annihilation and demand recognition for our existence in the world. This fight is not over – there are still groups that are subject for symbolic annihilation, and we need representation for them as well. For example, as I have argued, asexual people are still grossly underrepresented in media.

Fandom gives us a place to discuss the issues brought up by a TV show, Shadowhunters gave us the opportunity to gain so much knowledge. Through this community individuals have become more comfortable in their own bodies, understood their feelings, and found recognition and understanding. We've gained understanding and respect for people living a different truth than ourselves. Shadowfam has been and continues to be a safe space, even though this community, as most others, have had its disagreements and difficulties. The fandom spreads knowledge opens for discussion among people with different backgrounds, and boosts resilience in people who might need it in their everyday lives.

Being able to see themselves reflected on the screen made them feel validated and seen, especially for asexual people who have been pretty much anonymous in both the public at large as well as LGBTQ+ communities. The characters become role models for us to look up to, and the TV series gives us a platform to imagine what change would look like. Combine these, and one has a potent cocktail that translates into investment and dedication.

Fandom can be a place where one feels it is safe to be oneself. It is a space where one can learn and experiment with identity in a way that offline life will not let you. Social media amplifies the fandom by facilitating a way to be anonymous and connect across boundaries of any kind. Of course, fandom is not a utopia; no matter how much one wishes it to be, there is

always something to shatter the ideal. Nevertheless, we also learn from this because, in these tensions where we disagree, we challenge our points of view and gain new knowledge.

Fans worldwide meet in this space they have created; as they discuss the show's content, personal experiences also emerge. Through fandom activism, where the goal is to save their show, the fans also learn to engage in civic and political matters. People become more aware of how things are in other countries, develop empathy for their causes, and are willing to help each other spread awareness and take action through online activism.

The fandom is still going strong today, defying the networks by being active and showing they are still here. They keep pushing the boundaries and making themselves visible. Using symbolism from the show, they stay steadfast. The fact that they are topping Twitter trending lists in August 2021- two years after the last episode aired, tells me that the industry needs to reevaluate which shows they deem worthy.

Gross (2001) suggests that Networks operate “at the edge of cultural change not too far in front of most people (especially those in their target audience), but not too far behind either” (Gross, 2001, p.258). In other words, they tend to stay in a safe zone, in which they are working within the boundaries of cultural change, instead of pushing them. Media have the power to influence human behaviour as we gain a lot of our knowledge through the consumption of their content. If Networks could shed old notions of relying solely on viewing numbers as a measure of success for a show, they have potential to be at the very frontiers, breaking glass ceilings. If they used their power to show a wider variety of possibilities, it could change attitudes, and perhaps, we would get a more tolerant world. Increasingly fandoms are changing the game; being loud and vocal in their demands, explicitly letting the Networks know what they want. When it seems the ones in power are not listening, fandoms take matters into their own hands, changing the world in their own way. Little, by little they spread knowledge and acceptance, through the symbolism of their favorite show, *Shadowhunters*.

“Shadowhunters is like the symbol of change. The symbol of the society changing its mind” - Ariel

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Appendix



(Photo1) The plane flying past Netflix HQ with the Save Shadowhunters banner. Posted by Basic Shadowhunters Stuff on Twitter



(photo 2) Actor Luke Baines (has 51,1 thousand followers) contribution to the #ProudBoys takeover. Added is a photo of Malec's first kiss scene.



(Photo 3) An article posted by UNILAD (has 193,9 thousand followers) posted on Twitter. Adding the photo of Malec's first kiss.



(Photo 4) Actor Jack Yang on one of the Save Shadowhunters pedicabs outside the San Diego Comic-con. Posted on the Twitter account Boom Bitches



(Photo 5) Actor Kathrine McNamara in front of one of the Save Shadowhunters Billboards. Posted on the Twitter account Boom Bitches



(Photo 6) A screenshot of one of actor Jade Hassoune's post. In the photo is actor Emerald Toubia with a box of cupcakes sent to them by the fandom. Posted on the Twitter account "Boom Bitches"



(Photo 7) Save Shadowhunters billboards on
Posted on the Twitter account “Boom Bitches”



(Photo 8) Save Shadowhunters poster on a
double decker bus in London. Posted by
Basic Shadowhunters Stuff on Twitter.

