Transformative Works and Cultures, No. 20 (September 15, 2015)

Editorial
TWC Editor, Editorial: Works in Progress

Theory
Rebecca Wanzo, African American acafandom and other strangers: New genealogies of fanstudies
Kathryn Hemmann, Queering the media mix: The female gaze in Japanese fan comics
Anne Gilbert, What we talk about when we talk about bronies
J. Richard Stevens & Christopher E. Bell, (Re)examining the attitudes of comic book storepatrons

Praxis
Misty Krueger, The products of intertextuality: The value of student adaptations in a literature course
Lise Dilling-Hansen, Affective fan experiences of Lady Gaga
Melanie Piper, Recontextualizing celebrity bodies in fandom and film
Mary Ingram-Waters, Writing the pregnant man
Andrew Ryan Rico, Fans of Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold
Victoria Godwin, Mimetic fandom and one-sixth-scale action figures

Symposium
Maud Lavin, Patti Smith: Aging, fandom, and libido
Joshua Wille, Dead links, vaporcuts, and creativity in fan edit replication
Jasmin Aurora Stoffer, The transformative world of winter fashion in a Nunavik village

Review
Suzanne Scott, Understanding fandom: An introduction to the study of media fan culture, by Mark Duffett
Katie Wilson, Fan studies: Researching popular audiences, edited by Alice Chauvel, Nicolle Lamerichs, and Jessica Seymour
Katherine E. Morrissey, Transmedia storytelling and the new era of media convergence in higher education, by Stavroula Kalogeras
Editorial

Works in progress

TWC Editor

[0.1] Abstract—This issue showcases the depth and breadth of fan studies and promises the continuation of an already thriving interdisciplinary subfield. It is so much more than we ever could have hoped a decade ago.

[0.2] Keywords—Analysis; Fan fiction


1. Introduction

[1.1] This 20th issue offers us a moment to reflect on where we've come and where we want to go. Perhaps more important for us personally is the fact that it's been 10 years since we, Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, submitted our first collaboration. The project, which was conceived in early 2004 and began soliciting contributions in September 2004, moved quickly: essays were submitted and peer reviewed, and we received a publishing contract with an estimated print date of September 2005. Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet (http://www.mcfarlandbooks.com/book-2.php?isbn=0-7864-2640-3) would not be published for another few months, but we had accomplished what we had set out to do: give voice to the many scholars we had met at conferences and online; create a volume that would start with the premise that academics were often fans and fans often academics and that that was okay; and permit conversations that did not always begin with introductory definitions but instead would assume a knowledgeable audience, thus raising the level of discourse. During this project, it was clear to us that, by definition, we could never create a truly finished product—a fact that we acknowledged in the title of our introduction, which we shamelessly reuse for this editorial.

[1.2] We appropriated the fannish term "work in progress," which refers to posting or publication of a part of a story that is not yet completed, because it best illustrated the continuing flourishing of academic work on fan fiction and fan communities while paralleling the endless expansion of story worlds created by the myriad of fan fiction writers. The term captures the multiplicity and diversity of fictions and fiction writers as well as of academic works and academic writers. More than that, it captures the ephemeral and mercurial nature of the works, the constant need for expansion, and the inherent inability to ever finish or conclude. The TV shows and book series used as starting points must necessarily end eventually, but fan fictional expansions, alternatives, and supplements cannot and will not end. Nor should our academic work. Although the essays in our first edited volume,
published a decade ago, are no longer "new essays," as the book's subtitle promised, the contributing authors have continued to think, write, and publish, joined by the many others who were already working in the field or who have discovered fan studies since. This general issue of TWC, No. 20, showcases the depth and breadth of fan studies and promises the continuation of an already thriving interdisciplinary subfield. It is so much more than we ever could have hoped a decade—and 20 issues—ago.

2. Theory and Praxis

[2.1] Various forms of criticism have arisen around some of fan studies' inherent biases; several essays in this issue face those concerns directly. Rebecca Wanzo's "African American Acafandom and Other Strangers: New Genealogies of Fan Studies" calls fan studies to task for ignoring race on all levels and offers a corrective that includes black fan voices and that uses African American cultural criticism to illuminate fan studies more critically. A different criticism often leveled against fan studies is its focus on celebratory and positive fan representations and artifacts—a failure easily understood given the often pervasively negative fan portrayal within popular media. Andrew Ryan Rico's "Fans of Columbine Shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold" ventures into what he calls the dark fandom of fans of the shooters to show how all fan communities contribute to our understanding of fan cultures; these dark fandoms must be analyzed and included in scholarship.

[2.2] Real people fiction often finds itself in an uncomfortable gap between media and celebrity studies; neither discipline has fully studied or comprehensively theorized RPF. In "Real Body, Fake Person: Recontextualizing Celebrity Bodies in Fandom and Film," Melanie Piper bridges that gap by studying The Social Network fan fiction, which is and isn't RPF. These fics tell the stories of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, yet they use the 2010 film rather than journalistic accounts as their basis. Finally, Misty Krueger addresses the important but often overlooked relationship between fan studies and pedagogy. Her case study, "The Products of Intertextuality: The Value of Student Adaptations in a Literature Course," showcases the usefulness of encouraging students to fashion their own creative responses even, or especially, if the source text is canonical British literature such as Samuel Richardson's Pamela (1740).

[2.3] Gender and sexuality have been at the center of media fan studies from its inception, yet many aspects and areas could still bear examination. In "Queering the Media Mix: The Female Gaze in Japanese Fan Comics," Kathryn Hemmann expands the female revisions of male-targeted texts to include the entire media franchise, the media mix. Similarly, looking at female/feminist appropriations of male central characters, Mary Ingram-Waters's "Writing the Pregnant Man" analyzes the tensions between the fan fiction genre of mpreg (male pregnancy) and popular discourses surrounding trans identities and men bearing children. Anne Gilbert looks at the unusual but highly popularized fan community of bronies, adult male fans of My Little Pony (2010–), in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Bronies." By studying the media discourses surrounding the community, Gilbert suggests that the overwrought media presentations lack the subtlety to address both the dangers and
pleasures inherent in this fan community. Finally, Lise Dilling-Hansen's "Affective Fan Experiences of Lady Gaga" looks at the role of online social media and Lady Gaga's fan engagements to explain her fan's intense affective attachment.

[2.4] Bob Rehak's special issue in June 2014 on Materiality and Object-Oriented Fandom was a crucial reminder to not limit ourselves to textual and digital fannish engagements only. Fandom used to be primarily material, after all, and collecting remains a central part of many fans' experiences. Two essays in this issue focus on the materiality of fan objects, addressing its changing forms and fan production, respectively. In "(Re)examining the Attitudes of Comic Book Store Patrons," J. Richard Stevens and Christopher E. Bell address the effects of digitization on comic book culture by surveying comic book store patrons and their relationship to material and digital comic books. Victoria Godwin's "Mimetic Fandom and One-Sixth-Scale Action Figures" uses Matt Hills's contribution to Rehak's materiality issue, which introduces the term "mimetic fandom." Focusing on one-sixth-scale action figures and their production and material presentation in living spaces, Godwin argues that "material fan practices reproduce items in order to create transformative narratives" (¶0.1).

3. Symposium

[3.1] The mid-2000s were a time of meta. These fannish academic commentaries on episodes, characters, fan works, and fandom in general were often smart, insightful, and thought provoking. They would often invite discussion, both with and without the author, through comment threads with remarks numbering in the hundreds. Meta still exists, of course, but the persistent presence of fannish debate inspired us to create a sort of sequel to meta: the Symposium section, with its focused and often personal essays. In this issue, personal experience plays into Maud Lavin's mediation on her changing but always passionate relationship with vocal artist Patti Smith in "Patti Smith: Aging, Fandom, and Libido" and Jasmin Aurora Stoffer's account of the creative works and artists she has encountered while living in an Inuit village in Northern Quebec in "The Transformative World of Winter Fashion in a Nunavik Village." Finally, Joshua Wille discusses the ephemerality of online fan edits and the discourses surrounding them in "Dead Links, Vaporcuts, and Creativity in Fan Edit Replication."

4. Reviews

[4.1] The three book reviews that appear in this issue illustrate the increasing range of the field of fan studies. Suzanne Scott reviews Mark Duffett's introductory overview Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture (2013); Kate Marie Wilson discusses the collection Fan Studies: Researching Popular Audiences (2014), edited by Alice Chauvel, Nicolle Lamerichs, and Jessica Seymour; and Katherine E. Morrissey assesses Transmedia Storytelling and the New Era of Media Convergence in Higher Education (2014), by Stavroula Kalogerias. All three books provide important contributions to their respective fields and to fan studies in general.
5. Coming up

[5.1] The next issue of TWC, No. 21, will appear in March 2016 as a special issue guest edited by Ika Willis on the Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work.

[5.2] TWC No. 22 will be an open, unthemed issue, and we welcome general submissions. We particularly encourage fans to submit Symposium essays. We encourage all potential authors to read the submission guidelines (http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions). The close date for receipt of copy for No. 22 is March 15, 2016.


6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] It is not possible to properly acknowledge the depth of appreciation we feel toward everyone who has helped make this issue of TWC possible. They have suffered hard deadlines, late nights, and short due dates. As always, we thank the authors in this issue, whose original work makes TWC possible; the peer reviewers, who freely provide their time and expertise; the editorial team members, whose engagement with and solicitation of material is so valuable; and the production team members, who transform rough manuscripts into publishable documents.

[6.2] The following people worked on TWC No. 20 in an editorial capacity: Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (editors); Cameron Salisbury (Symposium); and Louisa Stein (Review).

[6.3] The following people worked on TWC No. 20 in a production capacity: Rrain Prior (production editor); Beth Friedman, Shoshanna Green, and Christine Mains (copyeditors); Rrain Prior and Gabriel Simm (layout); and Amanda Georgeanne Retartha (proofreader).

[6.4] TWC thanks the Organization for Transformative Works, which provides financial support and server space to TWC but is not involved in any way in the content of the journal, which is editorially independent.

[6.5] TWC thanks all its board members, whose names appear on TWC's masthead, as well as the additional peer reviewers and Symposium reviewers who provided service for TWC No. 20: Tonje Andersen, Lucy Bennett, Kirstie Blair, Lyndsay Brown, Caitlin Casiello, Cathy Cupitt, Alexandra Edwards, Judith Fathallah, Laura Felschow, Kathryn Hemman, Andrea
Horbinski, Anne Jamison, Bethan Jones, Linda Levitt, Matthew Ogonoski, Rukmini Pande, Will Proctor, Sudha Rajagopalan, Venetia Robertson, Marc Steinberg, and Benjamin Woo.
Theory

African American acafandom and other strangers: New genealogies of fan studies

Rebecca Wanzo

Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, United States

1. Introduction

[1.1] Anyone vaguely familiar with fan studies knows the case that Henry Jenkins makes in Textual Poachers for writing both as "an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community)" (1992, 5). The notion of acafandom, or the scholar-fan, was subsequently embraced by a number of scholars who developed a critical vocabulary for loving their (popular) objects of criticism without shame, and they made a case for the advantage that being a participant observer can give the critic (note 1). Acafandom has been particularly prevalent in television studies, with scholarship about Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997–2003) and Joss Whedon studies arguably becoming the most high-profile acafan community (Lametti et al. 2012). Scholars who utilize their fandom as a base for their research and referent in their scholarship should be seen as acafans, although many do not use that term (note 2).

[1.2] One group of scholars who often could be categorized as acafans but who do not claim the name are many black scholars of popular culture. A number of scholars who study black popular culture have, for all intents and purposes, been acafans, with an intimate knowledge of the black community that has often been essential in fields where black histories have not been addressed. A rich critical history of black fans and black acafandom exists, although the latter is never described as such (note 3). Important scholarship about black fandom and/or black acafandom includes Gerald Early's essays on sports, Jacqueline Bobo's Black Women as Cultural Readers (1995), Robin R. Means Coleman's African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor (1998), Jeffrey A. Brown's Black Superheroes: Milestone Comics and Their Fans (2000), and numerous works in hip-hop studies such as Tricia Rose's Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (1994) and Imani Perry's Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop (2004). However, these works, produced by fans of their subjects or about African American audiences, as well as discussions of race, are largely invisible in some of the most cited works in American fan studies. Even African American scholars trained in film and television studies are often excluded from scholarship about fandom; their absence from many studies cannot thus be solely attributed to disciplinary divides. This invisibility is curious because important moments of development or transition in music, radio, musical theater, film, and television in the United States often have controversial representations of African Americans at their center (note 4).

[1.3] Scholars sometimes lament the ubiquitous absence of race as an object of analysis. In his 1992 study of fans, John Fiske stated that he regretted "being unable to devote the attention to race that it deserves" but that he had "not found studies of non-white fandom." He argued that most studies focused on "class, gender, and age as the key axes of discrimination" (32). In making this case, he not only claims that there are few studies of fans of color but also fails to treat whiteness as a racialized identity. Fiske's apology and claim that race is somehow a topic that scholars should now add to the field is curious because race is visible in the Birmingham School scholarship that influences much of contemporary fan studies. Dick Hebdige's Subculture: The Meanings of Style (1979) is foundational to studies of fans, and race and whiteness are central to Hebdige's understanding of how
attachments to music, fashion, and various other subcultures work. The writings of Hebidge, Stuart Hall, and other scholars coming out of the Birmingham tradition of cultural studies in the United Kingdom demonstrate that race has been important to discussions of audiences and consumers outside of the United States.

[1.4] One of the reasons race may be neglected is because it troubles some of the claims—and desires—at the heart of fan studies scholars and their scholarship. In their 2007 collection Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World (which does not contain a single essay focusing on race), editors Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington argue that one of the reasons that sports fandom has been ignored or treated as a separate entity from studies of other kinds of fandom is because of the association with racism, nationalism, and violence “that marked much of their representation in particular in the 1980s.” Sports fans were thus less “likable” and “evaded the paradigm of a bipolar power struggle between hegemonic culture industries and fans” (4–5). However, if we see attachments to whiteness and xenophobic or racist affect as frequently central to fan practices, then sports fandom ceases to be an outlier. Influential scholarship on fans such as Constance Penley's NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America (1997) and Jenkins's Textual Poachers privileges a utopian understanding of fans in science fiction communities as being antiracist and progressive. As Penley explains, the discourse emerging from the Star Trek community gives fans a "language to describe and explain the world and to express yearnings for a different and better condition; it is, then a common language for utopia" (16). Yet high-profile racist and misogynist speech and bullying demonstrate that some fans of speculative works depend on the centrality of whiteness or masculinity to take pleasure in the text. Sexism, racism, and xenophobia are routinely visible in fan communities, including the cases of Gamergate (the harassment of women who are involved in the video game industry or who criticize it) and the fans of Suzanne Collins's popular young adult novel The Hunger Games (2008) who voiced anger that a tragic young character described as dark skinned in the book is played by an African American actress in the 2012 film (note 5). A number of scholars have criticized what the Fandom editors call the first-wave "fandom is beautiful" phase of fan scholarship (2007, 1), but the criticisms of this approach take a different shape if we recognize how often an investment in whiteness may be foundational to some groups of fans.

[1.5] A framing of sports fandom that focuses on white affect also ignores the fandom of the subjected. In the United States, African American sports fans’ attachment to athletes (particularly boxers and baseball stars) was historically a mechanism to make claims about black equality and black pride and to bond over black success. Such structures of feeling were also characteristic of African American fandoms attached to celebrities, film, and television. Black fandom can thus be both counter to white hegemony and normative in its adherence to ideological projects that treat black people as representative of US culture instead of outliers. Many discussions of fan theory emphasize that fans must make a case for the political importance of being fans, but it is not uncommon for people of color to make the argument that representation is important to political progress (and we similarly see such arguments around feminist representations). Discussions of black popular culture have been criticized for overstating the importance of representation, given the high stakes of material inequality affecting black people around the globe, but black intellectuals routinely talk about their intense pleasure, disgust, or investments in popular representations of black people. Moreover, antifandom is omnipresent in black cultural criticism. If we understand this history, many descriptions of the raison d'être of fans in canonical fan studies scholarship is either not applicable or is missing important historical antecedents.

[1.6] Because race is still frequently treated as an add-on or as something that should be addressed somewhere later, I argue for including African American cultural criticism in remapping the genealogies of not only acafandom but also fan criticism. Such reframing would both augment and complicate our understanding of much of the vocabulary of fan studies and definitions of fans and antifans. If we privilege African Americans in the story we tell about fans in the United States, how might that change our understanding of what a fan is, our understanding of how they are producers as well as consumers, or the role identity can play in the importance of identifying as a fan? I am not claiming that black people are central to all kinds of fandoms; nor am I arguing that they are absent from the kind of cult fan communities privileged in fan studies (although they are indeed rarely discussed). Rather, I am suggesting that we apply what I term an identity hermeneutics—interpretation by placing a particular identity at the center of the reading or interpretative practice—and explore the possibility that a different kind of fan, as well as different issues of concern to fans, might be visible if we focus on African Americans. Despite their invisibility in fan studies, African Americans are often hyperpervisible examples of fandom and demonstrate affective relationships to fandom that complicate existing studies of fans. Many claims in fan scholarship about alterity, fan interpellation, ambivalent spectatorship, and antifandom become more nuanced if we look at particular traditions of African American fandom and black cultural criticism.

2. "Three cheers for the Colored Fans": Fans as self-selecting others

[2.1] One of the primary ways in which attentiveness to race can transform fan studies is by destabilizing the idea that fans choose outsider status. In Textual Poachers, Jenkins is explicit about fans’ challenges to normativity and "cultural weakness." He argues that "fan culture stands as an open challenge to the 'naturalness' and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies" (1992, 18). Scholar-fans have long made claims about the politics that emerge from fandom—that women, queer people, and geeks offer alternative ways of relating to each other and seeing the world, and that a large part of that politics is choosing to become outsiders by investing time in often denigrated popular media. John Fiske describes the cultural economy of fandom as involving a "culture of a self-selected fraction of the people" (1992, 30). However, two issues complicate the portrayal of the fan as embracing alterity by choice. The self-selection model ignores the ways in which a fandom that is not a cult fandom can be considered somewhat normative, and it also fails to address the fact that sometimes social justice projects call on identity groups
to become fans as an act of politics. Various identity groups complicate the framework of choosing otherness—women, queer subjects, and people of color—but African American fans make hypervisible the ways in which fandom is expected or demanded of some socially disadvantaged groups as a show of economic force and ideological combat. They call attention to how fandom can be part of an effort to show that subjected populations are normative and that their experiences, desires, and lives should be considered part of the American imaginary.

[2.2] Romanticization of fan exceptionalness has perhaps produced resistance to emphasizing the normativity of some fandoms. Audiences, however, are not just marketed to in the hope that they will become mere consumers; they are marketed to in the hope that they will become fans. As Jonathan Gray notes, "Network executives would no doubt love if all audiences were fans, but they are not" (2003, 65). Some scholars have recently argued that companies have stopped treating fans as fringe groups and have begun marketing to them—a claim that depends on the model established by looking at a particular kind of cult fan, one who might attend a fan convention or write fan fiction about a favorite television show (note 6). Hollywood and fringe entertainers or producers have always been invested in creating fans—the person who loves with intensity, repeatedly rewatches a film or television show, follows a creator or performer without fail, and constantly discusses beloved texts with friends, family, and strangers. Corporation-owned (as opposed to fan created) fan magazines demonstrate this investment, as these publications have always been designed to encourage obsession with the minutiae of the lives of stars (Slide 2010). It is thus fair to say that some kinds of fandom have always been treated as normal. As Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst argue, "'Ordinary' audience members are more like fans and enthusiasts than might be initially thought" (1998, 122). Thus, if fandom is oppositional, it is not just about being in opposition to normative models of consumption but also about being in opposition to normative fans.

[2.3] The kinds of claims made about who can be a fan, often privileging science fiction fans, favors the identities and affective structures that are most apparent in that group of consumers. This framing privileges people who have produced an historical record through letters, fan fiction, and conventions and who have the leisure time to be cult fans. However, the emphasis on cult fans encourages a narrowness of what constitutes a fan and performs a profound set of historical erasures of fandom that could not be performed in that way. Moreover, the framing of fans as in opposition to normative practices of consumption and to culture more broadly talks about othering in a manner that valorizes people who have claimed otherness for themselves, as opposed to having otherness thrust upon them.

[2.4] We should see fans as having a dialectical relationship to normativity that is not always explicit in fan studies (and sometimes not acknowledged). Fan communities with women, queer subjects, and people of color often demonstrate the complicated tension between preexisting sociopolitical otherness and chosen alterity. Is choosing otherness something that truly characterizes women as a social and political category? Many women in the fan community, as Camille Bacon-Smith argues, have wanted "to reach out and be heard" (1991, 6). One aspect of women's alterity is that there are clear normative paradigms for who and what they should be. Ethnographies such as Janice Radway's Reading the Romance (1984) on romance readers, Penley's description of women writing fan fiction in NASA/TREK, and Tanya Erzen's exploration of Twilight fans in Fanpire (2012) all demonstrate that much of the self-selecting otherness in fan communities composed of many women often involves a resistance to normative womanhood, through content or through the practice of taking time for oneself by being fan and taking a break from caregiving.

[2.5] Thus, although white women have been central to fan studies, a key part of understanding their otherness is not only the history of criticism of their alleged inappropriate attachments to novels, performers, or other popular productions but also their resistance to being normative women through their consumption. Women are always already other as a social category (and prone to an excess and hysteria illustrated by their fandom), but they are also subject to regulations that attempt to make them fulfill normative identity categories. Consequently, theorizations of women's fandom often explore their rejection of normative roles, which stands in contrast to black identities in the United States, which are discursively constructed as always completely other to Western normativity.

[2.6] Another group represented in fan studies that complicates the choice claim is the queer fan. On the one hand, the political project of queerness has been theorized as being counter to normativity by definition (Warner 1999) (note 7). On the other hand, part of queer politics is a commitment to queering the normative. LGBTQ subjects have traditionally been socially and politically other, and like other subordinated and invisible populations, in mass culture they are often interpolated by queer characters. As with other groups that are often negatively depicted or not absent in popular culture, queer subjects are more likely to be drawn to representations that may have some relationship to their identities or experiences. Queer fans also queer texts that are ostensibly normative and are therefore part of the participation in a queer representational politics that has been about intentionally performing nonnormativity (Creekmur and Doty 1995). That commitment makes queer reading quite at home in fan studies.

[2.7] However, people of color often make the erasures, complexities, and challenges of thinking about the relationship between normativity and otherness in fan communities most visible. They are sometimes read as choosing otherness when they are part of fan communities that allegedly do not speak to their cultural backgrounds or contexts. This can be a problematic reading, as there are many people of color in communities most associated with white fans, and their reasons for being in the community are many. James Spooner’s documentary Afro-Punk (2003), which explores African Americans involved in the punk music scene,
demonstrates the varied relationships people of color can have to predominantly white fan communities. For many black fans, the white punk community is their community because they may have been raised in a predominantly white community. Being part of the punk community is normative. For others, the anger expressed in punk music speaks to their identity, and perhaps their black identity specifically, which demonstrates the way many texts hail people ideologically even if a text ostensibly appears to be produced for people not like themselves. For some, participating in the Afro-punk community means being part of an alternative black community. Others thus sometimes may be choosing otherness or sameness in their participation in a fan community. These complexities become most visible when scholars focus on particular identity groups when examining fan communities.

[2.8] The example of the Afro-punk community demonstrates that there is not a single kind of black or African American fandom. I want to call attention to the ways in which certain kinds of fandom seen in the African American community, as well as in African American cultural criticism, can complicate the assumptions made about fans’ relationship to otherness. We can challenge those ideas by being attentive to race in the scholarship, but also by placing black cultural criticism about black fans in conversation with texts in fan studies that focus on white fandom.

[2.9] By way of example, I turn to the most influential text in fan studies, Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers*. His argument establishes a great deal of the paradigm I wish to augment and complicate. Jenkins argues that fans “operate from a position of cultural and social weakness” (1992, 26). This weak subject position is shaped by capitalism, as fans lack the ability to influence, produce, circulate, and profit from what they consume. The productivity of fan culture is a response to this relationship to the market, giving them a stronger connection to (if not control over) their love object, allowing them to build community with other fans and reduce alienation.

[2.10] Matt Hills (2002) has provided a rigorous critique of the ways in which the participatory culture and production that Jenkins describes can be both too narrow and too expansive, so I will not rehearse his arguments here. Instead I want to embrace Jenkins’s argument as describing one group of fans who may be the examples par excellence of participatory culture: hip-hop fans. *Textual Poachers* was released in 1992, 2 years before Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise*. A new genealogy that recognizes African American fans would see Rose’s text as one of the more important works in fan studies that demonstrates the poaching practices of black consumers who become producers (often for profit as DJs or performers). Like Jenkins, Rose begins her book by describing her position as a scholar and fan. She says that people say she doesn’t “fit the image of a b-girl” to many people; however, she “learned about hip hop the way most kids from the Bronx did at that time; it was the language and sound of our peer group” (1994, xii). She merges “multiple ways of knowing” as a scholar. This “polyvocal” approach has “been immensely productive” as she attempts to “produce a blueprint for understanding black popular expression” (xii). Rose combines personal fan experience, history, cultural theory, close reading, and interviews in an analysis that is methodologically more akin to Radway’s *Reading the Romance* than *Textual Poachers* but that is ideologically more connected to Jenkins’s work because of her embrace of the political possibilities of fan culture.

[2.11] A great deal of *Black Noise* illustrates the now-canonical paradigm Jenkins describes in *Textual Poachers*. Hip-hop (like other forms of black music in the Caribbean) is produced by people who lack cultural power and capital; they rework existing texts (some that they love, some that they hate), transforming people’s reading of it in their community; and they challenge the hierarchies of copyright in their poaching of texts. Corporations have embraced hip-hop, but “hip-hop heads” have been accused of placing too much importance on the genre and embracing troubling fantasies in the form of gangsta rap. Although the television and music fans whom Jenkins and Rose describe have much in common with each other, one difference is the material conditions that produce these fandoms. The political or oppositional content of black hip-hop fandom has a different configuration: it is part of an everyday culture, and it articulates an otherness that is somewhat normative for many in the hip-hop generation. In other words, the counterculture otherness of hip-hop is attractive to many African American youth because it describes the alterity they already experience, not an otherness they seek to claim.

[2.12] Jenkins and coauthors (2009) do mention hip-hop in *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*, recognizing some similarities in copyright issues between fan fiction and the genre’s music production, but it is a brief reference to a large fan culture that spans the globe. Arguably, *Textual Poachers* is specifically about television culture, and the absence of a discussion of black hip-hop fandom in his text, or even in later discussions that use Jenkins, is because he focuses on television, and hip-hop is a different medium. Scholars of hip-hop might argue that the appropriate critical vocabulary here would be a discussion of remix culture as opposed to textual poaching. They routinely use the term *remix* without investing much in theorizing the term in itself, focusing instead on content analysis of the remix. Remix describes the practice of altering media through sampling, addition, and other kind of transformation of the original form. Its origins may be traced to 1970s DJ culture produced by black urban men, but the term now covers everything from hip-hop to YouTube videos. Abigail T. Derecho (2008) also describes fan fiction as a form of remix culture that emerged in this period, arguing that women who produced and participated in the fan fiction communities are, like black urban youth, participating in this culture from positions of cultural disenfranchisement and weakness. Jenkins and Rose are not often cited in the same text; Derecho’s work is a notable exception. Even in her discussion of censorship and regulation of remix culture, these critics are not put in conversation with each other. Scholars of black popular culture and scholars of (white) fandom often possess different critical genealogies; this is apparent even in a text like Derecho’s that sees commonalities in hip-hop and fan fiction communities.
Another prominent concept in fan studies that would benefit from focusing on African Americans is the idea of the antifan. Jonathan Gray’s discussion of antifandom describes both a knowledgeable dislike of a text and a knowledge that is sometimes based not only the text itself but also on the paratexts surrounding it. Although grounded in a late 20th-century or early 21st-century culture of audience response, African American histories of reception appear to be quite applicable when I read Gray’s discussion of the value of studying antifandom. He argues that “studying antifan disapproval and/or dislike” offers “media and cultural studies meaningful re-entry points to discussing quality, values, and expectations” (2003, 73). Black cultural critics have long negotiated the love for flawed texts that allow for attachment to quality despite the text’s problematic content while integrating discussions of aesthetics and politics.

African Americans have a rich history of antifandom, demonstrating the ambivalence—and at times hatred—they experience with many popular texts. Antifans both have and have not consumed their hate objects, but they know much about, or
have definitive opinions about, their injuriousness. The radio and television adaptations of Amos 'n' Andy had many African American fans, but there were also protests, particularly organized by Pittsburgh Courier editor Robert Lee Vann (Shankman 1978). The virulent racism in D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation (1915) produced anger and protests from the NAACP (Stokes 2008). Reactions to Gone with the Wind were more complicated. Some enjoyed it as a film and took pleasure in the representations of African Americans; others did not. This split could be seen in the NAACP's inconsistent response to the film; on the one hand, they rejected the romanticization of the South, but on the other, they took pride in Hattie McDaniel's Academy Award win (Tracy 2001). Years later, that split NAACP reaction was again in evidence in responses to the film The Color Purple (1985), which some people saw as presenting negative racist stereotypes, particularly about African American men. Alice Walker (1997) received many letters from African Americans condemning the adaptation of her 1982 novel. The NAACP somewhat shifted its response, however, when The Color Purple received multiple Academy Award nominations but no wins. In 2012, the film adaptation of Kathryn Stockett's 2009 novel, The Help, while having many African American fans, produced strong antifandom across the Internet and on Twitter as many African Americans, particularly women, criticized historical inaccuracies and erasures, as well as the preoccupation of white America with the mammy stereotype (note 9).

[3.3] Black Twitter has provided evidence of black antifan hate watching, with fans consistently tuning in to watch and comment on shows that they hold in contempt (note 10). What Fiske calls "enunciative productivity" and "asserting one's membership of a particular fan community" have not been outliers in black culture (1992, 36–37). These activities have been important to the long civil rights struggle. Fandom and antifandom can make African Americans part of the black community and fulfill a political duty. Fan studies scholars often talk about fandom as an act of resistance, and in the case of African Americans, love and hate of cultural productions are often treated as political acts. Fandom and antifandom can be activism by demonstrating the black community's buying power and encouraging the circulation of positive black images.

[3.4] A possible critique of my argument is whether these protests and expressions of dislike can be elevated to the level of fandom. Black Twitter productivity can easily fit into a paradigm recognized by scholar-fans, while some of my examples may be read as audience response and not evidence of the strong feeling attached to fandom or antifandom. However, historical context continues to be important in understanding how black fandom and antifandom fit and disrupt current scholar-fan paradigms. As antifans, Black Twitter participants can be highly creative; their responses continue a century of media critiques offered by the black public—criticisms archived in the responses of African American politicians and political organizations, in the black press, and by African American writers and entertainers. Much of black productivity around popular culture is antiracist, attacking stereotypical representations. Rather than modeling the wholly utopian other of fan production often praised in fan studies, black fandom is often rooted in a broader black intellectual tradition of media critique. Something beloved may be loved because it fills a gap when there is an absence, or because it is an attempt to rewrite or correct an historical representation.

[3.5] Methodologically, an important part of including African American writing and scholarship in a genealogy of fan studies requires breaking down the line between criticism and the study of the fan. Qualitative and ethnographic work done in fan studies undoubtedly constitutes a specific field of study. Nevertheless, other kinds of scholarship can augment our knowledge about fandom. If we can use Michel de Certeau's notion of poaching from The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), not only because Jenkins uses it but also because poaching is a theoretical concept that can be applied to understanding fans, we can use other theoretical texts. Thus, while James Baldwin's 1976 essay The Devil Finds Work is undoubtedly a work of film criticism, his largely autoethnographic discussion of being a child viewer and his accounts of black audience reactions to certain films are an important part of the historical record of black fandom. How might more cross-field pollination help us work through fan response to certain ideas across time?

[3.6] For example, reconciliation across lines of difference is a major theme in many science fiction fandom communities. In The Devil Finds Work, Baldwin recounts how the Harlem black audience verbally expressed disbelief and anger at the end of the 1958 film The Defiant Ones, when escaped black prisoner Cullen, played by Sidney Poitier, cannot pull Tony Curtis's character, Joker, onto a moving train. Cullen allows himself to fall off and be captured by the sheriff, and the "outraged" Harlem audience yelled, "Get back on the train, you fool!" ([1976] 1998, 525). These accounts of moments of communal, affective resistance and pleasure fill black cultural criticism. What different questions might we ask in fan studies, crossing genres and times, if we look at the pleasures and injuries that audiences receive from certain images in popular culture, building on a rich and varied archive of responses? What happens to our discussion of interracial (and, in fan studies, metaphorical interspecies) reconciliation if we ask research questions that look for archives that address this concept across time and genres and through different kinds of scholarship? Part of the archive of African American spectatorship comes from black writers who recount histories of communal viewing, and this African American cultural essayist is a rich source of fan theory. Alexander Doty, along with feminist and antiracist scholars, questions the idea that critics “hiding or suppressing” information about themselves is considered more scholarly (2000, 11). Thus, the imperative to value the personal narrative in cultural analysis crosses fields of study. This is not a concern exclusive to fan studies; people who work in identity studies have arguably been most frequently attacked with claims of bias and “unscholarly” approaches.

4. How much my heart could stand: Ambivalent fan affect
other kinds of bodies, as opposed to the real, fantastic, or idealized bodies that produce the pleasure for many scholars. He much pleasure when they apply these analyses but also that he takes less pleasure in reading analyses organized around these producing the work" (Smith et al. 2011, 211, 138). I interpret Bukatman as not only suggesting that the scholars must not get as "representation" can "rob" the scholars' objects of study "of whatever pleasures they may have contained for the very scholars roundtable discussion of comics acafans (although he did not name them as such), Scott Bukatman argued that analyses of Ahmed's (2013) "feminist killjoy" concept—a race theorist killjoy, sucking the pleasure out of fan studies by demanding the also complicate current definitions and methodological approaches. Some people might read me as being—to borrow Sarah Ahmed's (2013) "feminist killjoy" concept—a race theorist killjoy, sucking the pleasure out of fan studies by demanding the inclusion of race analysis. Some scholars do interpret studies of identity as functioning in exactly that way. For example, in a roundtable discussion of comics acafans (although he did not name them as such), Scott Bukatman argued that analyses of "representation" can "rob" the scholars' objects of study "of whatever pleasures they may have contained for the very scholars producing the work" (Smith et al. 2011, 211, 138). I interpret Bukatman as not only suggesting that the scholars must not get as much pleasure when they apply these analyses but also that he takes less pleasure in reading analyses organized around these other kinds of bodies, as opposed to the real, fantastic, or idealized bodies that produce the pleasure for many scholars. He
demonstrates the nexus between what Ahmed (2013) calls "citational practice" and the critic's pleasure. "Citation," Ahmed argues, is "a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies"—and fan studies in the West has largely been organized around white bodies.

[5.2] For all the unruliness of fan studies as a disrespected field, the practice of citation in its scholarship demonstrates how disciplinary it truly is. As Ahmed (2013) argues, "citational structures" form disciplines, and to reproduce the discipline, scholars practice "techniques of selection, ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and other not even part." Acafandom arguably makes transparent the ways in which pleasures and fears around bodies circulate in scholarship: we replicate paradigms that reproduce who we are, what we desire, and what we fear.

[5.3] Many fan cultures are about seeing or imagining bodies in new spaces—and it is fair to say that foci on subjected identities constantly ground the new worlds in the old. Yet it is this same political and utopian strand of fan studies focused on alternative bodies and worlds that demonstrates why African American studies and fan studies can be good bedfellows. These overlapping interdisciplinary fields are invested in the kinds of cultural productions that alterity produces.

[5.4] The absence of race in fan studies may be symptomatic of a moment in which increasing numbers of scholars say they do interdisciplinary work without actually engaging with other disciplines. Some scholars who are not trained in television, film, or cultural studies write about popular culture without reading extensively in those fields, as almost every discipline feels as if it has access to the popular. At the same time, race continues to be only vaguely referenced in many fields, if it is referenced at all. Many scholars may fail to do the work of learning the different critical languages and studying the canonical texts in fields that touch their work. It is humbling and hard. Doing truly interdisciplinary work means that sometimes you may get things wrong. My work here is not meant to be a polemic designed to berate people for these absences. Rather, it is a prompt, as is so often suggested in fan studies, to explore what may be missing. Rethinking our standard critical genealogies is never easy, but our work is always the richer for it.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] I thank Colin Burnett for his comments on the essay and Kristen Warner for both her help and for inviting me to participate in a panel on race and fan studies at the 2014 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference. The essay exists because her cogent criticisms of the field inspired me to write it.

7. Notes

1. Doty asks, "Why shouldn't readers know something about a critic's personal and cultural background and training?" He argues that "hiding or suppressing" this information may be a backlash against the personal narratives produced by feminist scholars, queer scholars, and scholars of color, but that it is also an understandable attempt at legitimation by those who work with popular culture (2000, 11).

2. As an example, superhero comics scholars rarely utilize the acafan label, but it is nonetheless appropriate, given the structures of feeling that comics scholars often make apparent in their work—the deep pleasure and intimate knowledge with comics and its fan communities, as well as their position as derided consumers of devalued cultural productions. Most scholars of superhero comics are long-term readers. At the 2014 International Comic Arts Forum, keynote speaker Bart Beaty asked how many people in the audience had not grown up reading comics, and I was one of three people who raised a hand.

3. I move back and forth between using the terms African American and black in the essay. I am primarily focusing on African American cultural criticism, but I sometimes use the term black to be clear that this argument is still applicable to describing people of African descent on the continent and in the black diaspora.

4. By way of example: father of American music Stephen Foster's faux plantation songs are controversial. The extremely popular radio show Amos 'n' Andy (1928) was an update of the minstrel show. The first modern musical, Show Boat (1927), had a race plot at its center. Films with actors in blackface (The Jazz Singer [1927] and Birth of a Nation [1915]) are two of the most important texts in early cinema.


6. The mainstreaming of Comic-Con has been the most discussed.

7. This is controversially something that some queer theorists argue distinguishes queerness from LGBT rights liberal discourse (Warner 1999).

8. This is true of other groups, and feminists have certainly been making that argument since second-wave feminism, with it becoming even more of a concern in the third and fourth waves, which focus substantially on media representation. However, the
mainstream commitment for over a century and across various levels of society—politicians, press, and everyday people—to address representation in the African American community makes it distinct from the US feminist tradition of critique.

9. For an overview of critical and popular responses to The Help, see the special issue on that film in Southern Cultures, 2014, 20 (1).

10. Contempt is often blended with love. See Kristen Warner’s forthcoming discussion of Black Twitter and fans and antifans of the Shonda Rhimes drama Scandal (2012–).

8. Works cited


Lametti, Daniel, Aisha Harris, Natasha Gelling, and Natalie Matthews-Ramo. 2012. "Which Pop Culture Property Do Academics Study the Most?" Slate, June 11.


Theory

Queering the media mix: The female gaze in Japanese fan comics

Kathryn Hemmann

George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, United States

[0.1] Abstract—The Japanese expression "media mix" refers to multimedia marketing strategies for entertainment franchises. Although such franchises are commonly understood as being controlled by large corporations, the fans of these media properties make significant contributions to the mix, often expanding on the central themes of the source texts and queering them by rendering their subtexts explicit. In dōjinshi, or self-published fan comics, female readers create their own interpretations of stories, characters, and relationships in narratives targeted at a male demographic. In BL (boys' love) fan comics, which are notable for their focus on a romantic and often physical relationship between two male characters, the female gaze has created its own overtly homoerotic readings and interpretations that creatively subvert the phallocentrism implicit in many mainstream narratives. The interactions between texts and their readers found in dōjinshi illustrate how cycles of narrative production and consumption have changed in the face of active fan cultures. Because of the closely interrelated nature of the components of increasingly international media mixes, communities of fans have the potential to make positive and progressive contributions to the media mix ecosystem.

[0.2] Keywords—BL manga; CLAMP; Dōjinshi; Fan comics; Fujoshi; Gender performance; Manga; Shōjo manga; xxxHolic; Yaoi


1. Introduction

[1.1] The concept of the male gaze as expressed in Laura Mulvey's classic 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has been challenged by critics proposing ideas such as a hermaphroditic gaze and a homosexual gaze, but the visual and narrative conventions associated with the heterosexual male gaze are still readily apparent in contemporary media across the globe. The male gaze has been subverted in a galaxy of works spread out across myriad artistic formats, but it is deeply entrenched in media practices and exerts a hegemonic influence over what is published and released for mainstream audiences. Therefore, while it is important to demonstrate how female creators and consumers operate outside of the realm of the
male gaze, it is equally important to examine how they subvert it from within male-dominated mediascapes.

[1.2] Scholars of comparative literature tend toward a postmodern and poststructuralist understanding of the relationship between writers and readers; but although the individual author may be dead, the corporate author is still enormously powerful, and there is no shortage of ready instances of authorial control in contemporary media. To give a topical example, the BBC television series *Sherlock*, which first aired in 2010, has won numerous awards and is one of the most watched and pirated drama series in the world (note 1). As can be imagined, the show has a large fan base that is active across multiple social networking platforms, from Twitter to Tumblr to Facebook. Although it is difficult to quantify any given group of fans, circumstantial evidence indicates that a sizable percentage of this fan base is female (note 2). Despite the fact that *Sherlock’s* creators are certainly aware of its female fans, they do not seem to accord them much respect (note 3). In an interview with the *Hollywood Reporter*, series cocreator Steven Moffat offered the following assessment:

[1.3] The original [Sir Arthur Conan Doyle] stories had a huge female following, which I'd never forgotten, and that's because the Victorian ladies liked the way Sherlock looked. So I thought, use this massively exciting, rather handsome man who could see right through your heart and have no interest...of course, he's going to be a sex god! I think we pitched that character right. I think our female fanbase all believe that they'll be the one to melt that glacier. They're all wrong, nothing will melt that glacier. (Ng 2014)

[1.4] Apparently female fans do not "love a thrilling detective show as much as men do" or "appreciate the visual and mental stimulation of good television programming" but instead are capable of enjoying little more than the physical appearance of the male leads (note 4). Furthermore, in response to fans' delight over the homoerotically charged friendship between Holmes and Watson, various people involved with the show, from Moffat to several of the actors, have vehemently stated that the characters are unquestionably straight (Penny 2014), thus echoing literary critic Loren Estleman's assertion that "those who suggest homosexuality...either are ignorant...or stubbornly refuse to accept Holmes's much-discussed misogyny at face value" (1986, xii). Despite the pressure of numerous fan interpretations to the contrary, many of the main players on the stage of the *Sherlock* television series continue to insist on the canonical intent of the original author. Why bother with the fans at all, then?

[1.5] This is where the media mix (media mikkusu) comes into play. As Marc Steinberg explains in *Anime's Media Mix*, "Since the 1980s, the term 'media mix' has been the most widely used word to describe the phenomenon of transmedia..."
communication, specifically, the development of a particular media franchise across multiple media types, over a particular period of time" (2012, 135). Steinberg outlines the company strategy of the Japanese publishing giant Kadokawa Books (Kadokawa Shoten), which launched its own film studio and record label in the 1970s, thereby rendering itself able to create its own anime and anime soundtracks based on its most popular manga titles. The company simultaneously launched several new publishing imprints so its manga could be released as novels, and vice versa. Company president Kadokawa Haruki is credited with having coined the phrase "media mix" after having studied the American advertising theory of the previous decade, which advocated placing ads not only in newspapers but also in magazines and on the radio, not to mention on the emerging medium of television (note 5). Kadokawa's executive decision regarding the intellectual properties of the Kadokawa corporation was not unprecedented in Japan, however, as Tezuka Osamu had pursued a similar strategy by having his own company, Mushi Productions, launch a magazine and several toy lines to promote his new television anime Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atomu, 1963–66), which was itself based on a manga that Tezuka serialized in several stages across multiple periodicals. The media mix model proved economically viable; and, as Steinberg demonstrates, "a new, stable regime of media connection emerged" (2012, 169). Over the next 50 years, this regime gradually expanded to include the productions of fan communities as well.

[1.6] As this media mix has had several more decades to evolve in Japan than in the United States and Europe, the Japanese understanding of convergence culture is significantly more progressive concerning the user-generated portion of the mix (note 6). Specifically, Japanese publishers, producers, and entertainment corporations create media properties in such a way as to encourage audience participation through transformative works, the production of which is taken for granted and directly incorporated into their business strategies and marketing models (Steinberg 2012). Instead of discouraging fan works such as fan fiction, fan art, and fan comics, Japanese media producers depend on them to ensure a healthy and stable economic ecosystem for their franchise properties. After all, many highly successful content creators were once fans themselves (note 7). Therefore, in Japan, fans do not exist outside of transmediality and corporate convergence cultures but instead are integral to the success of the media mix. Since the Japanese media mix model may serve as an indicator of the future evolution of overseas media cultures, which are increasingly pursuing mutually beneficial relationships with fan cultures (note 8), a better understanding of Japanese fan works and their relationship to mainstream media is useful for understanding the transnational fandom response to titles such as Sherlock (note 9).
Japanese fan works exist in a plethora of media, ranging from fiction to computer games, but this essay will focus on dōjinshi, or self-published fan comics. A dōjinshi is, in essence, a publication by and for fans. A possible translation might be "fanzine" \textsuperscript{(note 10)}, but the connotations of the word in North American fan cultures \textsuperscript{(note 11)} fail to capture the professional production values of the vast majority of dōjinshi, which are printed in small batches by specialty printing companies and collectively financed by the group of fans (known as a sākuru, or "circle") who contributed to the work \textsuperscript{(note 12)}. Although dōjinshi primarily featuring fan fiction are not rare, the contents of dōjinshi can generally be classified as manga \textsuperscript{(note 13)}. Dōjinshi have a wide range of distribution through online channels and meticulously organized and well-publicized market "events" (ibento), and secondhand copies can be found at specialty chain stores such as Mandarake and K-Books as well \textsuperscript{(note 14)}. Thus, although dōjinshi are the products of a subculture, their creators and distributors make no attempt to hide their activities or render the fruits of their labor inaccessible to newcomers. By working outside of conventional publishing channels, dōjinshi creators have little need to conform to the demands of market forces or demographic genre conventions, and their creators are therefore freer to challenge or subvert the visual and narrative conventions implicit in the narrative and visual structures catering to a presumed male gaze.

As the massive attendance at fan events such as the biannual Comic Market demonstrates (Lam 2010), dōjinshi are not representative of an isolated corner of an insular fandom. Hundreds of thousands of people buy and sell these fan works at conventions attended by manga publishers, animation studios, and video game producers. Despite the obvious violation of intellectual property laws, the content industry allows dōjinshi to exist without persecution because the fan cultures surrounding their production and distribution allow the media mix sponsored by the content industry to flourish (Kinsella 2000). Dōjinshi exist as part of an acknowledged feedback loop of production and consumption that fuels enthusiasm and ultimately results in the purchase of source texts and officially licensed products (Ōtsuka 2010). Dōjin events also provide tailor-made opportunities to scout talent in a manner that would prove difficult in online distribution channels \textsuperscript{(note 15)}. Furthermore, as dōjin artists are not fringe elements of fandom but primary shapers of market opinion, the content industry has kept an eye on fan conventions for decades to ascertain trends that may prove profitable. Far from existing in a black hole of high-density geekiness, Japanese fan activities relating to dōjinshi are capable of changing the manner in which stories are written, edited, and produced for a mainstream audience.

Dōjinshi subvert not only normative ideologies of gender but also phallogocentric notions of text and subtext common in conventional literary studies and media practices in which the creator or distributor controls a singular and
immutable set of textual meanings. This essay examines dōjinshi created by fans who have been inspired by the work of a four-woman team called CLAMP—specifically, their manga series xxxHolic (2003–11), and demonstrates how these fans employ the female gaze to create their own interpretations of stories, characters, and relationships in narratives targeted at a male demographic (note 16). Many dōjinshi based on xxxHolic fall into a genre category often referred to as BL, an abbreviation of "boys' love," which is notable for its focus on a subtly or blatantly homoerotic relationship between two male characters (note 17). No matter what the source text, the female gaze exercised in BL dōjinshi has created its own queer interpretations of the relationships between male characters in a way that creatively subverts the phallocentrism implicit in many manga narratives written for a male audience. As the manga industry in Japan is fueled by fan consumption and production, an understanding of the practices and poetics of dōjinshi is necessary to fully appreciate the driving forces of Japanese popular cultures, as well as the global media cultures that have increasingly begun to mirror the model of the Japanese media mix (note 18).

2. Shōjo manga and the female gaze

[2.1] Tomoko Aoyama sees one of the roots of contemporary BL fandom in Japan in the shōjo manga of the 1970s written by the 24-Nengumi ([Born in] Shōwa 24 [1949] Group), a cohort of female artists that includes Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko (note 19). From the overt homosexuality present in Hagio's The Heart of Thomas (Tōma no shinzō, 1974–75) and Pō no ichizoku (1972–76, The Poe Clan) to the more subtle homoerotic tension in Takemiya's To Terra (Chikyū e, 1977–80), beautiful boys locked in fatalistic embraces with each other are one of the more distinctive traits of the shōjo manga of the period. As in earlier shōjo manga, "beauty and fantasy were emphasized over reality," states Aoyama, but the artists of the 1970s "sought new modes of romanticism through science fiction, historical sagas, and homosexuality" (1988, 188). Artists and readers were "no longer satisfied with the persistent variations on the Cinderella theme," and homoerotic shōjo manga with male protagonists arose from a "desire to explore masculinity or androgyny as opposed to the worn-out image of femininity" (194). One of the primary motivating factors of the homoeroticism found in classic shōjo manga was a desire to move beyond the restraints placed on women and female characters by a heteronormative society.

[2.2] Sharalyn Orbaugh also draws a connection between classic shōjo manga and dōjinshi parodies, especially as the culture of dōjinshi recreates "long-standing tendencies in shōjo literary activity in Japan, including the blurring of boundaries between production vs. consumption, and professional vs. amateur" (2010, 176). Instead of readers who passively submit to the phallocentric authority of the text,
which privileges original production and authorial intent over reader interpretation and reproduction, dōjinshi imply "multiple readers actively seizing the text and expanding its possibilities in incredibly diverse ways, each basing his/her expanded text on his/her preferred reading of the source" (176). Dōjinshi are therefore transformative readings of the source material, which is to say that they are interpretations and expansions of textual elements with which the reader feels unsatisfied (note 20). Although writers and artists are free not only to return to the original material but also to create new stories using the same characters and settings, it is worth remarking that many dōjinshi serve to explore, mock, or intensify what is already present in the original text. Just as the erotic male gaze of dōjinshi written by and for men (note 21) make explicit that which is already there in popular anime and manga—namely, the elements of fan service that cater to heterossexual male viewers—so too does the erotic female gaze emphasize the established homosocial relationships between male characters, which often take the form of close friendships or bitter rivalries. In particular, BL artists who draw homoerotic love scenes are picking up on the subtext of the strong bonds between men that often form the core of popular narratives (note 22). By excavating this subtext, which tends to privilege the subjectivity, agency, and interiority of male characters over those of female characters, female fans are able to subvert the original text by challenging and queering its phallocentrism.

[2.3] To demonstrate how this process works, this essay will examine two dōjinshi based on CLAMP's popular manga series xxxHolic, which was serialized in Weekly Young Magazine (Shūkan yangu magajin) from 2003 to 2010 and in Bessatsu Shōnen Magazine from 2010 until its conclusion in 2011 (note 23). The protagonist of xxxHolic is a high school student named Watanuki, who is able to perceive yōkai, supernatural creatures that are invisible to normal humans. Yōkai sense that Watanuki can see them and thus go out of their way to harass him, so he is driven to make a bargain with a wish-granting witch named Yūko, who promises to cure Watanuki of his ability to glimpse beyond the phenomenal world. Until then, he must work in Yūko's shop as her servant. Watanuki is typically accompanied by his classmate Dōmeki when Yūko dispatches him on errands. Dōmeki cannot see yōkai; but as the heir to a Buddhist temple, he has a mystical ability to dispel them. Watanuki has a crush on a female classmate named Himawari; convinced that his friend is competing for her affections, Watanuki maintains an antagonistic attitude toward Dōmeki. Although Watanuki repeatedly attests that he does not desire Dōmeki's companionship, particularly when the two are in the company of Himawari, Dōmeki always seems to appear whenever Watanuki is in need of help (figure 1).
On the surface, *xxxHolic* conforms to many of the narrative conventions and character tropes common to manga aimed at a male audience. The protagonist of the story, Watanuki, and his foil, Dōmeki, are both male. The two main female characters of the story, Yūko and Himawari, have a more passive narrative role. Himawari's purpose is to provide an opportunity for the creation of a stronger bond between the two male characters, while Yūko serves as the otherworldly and somewhat villainous adult woman against which the idealistic heroism of the two male characters may be defined (note 24). Neither Yūko nor Himawari is granted the same degree of screen time or narrative interiority as that afforded to Watanuki and Dōmeki, and therefore a generalization may be offered that *xxxHolic*, as a manga aimed at a *seinen* (teenage to college-age male) audience, posits men as subjects and women as objects. The role of Himawari in particular calls to mind Eve Sedgwick's discussion of homosociality in *Between Men* (1985), in which the female character at the point of a love triangle acts as a bonding agent for the two men who compete for her affections (note 25). According to Sedgwick, homosociality is not synonymous with homosexuality; similarly, CLAMP never openly states that its male characters are in any way
romantically interested in one another (note 26). For readers looking for homoerotic undertones, however, the subtext of *xxxHolic* is clear.

3. Tentacle porn for women and the *uke/seme* dynamic

[3.1] BL *dōjinshi* based on *xxxHolic* are able to bring its homoerotic subtext closer to the surface and adventurously delve into the explicit implications of this subtext. *Kuchinashi kaoru* sono *ude ni* (In the Arms of a Fragrant Gardenia, 2006) is loosely based on an episode in the tenth volume of *xxxHolic* in which Watanuki is trapped underground by the spirit of a hydrangea plant and must be rescued by Dōmeki. Such a scenario is not uncommon in *xxxHolic* because Watanuki's supernatural sight makes him vulnerable to all manner of malicious *yōkai*. Female readers have seen in this character dynamic not only the possibility for romance—why does Dōmeki care so much about Watanuki?—but also fodder for the hurt/comfort scenario that Sharalyn Orbaugh (2010) has identified as one of the most common narrative patterns in male/male fan fiction and *dōjinshi* (see also Pugh 2005). In the case of *xxxHolic*, after Watanuki is harassed or threatened by *yōkai*, he can then be comforted by Dōmeki in an emotional exchange that strengthens the bond between the two.

[3.2] In *Kuchinashi kaoru*, the fan artist Kuroimisa imagines that Watanuki is sexually violated by a gardenia plant. When Watanuki finds refuge in the arms of Dōmeki, Dōmeki urges him to ejaculate, since that seems to be what the plant wants. Dōmeki then holds Watanuki as Watanuki suffers the attention of the plant's tendrils. After the ordeal is over, Dōmeki explains that the gardenia plant had somehow merged with the recently deceased spirit of a woman who had been traumatized by a miscarriage. The woman's husband was cheating on her, and she had hoped that a baby would repair their relationship. This woman was run down by a car as she rushed out into the street in pursuit of her husband, and her dying wish for a baby was absorbed by one of the gardenia plants lining the road. Dōmeki's explanation of the event is delivered in a style that perfectly mirrors the exposition concerning similar phenomena in the original manga. Furthermore, the manner in which Watanuki and Dōmeki speak to each other in the *dōjinshi* is faithful to their characterization in the manga. The art style and panel layout are also fairly consistent with those of the original. The only added element is the explicit sexuality.

[3.3] The device of "tentacle rape" (or "tendril rape," as the case may be) has a long and colorful history in Japanese illustrated and animated pornography, but these tentacles are usually applied to solitary girls and women who are openly exposed to the gaze of the reader, not to men who are shielded from the reader's gaze by the arms of another man. On the cover of *Kuchinashi kaoru*, Dōmeki is shown as supporting the incapacitated Watanuki (figure 2). Watanuki is posed in such a way as
to suggest vulnerability, but Dōmeki hovers protectively over him. Watanuki's line of sight is directed not toward the reader or coyly away from the reader, but rather at Dōmeki. The reader is certainly witness to Watanuki's violation, but many of the visual devices that allow the reader to project him- or herself onto the page in more conventional illustrated pornography, such as a faceless or invisible sexual partner, are relatively absent in Kuchinashi kaoru. Dōmeki appears in all but two of the eight pages depicting Watanuki's tangles with the lustful gardenia, and his purpose is to alleviate Watanuki's humiliation, not to exacerbate it. The erotic female gaze guiding the narrative flow and visual layout of Kuchinashi kaoru thus displays several deviations from conventions designed to appeal to an erotic male gaze. For example, comfort is emphasized over humiliation, and partnership is preferable to anonymous rape. Although the graphic depiction of sex is often a major component of the BL dōjinshi that feature it, the focus of the female gaze is not necessarily on the physical exchanges between two men but rather on the exploration of a facet of the relationship between two characters that is only hinted at in the source text.

[3.4] In this dōjinshi, the sexual aggressor, the gardenia, is female, as the plant acts under the influence of a recently deceased woman. According to Dōmeki, this woman's

---

Figure 2. The front cover of the dōjinshi Kuchinashi kaoru sono ude ni. Dōmeki holds an incapacitated Watanuki, who is encircled by the tendrils of a gardenia bush possessed by the spirit of a vengeful woman. [View larger image.]
final thoughts melded with "the vegetable instinct [shokubutsu honnō] of the
gardenia," thus creating a strange hybrid of reproductive lust in a flowering plant that
is not just female by poetic association but also female by spiritual possession. On one
hand, this creature is pathetic, as its actions are mindless and catalyzed by the tragic
death of a woman obsessed with a man. On the other hand, in contrast to the
passivity of both of its component parts, the woman/gardenia is able to accost a
passing stranger and take what it desires from him, despite his protests. The vines
prying apart the male principal's limbs and exposing his body to the reader are female,
which suggests a connection between the female sexual aggressor in the dōjinshi and
the presumably female reader of the dōjinshi.

[3.5] A criticism of BL manga commonly found on English-language online forums
(note 27) is that the tropes of the genre reproduce heteronormative gender roles while
simultaneously shutting out actual women from the story. One of the best-known BL
tropes is the dichotomy between seme and uke, or between the "active" sexual
partner (who penetrates) and the "passive" sexual partner (who is penetrated). The
seme is typically older and taller than the uke, with larger hands and a more angular
face. The seme will also generally be in a position of power relative to the uke. For
example, if the uke is a student, the seme will be an upperclassman or a teacher.
Besides being physically larger than the uke, the seme will perform masculinity by
actively demonstrating his social dominance over the uke or by concealing his feelings
behind a facade of taciturn reticence. There are variations on this dynamic, such as
the tsundere uke (note 28), who disguises his affection for the seme by scolding him
and bossing him around, but such variations are appealing precisely because they
deviate from the usual character dynamic in easily recognizable ways. Therefore, in BL
manga, the active seme partner is coded as masculine, while the passive uke
character is coded as feminine. If the relationship between two men is essentially that
between a strong masculine partner and a weak feminine partner, this reasoning
follows, then BL manga merely exploits a harmless fantasy of homosexuality to appeal
to the heteronormative desire of heterosexual female readers.

[3.6] The fact remains, however, that such constructions of masculinity and
femininity are being performed by male characters. In BL narratives, a character is not
passive because the character is biologically female; rather, the character is passive
because that is how his personality fits into a specific relationship. Although the
masculine sex of the uke may merely be an attractive window dressing on a character
coded as female, the inscription of a stereotypically feminine role onto a male
character is still subversive in its denial of biological determinism. In fact, the more
passive the uke, the more the association of femininity with romantic and sexual
passivity is called into question. The presumption that BL is gendered heterosexually is
founded on the supposition that there is by default a passive partner in a relationship,
and that this passive partner should always be depicted and read as female. In order to discredit this bias, it is necessary to understand how femininity is coded in BL dōjinshi. In many BL dōjinshi based on shōnen or seinen manga, the character traits that distinguish a certain character as masculine in the original work are often retained in fan works that depict the character as an uke, thus queering common tropes used in manga to code characters as masculine.

4. Beautiful men and the performance of shōjo

[4.1] As femininity is often defined by its deviations from masculinity, it is difficult to discuss the coding of femininity in male/male partnerships without relying on stereotypes. In Yokubō no kōdo: Manga ni miru sekushuariti no danjosa (Codes of desire: Differences between male and female sexuality in manga), Hori Akiko (2009) argues that when discussing gender coding in BL manga, it is useful to compare the genre to shōjo manga. Whereas the covers of manga anthology magazines and standalone manga softcover editions (tankōbon) for both gay and straight men almost always feature a full body shot of a single person, the covers of BL magazines and paperback manga, like the covers of shōjo manga, tend to feature a couple posed in manner that illustrates their relationship (note 29). The connection between shōjo and BL manga extends beyond the bodies exposed to the reader's gaze, as there is also a similarity in the characters through whom the reader experiences the story. In shōjo manga, events are presented from the narrative perspective of the female protagonist. In BL manga, the point-of-view character is often the uke, who supposedly occupies a feminine position in relation to the seme (Akiko 2009). When analyzing the femininity of the uke in BL manga, the construction of femininity in shōjo manga may thus serve as a convenient comparison (note 30).

[4.2] There is an extraordinary range of shōjo manga in existence. Even stereotypical portraits of passive femininity may be subverted within a shōjo title, as the character development that is a defining quality of the genre ensures that a character's personality will not necessarily remain consistent from one installment of a series to the next. Nevertheless, the female protagonists of a number of popular titles, such as Sand Chronicles (Sunadoki, 2003–6) and We Were There (Bokura ga ita, 2002–12), all begin their respective stories with similar character traits (note 31). A representative example of these traits can be found in Kuronuma Sawako, the protagonist of Shiina Karuho's hit series Kimi ni Todoke: From Me to You (Kimi ni todoke, 2005–) (note 32). Because of her resemblance to a certain evil little girl from a popular horror film, Sawako is nicknamed "Sadako" and ostracized by her classmates, despite her best efforts to be friendly. Sawako has therefore become a shy and self-deprecatig young woman by the time she enters high school. She admires Kazehaya Shōta, an outgoing boy in her class who is always surrounded by his friends. Over the course of the
manga, Kazehaya helps Sawako to come out of her shell and gradually form friendships with other students in their class. Sawako appreciates Kazehaya's kindness but is unable to understand how he could be attracted to her.

[4.3] According to the character type modeled so aptly by Sawako, the personality traits associated with the *shōjo* heroine of a romantic comedy are a lack of self-confidence, a cheerful willingness to help and forgive others, and a charming ignorance regarding romantic matters (note 33). The heroine channels the reader's wish to be emotionally nourished and protected by an attractive and fiercely monogamous partner who loves her unconditionally despite her flaws (which are minor and in the end only serve to make her more desirable), as well as the wish for this relationship to be acknowledged and respected by her female peers. The romantic *shōjo* heroine will gradually develop into a more assertive and emotionally independent character over the course of the story, but the catalyst for this development is more often than not her interaction with her primary male love interest.

[4.4] The narrative tendency of character development through romance applies to BL narratives as well. The *dōjinshi* Kemuri (Smoke, 2010), written and drawn by the artist Kō of the circle Kia, explores how the relationship between Watanuki and Dōmeki changes as *xxxHolic* nears its conclusion. By this point in the story, Watanuki has inherited the absent Yūko's role as a wish-granting witch inhabiting a mysterious shop. Since the fragile dimension that houses Yūko's shop would disappear if Watanuki were to physically leave it, he vows to remain there, never leaving and thus never aging. Dōmeki graduates from high school and enters college, yet he continues to visit Watanuki. Since the original manga does not offer many details concerning how these plot developments affect the relationship between Watanuki and Dōmeki, Kemuri picks up the pieces and fills in the gaps left open by the source text.

[4.5] Kemuri chronicles one of Dōmeki's visits to Watanuki after Watanuki has inherited Yūko's shop. In this *dōjinshi*, Watanuki has also inherited the wispy strands of smoke that are one of the primary visual motifs associated with Yūko in the *xxxHolic* manga. Similar to the manner in which the smoke motif suggests that Yūko is veiled in mystery in the original manga, the author of Kemuri uses this device as a metaphor for Watanuki's veiled intentions regarding Dōmeki. In Kemuri, Watanuki surreptitiously gives Dōmeki an aphrodisiac, then initiates a sexual encounter when his friend stays the night at the shop. Watanuki's conversation with his magical companion Mokona after this encounter suggests that he has seduced Dōmeki to create an emotional obligation engendered by physical desire that will give Dōmeki a stronger incentive to continue visiting him. "We tease each other, yet I really am fairly bad-natured," Watanuki muses. "I wonder how long he'll continue to be my friend."
Watanuki later confesses and apologizes to Dōmeki, but Dōmeki brushes off Watanuki's apology and suggests that he knew Watanuki's intentions all along. The *dōjinshi* ends with the pair embracing (figure 3). Watanuki continues to antagonize Dōmeki verbally but is obviously happy, and the strand of smoke on the right panel divides what Watanuki says ("Let me go") from his true feelings ("Hold me just a little longer").

**Figure 3.** The final page of the manga portion of the *dōjinshi* Kemuri. Watanuki says, "Let me go...You're holding me too tight," while he thinks, "But...Just a little longer."

[View larger image.]

[4.6] At the end of *xxxHolic*, Watanuki takes over Yūko's position in the shop by helping the people and spirits who enter hoping to have their wishes granted, and his main concern seems to be accepting Yūko's departure while waiting for a sign that she will return. He is no longer as intensely involved with the people with whom he had previously enjoyed strong friendships, such as Himawari; he merely watches their lives from afar with benevolent disinterest. As Watanuki matures, the tension drains from his relationship with Dōmeki. Like Yūko, who wore kimono and surrounded herself with objects of traditional Japanese craftsmanship, Watanuki has removed himself from the present and the real world, not only physically but emotionally as well. Since the flow of time accelerates in the closing chapters of the manga, the shift in Watanuki's personality feels abrupt and leaves the reader with several unanswered questions. For
instance, how does Watanuki feel about the sacrifices he has had to make in order to inherit Yūko's shop? Neither xxxHolic nor the various animated and live-action adaptations of the manga answers these questions, so the dōjin artist who created Kemuri attempts to address them through a sexual encounter between Watanuki and Dōmeki that forces Watanuki's hidden feelings to the surface for the benefit of both Dōmeki and the reader.

[4.7] In Kemuri, as in shōjo manga, character development takes precedence over physically oriented action, and the romance between two characters provides the stage on which this character development unfolds. As the interior monologue of Kemuri suggests, Watanuki is the point-of-view character, but it is not necessarily the case that Watanuki is feminized in exactly the same manner as the heroine of a shōjo romance. Some of the traits associated with Sawako, the heroine of Kimi ni Todoke, also apply to Watanuki as characterized in Kemuri. For example, although he is no longer insecure about his role as the master of the small world created by Yūko, Watanuki is nervous about his relationship with Dōmeki and does not seem to understand why his friend continues to visit him. The overtly sexual elements of the dōjinshi do not resonate with the tonal gestalt of shōjo romance, however, and Watanuki's calculated use of sex as a means to emotionally manipulate Dōmeki decisively separates him from the pure-heartedness of a shōjo heroine. Moreover, Watanuki maintains the ill temper and surliness that mark him as masculine (as opposed to a friendly shōjo character like Himawari) in the original manga. Thus, even though Watanuki is the point-of-view character and the uke of the dōjinshi, he is not coded as feminine in the same way that a shōjo heroine would be.

[4.8] The fact that Watanuki attempts to rape Dōmeki in Kemuri is another twist in the uke/seme dynamic. As in Kuchinashi kaoru, the uke often finds himself in a position of sexual vulnerability vis-à-vis the seme. Even though the uke is not necessarily feminine, the dynamic of a more aggressive partner taking advantage of a more passive partner has caused some members of BL fandoms to decry the uke/seme method of pairing as not only heteronormative but also misogynistic in its recapitulation of rape culture (note 34). In Kemuri, however, Watanuki is not an innocent virgin who is forcefully inducted into sexual maturity by an uncontrollably virile partner, and it is not immediately clear who is taking advantage of whom in Watanuki's coupling with Dōmeki. If anyone is taking advantage of these two young men, it is the female reader, who uses these fictional constructs for her own enjoyment, whether this enjoyment is erotic, emotional, or subversive. At its core, the debate over heteronormativity, misogyny, and rape tropes in BL narratives is not about fictional men but rather about the agency of the women who read and write them (note 35).
5. Fujoshi and the power of female fans

[5.1] In *Otaku joshi kenkyū: Fujoshi shisō taikei* (A study of female otaku: Essays on fujoshi), journalist Sugiura Yumiko repeatedly assures her readers that fujoshi, the "rotten girls" who create and consume BL manga (note 36), are not poorly groomed antisocial misfits. "The majority of fujoshi," Sugiura writes, "are adult women. They live in the real world, where things like 'true love' don't exist. These women fall in love and get married in the real world, where society necessitates compromise. When they get tired, they take a break in a fantasy world, and then they go back to reality" (2006, 42). According to Sugiura, although fujoshi occasionally immerse themselves in fantasy, or delusion (*mōsō*), they are far from delusional (*mōsōteki*); for them, the world of BL is a break from reality (*genjitsu*), not the sort of separate reality (*riariti*) that attractive *shōjo* characters provide for male fans of the anime and manga media mix (see also Saitō 2006). Sugiura's assessment of fujoshi is therefore largely positive (note 37). It is precisely because these women have a firm grasp on reality, she argues, that they are able to enjoy the fantasy of BL, which functions as a safe haven from the pressures of the real world.

[5.2] According to Sugiura's interpretation, however, fujoshi are women who, while not completely passive, make no effort to actively engage with or change the media they consume. Even when Sugiura (2006) discusses the women who read newspapers on their way to work in order to gather more fodder for scenarios revolving around forbidden relationships between male political figures, she does not attempt to argue that they have any real interest in politics outside of BL fantasies. Sugiura even suggests that fujoshi have been largely ignored by the Japanese media because they are remarkably adept at hiding their fannish interests and because they don't seem particularly unhappy or maladjusted. In other words, they do not challenge the status quo. As the subcultures associated with dōjinshi demonstrate, however, many fujoshi are not merely consumers; these women are quite active as producers as well. If fujoshi are unsatisfied with the phallocentrism and heteronormativity they see in the media mix, they create their own versions of official narratives in the form of dōjinshi fan comics, which may depict the homosexual escapades of male leads or go into more detail regarding the background and perspective of a female character who is shortchanged in favor of male characters in the original work. When female fans find themselves excluded from male-centered stories and discourse, they simply create their own.

[5.3] As the interpretations of the *xxxHolic* as expressed by Kuchinashi kaoru and Kemuri demonstrate, female readers are perfectly capable of translating homosociality into homoeroticism, and they are able to refigure the elements on the printed page into a narrative that suits their own interests and responds to issues not addressed by
the original text. *Fujoshi* and other readers creating fan works in a global context are thereby able to apply different hermeneutic lenses to male-dominated narratives, as the female gaze actively exposes the contradictions and possibilities embedded in phallocentric homosociality. As they exercise a female erotic gaze, readers who participate in BL and slash fan cultures subvert the concept of a masculinity that must continually assert its heterosexuality to maintain its prominence in gender-based power dynamics. By conducting these activities as members of a fandom community, whether that community is an online forum hosting fan fiction or a circle that publishes *dōjinshi* and distributes them at conventions, female readers are playing subversive games with corporate-owned texts that allow them to establish their own authority. Even though intellectual property still legally belongs to its author or producers, and even though the highest-grossing creators in transnational entertainment industries are still largely male, there are large and active subcultures of people to whom phallogocentric power structures of exclusive ownership and authorized interpretations do not matter in the slightest. The integration of fan works into the Japanese media mix renders it particularly open to the influence of queer and female voices, although it remains to be seen whether a critical mass of such fannish contributions will carve out a broader space for more inclusive representation or whether *dōjinshi* will simply follow a parallel path alongside mainstream entertainment.

6. Notes


2. As mentioned above, the *Sherlock* fan base is quite large and thus difficult to survey. The circumstantial evidence mentioned here includes not only essays and critiques from female-identified bloggers, such as those at *Jezebel* and the *Mary Sue*, but also fan works considered to be generally (but not exclusively) female-oriented, specifically slash art and fan fiction. For example, the "Sherlock Holmes/John Watson" tag on the fan fiction archive Archive of Our Own (http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Sherlock%20Holmes*s*John%20Watson) has more than 40,000 works within the "Sherlock (TV)" fandom as of this writing, making it one of the more popular relationships on the site.

3. The first episode of season 3 of *Sherlock*, "Many Happy Returns," features a meeting of a Sherlock fan club in which one female member posits that Moriarty did
not attempt to kill Sherlock but instead spirited him away for an intense one-on-one romantic encounter, an imagined scenario highly characteristic of slash fan fiction. As of this writing, the show has included spoken lines teasing various characters (most notably John Watson) about possible homoerotic interest but has not vindicated such potential with action or acknowledgment. This has led to many critics accusing the show of queer baiting, in which queer representation is hinted at but never achieves canonical status. For a summary of this discussion in the wider context of television history, see Rose Bridges, "How Do We Solve A Problem Like 'Queerbaiting'? On TV's Not-So-Subtle Gay Subtext," Autostraddle, June 26, 2013, http://www.autostraddle.com/how-do-we-solve-a-problem-like-queerbaiting-on-tvs-not-so-subtle-gay-subtext-182718/.

4. The quoted text is from a collection of responses to the Moffat interview posted by the Tumblr user X-Cetra, http://x-cetra.tumblr.com/post/72649952737/its-interesting-also-its-got-such-ahuge.

5. As described by Steinberg, Kadokawa Haruki began developing specific media mix strategies in the early 1970s as a response to the popularity of translations of English novelizations of American movies. The entry of these disposable paperbacks transformed the fiction market in Japan, and their success was the primary motivational factor in Kadokawa Books' establishment of a film production company, which originally released live-action movies and movie soundtracks based on the company's novels. The publisher's foray into anime, manga, light novels, character goods, and related media came somewhat later and did not reach its current level of sophistication until the 1990s. Japanese media critics such as Ōtsuka Eiji and Okada Toshio generally identify the development of Kadokawa's otaku-centric media mix with Mizuno Ryō's novel series Record of the Lodoss War (Rōdosu-tō senki, 1988–93), which was quickly adapted into several manga series, as well as an animation and a video game.

6. Although the encouragement of reader and audience participation is for many reasons preferable to the dismissal or prosecution of such participation, scholars such as Kristina Busse, Abigail De Kosnik, and Julie Levin Russo have argued that media production companies have begun to exploit fannish labor from which they profit but which they have no legal obligation to compensate in any way. Moreover, since intellectual property law is more easily manipulated by those with greater financial means, production companies are potentially able to control fan production with legal sanctions at any point. For further discussions of these concerns in the context of English-language fan fiction, see Hellekson (2015).

7. Aside from CLAMP, which began its activities as a dōjin circle, famous examples include Takahashi Rumiko, the creator of Ranma 1/2 (1987–96) and Inuyasha (1996–
2008), and Azuma Kiyohiko, the creator of *Azumanga Daioh* (*Azumanga daïō*, 1999–2002) and *Yotsuba&!* (*Yotsuba to!*; 2003–). Moreover, many manga artists continue to publish *dōjinshi* even after they become successful. Examples include Akamatsu Ken, the creator of *Love Hina* (*Rabu hina*, 1998–2001), and Kōga Yun, the creator of *Loveless* (*Raburesu*, 2001–). An expanded list can be found in the Wikipedia entry for *Dōjinshi*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C5%8Djinshi#Individuals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C5%8Djinshi#Individuals).

8. A useful indicator of this trend is the increased entertainment industry presence at fan conventions such as the San Diego Comic-Con, the New York Comic Con, the MCM London Comic Con, and the Angoulême International Comics Festival. Although industry representatives have always attended such conventions to give panels and offer portfolio reviews, spikes in attendee numbers (as provided on the Web sites of the managing organizations of these events) and positive news media coverage in the past decade have generated a feedback loop with cinema and television professionals and production companies. Industry conventions such as New York’s BookCon have also begun to see more fan attendees in recent years. In addition, North American comics and animation companies such as Boom! Studios and Frederator Studios have begun to recruit writers, artists, and interns directly from fannish social networking sites such as DeviantArt and Tumblr.

9. Interestingly enough, Kadokawa has applied its media mix strategy to the *Sherlock* television series, serializing a manga adaptation of several of the show's more self-contained episodes in its monthly *seinen* magazine *Young Ace*, which also runs installments of a CLAMP manga titled *Drug & Drop* (2011–). Like *Sherlock*, *Drug & Drop* is a mystery series centered around the adventures of two attractive men with a close yet complicated relationship. By outwardly catering to a male demographic while subtly appealing to female BL fans, *Young Ace* is able to maintain a large readership as one of Kadokawa's flagship manga publications.

10. A common translation of *dōjinshi* is "coterie magazine," which is more apt when referenced with the broader history of the Japanese term, as the word *dōjinshi* is also used to describe the literary magazines published by small schools of writers and poets of the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–26) eras. Self-published and privately distributed poetry collections and *surimono* art prints were a major feature of Edo period (1600–1868) print and literary culture as well. However, the introductions of many *dōjinshi* how-to guides, such as *Dōjinshi · Saito · Ibento kaisai dōjin katsudō nō hau no subete* (2007, *Everything you need to know about dōjinshi*, Web sites, and fan conventions) and *Mezase Komike!* (2005, *Aim for Comic Market!*), trace the origins of Japanese *dōjinshi* culture to American fan conventions such as those held in the honor of the *Star Trek* television series (1966–69). It is therefore difficult to assume continuity between prewar literary *dōjinshi* and postwar *dōjinshi* fan comics, although
contemporary poetry circles and university literary clubs in Japan still refer to their in-house publications as *dōjinshi*.

11. These connotations stem from the fanzines distributed at science fiction and fantasy conventions during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Such fanzines could vary greatly in quality, but a typical example might be composed of mimeographed or photocopied pages stapled together and filled with margin-to-margin handwritten or typewritten text and low-resolution images, although a select number of fanzines were expertly formatted and beautifully published. As Japanese *dōjinshi* have become more widely accessible in North America and Europe, however, the fanzines sold in the "artist alley" sections of the main exhibition areas of fan conventions have gradually come to reflect the high print quality and stylistic conventions of *dōjinshi*. Instead of referring to their self-published fan comics and fan art compilations as fanzines or *dōjinshi*, many North American and European artists now use the English expression "fan book," a translation of *dōjinshi* commonly used by Japanese artists.

12. With the advent of artist-friendly social networking sites such as Pixiv (http://www.pixiv.net/) and specialty online *dōjinshi* retailers such as Alice Books (http://alice-books.com/), many fans now operate as individuals and refer to themselves as *kojin* (one-person) circles. In recent years, a collaborative publication between *kojin* artists has come to be referred to as a *gōdōshi* (multi-artist fan book).

13. Physically printed and bound prose fan fiction is known as a *dōjin* novel (*noberu*). Such *dōjin* novels can be stand-alone stories of varying length, collections of works by the same author, or anthologies of works for a specific pairing contributed by multiple authors. Many, but not all, *dōjin* novels contain manga-style illustrations, and some even feature several pages of sequential manga portraying key scenes.

14. Certain branches of Book-Off, a large national chain specializing in used books, may carry *dōjinshi* as well, especially those located in or contingent to entertainment districts catering to fannish interests, such as Akihabara in Tokyo and Nanba in Osaka.

15. These channels include personal Web pages and accounts on sites such as Pixiv and Twitter. Fan artists operating online often do not provide contact information, although they may advertise their appearance at fan events. It is possible for the work of extraordinarily popular artists to be highlighted in publications such as *Quarterly Pixiv* (a magazine distributed by the manga publisher Enterbrain), but publication opportunities stemming from online activity are exceptions. Himaruya Hidekazu's historical gag manga *Hetalia: Axis Powers* (Akushisu Pawāzu Hetaria, 2006–13), which was hosted on its author's personal Web page, is one such exception.
At conventions and resale stores, dōjinshi are generally divided into two categories: dansei-muke (for men) and josei-muke (for women). Dansei-muke dōjinshi tend to feature graphic heterosexual pornography, while josei-muke dōjinshi have often been stereotyped as focusing on beautiful boys in love with each other (although a sizable percentage of josei-muke dōjinshi involve heterosexual romance or nonromantic dramatic or comedic stories). Josei-muke dōjinshi are not necessarily modeled on media for female audiences (such as shōjo and josei manga) and are more frequently based on media targeted toward male audiences (such as shōnen and seinen manga). For example, the shōnen titles serialized in Weekly Shōnen Jump (Shūkan shōnen janpu), such as Naruto (1997–2015) and Bleach (Burīchi, 2001–), are commonly appropriated as the source texts (gensaku) for josei-muke dōjinshi.

For a short overview of the BL genre, see McLelland and Welker (2015).

Jenkins (2008) makes a similar argument in the context of American media. However, as legal practices concerning fair use and copyright violations related to popular media are different in Japan, an examination of how fan production increasingly drives the creation of popular culture is necessary in a Japanese context.

Another prominent member of this group of female manga artists born in 1949 is Ikeda Ryōko, internationally famous for her epic saga Berusaiyu no bara (The Rose of Versailles, 1972–73). For a perspective on Ikeda and the political and literary climate that influenced her and the other members of the 24-Nengumi, see McKnight (2010).

Jenkins (2007) has also emphasized the appeal of filling in the textual gaps to fan cultures; he argues that media producers are increasingly structuring stories in such a way as to emphasize these gaps in order to create properties that are able to sustain a large and dedicated fan base.

It should be noted that men are not the sole producers and consumers of pornographic dansei-muke dōjinshi, as women are often members of the circles who sell such dōjinshi at fan events. Self-identified female otaku (a word for "geek" implying fannish interest in media properties targeted at a male audience), such as the lesbian manga essayist Takeuchi Sachiko, readily admit to enjoying dōjinshi catering to a male erotic gaze.

Angles (2011) discusses these homosocial bonds as they appear in the fiction of writers such as Edogawa Ranpo and Murayama Kaita. In his conclusion, Angles demonstrates how contemporary dōjinshi artists have translated the homosociality and covert homoeroticism of modern literature into open and explicit relationships.

Weekly Shōnen Magazine is a seinen publication targeted at an older male audience, as evinced by its portrayal of overtly sexual themes and explicitly violent
scenarios. Although inserts and pullout posters depicting teenage gravure idols in bikinis fill the magazine, the manga stories serialized within its pages tend toward the dystopian end of speculative fiction. *Bessatsu Shōnen Magazine* is a monthly spin-off of *Weekly Shōnen Magazine*, allowing for each installment to be longer and more intricately plotted. Far from being derivative or less prestigious than its weekly cousin, *Bessatsu Shōnen Magazine* is home to many of the most popular *seinen* manga series in Japan, which are often licensed for distribution overseas. Recent notable examples include Isayama Hajime's *Attack on Titan* (*Shingeki no kyojin*, 2009–) and Oikawa Tōru's *From the New World* (*Shinsekai yori*, 2012–14), the latter of which is based on an award-winning 2008 novel by the avant-garde horror and mystery writer Kishi Yūsuke.

24. The character Sakura in *xxxHolic*'s companion manga, *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* (2003–9), serves a similar purpose, in that she acts as an object through which the male characters can indirectly form bonds with one another and, later in the manga, as a morally ambiguous character against which the male protagonists can define their own character development.

25. One of Sedgwick's main arguments in *Between Men* is that the intense relationships of the men involved in the creation and administration of the British empire were characterized by homosocial desire, a "pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, [and] rivalry" (1985, 1).

26. Because CLAMP's *shōnen* and *seinen* titles are serialized in magazines targeted at the corresponding demographics—boys and young men—most male characters in these titles are coded as straight through their attraction to their designated female love interests. Several male and female characters in the CLAMP universe are canonically gay (in the sense of being in easily discernible romantic relationships with members of the same sex or being clearly romantically interested in members of the same sex), but these characters generally appear in CLAMP's *shōjo* and *josei* manga.

27. One such forum is the community Fandom Secrets (http://fandomsecrets.dreamwidth.org/, formerly http://fandomsecrets.livejournal.com/), on which members of multiple fandoms post anonymous observations and opinions. Each secret has its own chain of comments, wherein the issue at hand is discussed by both anonymous and named users. Sexuality, especially as it is expressed in fan art and fan fiction, is a common topic on the forum.

28. The word *tsundere* is a portmanteau of *tsun-tsun*, which expresses disgust, and *dere-dere*, which expresses adoration. The *tsundere* character type is borrowed from *moe* fandoms, whose constituents are generally assumed to be male. The relationship
between male and female fandom cultures in Japan is complicated and requires further study, but BL and moe fan cultures are fully aware of each other and borrow character tropes and narrative patterns from each other even as they poke fun these tropes and patterns.

29. Hori (2009) provides tables of information on 80 contemporary mass market magazines. This information includes the number of characters on the covers, the sight lines of these characters (whether they are looking at the reader or at each other, for instance), and the clothing that the characters are modeling. Reproductions of 24 magazine covers are included as illustrations. This information demonstrates a correlation between the covers of pornographic magazines for men and manga magazines for men. There is also a clear correlation between the covers of magazines for women, shōjo manga magazines, and BL manga magazines. It should be noted, however, that not all shōjo and BL manga covers, and indeed not all shōjo and BL manga, feature a romantically intertwined couple.

30. Although this comparison is useful, it is important to remember that correlation does not equal causation. Shōjo manga and BL manga are in fact marketed to two separate demographics, with BL being a subcategory of the larger demographic genre of josei manga, which is targeted toward women of college age or older. Like its male demographic equivalent, seinen manga, josei manga encompasses a broad range of subgenres, from mother-in-law horror stories to workplace dramas to science fiction to abstract artistic pieces. This breadth of genre makes comparing BL manga to other josei manga difficult.

31. This trend is partially a result of the effort of publishers to brand manga magazines and tankōbon publishing labels through similar art styles and familiar narrative conventions. Although there will naturally be a diversity of styles and stories represented by the different artists managed by a publisher, the editors assigned to these artists contribute greatly to the finished product. Nevertheless, artists, especially high-profile artists like those of CLAMP, still have a great deal of creative freedom.

32. The manga series was adapted into a light novel series in 2007, a television anime in 2009, and a live-action film in 2010.

33. Examples of this type of heroine are easily found in recent shōjo manga such as Fushigi Yûgi (Fushigi yûgi, 1992–96), From Far Away (Kanata kara, 1993–2003), Red River (Sora wa akai kawa no hotori, 1995–2002), Peach Girl (Piichi gāru, 1997–2003), Fruits Basket (Furûtsu basuketto, 1998–2006), Hot Gimmick (Hotto gimikku, 2000–2005), We Were There (Bokura ga ita, 2002–12), Vampire Knight (Vanpaia naito, 2004–13), Black Bird (Burakku bādo, 2007–13), and Dawn of the Arcana (Reimei no arukana, 2009–13), and many others.
34. An insightful blog post critically discussing these tropes in relation to the anime series Sekai-ichi hatsukoi (2011, World's Greatest First Love) is "World's Worst First Love" on the fan blog GAR GAR Stegosaurus at http://gargarstegosaurus.wordpress.com/2011/05/01/worlds-worst-first-love/.

35. For an academic treatment of one such debate, see Vincent (2007).

36. The expression fujoshi, which might be translated as "rotten girl" or "fan trash," is a play on fujoshi, a somewhat antiquated word for "wife" that is pronounced the same but written with different Chinese characters in Japanese.

37. Sugiura's assessment is positive in the sense that she asserts that fujoshi are not social miscreants but fully functioning adults. Nevertheless, such a statement runs the risk of reinforcing heteronormativity in its positioning of queerness as an escape from the inequalities implicit in heterosexual romance. The relationship between the lived experience of queerness and symbolic representations of queerness is fraught with complications and contradictions, but I would argue that the fantasy of openly accepted and uncontested queerness implied by many (but far from all) BL manga and dōjinshi can also serve as an analgesic against the harshness of real-world queer identity, in which automatic happy endings are not necessarily forthcoming at the end of every story.

7. Works cited


Theory

What we talk about when we talk about bronies

Anne Gilbert

University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas

1. Introduction

[1.1] The notion of grown men who love, really love, a sweet, pastel-colored cartoon produced for young girls galvanizes public interest. Bronies are incongruous and unexpected, and have therefore become the subject of news and culture features attempting to explain these fans to a mainstream readership. Fascination with bronies has focused outsider attention on them to a degree not commonly experienced by other fan communities, and thus the incredulity and discomfort that frame coverage of bronies speak to cultural efforts to construct an identity for bronies—and, implicitly, for fans—that can be contained as either acceptable or problematic.

[1.2] This article outlines major themes in conversations that take place about bronies outside of their fan community: how journalists, critics, bloggers, and pop culture commentators describe the fandom and its participants to a mainstream readership, and how articles and documentaries on bronies mediate self-identified members' articulation of their practices to outsiders. In academic discussions, bronies are one particular representation of fandom, and their practices demonstrate the interpersonal connections and productive possibilities of participation. In the popular press, however, bronies are a specific case that garners public interest, but the underlying message is that fandom in general is a fraught enterprise; how bronies are framed in mainstream news coverage indicates that popular appreciation for fandom is constrained in ways that limit fans' value as cultural producers to a narrow range of normative identities. Outsider coverage of bronies provides a case study of how implicit preconceptions of media consumption, sexuality, masculinity, and children's media contribute to privileging particular fan identities and containing any subversive potential of alternate modes of cultural participation.

[1.3] The sections that follow parse the rhetoric of newspaper, magazine, and online articles about bronies, indicating that though the coverage of bronies is largely positive, the descriptions frequently reinforce the discomfiting nature of the brony phenomenon. These articles reassure readers of bronies' heterosexuality and focus on community, affording them a type of nontraditional masculinity that is lacking in cultural capital but is also relatively harmless. The implications of this coverage, however, extend beyond bronies themselves: Preoccupation with male fans of My Little Pony reinscribes a longstanding marginalization of feminized fan practices, privileging male fans and erasing from the discussion women and girls who are fans of the show. Though academic coverage treats bronies' behaviors as part of their fan identity, mainstream articles reveal a persistent desire to pathologize fans. Even in an era in which fan practices, geeks, and media subaltern cultures are increasingly appropriated by mainstream media, bronies provide an illustration that acceptance of these practices can be conditional. Though bronies profess to be performing a radical version of masculinity, their mediated rhetoric and the descriptions of their community by outsiders indicate that they have, rather, appropriated markers of brony participation into conventional gender identities and that efforts to describe bronies for mainstream audiences are focused on sorting these fans into familiar categories of normalcy and deviance.

2. Covering bronydom

[2.1] "Brony" refers to an adult, generally aged 15 to 35, who is a fan of the My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (FiM) (2010–) television cartoon. The name, a portmanteau of "bro" and "pony" (note 1), originated on 4chan, a loosely regulated (and deeply...
masculinist) anonymous message board with a high profile in geek and Internet culture. The term was initially derisive, meant to distinguish FiM fans from those of animation or otaku, but bronies took over the moniker as one of self-identification. Bronies are largely male, single, and educated, and are either in or have completed college (Edwards and Redden, 2011–14). There are also adult female fans of the show (who refer to themselves as bronies, lady bronies, or pegasisters), as well as a sizeable audience of viewers within the show’s demographic of three- to six-year-old girls (Johnson 2013). Interest in the brony phenomenon, however, focuses almost exclusively on adult male participants.

[2.2] While they are fans of the Friendship Is Magic series, bronies are not necessarily fans of earlier My Little Pony franchise efforts. Hasbro introduced My Little Pony programming in the 1980s for syndicated Saturday morning cartoons and direct-to-video features designed to sell branded merchandise to young girls. Such commercially driven, feminized ventures have been dismissed for decades "as the trashiest, most saccharine, most despicable products of the children’s television industry" (Seiter 1995, 145), but when Hasbro wanted to revitalize sales of My Little Pony merchandise in the late 2000s, it launched a reboot of the cartoon for the fledgling children’s cable network The Hub. My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic premiered in 2010, and despite its visible commercial goals, it also exhibited markers of quality: the elevation of series creator Lauren Faust to an auteur figure (Johnson 2013, 146) and the pop culture–inspired jokes and attention to detail (Robertson 2014) meant that the show could claim crossover appeal for adults.

[2.3] FiM remains an aggressively feminized text. It tells the tale of Twilight Sparkle, sent to Ponyville by Princess Celestia to discover the importance of friendship, harmony, and loyalty. The pony friends work together to combat both quotidian challenges and occasional forces of darkness; their adventures are depicted in a vibrant color scheme of pinks, purples, and yellows and interspersed with perky songs and earnest conversations about hugs. FiM makes strides toward complex humor, multidimensional characters, and insightful stories in order to engage viewers at multiple levels, and is still overwhelmingly girly. This alone makes bronies a subject of interest, because grown men who create pastel pony art and passionately discuss characters with names like Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie are amusing, baffling, or worrying.

[2.4] In academic discussions, bronies are interesting, but not necessarily unique. Venetia Laura Delano Robertson (2014), for example, considers how bronies’ interactions with the FiM text and with one another contribute to a sense of identity, one that challenges existing normative gender constructions. Derek Johnson (2013) focuses on bronies as productive audiences whose practices contribute to the authorship of My Little Pony as a text and as a locus of participatory culture. Two psychology researchers launched the Brony Study (http://www.bronystudy.com) in 2011 to survey the brony community both online and at conventions, and have quantified brony demographics and coded bronies’ personality types (Edwards and Redden, 2011–14). In scholarly conversations, bronies are fans first; their behaviors and community are fruitful fields of analysis not because they are odd, but because their particularities have widespread implications. As the subject of fan-focused academic research, bronies are recognizable and, in some ways, representative.

[2.5] On the other hand, in journalistic coverage, bronies have generated a great deal of public interest that focuses on their incongruity. In national magazines and newspapers (Wired, Atlantic, New York Times, Guardian), in online publications (Gawker, Daily Beast, Jezebel), in regional papers, and on blogs, bronies have become the subject of mainstream general-interest articles written by outsiders for outsiders, meant to describe bronies and address the bewilderment (and discomfort) their existence raises. This outsider coverage of bronies is the focus of this article, because the approach it takes has implications for cultural opinions of masculinity, sexuality, gendered media practices, and fandom broadly speaking.

[2.6] Fan identities are often constructed from the outside: industrial entities imagine an audience of engaged consumers, academic authors formulate arguments about the significance of fan practices, and nonfans construct narratives that situate fandom within familiar territory. Research commonly addresses these first two constructs, focusing on the cultural and economic impact of fans’ identities, but here my interest is in the cultural conversation that takes place among general audiences. The bronies case study serves to illustrate pervasive uneasiness with fandom, gender, and media consumption that extends beyond its particularities. Participatory culture, including fandom but also produsage, cocreation, and other patterns of convergence, is lauded for its liberating potential, but can privilege young male users with disposable income and technological know-how—the perceived early adopters (Scott 2013; Johnson 2013). Fandom, too, is often a gendered proposition, with factions and hierarchies divided such that feminized practices and female fans are kept separate, less valued, or outright ridiculed (see, for example, Busse 2013; Click 2009; Johnson 2007). Despite cultural shifts that have moved fandom from the periphery to a place of prominence, the methods used to pathologize and normalize bronies indicate that interest in and acceptance of fans by the broader public is often tenuous, shallow, and contingent upon a very specific performance of fandom.

3. Bronies from beyond the herd

[3.1] “Each day, out-of-work computer programmer Luke Allen self-medicates by watching animated ponies have magical adventures,” begins a magazine feature on bronies (Watercutter 2011). This article, from Wired, is one of several published in mainstream venues in the United States, the UK, and Australia as bronies emerged as a burgeoning fan subculture. These features are not meant to give bronies a voice, but instead to introduce the brony fandom to a general audience. They are, perhaps surprisingly, largely positive: Articles paint bronies as “true rebels” (Angel 2012), and they explicitly attempt to reconcile...
bronies with the popular mainstream. The above quotes and the excerpts to follow, however, indicate that outsider coverage of bronies may be well-meaning and overtly benevolent, but it also incorporates language that reinforces separation between the brony fandom and acceptable notions of masculinity and media consumption.

[3.2] In addition to being unemployed self-medicators, bronies "claim to have no interest in dating" and are "purposefully delaying adulthood" (Vlahos 2014). Articles mention bronies seeking refuge from depression (Watercutter 2014) or still living at home (Peters 2013; Riess 2014). Bronies are, in other words, depicted as inhabiting a diminished social position: They do not possess markers of economic power—a job, their own home—nor do they have power over their own sensibilities, needing addictive habits in order to face the world. These are selective characterizations, ones that highlight the dysfunction of bronies and emphasize their lack of cultural capital by implicitly reinforcing the stereotype of the fanboy who lives in his mother's basement. Not mentioned are statistics that show the average brony is a 21-year-old student (Edwards and Redden 2011-14), which could explain the lack of a job and an independent home better than could participation in the brony fandom.

[3.3] Regional news outlets also feature articles on bronies in conjunction with upcoming conventions in order to introduce readers to bronies in the local area. In these articles, reporters might attend a convention or interview a local brony and might be won over by the fandom. The articles often welcome bronies to the region, but again the language employed reveals a troubling image of grown men displaying affection for media content and products intended for young girls. As a result, descriptions are filled with stereotype: Bronies "are not what you think. They're not overly effeminate. Many aren't gay. They aren't predatory" (Fallon 2014). Compliments to bronies are decidedly backhanded, mentioning that bronies "have no bad intentions" (Collins 2012), that they are "harmless" (Fallon 2014) and "surprisingly" not creepy, and that bronies restrain themselves from "any deviant or perverted behavior" (Gregory 2014). Even in complimentary coverage, bronies receive dubious endorsements and assurances only that they do not present a direct threat.

[3.4] Articles published in fan-friendly outlets are not suffused by the same discomfort, but they do indicate that this discomfort is understandable. Stories circulate of a brony who was "essentially gay-bashed" at a gas station (Lambert 2013), of a man claiming to have been fired for his FiM fandom (Zimmerman 2013), of a boy bullied to the point of a suicide attempt over his brony passion (Chayka 2014). Violence toward bronies is deplorable but still recognizable, as the presumed deviance of the fandom is presented as readily visible. Keeping a brony identity under wraps is a valid strategy, because "people who hear about bronies consider the group either ridiculous or creepy" (Angel 2012).

[3.5] Journalists also make frequent use of social scientific methods to rationalize the brony fandom. Psychologists and sociologists are brought in as experts who explain that bronies can be viewed as normal, contributing members of contemporary culture (Elder 2013; Peters 2013; Vlahos 2014). A Grantland article celebrates the "wonderful world" of bronies, but also summarizes numerous uncited social psychology findings that make bronies the victims of circumstance: "One study sees them as men-children, running from the realities of the recession and the post-9/11 world and taking flight in the fanciful world of the ponies, while another posits that they are men uncomfortable in the world of masculinity, who find validation in a sphere that promotes positive values like cooperation and emotional openness that may be typically seen as feminine" (Lambert 2013).

[3.6] Negative coverage of bronies makes explicit the criticism present in more sympathetic articles. Reactionary screeds, often on politically conservative opinion sites, castigate bronies and characterize the phenomenon as a sign of the demise of contemporary masculinity. Hate pieces call the fandom "terrifying" and "a freaking embarrassment" (Schlichter 2012) and screeds on the conservative Fox News network express disgust and horror (Bronies 2013). Articles on bronies, both positive and negative, that include comment sections carry responses from readers who denigrate bronies, questioning their masculinity, sexuality, and maturity, and speculating about their likely perversions. Though most articles written on bronies are not characterized by such vehemently antibrony perspectives, these few do illustrate the most instinctual and overt criticism, underpinnings of which are shared by more positive coverage as well.

4. We bronies are men

[4.1] The perspectives of nonfans explaining bronies to a general audience are augmented in outsider coverage by bronies' efforts to voice their own descriptions of the fandom and its appeal. Bronies articulate their position as interview subjects in news articles and documentaries, both intended for a wide, nonbrony audience. Their voices are mediated in these sources, but their methods of rationalizing and celebrating participation in the brony community represent a contrast to outsider perspectives. Bronies laud the quality of the show's production (in particular its animation and voice acting), the quality of its content (the storylines, complex characters, and catchy songs), and the pleasure of viewing a program that has no violence and transmits joy (A Brony Tale 2014; Bronies 2013), as well as the possibilities inherent in membership in the brony community. The narratives constructed within these sources from bronies' reflections on the fandom echo benevolent outsider perspectives, but reveal their own set of anxieties about the gender implications of the brony fandom.

[4.2] My Little Pony is shown as appealing to bronies partly because it enables membership in a community. This community is described by participants as enthusiastic, charitable, and welcoming, a safe haven in which "people who were not that popular" make friends (Elder 2013). The "big line" for the director of A Brony Tale (A Brony Tale 2014) is bronies who proclaim, "We came for the show but stayed for the community" (Fallon 2014). In Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of "My Little Pony"
At these events, bronies profess to find a nonjudgmental, safe environment full of people who understand. Benefits of membership in the brony community are, in many ways, the benefits of fan participation, in which a shared interest in a text provides entry to a subcultural, often close-knit community of like-minded individuals. Bronies, however, also describe their community as offering an opportunity to re-create, figuratively and literally, the world of My Little Pony by forming spaces “in which to practice the show’s values of friendship, compassion, and harmony” (Watercutter 2014).

Bronies often exhibit pride in challenging gender stereotypes (Peters 2013). Instead of ignoring cultural pushback, bronies profess to deliberately rewrite codes of masculine behavior that valorize competition and aggression (Watercutter 2014). Animosity toward bronies is incorporated into their collective identity—the brony motto, with some variation, is “I am going to love and tolerate the shit out of you.” They take pride in not conforming to conservative expectations of masculinity (Bronies 2013), and respond to derision and attacks with tolerance and empathy. Yet a great deal of bronies’ gender performance is rooted in normative masculinity. Bronies prize *FiM*’s similarities to Japanese anime, Dungeons & Dragons, *Doctor Who*, and *Star Wars* (Vlahos 2014), action films (Peters 2013), and programs like *Breaking Bad* (Riess 2104), implicitly appropriating—and legitimating—*My Little Pony* by likening it to artifacts from traditionally masculine geek culture. Bronies tell stories of coming to *FiM* through recommendations on boards like 4chan or the online gaming site Steam (Vlahos 2014), grounding appreciation for the show in arenas that have preexisting credibility among male consumers. The self-proclaimed “Manliest Brony in the World” balances his brony identity with his welding skills and mechanical know-how (Bronies 2013; Fallon 2014), and brony conventions feature military meet-ups, thus displaying in ways in which markers of bronydom can be incorporated into masculinity rather than contradicting it.

Though these mediated perspectives on bronies construct a narrative that explicitly claims to break down gender distinctions, the rhetoric attributed to bronies is masculinizing in a way that implicitly comes at the expense of the feminine. It is certainly the case that bronies occupy a privileged space in cultural, industrial, and academic conversations. Johnson notes that bronies are able to be understood as cocreative authors of *FiM* because, as an audience, they are already constructed in industrial imaginations as adult, heterosexual men, and therefore collaborative, powerful, and desirable viewers (2013, 143). That bronies warrant such public attention, too, and are able to sustain interest as the topic of news articles, blogs, and documentaries speaks to their privileged role. Bronies are a focus because they are portrayed as a fandom comprising adult men—valuable audiences who already hold a great deal of cultural and industrial capital. Bronies who are given voice in features in order to speak about the fandom and their role within it are already part of this narrative that privileges a specific fan identity; the frames that they articulate, too, reinforce their masculinity in ways that maintain their structured privilege.

Bronies’ descriptions of their gender performance manifest as a practice of appropriating a feminized text into an otherwise traditional masculine identity, which can leave female fans in the cold. The feature-length documentary *Bronies*, for example, includes a two-minute segment reminding viewers that women are bronies, too. “Pegasister” is to some a “lame” term that carries the same gender baggage as “girl gamer” (Loving 2013). At brony conventions, which male participants laud as an ideal site of bonding, male attendees can outnumber female ones nearly two to one (Gregory 2014). Some female fans contend that bronies have ruined *My Little Pony*: “The problem...has nothing to [do with] grown men liking a children's cartoon and everything to do with their usurping of a safe space for young girls and distorting it into a hypersexual and toxic environment for these younger fans” (DeCarlo 2014). Bronies have, in many respects, constructed a fandom that conforms to their own needs and may not meet those of others. Though mediated representations of bronies highlight their empathy and progressiveness, their attentions are directed to other bronies, other men. They do not indicate that they are aware of the people or the practices pushed out by the focus on male fans. In effect, bronies claim to want a space in popular culture that includes room for a nonnormative approach to gender and media consumption, but they are not necessarily creating a space of inclusiveness.

5. Pony sex, brony sexuality

The specter of nonnormative sexuality is a pervasive thread in brony coverage. Articles written by outsiders explicitly address bronies’ desires, fetishes, and sexual preferences, implicitly illustrating a link between the brony identity and presumptive associations with sex and sexuality. The most common assumption made about bronies is of homosexuality (wielded as “an accusation” [Angel 2012]), and coverage focuses on correcting this misconception. Brony Study surveys indicate that only 1.7 percent of 50,000 respondents self-identify as homosexual. While greater percentages identify as bi- or asexual, the overwhelming majority of bronies—84 percent—describe themselves as heterosexual (Edwards and Redden, 2011–14). Writers employ these and similar statistics to depict bronies as predominantly heterosexual, but doing so helps construct bronies as a paradox. One article notes, "One might be hard pressed, when seeing college-age guys wearing pink wigs and furry faux tails walking into a convention center...not to look for some LGBT connection" (Vlahos 2014), as though bronies would be easily understandable if *FiM* were overtly queered and bronydom established as a signifier of homosexuality. Bronies are disruptive to those outside the community because they cannot be easily identified as homosexual and sorted into existing classifications of gender.

Though assuring readers of bronies’ predominant heterosexuality, writers perpetuate the assumption of homosexuality by describing bronies and their relationships with others using vocabulary borrowed from narratives of homosexuality in an intolerant
Successful because of its aggressively feminized content: Once toy and entertainment producers began to take an interest in little
aesthetically motivated…and it was gendered as hyper-feminine" (2013, 138). Seiter contends that the 1980s My Little Pony
meant to appeal to girls ages three to six does not merit a large investment of care, complexity, or capital.

The language employed emphasizes bronies' lack of mainstream acceptance, implying that they may be isolated and
disenfranchised.

5.3 Perhaps most troubling is the ease with which bronydom is equated with pedophilia. Bronies are attacked
for having a sick "hidden agenda" (Gladnick 2014), and if they are dangerous, the threat has a decidedly sexual
undertone: Bronies are "terrifying" and "predatory" in a manner that suggests they are pursuing a sexualized interest in extremely vulnerable populations (Schlichter 2012). Concerned mom bloggers are "disturbed" by grown men whose interests overlap with those of little girls (OOPH 2011;
Vlahos 2014), thus illustrating that the brony identity, to some outsiders, is incompatible with healthy, normal sexuality. While
pedophilia is only one way outsiders imply that bronies' interest in My Little Pony cannot be "real," interest in FIM is presumed to
be a cover to lure in young children. Accusations of pedophilia are perhaps extreme—and rare—but it is worth noting that, for
some outsiders, it is easier to categorize grown men who love My Little Pony as predatory sexual deviants than it is to consider
what a genuine, nonthreatening affection for FIM might say about contemporary formations of masculinity. These are the
assumptions that underscore discussions about bronies by outsiders.

5.4 It is notable, too, that sexuality is so easily introduced to descriptions of bronies. Fan participation is not in itself a sexual
enterprise, and little about the bronies' particular mode of practicing and displaying their fandom—conventions, cosplay, meme
creation, fan art—points to an ulterior sexual motivation. As in all fandoms, there are those within the brony community who
pursue sexual, violent, or fetishistic readings of FIM, but this fringe is not central to or representative of the brony fandom. Yet
sexuality and desire are raised often enough by nonbronies that they might appear to be key components of the fandom. In Slate,
bronies are charged with wanting "nothing more than imagery of [the ponies] as humans to appeal to their less-than-innocent fantasies about really getting personal with their favorite toys" (Marcotte 2013). Again, bronies fetishizing the ponies is perhaps distasteful, but somehow understandable.

5.5 The preoccupation with sex and sexuality in articles about bronies highlights the ways in which this mode of media
consumption and this fandom are not easily categorized within mainstream conversations. The fact that outsider coverage
continually discusses bronies' sexual tendencies speaks to a desire to compartmentalize these men's fascination with a little girls'
cartoon as something familiar, if not desirable. The effect is that these fans' desires are positioned as deviant in some way:
Though the particular aberrance is unnamed (they are not pedophiles, not fetishists, not plushies or furries [Buckley 2014]),
bronies are suspected of somehow diverging from normative, understandable sexual pursuits. Bronies may be threatening
because of their presumptive nonnormative sexuality, but they are objects of cultural fascination—and significance—for the same
reason.

6. Incongruity is magic

6.1 Even within a culture that has shifted fandom from the fringes to a more central position among forms of media
consumption, bronies are a fan community that is perceived as anomalous. Though bronies may be used to illustrate emerging
patterns of cocreative participation (Johnson 2013) or alternative approaches to masculinity (Watercutter 2014), they are also
used to underscore ongoing reservations about fandom and to reinforce hierarchies of media production and consumption. Bronies
are notable, newsworthy, and somewhat unsettling because they do not conform to notions about what masculine media
consumers are meant to do with cultural texts.

6.2 Children's media are highly gendered, and this gender divide is accompanied by implied value systems. In 1995, Ellen
Seiter noted, "One of the axioms of motion picture and television production...is that the female audience will take an interest in
stories about male adventurers...but the male audience will not take an interest in stories about the female adventurers" (147). In
the intervening two decades, female characters in children's media have multiplied, and include multiple examples that actively
challenge this industry axiom (Banet-Weiser 2004), but according to conventional wisdom, the masculine audience and male
consumer remain the neutral default. Media for boys can be media for all children, whereas girls' media are just for them—a
position that influences the perceived quality of, industrial investment in, and value attributed to those media. A cartoon only
meant to appeal to girls ages three to six does not merit a large investment of care, complexity, or capital.

6.3 Derek Johnson explicitly points to ways that My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic was, from the moment it aired, perceived
to lack legitimacy, because it made use of "cheap vector graphics of Flash animation...it was marked as commercially rather than
aesthetically motivated...and it was gendered as hyper-feminine" (2013, 138). Seiter contends that the 1980s My Little Pony was
successful because of its aggressively feminized content: Once toy and entertainment producers began to take an interest in little
genuine, and the response to their sentimentality is telling. First, it illustrates the rarity of men openly displaying affection without then their practices have a recognizable ulterior motive. To counteract this impulse, articles on bronies point out that their interest in order to signify a countercultural sensibility) or camp enthusiasts (celebrating My Little Pony as so bad it becomes pleasurable), might offer value to its viewers and glosses over the consequences of incorporating its pleasures into models of masculinity.

Efforts to secure cultural and social legitimacy for bronies, however, implicitly reject the possibility that for some way to legitimize the phenomenon, and thus it pondered whether they are homosexuals, pathological fans, or examples of deviant or normalized, bronies are made less dangerous by being safely categorized as something familiar. Brony coverage strives to be spending time and attention on frivolous entertainment, as though rigorous analysis of Mad Men has inherent value that enthusiastic discussions of and fan creativity for FiM lack. Bronies are devoted to a cartoon, made for young girls and short on cultural legitimacy, rather than to comic books, science fiction, computers, or other components of geek and fan culture that have gained social and economic capital. As a result, bronies remain on the edge of deviance and illustrate that fandom is still perceived as a pathological condition, even if only among particular groups.

These illustrations are brony-specific even though many of them are quite representative of broader fan practice. They read as implicit critiques of bronies, but in fact reveal broader biases against fandom in general. Bronies are, in effect, simply the latest case study of fan pathology. Writing in 1992, Joli Jenson argues that popular opinion characterizes fans as pathological and deviant: "Fandom is conceived of as a chronic attempt to compensate for a perceived personal lack of autonomy, absence of community, incomplete identity, lack of power and lack of recognition" (17). Fans are "making up for some inherent lack" and pathologizing fans "implies that there is a thin line between 'normal' and excessive fandom" (18). In Jenson's writing, fans are perceived as moments away from a display of excess, violence, obsession, or another visible break with reality. In contemporary conversations, fans are afforded more cultural capital and associated less with fanaticism than with their desirable characteristics as cocreators and powerful consumers in convergence culture. Yet coverage of bronies indicates that not all fans enjoy such a privileged position. Bronies are perceived to be spending time and attention on frivolous entertainment, as though rigorous

There is an impulse, therefore, to dismiss bronies' interest as ironic. If bronies are hipsters (establishing an ironic distance in order to signify a countercultural sensibility) or camp enthusiasts (celebrating My Little Pony as so bad it becomes pleasurable), then their practices have a recognizable ulterior motive. To counteract this impulse, articles on bronies point out that their interest is driven not by irony (Elder 2013) but by earnestness—"They are truly fans. Like, big fans" (Fallon 2014). Bronies are disarmingly genuine, and the response to their sentimentality is telling. First, it illustrates the rarity of men openly displaying affection without
cynicism or emotional distance. Secondly, it creates a need to treat FiM as a valid cultural object, and consider what it means that it generates such authentic devotion among its fans.

[7.3] Bronies are the first to sing the praises of the show text; “Hearing them rave about the quality of the My Little Pony series, you’d think they were talking about Citizen Kane” (Fallon 2014), remarks one article. Bronies explain their passion as motivated by the show’s engaging quality, which they contend should be evident to anyone who has watched the show. For show creator Lauren Faust, the show’s quality is rooted in its feminist perspective. In an editorial for Ms. Magazine, she contends that FiM was designed to counter female-centric shows with homogenized characters that are impossible to distinguish from one another, who have no flaws and giggle endlessly and cry in the face of villainy. Her program shows that “there are lots of different ways to be a girl...Girls are complex human beings, and they can be brave, strong, kind and independent—but they can also be uncertain, awkward, silly, arrogant or stubborn” (Faust 2010). The female characters face real conflict, make mistakes and forgive one another, depend on their friends, and make things happen. The program is, in some ways, conventionally feminine; content for women and young girls frequently borrows tropes from “women’s genres” such as the melodrama and soap opera and focuses on emotional life (Seiter 1995) and elements of nurturing and caring (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003). FiM is feminized for adhering to these tropes, and for doing so with bright pastel colors and chipper voices talking about friendship, but it was deliberately created to be both girly and good.

[7.4] Bronies’ praise, however, frequently separates FiM from its association with its feminist possibility and young, gendered target audience. They contend that the series “has a higher quality writing style than other children's shows, with varied themes, and the plot and characters develop over the seasons” (Angel 2012). Bronies discuss how they were not expecting to like and watch such a program. One recounts, “First we can't believe this show is so good. Then we can't believe we've become fans for life” (Watercutter 2011). Another notes, “If you asked me three years ago if I would be running pony stuff and watching My Little Pony, I would be like 'What? No, that's girl stuff’” (Peters 2013). The aspects of the show lauded by bronies, including its animation style and clever references to geek and pop culture, are associated with masculine genre and aesthetics, and their praise thus reframes it as something more suited to an adult male viewership.

[7.5] This is the missed opportunity in how bronies are situated in popular culture, both by bronies themselves and by the wealth of outsider coverage. Friendship Is Magic provides a form of sincere entertainment, free of cynicism and postmodern disdain. The show teaches that tolerance, empathy, and caring are admirable qualities. Perhaps even more of a rarity, the friendships on the show are not sexual, romantic, or, most importantly, competitive; the ponies do not pit themselves against one another in an effort to be the best. In short, FiM offers messages and behaviors that are not emphasized in media content aimed at men and boys. Yet when bronies describe the show and their fandom to a mainstream audience, these elements are deemphasized. FiM is incorporated into a traditional performance of masculinity, and the fandom effectively reinforces a privileging of men in fan practice. Outsider coverage attempts to locate the brony phenomenon in suppressed sexual expression, underlying deviance, or even the camaraderie of the community, thus implying that brony devotion is rooted in motives unrelated to the text or the opportunities for subversive gender performance it may present. Articles written on the brony phenomenon for a mainstream readership seek to smooth over the incongruity of the bronies, organizing them into categories, whether positive or negative, in familiar structures of social organization, rather than exploring the potential benefits of an unexpected approach to fandom and cultural participation.

8. Conclusion

[8.1] Bronies generate a great deal of public interest, and as a result, are the subject of a wide array of media coverage that is written by nonbronies in order to describe, explain, or critique bronies for a mainstream audience. Despite the fact that much of this coverage seems positive, the language it uses reveals a desire to dismiss bronies: They are discomfiting, incongruous, and baffling; they lack masculinity or cultural capital; they are closeted homosexuals or, worse, sexual deviants. Articles on bronies may explicitly counter these claims, but they implicitly reinforce that bronies confound popular preconceptions. Bronies are disconcerting because, as media consumers, they do not behave as expected. These grown men elect to consume media created for very young girls, to form a strong and effusive community around it, and to do so without irony. The questions asked by outsiders faced with these practices reveal persistent notions of fans as pathological, excessive consumers. Even if My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic has stepped in to fill a gap in how masculinity is socialized and modeled, in particular in children’s media, bronies do not follow through on the transgressive potential of their identity performance. Bronies remain a privileged group of male fans, with a narrow approach to inclusiveness in the brony identity, and their celebration of FiM’s quality is predicated on divorcing it from its identification as girly. Bronies contend that their position challenges gender norms while, at the same time, appropriating that alternate approach for a traditional version of masculinity.

[8.2] Coverage of bronies is focused on containing any possibility they may offer of subversion. Unfortunately, but perhaps unsurprisingly, coverage of the brony phenomenon leaves largely untouched a more complicated conversation that considers shortcomings that arise from such a sharply distinguished performance of gender in existing media for young kids. What bronies have the potential to offer—and what outsider coverage has the potential, even if unrealized, to initiate and cultivate—is a conversation that begins to blur the boundaries of gendered media content. Instead, bronies illustrate that cultural perceptions have underlying and persistent reservations that do not match progressive assurances. In a culture that has moved to welcome
fans into the mainstream, bronies reveal that this welcome extends only to a specific type of fan, while others remain odd at best, deviant at worst. Similarly, gender, sexuality, and masculinity are closely tied to media practice, and bronies illustrate the interest, discomfort, and resistance generated when individuals do not conform to expectations.

9. Note

1. Though "bro" + "pony" is by far the most common genealogy for the term, two recent articles contend that "brony" in fact references discussion of My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic on 4chan's /b/ message boards. However, this is a relatively new explanation, only appearing in the latter half of 2014, and attributed to individual bronies rather than collective memory, and therefore the earlier and more prevalent explanation is used here. Also, the "bro" and "pony" portmanteau appropriately accounts for the "r" in "brony."

10. Works cited


A Brony Tale. 2014. Written and directed by Brent Hodge. Hodgee Films.


(Re)examining the attitudes of comic book store patrons in the digital era

J. Richard Stevens
University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado, United States

Christopher E. Bell
University of Colorado Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, Colorado, United States

Abstract—As digital comic book consumption continues to rise in popularity, the comic book community appears conflicted over the effects that digital scans have on the meaning of collecting and reading comic books. Historically, comic ownership served as the locus of comic fan social capital; will digital scans hold the same cultural capital as printed books? And does postpurchased digital scan dissemination primarily hurt copyright holders through lost sales, or does it help through social promotion? Building on an analysis of fan attitudes toward digital comic book texts, we seek to account for the limitations of locality by surveying the attitudes of comic book store patrons concerning their attitudes toward physical and digital comic book texts.

Keywords—Copyright; Digital media; Piracy


1. Introduction

In their book on fandom, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) organize fandom studies into three stages: initial studies exploring popular media as sites of cultural resistance, the "fandom is beautiful" movement that allowed fans to speak for themselves, and a third wave that describes the study of the role of fandom in everyday life (1–7).

The third wave will likely prove a boon to studies of comic book fandom, for previous studies in other disciplines have framed comic book consumers in precisely this way. For example, Brown (1997) described comic book fans as groups of highly motivated discussers of cultural knowledge (28), and Fiske (1992) described comic book fandom as a "shadow cultural economy" that reflects bourgeois standards (30).

What can comic book fans tell us about attitudes concerning the production, dissemination, and control of the object of fandom in a digital age? How does the emergence of digital comic book formats—both those authorized by publishers and those generated through third-party scanning practices—affect the core practices of fan culture? This article pursues these questions by examining fans' views of copyright, ownership, and the digitization of text, as well as surveying acquisition and consumption practices.

The definition and boundaries of comic book fandom can be ephemeral and fraught with controversy. For some, consumption of comic book texts does not denote fandom, as "without ever interacting with other fans who are within fandom, [one] can never become a part of that fandom" (Kleefeld 2011, 24). Though fans can be subcategorized by their use of texts—some enjoy reading comic books, some enjoy collecting them, and most seem to enjoy reading some while collecting others—the appreciation of the comic genre has historically revolved around common conventions that provide consistent demand for texts (Coogan 2006). But the American comic book industry is currently grappling
with the transition from printed texts to digital file formats. Though major comic book publishers initially resisted digital distribution of comic books, the emergence of tablet devices in American culture with their advantages for book reading (Clark et al. 2008, 119) has unleashed a surge of interest by publishers who see them as potential distribution mechanisms for their products (Aghbali 2011). This study looks at fandom located around comic book retailers—the historic communal space for comic book fans—and attempts to measure what effects the introduction of digital comic book texts has on the relationship between fan and text, attitudes toward copyright, and the role comic book stores play in comic book fandom.

[1.5] Comic book publishers have acknowledged the value of their fans, for their devotion translates to dependable consumption of content. The benefits of honoring fandom are recognized in most media, as Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) explain:

[1.6] Rather than be ridiculed, fan audiences are now wooed and championed by cultural industries, at least as long as their activities do not divert from principles of capitalistic exchange and recognize industries' legal ownership of the object of fandom. (4)

[1.7] Fredrick Wright (2008) surveyed 28 comic book store customers about digital comic books and found that most (73 percent) did not consider them a collection, defining comic books by their medium (object). The remaining 27 percent described digital comic books as comic books, reasoning that all comic books were reproductions (content) of the original master artwork (3). These core arguments seem to reflect different emphases on the sources of comic book fan social capital described by Brown (1997), who pointed to the acquisition of key canonical texts for some (26), in addition to the extensive knowledge of the content and industry (23). Woo (2012) argued that the collecting and reading functions of comic book fandom had separated, leading those who primarily engage in one or the other to have different understandings of what the comic book medium is (181–82). Our previous work extended this taxonomy to account for alternative activities and fan activities—such as other media viewing, public event participation, and costume play—as markers of different forms of fandom drawing upon different forms of social capital (Stevens and Bell 2012).

[1.8] Although not explicitly addressing the differences between official publisher releases and illicitly scanned comic books, Wright's study reported that "some" fans admitted turning to unauthorized scans (fan-scanned images of comic books from an owner's physical collection distributed via networked media) to extend their archives (4). But the majority of subjects opposed the practice of downloading scanned comic books, regardless of source.

[1.9] However, the locus of the study presented a potential variable for consideration: Fredrick Wright (2008) drew his sample from comic book store patrons. We decided to study whether comic book fans in different locales would respond differently about preferences in text selections. Drawing from comic book sites and comic book download forums, the authors found that online audiences expressed views opposed to the findings of Fredrick Wright—views informed by interpretations of the comic book texts themselves (Stevens and Bell 2012). In that study, more than 90 percent of online fans favored the consumption of digital texts over printed texts. Using discourse analysis, we analyzed the argument frames of the online fans, finding pro-digital text frames positioned within pragmatic concerns, while anti-digital text frames were positioned within moral judgments. We considered the locus of fandom to be a significant intervening variable between Fredrick Wright's findings and our own findings, suggesting in the concluding remarks a need to bring "in the patrons of comic shops alongside the online fan community might delve into the amount of overlap between these two groups and attempt to uncover whether there are attitudes distinct to each group of fans" (16).

[1.10] These observations raise the question of whether online fan Web sites are beginning to replace the comic store as sources of cultural exchange or if the two groups host different kinds of fans. If the latter,
one might presume the locus of cultural negotiation might predict attitudes toward the adoption of digital texts, issues like copyright and intellectual property, and a potential renegotiation of the materiality historically inherent in comic book "ownership."

Historically, comic book stores have served as a gathering point for comic fan communities. Brown (1997) observed: "These stores have provided a focal point for the entire culture of comic fandom. They have taken comics off the bottom rack and placed them front and center where they can be found on a regular basis and in an atmosphere where older readers feel less embarrassed to shop" (16).

More than retail establishments, comic book stores have historically served as a social setting for interaction among community participants, as nodes relating "contingent communities of practice," as sanctuaries from mainstream hierarchies of taste and status, and as "arenas of competition for social and subcultural status" (Woo 2011, 125). For comic book fans, "comic shops are gold mines, places to find buried treasure, catch up with old friends, make new acquaintances with like-minded souls" (Pustz 1999, 6).

Of course, the retail landscape of comic book distribution is markedly different in 2015 than it was in the late 1990s, when many of the seminal studies were conducted. While Woo's (2011) work involving in-depth interviews of comic store owners and patrons indicated the cultural aspects of comic book stores remain important to fans who collect comic books, the evolution of the comic book medium toward digital distribution potentially expands the audience for comic books. Sales figures for all print formats show that the years between have increased the overall North American market size—from approximately $260 million in 2000 to upward of $780 million in 2013, of which comic book stores appear to account for $517.66 million in sales (Miller 2015). In just over the course of a 3-year span, digital sales for comic books in North America rose from $25 million in 2011 to over $90 million in 2013 (Miller 2015). For at least some comic store owners, "Our best-case scenario—that digital will act like a newsstand—seems to have come true...the problem for the longest time for the comic book industry is that we were off the newsstand. We had no way to expose people to comics" (Gustines 2014).

The digital newsstand metaphor is interesting, though problematic, as it was scarcity at the newsstand that led to the emergence of comic book stores in the first place (Pustz 1999, 6), but scarcity is not a factor in the digital distribution of texts through apps. In fact, as new methods of distribution emerge around devices and direct digital delivery, it is not clear whether this activity will capitalize most on new fans and readership or whether it will cannibalize the existing profits channeled through comic book stores. Comic book store owners understandably fear the latter (Newman 2010), but it is not at all determined how readers of digital comic book texts and physical comic books are related to one another. Do comic book store patrons also read digital comic books? How are the values attached to older forms of physical comic book collecting similar to or different from digital comic book storage? Are readers and collectors equally predisposed to consider whether adoption of digital comic book formats have advantages over physical comic books (or vice versa)?

The following research questions target these nuances:

**RQ1.** What attitudes exist in the way customers of comic book stores relate to physical and digital comic books? What do the expressed attitudes suggest about relationships between fans and texts?

**RQ2.** Does longevity of comic book store patronage affect attitudes toward the adoption of digital texts?

**RQ3.** Does the amount of comic book consumption affect the attitudes toward the adoption of digital texts?
2. Survey methods

[2.1] To gather the attitudes and opinions of comic book store patrons, an online survey was constructed. Researchers approached two metropolitan comic book stores to solicit participation in the promotion and recruitment process. A total of 195 patrons who participated in the survey were asked about their buying habits, attitudes toward different formats of comic texts (floppies [note 1], paperback trades, hardback trades, authorized downloads, and unauthorized scanned comic books), purchase history, and several questions related to general media use. Purchase history included descriptions of initial exposure to the comic book medium, what titles were currently read, and where comic books were acquired. In addition to the quantitative data collected, respondents were given opportunities for open-ended responses.

[2.2] At this point, it should be noted there is little or no narrative difference between the floppy comic format and the digital download format for most comic books, in that the tablet downloads attempt to replicate the floppy narrative experience without adding elements that most devices would be capable of supporting (such as sound or motion). However, this trend could change at some point in the future, and that would certainly affect the attitudes of the comic consumers.

[2.3] The evolution of tablet devices, digital text formats, and the diffusion of technology through society will likely alter the relationships under scrutiny in the future. This study presents a snapshot of a particular time at a particular point in the transition from analog to digital media. Furthermore, caution should be recommended to all such future analyses, given that sites of fan activity become "the battleground through which cultural meaning is constructed and as such is always contested terrain" (Costello 2013, 1). Measuring fandom attitudes will always present a challenge because it is an ever-evolving set of communal practices organized around an ever-evolving cultural industry environment.

[2.4] The current study examines three elements of comic book fan culture to illustrate the specific effects of technological advances on the comics industry: the comic book texts, the cultural identity connecting comic book fans to comic books, and the technological imperatives brought to bear on intellectual properties.

3. Comic books and cultural identity

[3.1] Comic book collecting has been called "the nation's third largest collectible market, just after coins and stamps" (Wright 2001, 261). Though most comic books are purchased in floppy (pamphlet) form (note 2), some comic texts are obtained in collected trade paperbacks, some appear exclusively on the Web, and some are delivered to e-reader devices, tablet computers, and cell phones. Comic books fans organize and behave like other societal subgroups, creating social identities that provide status and bonds between one another. People tend to define themselves either "in terms of what makes [them] unique compared to other individuals" or "in terms of [their] membership in social groups" (Reicher 2004, 928).

[3.2] Comic books are popular culture artifacts but are different from other cultural objects because the fan culture has been "almost exclusively centered around a physical, possessable text" (Brown 1997, 26). Comic books have historically served as the focal point of a social subgroup of those interested in comic book texts, demarcating consumers into readers (sometimes fans), collectors (always fans), and investors (rarely fans). Additionally, those who consume only ancillary products, like comic book movies or television versions, without consuming the actual texts are not generally considered fans. In the past, in order to credibly be called a comic book fan, a person had to own comic books he or she had read, though exceptions are often made for special circumstances, such as for soldiers serving abroad, who often use digital scans to keep up with their texts with minimal fan interaction (Gorman 2006). But in general, possessing the text has been a key demarcation for comic book fandom.
Brown (1997) further explains:

For Star Trek, Rocky Horror Picture Show, or Grateful Dead fans, it is the experience of viewing the show, hearing the band, or participating in ritual consumption that is of prime importance. And while reading the comic is obviously fundamental to comic fans on an individual basis, it is the possession of the actual comic that acts as the focal point for the entire community. Other fan cultures can own a New Kids On the Block album or videotape all the episodes of Dr. Who, they can even purchase all the T-shirts, dolls, and posters they want, but none of it carries the same ability to substantiate fan authenticity in the way that owning a copy of Wolverine #1 does. Knowledge and the ability to use it properly amounts to the symbolic capital of the cultural economy of comic fandom, but it is the comic book itself that represents the physical currency. (22)

In the past, comic knowledge alone did not grant standing among comic book fans; the cache of cultural capital that one possessed was ancillary to the physical capital of property ownership. Property, in this case, related not only to the tangible good but also to the social relations represented. As Coombe and Herman (2005) explain:

Property is not simply or even primarily a relationship between persons and things...It is a social relationship between socially recognized persons with respect to real and intangible things (and between peoples who as nations may hold cultural properties) that is authorized and legitimized in particular cultural contexts. It is also a relationship of profound social power. (561)

Understanding that comic book fandom has historically been organized around the physical, tangible objects of comic books in paper pamphlet form is critical to examining the way technological innovations affect the industry’s future prospects and the relationship between reader and text and any potential shifts in the role comic book stores play in those relationships. Are comic book readers not fans if they collect digital files instead of physical texts, or has this historic boundary shifted as a result of textual digitization? Can one "own" a digital comic book text and, if so, how does this ownership alter the historic boundaries between comic book readers and comic book fans? And how does the locus of fan community shift if texts are no longer primarily distributed through comic book stores?

4. Comic books and technological advancement

Since the consumer electronics age began, manufacturers have attempted to create electronic reading gadgets to replace printed books. "Serious attempts to replicate the portability, readability, and convenience of a printed book have...been with us for a decade or so" (Young 2008), such as the Rocket e-Book, the Franklin eBookman, the Sonystyle, and more recent e-readers like the Amazon Kindle and the Barnes and Noble Nook.

The comic book industry also entered this digital revolution, albeit reluctantly. In 2001, Marvel Comics partnered with Graphic Imaging Technology (GIT) to produce approximately 30 CD-ROMs and DVD-ROMs of back issues. Marvel took another leap in late 2007, with the launch of the Marvel Digital Comics Unlimited (DCU) service. The DCU offers Marvel’s comic book content for $59.88 a year, though with two major caveats: users cannot print or save issues to their hard drives, and to avoid competing current issue sales, users must wait 6 months after publication before a digital version is available (Musgrove 2007).

In 2009, Comixology launched a digital comics service that delivered comic book texts (including select books from Marvel Comics) to Apple’s iPhone. The release of Apple’s iPad in April 2010 prompted the release of an official Marvel Comics app (powered by Comixology’s architecture), and a similar DC Comics app arrived in June 2010. The Comixology apps initially allowed users to download select comic books for
$1.99 per comic or less, compared to the $3.99 to $4.99 cover price for contemporary physical comic books. After Amazon purchased Comixology in 2014, digital prices eventually rose to an average of a dollar less than the price of physical copies for first releases and $1.99 for older back issues, with some issues offered at $.99. Simultaneously, several iPhone, iPad, and other smart phone applications emerged to store and display scanned comic book formats.

[4.4] The introduction of such devices served to mainstream the use of digital formats by publishers. In particular, the Marvel Comics application that shipped with Apple's iPad was considered the mainstreaming moment of digital distribution (Wallace 2010), while competitor DC Comics upped the ante with same-day releases of digital and physical comic books (Trenholm 2011), a trend many smaller publishers followed (Caldwell 2011). Already, major booksellers like Amazon and Barnes & Noble (who also offer tablets and e-readers, and digital content for them) are jockeying for the rights to digital comic book texts (Cavna 2011), which is increasingly seen as a valuable source of revenue. Comic book store owners have largely expressed concern, and existing comic book fans appear to offer mixed reactions to these trends (Newman 2010).

[4.5] Several fundamental cultural behaviors differ in the consumption of printed comic books and electronic formats. The first involves the physical handling of the comic book. In print form, no restrictions are placed upon the comic book's usage. However, many readers and collectors continue to struggle to separate the content of comic books from their medium. As Fredrick Wright (2008) observed, "Anyone who collects comic books has to deal with this factor of materiality, emphasized further by collected comics often being bagged and boarded for preservation purposes, and classified according to grades of physical condition from near mint to poor for commercial or trading purposes" (1).

[4.6] The materiality of comic books represents a hurdle to the opportunities available in digital distribution. Comic book retailers, who built their enterprise serving as cultural sites of negotiated meaning and social interaction, have a vested interest in the printed format. As a result, digital comic books are often perceived as direct competition for brick-and-mortar stores (Wright 2008).

5. Results

[5.1] The respondents displayed a variety of attitudes toward physical and digital texts. Most respondents bought at least some physical comic books (as one might surmise, given that the sample was drawn from a comic book store), but not all did. In the complete sample (n = 195), respondents reported, on average, reading 13.29 comic books texts per month and buying 12.05 floppy comic books, 1.57 trade publications, 0.75 digital files distributed directly from the publisher, and 0.66 unauthorized scanned comic book files. The average respondent spent $48.92 per month on comic book texts and had been reading comic books for about 15 years. However, breaking down the sample by behavior brought out some interesting behavioral characteristics, creating five distinctly different profiles of comic book consumers.

[5.2] Respondents who read unauthorized scanned comic books (n = 17) read 11 comic book texts each month. An average of four of these texts were floppy copies, one was a trade publication, and four were unauthorized scans. This group of respondents reported spending an average of $31 each month on comic book texts, had been reading for an average of 9 years, and was an average of 24 years of age.

[5.3] There were five respondents who reported consuming downloaded scanned comic book without purchasing any physical copies. However, these five (who spent no money monthly on comic texts) do not appear to be heavy readers, consuming an average of just 2.4 books each month. Initially, the researchers thought these might be new readers, but these fans reported an average of nine years of comic book readership. These respondents reported a preference for physical floppy comic books, but cited prohibitive costs as a barrier to purchase. Though they encountered the survey in a comic book store, none cited a comic book store as a primary source of their comic book texts, citing instead online auction sites such as
eBay for their occasional physical purchases. These respondents reported visiting an average of two comic book stores in the past month. This is curious because they purchased no physical comic books on a consistent basis, perhaps suggesting they visited only for the social interactions, the cultural communication, and/or the capital-building activities.

[5.4] The rest of the sample who downloaded comic texts of any kind (n = 24) also regularly spent at least part of their comic book money on printed materials. This group reported reading an average of 17.14 comic texts each month and buying 6.57 floppies, 1.57 trade publications, 6.71 authorized publisher digital files, and an average of three unauthorized scans read in place of a purchase (this group also acquired 1.86 scans of comic books previously purchased). This group spent an average of $75 per month on comic book texts and had been reading comic books for 17.5 years.

[5.5] For this group, the story appears to transcend concerns about medium. As one respondent noted, "The medium doesn't really matter to me as long as I get to read the comics." Some cited digital files as an opportunity to save money (to read more stories), as well as avoid the challenges of storing large amounts of comic book texts. An additional frame emerged as a few respondents noted that digital file formats helped them avoid stigma surrounding their fandom ("having physical comics laying around my room isn't going to impress any attractive women").

[5.6] Only one respondent reported downloading and reading comic books exclusively in the authorized publisher file format. This respondent reported consuming only three comic book texts each month, spending an estimated $15, but did report visiting a comic book store regularly where he occasionally special-ordered some physical comic books or trade publications. Like those who read scanned comic books, this respondent cited storage constraints and increased portability as a reason to read digital comic books.

[5.7] Most in the sample (n = 140) reported no digital file use (and some appeared quite hostile to digital formats), reading an average of 14.12 comic texts each month, reportedly from an average of 12.72 floppies and 1.4 trade publications purchased. This group spent an average of $53.16 on comic texts each month and reported reading comic books for an average of 15.83 years. The average age of this group was 33.23.

[5.8] This group cited the tradition of the physical format ("I grew up reading comics this way") and a strong preference for "holding something in my hands," though several cited storage capacity problems as a possible impetus for future reconsideration of their stance on digital files. This group tended to use rhetoric more consistent with collecting than reading, and several noted that digital files offer no return on investment upon disposal, and the inability to have digital texts autographed by comic book creators.

[5.9] Demographically, those in the population reporting their gender split nearly evenly along gender lines, with 52.1 percent (n = 88) male and 47.9 percent (n = 81) female. The average age was 31.88 years, and the dominant ethnicity was white (80.4 percent).

[5.10] RQ2 asked whether the longevity of comic book store patronage affected attitudes toward digital texts. The survey results suggest that the answer to this question is a resounding yes. In addition to the age differences reported between those who download or avoid downloading, the survey also asked respondents to rate preferences of formats. When age was cross-tabulated with these preferences, the average longevity of comic book readership and for those preferring unauthorized downloaded text formats was 10 years, for those preferring authorized digital files was 11.75 years, and those preferring the physical floppy format was 21.03 years.

[5.11] RQ3 asked whether the amount of comic book consumption affected attitudes toward digital texts. The survey results suggest that the answer to this question is also resounding yes. Though the numbers reported by the digital users and nondigital users were close (17.14 and 14.12 comic book texts,
respectively), the preference measures produced a wider gulf: those "mostly preferring" the floppy format consumed 11.15 comic texts per month, while those preferring authorized comic book downloads consumed 35 comic texts per month. The "slightly prefer" numbers closed that gap, with those preferring floppy formats consuming 22.5 comic texts per month, while those slightly preferring authorized digital formats consumed 7.75 comic texts. Overall, authorized digital users appeared to consume the most comic book texts, though that consumption appeared to be mostly a mixture of digital and floppy formats. No one reported "mostly preferring" illegally scanned comics, and the largest block of users reported overwhelmingly favoring other comic book formats.

RQ1 asked more general questions about the way comic book store customers related to comic book texts, and the contrast to attitudes in our previous study of online pirate sites was stark. In the earlier study, more than 90 percent of respondents reported preferring digital formats to any analog formats. The respondents in the current study reported an almost equally strong relationship, but reversed in direction. Clearly comic book store patronage does mitigate attitudes toward digital formats, as we hypothesized.

6. Conclusions and discussion

At the heart of the central question—why do fans consume comic books, and why might they prefer particular modes of dissemination?—lies the future definition of comic book fandom. Currently, comic book fandom exists in a state of transition comparable to the state of transition of their object of focus. Fandom is composed of reading and collecting activities, and it would appear an emphasis on one activity over another might affect one's attitude toward comic book formats, as well as the role of the comic book store in the fan community.

In the latter 20th century among American comic book collectors, the comic book store was the hub of comic book fandom. Though Internet fans sites are beginning to supplant the centrality of comic book stores for some fans, this sample clearly shows a lingering connection. Even the five respondents who purchased no comic books each month in physical form went to the comic book store to place occasional special orders and discuss texts with other fans, and it appears at least one of the respondents perused the physical floppy comic books before acquiring a digital text later.

The respondents who consumed only physical texts consistently expressed concerns that digital comic books (both authorized files and unauthorized scans) posed a threat to the survival of comic book stores. Next to complaints about the interface of digital texts, the desire to "support the industry" and support comic book stores was the most cited rationale for exclusively purchasing physical comic book formats. These fears appear to be somewhat well founded. Though fans who buy authorized digital files from the publisher spend more money than any other group on comic books every month, less of that money goes to the comic stores because digital download purchases go to the software developers and publishers. However, it's also interesting to note that the fans who download authorized comic texts each month buy more trade publications than those who purchase floppy comic books. This suggests an interesting relationship between the digital texts and the trade publications: because digital downloads are cheaper (for example, Comixology downloads of new releases run about a dollar cheaper than the corresponding print version of a comic), the fans who consume them buy more comic texts overall—but still prefer the materiality of the collected trade publications for at least some of their favorite texts.

Fans that supplemented or replaced floppy comic consumption with unauthorized scans frequently cited the trial function downloaded digital files can provide. As one respondent noted, "I don't frequently pirate comic books, but I appreciate that I can do so to get an idea if I would like a series or not. How else am I supposed to know? The cover? Reviews? Just doesn't cut it. I have no qualms about pirating a book, and I have read unauthorized copies and then gone out and made purchases afterwards many times."
Others argue that reading older comic books online doesn't necessarily take revenue from the original creative team: "I think there's a place for this especially when DC and Marvel jack up the prices on reprinted comics that never give proceeds to the writers or artists of those stories." Another cited rationale for supplementing physical purchases with authorized downloads and unauthorized scans was increased accessibility: "I love the portability and purchasing convenience of them. This is how I keep up with issues weekly, and how I take comics on the road."

[6.5] In addition, such fans suggested that digital copies of files they physically possessed allowed them to read their comic books without risking devaluing damage to the fragile floppy copies. Looking at the responses as a whole, an interesting trend related to these statements emerges: for those favoring digital file use, the rhetoric about reading and story assumes primacy over material interests ("I like the story. I really have no preference what media it is provided in"). But for those who favor the exclusive use of physical formats, a rhetoric around collecting and preserving artifacts appears to assume primacy over concerns about reading convenience and story.

[6.6] This trend, in turn, leads to yet another interesting difference in identity between these two groups of fans: while fans of physical formats stress the importance of the presentation of their collection as a status symbol, fans who use digital formats were more likely to mention their ability to read comic texts clandestinely ("having physical comics laying around my room isn't going to impress any attractive women"). This suggests a different relationship between readers and collectors when it comes to the presupposed identification with text. One of the points Brown (1997) used to distinguish comic book fans from other kinds of fans was the unique role of the "physical, possessable text" (26). But fans who use digital files, who stress reading over collection, would appear to have a different relationship with comic books texts than collectors (who are more classically associated with the stereotype of the comic book fan). Where physical collectors see status, digital readers appear more likely to see stigma.

[6.7] Such expressions imply dramatic differences between those for whom collector activity is the prime source of fan identity (as Brown 1997 suggests) and those for whom reading and discussing stories (increasingly online) is the prime source of fan identity. These differences signal different messages to publishers and comic book owners. Digital consumers read more comic texts and spend more money on comic books than those who collect and read physical floppies. For the publisher, the digital distribution model would appear to have some obvious economic advantages (cheaper production costs, higher sales). For the consumers of authorized digital files, claims of respect for copyright law were quite common. Some of these fans refused to download unauthorized files, while others downloaded to see if the comic texts were worth purchasing.

[6.8] But what of those who primarily consume unauthorized scanned comic texts? On the surface, it would appear, given the nature of the consumption by consumers of unauthorized texts, that the current framework of copyright law is of little or no concern to these consumers, and piracy is a concept given little or no thought. However, such a narrow view of what constitutes piracy belies the truth about these so-called pirates: digital consumers overall read more comic texts and spend more money on comic books than those who exclusively collect and read physical formats. When the two outliers who purchase no physical material are excluded, it appears the publisher gets more revenue from the digital format consumers than the physical format consumers. Much like the iTunes model, consumers who are offered accessible, legal means of consuming digitally are often willing to pay for their wares; piracy is a matter of convenience, not necessarily a matter of maliciousness. The key difference is, of course, that less of that revenue goes to the comic book store.

[6.9] Comic books stores sellwares beyond just comic book texts. Action figures, comic-related T-shirts, and posters are but a few of the derivative products that generate revenue. But if digital subscribers show more consistent concerns toward avoiding stigma than their counterparts, they might not be buying T-shirts and posters in the quantities their counterparts do, or they may be acquiring those items more
cheaply through online storefronts. For their part, several of the digital file consumers mentioned using online sources like IFanBoy (http://ifanboy.com) to acquire or supplement the comic book information normally exclusively associated with comic book stores.

[6.10] Both length of readership and average age appear to be significant factors in determining attitudes toward textual formats: the readers of primarily digital texts averaged 24 years of age and had been reading comic books for an average of 9 years. By contrast, those who did not consume any digital comic texts averaged 33.23 years of age and had been reading comic books an average of 15.83 years. But whether this is a function of generational attitudes toward technology or a function of generational attitudes toward comic books is not knowable from the current analysis. As others have pointed out, the introduction of video games in the 1980s stole away many of the younger potential comic book readers by redirecting fan activity attention and resources. One can imagine the expansion of media offerings would at least change the reverence and approach to the medium between older and younger fans.

[6.11] Because the previous study and the current study show such dramatically different attitudes between fans in different loci, it would appear a taxonomy accounting for different settings and fan practices should be included in future analyses. It should be noted that Woo (2012) subdivided collectors into "completists," "hobbyists," and "speculators." Our previous study (Stevens and Bell 2012) noted that different reading patterns were witnessed, as some readers followed characters, some titles, some creators, and some genres. And Brown (1997) points to comic book conventions as entry sites for the cultural economics of fandom (17). It stands to reason that newer fans with even different forms of cultural capital can be observed at public events, leading to the possible need for a taxonomy of fandom expressions and sources of cultural capital. Further, a deeper understanding of the connections between reader and text might be facilitated by comparing different titles with different behaviors. For example, does the reader of Superman have a different attitude toward comic book texts than the readers of Deadpool or Scalped?

[6.12] The transition from exclusively print comic book distribution to the inclusion of digital comic book formats has barely begun, but already complex attitudinal shifts about the relation between fan and text and the role that comic book stores play in that relationship are emerging. When the results of this study are compared with the results of the previous study (Stevens and Bell 2012), it becomes clear that where fans gather for fan community exchange (comic book stores in the current study and online comic book sites in the previous study) significantly determines attitudes toward digital files, copyright, and the importance of materiality in physical comic book texts. As Brown (1997) observed, "Comic book fandom is complex and structured, [because fans are] constructing a sense of self" (13). And as Fiske (1992) observes, fan interactions are likely to always include an element of conflict because "fan cultural knowledge differs from official cultural knowledge because it is used to enhance the fan's power over, and participation in, the original, industrial, text" (43). That struggle likely predisposes competing fan subgroups to intergroup conflict, as control of the industrial text can be perceived and even valued through an ever-increasing variety of differing practices, each with varying types of social capital.

7. Notes

1. Among comic book scholars, store owners, and patrons, the terminology for physical comic books varies greatly, though the two most common uses seemed to be "floppies" and "pamphlets." Of course, many refer to this format simply as "comic books" or "traditional comic books," but those are the very terms that sometimes confuse discussions about the evolution of the medium. We use "floppies" and "pamphlets" throughout.

2. Graphic novels are trade paperbacks, but not all trade paperbacks are graphic novels. Most trade paperbacks are collections of previously published comic book pamphlets. Graphic novels are longer-length
narratives in trade format that did not appear in the pamphlet format.

8. Works Cited


The products of intertextuality: The value of student adaptations in a literature course

Misty Krueger

University of Maine at Farmington, Farmington, Maine, United States

[0.1] Abstract—The essay explores a pedagogy of adaptation that focuses on examining intertextuality and engaging students in textual production through the creation of an adaptation. The paper discusses the success of assigning an adaptation project in an upper-level, third-year literature course taught at a small university. It examines student adaptations of writings by William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Mary Shelley, and Ben H. Winters and of existing film adaptations of Sense and Sensibility and Frankenstein. I link student projects to critical concepts such as re-vision and multimodality, and disciplines such as literary studies and the digital humanities. I also analyze how the projects reflect students’ interests in popular culture and fandom.

[0.2] Keywords—Jane Austen; Digital media; Fandom; Multiderivativeness; Multimodality; Pamela; Parody; Pedagogy; Re-vision; Samuel Richardson; Sense and Sensibility; Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters; William Shakespeare; Social media


1. Inspiration and intertextuality

[1.1] For years I thought about teaching a course on adaptation, and in 2013 I designed a course specifically on adaptations of 17th- through 19th-century British literature. I hoped that students would appreciate reading adaptations of writings by some of my favorite authors: William Shakespeare, Aphra Behn, Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, and Mary Shelley. The true inspirations for this course were not these writers, however. Upon reading Chuck Dixon and Brett Booth’s 2009 graphic novel adaptation of Dean Koontz’s novel Frankenstein: Prodigal Son and then Jane Austen and Ben H. Winters’s coauthored 2009 Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters, I imagined teaching a class that would both be fun for me and the students, and show students how and why writers, illustrators, and filmmakers modernize works of early British literature. I wanted students to study “adaptations as adaptations,” as Linda Hutcheon says in A Theory of Adaptation, “not only as autonomous works” (2006, xiv). In creating this class at a small public liberal arts university, I anticipated that my students, who were English, creative writing, and education majors, would benefit from studying texts as stand-alone artifacts, then as derivatives, and finally reconsidering sourcetexts (note 1) through their derivatives. On the whole, I aimed to teach students that adaptation served an important function in Restoration and 18th-century British literature, and that intertextuality, the way that texts refer to one another, is at the heart of literary history and will continue to influence the inception of future works (note 2).

[1.2] In the essay that follows I share the benefits of requiring students in an upper-level, third-year undergraduate British literature class to take part in this intertextual cycle and create adaptations instead of a final research paper. (Prerequisites for this class included a writing course, a literary interpretation and analysis course, a survey of British literature, and a Shakespeare course. Sixteen students were enrolled, and all consented to having their work discussed in this essay.) I asked students to choose at least one primary text from the syllabus, adapt it in any medium, and write an introduction to their adaptation that provided an overview of the project and situated their work in the context of scholarly work on the sourcetext, its author, or their mode of adapting it. Students were instructed to consider their goals in adapting a text, and their projects were to make clear intertextual references to the “original” work (note 3). Projects would be presented to the class at the end of the semester. Over a month before the project’s due date, I required students to pitch their project ideas to me, outline their projects’ goals, and consider their timeline, as well as any concerns they had about the assignment or their project. To ensure that I could easily, and as objectively as possible, grade these assignments, I created two rubrics that allowed me to assess the presentations of the adaptations and how well the projects fulfilled the assignment. In this essay I share excerpts from these projects and explain how I see adaptations intersecting with 21st-century modes of communication and approaches to pedagogy.

[1.3] By participating in what Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw, and James M. Welsh have called “adaptation exercises” (2010, xvi) my students engaged firsthand with both the process and the product of adaptation (Hutcheon 2006, 7–8). Students first handled what Gérard Genette calls a palimpsest or hypotext—"an earlier text that [the adaptation] imitates or transforms"—and then created a hypertext, a work that "graft[s] itself onto a hypotext" (Prince 1997, ix) (note 4). Students entered the domain of intertextuality when they understood that narratives—even those written by literary giants—are not closed, but open to manipulation and reiteration. Equally important, students embraced what Adrienne Rich calls re-vision, in which the hyphen signifies that the creator of the derivative work plays an important part in the process. Rather than merely revising the language or plot of a work, students were responsible for participating in re-vision: a new way of seeing and transforming literature to fit one’s interests and purposes. As I explained to my students, re-vision is not entirely separate from appropriation. Appropriation implies a personal or political agenda; appropriations purposefully manipulate a sourcetext in order to reflect the reader-cum-author’s own culture. Students began the course by studying this process in Restoration dramatic adaptations of Shakespeare,
2. A pedagogy of adaptation

[2.1] I have seen firsthand the positive results of a pedagogy that asks students to shift from merely reading to writing adaptations. A model of "adaptation as interpretation" (Draxler 2011) connects creative writing with the practices of literary analysis, including close reading, critical thinking, and contextual and cultural analysis. An adaptation assignment draws on both students' knowledge (of sourcetexts, genres, and contexts) and their imaginative faculties. This kind of assignment can produce classroom work in which students feel personally invested. Such work represents students' personal interests and creativity in a way that literary analyses or research papers alone do not.

[2.2] As well as having benefits for the individual student, a pedagogy of adaptation relies on the power of the collective. Adaptation exercises foster a classroom community that is built upon what Hutcheon labels a "knowing audience"—a group that has read the same texts together and knows them very well (2006, 21). In the adaptation class, this audience became a cohort of writers who also read and evaluated each other's work. As in fan communities, the student adapters shared in the joys of extending much-loved narratives and characters, and their readers (professor and classmates) had the knowledge necessary to understand the nuances of the moves made by the adapters.

[2.3] Creating adaptations in a course on British literature of the late 17th through early 19th centuries also brought student-writers into closer connection with the authors and works they studied. As Draxler notes in her essay on integrating "eighteenth-century methods in the twenty-first-century classroom," the writing of adaptations "allows students to bring literature from earlier periods into a contemporary context" while also "bring[ing] students back to an earlier cultural moment, a moment that valued the creativity of collaboration, the inventiveness of imitation, and the originality of adaptation as a valuable form of literary creation and interpretation" (2011, 338). As Draxler suggests, adaptation exercises reach back to the past while drawing heavily upon the students' present, thus bridging the gap between two time periods.

3. The products of 21st-century adaptation: Multimodality

[3.1] In examining my students' adaptations, I recognized the value of this pedagogy in 21st-century university curricula on literary studies, composition studies, digital humanities, and even fan studies. Scholars of composition studies, for example, have described turn-of-the-century students as "multiliterate" readers who regularly engage with narratives on many platforms, including print, video, and online venues, such as social media; these multiliterate students are also "multimodal" writers who move beyond "linear, print-based writing-to-learn approaches," as Jody Shipka asserts, and "experiment with...hybrid, or diverse, forms of discourse" (2011, 1) (note 5). The same can be said of my students. The adaptation assignment required all of the projects to be multimodal, for students combined multiple, hybrid discourses to create their projects and then situate them in a critical context. As challenging as this task might sound, they moved seamlessly between these two modes. Students thoughtfully reflected on their work and were excited about the opportunity to work with texts from the course while drawing on their own interests. I attribute much of the success of these projects to their excitement.

[3.2] Students engaged in autoethnography (note 6). They were asked to explain in their introductions how they had devised their ideas and completed the projects. These introductions are multigeneric because they also include a contextual analysis of the adaptation through the incorporation of secondary-source material. Tyler, for example, describes his project as "a political/ethical response to Samuel Richardson's Pamela"—thus, an appropriation of Richardson's 1740 novel, Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded. Tyler uses Bianca Del Villano's 2012 essay on 18th-century adaptations, authorship, and identity to help contextualize what he calls "transformations," including his own, as "critical responses." He also quotes Draxler to make a case for "re-contextualizing and re-writing for the understanding of modern audiences" (2011, 326). Tyler writes, "I've re-written and re-appropriated Richardson's text, and rendered it for film, according to the twenty-first-century audience and culture. By using modern references to contextualize my adaptation, I've enabled modern audiences to connect with the uncomfortableness of Pamela's situation." He describes how he looked back to the 18th century and forward to his own time, and he understands his place in this intertextual transmission.

[3.3] Because the projects combine a critical introduction with another genre, they are multimodal. Their genres and media include fiction, screenplay, poetry, Web site, video, music, and drawing. Some students used multiple media. Marie, for instance, composed poetry and fiction in the voice of Marianne Dashwood as she appears in Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters. She emulated the style of early 19th-century verse, while also integrating elements of the 21st-century monster plot. Marie's poem "A Romp with Tentacles" reflects a scene from Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters where Marianne is attacked by an octopus and rescued by Willoughby, and "The End of Marissa Bellwether" recalls an earlier scene where Marissa, a character momentarily added to the story so that she can be eaten by a giant jellyfish, dies on the beach. Marie's project also includes journal entries written by Marianne, in which Marie channels Marianne's private, hypersensible emotions.

wherein dramatists appropriated sourcetexts in order to surreptitiously critique government or mock social conventions. I gave them excerpts from Jean I. Marsden's "Rewritten Women: Shakespearlean Heroines in the Restoration" and Nancy Klein Maguire's "Nahum Tate's King Lear: 'the King's blest restoration,'" both from Marsden's 1991 edited volume The Appropriation of Shakespeare.
Amelia's project, "Sense and Sensibility in High School," uses fiction and color drawings to modernize Austen's characters and setting. It tells the story of students' experiences over the school year and summer break. As shown in figure 1, Austen's early 19th-century characters get 21st-century updates. Amelia changes their names, such as from Elinor to Ellie and from Colonel Brandon to Brandon Colonel (giving him a last name indicative of his rank in Austen's novel and thereby making the intertextual reference).

Figure 1. Sample from Amelia's "Sense and Sensibility in High School" (2014) character list, including descriptions of the characters. [View larger image.]

As shown in figure 2, Amelia also includes floor plans for Barton Cottage and Norland, showing their different sizes as well as the effects of resituating the story in New England (each house has a mud room, for instance).

Figure 2. "Sense and Sensibility in High School" (2014) Barton Cottage floor plan showing details such as a mud room. [View larger image.]

The adaptation provides sketches of characters dressed in 21st-century attire, as shown in figures 3–5. Mary, aka Marianne, wears a cropped top and jeans and Will Willoughby wears a fraternity shirt. Brandon wears plaid, but not a flannel waistcoat (a detail that a knowing audience of Sense and Sensibility readers greatly appreciates).

[3.4] Amelia's project, "Sense and Sensibility in High School," uses fiction and color drawings to modernize Austen's characters and setting. It tells the story of students' experiences over the school year and summer break. As shown in figure 1, Austen's early 19th-century characters get 21st-century updates. Amelia changes their names, such as from Elinor to Ellie and from Colonel Brandon to Brandon Colonel (giving him a last name indicative of his rank in Austen's novel and thereby making the intertextual reference).

Figure 1. Sample from Amelia's "Sense and Sensibility in High School" (2014) character list, including descriptions of the characters. [View larger image.]

As shown in figure 2, Amelia also includes floor plans for Barton Cottage and Norland, showing their different sizes as well as the effects of resituating the story in New England (each house has a mud room, for instance).

Figure 2. "Sense and Sensibility in High School" (2014) Barton Cottage floor plan showing details such as a mud room. [View larger image.]

The adaptation provides sketches of characters dressed in 21st-century attire, as shown in figures 3–5. Mary, aka Marianne, wears a cropped top and jeans and Will Willoughby wears a fraternity shirt. Brandon wears plaid, but not a flannel waistcoat (a detail that a knowing audience of Sense and Sensibility readers greatly appreciates).
Marie's and Amelia's projects are excellent examples of multimodality because they rely on multiple creative methods to connect with their knowing audience. They give their readers at least two ways of envisioning Austen's (or Austen's and Winters's) work in terms of 21st-century intertextuality.

4. The products of 21st-century adaptation: Digital and social media
As someone interested in connecting literature students with the digital humanities (note 7), I hoped that students would take advantage of an assignment that permitted them to work with the digital modes that they frequently encounter as readers, viewers, and listeners. I was pleased to find them using multimedia, and a third of the projects included digital media by mixing prose with social media, Web sites, or live-action video.

Austen’s 1811 novel *Sense and Sensibility* was a popular choice for projects. Three students chose to modernize it digitally. Meghan captured the melodrama of a *Sense and Sensibility* love triangle in high school through a series of short animated videos created in GoAnimate. Their animation style, dialogue, and computerized voices can entertain a contemporary audience who love Austen’s characters and might also enjoy cartoons.

While each episode might seem to be fun and games on the surface, the awkward voices and pauses, as well as Marianne’s excessive animated tears, also capture the uneasiness and sensibility found in Austen's 1811 tale. Through the newer medium, Meghan finds a way to present the titular theme of Austen's book while also lightening the book's serious tone through dry humor.

Two other students appropriated online social media to contemporize *Sense and Sensibility*. Elizabeth created fake Facebook profiles (note 8) for Marianne and Elinor replete with status updates, wall posts, and selfie photos; Nicole created temporary OKCupid dating profiles for Marianne, Willoughby, and Brandon. Like the GoAnimate videos, these projects focused on humor and visual representations of the characters. Although they clearly altered Austen's discourse, the adaptations retained Austen's plot points and characters' personalities. Both projects incorporated phrases or passages from *Sense and Sensibility*, thereby explicitly linking the hypertexts with the novel. The Facebook project even showed intertextual references to two sources—Austen’s novel and the 1995 film written by Emma Thompson and directed by Ang Lee. While the project’s overarching idea is derived from Austen's novel, it includes still shots from the film to help viewers connect with familiar faces. The class had read excerpts from Deborah Kaplan’s “Mass Marketing Jane Austen” (2001), so we had already discussed the impact of casting famous actors and actresses in adaptations. See figure 6 for an example that includes images of Kate Winslet as Marianne.
[4.5] Elizabeth capitalized on her casting choices. Because our class had read the novel and watched the film, students could actually see that she had adapted two works.

[4.6] These projects helped me better understand that digital adaptation affords a subtly nuanced way of thinking about intertextuality, specifically in terms of what Paul Booth calls in Digital Fandom "narratives that cross technologies of distribution channels" (2010, 58). The result, though, is not a fragmentation of texts through transpositional or transtextual movement (note 9) from one medium to another, but a celebration of a sourcetext, in this case Austen's work, through "new media" (Booth 2010, 3), such as a dating Web site or Facebook, that are updatable and open to user feedback. Austen's characters' shift from a print to an open digital medium might even show us what Gevirtz (2010) calls "an enhancement of cultural status for both texts," as people interested in Austen go to the Web and enjoy derivates that speak to their interests in contemporary media beyond film. (Gevirtz also offers a discussion of fidelity and a list of sources on Austen and film.)

5. The products of 21st-century adaptation: Multiderivativeness and parody

[5.1] The Facebook project is not the only one to draw on multimedia and multiple sourcetexts. Half of the projects are what I am calling multiderivative. Rather than simply appropriating a single hypotext, some students adapted two or more works, and their extracurricular interests and work experiences shaped their choices. For instance, Gia, who works as a waitress at a popular Maine ski resort, decided to set her adaptation of Sense and Sensibility in the resort's restaurant. Most students, though, looked to readings, films, TV, and music external to our course for inspiration.

[5.2] Two students who adapted Samuel Richardson's novel Pamela created parodies inspired by one of our course readings, Henry Fielding's 1741 parodic adaptation, Shamela. One of these two was additionally inspired by George Orwell's 1945 Animal Farm, which was not discussed in the class. The result is an interesting mash-up; the title page, shown in figure 7, imitates the formatting of Richardson's original title page.

[5.3] This project revealed even more derivativeness than its author, Thelonius, may have intended. He chose to change Pamela's human would-be rapist, Mr. B, into a dog, or what could be a kind of fairy tale–like Big Bad Wolf, and his teenaged maid, Pamela, into a pig. This parody, like other course projects, is multimodal, for it includes illustrations to help the reader visually connect with the derivate. One illustration, drawn by Thelonius's friend Janelle, shows the poor little pig crying as the dog barks cruelly at her, much as Mr. B yells profanities at Pamela in Richardson's novel.

Figure 7. Thelonius's Hamela or Pork Rewarded (2014) title page, written in imitation of Pamela's 1740 title page, including the lessons about what readers can learn from reading the text.

[5.4] This image, among others, of a frightened little pig tugged at my heartstrings. Intertextually, the appeal to pathos bears an analog to the novel's 18th-century context, too, in which readers worried for Pamela's safety and cried over the novel

Figure 8. Hamela's (2014) image of Mr. B, a dog, barking at a frightened Hamela, a pig.
[5.5] In addition to literature, many of the projects responded to nonliterary sources from popular culture—including Disney films, YouTube series, TV programs, and mainstream music—that were not addressed in the course. Students’ decisions to respond to such sources demonstrate their instinctual abilities to draw parallels between course texts and their previous reading, viewing, and listening, and to forge new intertextual relationships between these works. For example, Tyler's video project, "Sassy Gay Friend: Pamela," adapts Pamela, Shamela, and Second City Network's YouTube series Sassy Gay Friend (https://www.youtube.com/show/sassygayfriend). The YouTube series itself is a product of re-vision, for it uses "the 'camp gay' trope," as Tyler puts it, to offer famous literary characters, such as Shakespeare's, some frank advice about the errors of their ways. Tyler explains that he chose Sassy Gay Friend as a vehicle of appropriation because he wanted to appeal to a 21st-century audience. He believes that "modern audiences find ["the 'camp gay' trope"] endearing" and "can apprehend the particulars of these [18th-century] characters via their own cultural and intertextual connections." Tyler, like Thelonius, called upon collaborators to help him make the video, an indication of how this kind of project benefits from a supportive peer community. The video and script, which Tyler posted on YouTube, shows the sassy gay friend (played by Tyler) criticizing Pamela (played by his friend Molly) for considering suicide. The episode takes an important scene from Pamela in which her soul, rather than merely her body, is in jeopardy and uses humor to appeal to modern readers, who are often frustrated with Pamela's dither:

![Video 3: Tyler's Sassy Gay Friend: Pamela (2014), which shows the Sassy Gay Friend, played by Tyler, lecturing Pamela, played by Molly, for considering suicide.](https://www.youtube.com/show/sassygayfriend)

[5.6] Here intertextuality meets pop culture and digital media as this project adapts an 18th-century novel, an 18th-century burlesque derivative of it, and a popular 21st-century literary parody Web series.

[5.7] Tyler was not the only student to recognize the power of lampoon. In another parody, Alison created a hybrid video-musical-infomercial adaptation of Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters. One inspiration for this project is the soundtrack of Disney's 2013 animated film Frozen. Alison's close reading of Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters's characters prompted her to consider how they might share their feelings in song, as Disney's characters famously do. In her project, "Frozen Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters," Alison composed her own lyrics, solicited students to help her film herself singing songs and setting up the infomercial, and then added the lyrics on screen to appeal to viewers who might want to sing along. The song "Build a Boat," for example, is sung in the voice of Lady Middleton, Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters's aboriginal abductee, who eventually escapes by submarine from her imperialist European husband. This adaptation of the award-winning tune "Let It Go" is accompanied by versions of two other songs from Frozen's soundtrack: "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?" and "Fixer Upper." Marianne's song to Elinor entitled "Do You Really Wanna Marry Edward?" clearly ties into Winters's questioning, in Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters, of Edward's vapid personality in Austen's novel, and Mrs. Jennings's song to Marianne, "Fishy Fixer Upper," tries to convince the teenager that old Colonel Brandon's fishy face should not prevent her from marrying him. In Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters the character actually has tentacles on his face, a fact that is visually and verbally repeated time and again in the 2009 book. Video 4 shows Alison in action:

[5.8] Alison's project won the award for class favorite because of its effectiveness in making intertextual references to narratives known by the audience and its appeal to humor. The students and I were amazed at how well Alison drew on her strengths in songwriting, singing, and digital manipulation to create an adaptation that borrowed from Disney—a company well known for adapting its own tales—and cleverly highlighted some of the social issues, such as the subjugation of women, underlying Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters.

[5.9] Film and television inspired three other projects. Angelisa's screenplay adaptation of Sense and Sensibility, called "Sense of Spells," turns the three Dashwood sisters into witches. Like the three sisters in the Warner Bros. TV show Charmed, Angelisa's characters, Mara, Ellia, and Maggie, have to battle warlocks who want to take their powers from them. Angelisa creates a world of magic to transform the emotional anxieties and social pressures present in Austen's work. While the sisters in Austen's novel have to learn how to balance sense and sensibility, the sisters in the screenplay have to control their emotions in order to control their magic and protect themselves.

[5.10] Another multiderivative screenplay project offers a trailer for a film called Vampela. This adaptation not only combines Pamela with Bram Stoker's Dracula and the genre of action/adventure film, but also takes inspiration from the trailers I showed the class for the 1931 Frankenstein and 1935 Bride of Frankenstein movies. Eric's project imagines Vampela—an alternate version of Pamela—fighting to protect her virtue from the vampire Mr. D—a Dracula-esque version of Mr. B. In adapting some of the bombastic language of the movie trailers, Eric creates a black screen that fades into the words "THE MOST EPIC STORY EVER TOLD." The trailer represents more than humor and parody; Eric played with the seriousness of Pamela and the sensationalism of vampire movies. This project impressively combined course texts that few individuals would intuitively think to put together.

[5.11] The course aimed to show students how movies adapt novels and how film adaptations modify other film adaptations, thus giving them another exercise in intertextuality. I asked students to watch excerpts from the 1930s Frankenstein films so that they could analyze the ways in which the 20th-century cinematic conception of the monster altered Mary Shelley's early 19th-century creature. I also wanted them to see how the 1935 Bride of Frankenstein adapted the 1931 Frankenstein, and how a host of later films adapted those movies. One of these later adaptations is Steve Oedekerk's 2002 short film Frankenthumb, which dresses up human thumbs and parodies the 1931 film. One of my students, Nick, was fascinated by this trail of adaptations, especially Frankenthumb, and imagined what other sources might affect another 21st-century Frankenstein derivative. Nick was influenced by Mary Shelley's novel, the 1930s films, Frankenthumb, and a plethora of seemingly unrelated works that he cleverly integrated as sources for his project. His novella, The Tale of Frankenfett, is perhaps one of the best student examples of multiderivativeness, for, as Nick explained to me, he tried to make as many references as possible to a range of texts, including film, television, and music. This project is the stuff of intertextuality.

[5.12] The nods to other texts in Frankenfett are sometimes obvious and at other times subtle, what Nick calls in his introduction "tiny little easter eggs." As a reader, I was on the hunt for these colorful gems, and I found many. To start, the novella's title (and protagonist's name) is a mash-up of Frankenstein and Star Wars's Boba Fett. Frankenfett proposes that Victor Frankenstein (who gets to keep his name in this adaptation) decided to name his son after "the greatest sci-fi film canon ever, despite the fact that the prequels were largely boring and silly," as Nick puts it. Here we might imagine the energy of fan critics, as demonstrated in Alexandre Philippe's documentary The People vs. George Lucas (2010). The name of Mary Shelley's narrator, Walton, is changed to Wilson in homage to Mr. Wilson, a character in the comic Dennis the Menace. Nick also mentions the title character from the children's series Captain Kangaroo and Guy Fieri's Diners, Drive-ins and Dives. Music from the 1970s through the 1990s has a presence in the text. Nick makes obvious references to KoRn, Limp Biskit, Sonic Youth, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and Bauhaus. One character says, "Bela Lugosi's dead," which is the title of a Bauhaus song as well as a reference to the actor and thus to his films. Similarly, a casual reference to a brand of alcohol called "Old Windmill" evokes the scene of the burning windmill in the 1931 movie. In a nod to 1935's Bride of Frankenstein and 1974's Foxy Brown, Pam Grier is offered up as a model for the would-be bride of Frankenfett. Literature is incorporated into the novella as Nick refers to Alex from A Clockwork
6. The products of 21st-century adaptation: Fandom

[6.1] A pedagogy of adaptation can and should include fan fiction in its framework. A cousin to adaptation, fan fic certainly is a part of 17th- to 19th-century literary history, and scholars have labeled some of the texts I taught in my course, such as *Shamela*, as fan fic (Judge 2009; see also Simonova 2012). When I created my adaptation assignment I neither considered how heavily fandom would affect students' decisions, nor anticipated that their projects would incorporate elements of fan fic. Nevertheless, at least a third of my students professed strong fannish or cultist (note 10) identifications with an author or primary source, either in class or in the written introductions to their projects. Drawing on the connection between Austen and fan fic can be productive in a university setting, as Amanda Gilroy has noted in "Our Austen: Fan Fiction in the Classroom" (2010). In my class I found a loyal fan base for Austen, who certainly has been the source for many adaptations and much "Janeite" fan fic. Web sites such as the Republic of Pemberley, Dwiggie.com, FanFiction.net, and Wattpad host Austen fan fic, and recent scholarship has addressed the long tradition of online fandom of Austen and her characters (Yaffe 2013; Mirmohamadi 2014; see also Van Steenhuyse 2011 and Pugh 2005). As Mirmohamadi notes, online Austen fandom reflects evolving notions of literacy, sociability, and writing communities in a digital age. As Yaffe puts it, "the heart of the Austen operation is the computer" (2013, 121).

[6.2] Regardless of the medium used or the work adapted, my students' adaptations reveal some of the tropes of fan fic. Their projects offer AUs, fixes, tags, crossovers, badfic, het, slash, and BDSM, and we could call the creators of the video projects vidders (note 11). Alternate universes certainly dominate their adaptations, as do narrative interventions: some students felt the need to rethink scenes or add scenes to plots. Other students complied with a source text's heterosexual romance, but at least one added a homoerotic subtext that hints at subversive behavior. After the semester ended I realized that my students could also be considered adapters and fan writers. As Henry Jenkins writes in *Textual Poachers*, fan writers participate in "strategies of interpretation, appropriation, and reconstruction" (1992, 162); creators of adaptations do the same. The combination of a creative product and a reflection on the process of adaptation also invites us to see the student-adapter as an acafan, a person "who co-opts fan cultures into his or her academic project" (Busse and Hellekson 2006, 32, note 4). Like the adaptation of 17th-century works in the 21st, this connection between the academic-student and the fan-student brings together seemingly disparate worlds. It establishes, however, that students can embrace fandom while also developing academic identities.

[6.3] One such student is Marie, who identified her poetry and fiction project on *Sense and Sensibility* and *Sea Monsters* as fan fic. A fan of everything Austen, Marie had read Austen's novels, seen the film adaptations, and even read *Sense and Sensibility* and *Sea Monsters* of her own volition long before the course began. She writes, "Though the topic of my poetry comes from Jane Austen, the way in which I wrote the topic allowed me to broaden subjects that Jane Austen had touched on but not really developed, and it allowed me to focus on those things in a way that I as a reader would have liked to see them developed." Marie explains that her project allowed her to "connect with the story through [her] own way." She situates herself as a fan reader and fan writer as she imagines what more of the *Sense and Sensibility* and *Sea Monsters* world readers might want and how she could provide it in a tag or missing scene.

[6.4] Like Marie, other students claimed to have read *Sense and Sensibility* as adolescents and to have seen the 1995 film many times. As one might expect, these students' projects were Austen derivatives. The *Sense and Sensibility* projects that depicted a high school version of Austen's characters are examples of het and represent a subgenre of Austen adaptation as well as a subcategory of the AU genre—high school AU. The "Sense and Sensibility in High School," "Sense and Spells," and "Sense and Sensibility and Ski Resorts" projects transplant Austen's characters into a new space with different social norms, and they reiterate the importance of heterosexual relationships in the management of Austen's world. Like Austen's 19th-century novel, the Facebook and OKCupid *Sense and Sensibility* sites place romance at the forefront, but in them Austen's characters exist in the digital world of the 21st century and share their romantic endeavors publicly in this digital landscape. Thanks to Facebook and the dating Web site, Marianne gets to experience new kinds of social interactions. These projects are a reminder that fans "use the tools of new media to write and share fannish narratives," as Louisa Ellen Stein argues; such tools allow "new forms of fan creative expression [to] come into being" (2006, 247).

[6.5] In addition to Austen, my students also claimed to be fans of Shakespeare. My course began with Shakespearean adaptations, and one excited student revealed to me early in the semester that he wanted to create his own adaptation of *The Tempest*. Caleb created *Lordless*, an illustrated chapbook that includes hand-drawn images of Ariel and Caliban to complement the verbal narrative. While this project utilized the cultural context covered in our class discussions, including problems of rulership in early 17th-century England, colonialism, and the master/slave dialectic, the most interesting elements of *Lordless* align it with fan fic. *Lordless* imagines what happens on the island after Prospero, Miranda, and the Europeans leave, thus offering a fix or tag to the source. It focuses exclusively on Ariel and Caliban's relationship, and in some ways the text embeds elements of slash and BDSM as it portrays Caliban enjoying his enslavement of Ariel, who is grieving the loss of his temporary freedom from Prospero.
This adaptation shows how applying narrative frameworks from outside of the hypotext can draw out textual elements, such as sexual tension and emotional oppression, that the sourcetext either does not handle directly or avoids altogether. As Caleb reimagines the play through the lens of homosexual or homosocial anxiety, his narrative can encourage readers to return to the play and rethink the established het dynamic that dominates the plots of early modern drama.

[6.6] The images shown in figures 9–11 are visual references to Ariel’s enslavement in Shakespeare’s play, Caliban and Ariel’s troubled relationship, and a fascination with the body. Ariel’s nude body is on display in a handful of drawings in Lordless, such as the one in figure 9.

![Figure 9. Caleb’s depiction of Ariel’s nude body in Lordless (2014).](View larger image.)

[6.7] This sensual image of Ariel—one replete with the curves of muscles and including the outline of genitalia—forces viewers to look at Ariel in a way that either recapitulates or redefines the male gaze. Because of this, our gaze binds Ariel, much like the tree that once contained Ariel in the play. As shown in figure 10, the cover of Lordless is graced by a tree that is reminiscent of the pine from which Prospero freed Ariel in The Tempest, only to make the sprite his servant.

![Figure 10. The cover of Lordless (2014), showing the tree that once imprisoned Ariel.](View larger image.)

[6.8] Unfortunately, as we close the book, we find Ariel imprisoned again. In figure 11, readers see a long shot of the island drawn in a series of heavy, chaotic lines, contrasting with an opening image of the island that is drawn with neat, clean lines. For me, the change in artistic energy reflects the turmoil of Ariel’s state of mind.

![Figure 11. Lordless’s (2014) images of the island at the beginning and end of the book. At left, the opening image of the island illustrates a clear, sunny day; at right, the closing image shows the storm that is both real and in Ariel’s mind.](View larger image.)
[6.9] In reflecting on *Lordless* as a transformative work, Caleb convinced me that his project is the product of fan fic written by an acafan. He writes,

[6.10] I definitely think of *Lordless* as a fan fiction. I am blatantly and unapologetically in love with the characters, and was all too delighted to work with them. While I do believe that my piece may have some small amount of academic merit being an experiment where rough character sketches interact in an environment void of distractions or interruptions, I am not sold on the idea that it is anything more than a guilty product of my overactive imagination. I like to think of it less as a transformation, and more as a magnification of sorts, where I have taken a facet of the original (­cough­) play and have blown it up into its own story. While interesting, many of the play's historic political references are, in my mind, out of vogue with current interests. More to the fore are the ideas of personhood and the concepts of personal ownership and intellectual slavery that a certain BDSM romance novel has sparked a public interest in (note 12). It was these things that I plucked from beneath Shakespeare's pen, and fed them into my own work through keyboard and scanner. Whether I accomplished this or not is beside the point.

[6.11] Caleb's thoughts about his work encapsulate the concepts that are at the heart of a pedagogy of adaptation. As he indicates, his purpose was not to imitate Shakespeare or fully capture the meanings of the “original” play. Rather, he shares his love for characters and storytelling; he has something more to express about these characters than the play allows. He makes clear intertextual references while adding something new to the sourcetext. The characters of Ariel and Caliban inhabit the same locale as they do in the 17-century play, but their interactions are the product of the 21st century and even of novels of this century.

-----------------------------------------------

7. Concluding thoughts

[7.1] While readers and viewers often focus on what adaptations do to "original" texts, we should consider what they can do for these works. "Rather than being displaced by the adaptation," Hutcheon reminds us, the adapted literary text "gets a new life" (Hutcheon 2007; see also Gilroy 2010). In my class, students gave Shakespeare's, Richardson's, Austen's, and Shelley's works new lives. Their projects bridge the gap between centuries of writing and, to adapt a 19th-century English bridal rhyme, make something old something new, and something borrowed something new, too.

[7.2] In creating adaptations, students established a firsthand connection between works of literature and their own creative practices. Because they were required to think about the relationships between texts—others' and their own—they were able to appreciate intertextuality. Producing adaptations helped them closely examine sourcetexts and contexts, consider intertextuality, think about ways of adapting texts to suit their own interests and current audiences, and create projects that were meaningful to them. This assignment encouraged a subtle, yet pertinent, interrogation of the longstanding bounds of canon and privileged students' contributions to a genre or literary corpus instead of merely asking them to analyze an author's text. The process of adaptation empowered student-readers to become creators of literature, film, and art, and, even better, to share this work with their peers and beyond the classroom.

-----------------------------------------------

8. Acknowledgments

[8.1] I thank my English 377 students for enthusiastically sharing their work with me. I also want to acknowledge three amazing projects that I did not analyze in this essay: Nate's screenplay adaptation of a section of *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, Kaitlyn's novella adaptation of *Frankenstein*, titled *The Undertaker's Child*, and Russell's prose adaptation of *Pamela*. These works were omitted because of the structure of my argument, not any lack of merit on their part.

-----------------------------------------------

9. Notes

1. I combine the words "source" and "text" to form one compound word, as Julie Sanders does in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006, 26), because this orthography implies a conflation of the ideas signified by the words. The text is a source, and the source is a text.

2. Sanders's (2006) synthesis of adaptation studies helped frame much of my critical thinking about intertextuality. Sanders provides a short history of adaptation and intertextuality in her introduction, including the term's origin in the work of Julia Kristeva and the impact on adaptation studies of Roland Barthes's and Michel Foucault's theories of the "death of the author." She turns to T. S. Eliot's writings in claiming that adaptation relies on the "existence of a canon" while it also reformulates and contributes to a canon (2006, 8).

3. I used the term "original" with students because I expected them to be familiar with it on entering the class. Like Sanders (2006, 19), I use scare quotes to question the idea that a work can be original, a singular starting point void of other influences.

4. Genette introduces a host of terms in his exploration of textual relationships. While I use the Kristevan term intertextuality throughout this paper, Genette describes a similar theory using terms such as architextuality, transtextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, transformation, and imitation (1997, 1–7).
5. See the New London Group's 1996 "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures" (http://wwwstatic.kern.org/filer/blogWrite44ManilaWebsite/paul/articles/A_Pedagogy_of_Multiliteracies_Designing_Social_Futures.htm) and Jody Shipka's 2011 Toward a Composition Made Whole. Multimodality draws on multiple methods of textual experience—via reading and writing—to accommodate 21st-century students who actively use multimedia and whose literacies are affected by different modes of representation: visual, verbal, oral, and others.

6. In their introduction to Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson discuss the value of autoethnography as a part of writers' hybridity, an examination of oneself under the lenses of "fan and the academic-fan" and "a useful tool to situate writers in their scholarly and fannish contexts" (2006, 24).

7. "Digital humanities" refers to the study of authors, texts, and genres through a digital medium. It can draw on data mining and statistical data; it can refer to the ways we benefit from digital storehouses, such as open-access Web sites or databases; or it can simply speak to our interests in the digital publishing of texts, including HTML versions of early modern works and our own Web sites. The Center for Scholarly Communication & Digital Curation at Northwestern University offers a comprehensive Web site that explores the discipline: http://sites.northwestern.edu/guidetodh/.

8. She did not create actual Facebook profiles for the characters, because she did not want to misrepresent characters as real people. Instead, she used a template to imitate a Facebook profile. She talked about her project, however, as if the profiles actually existed, in a kind of alternate universe.

9. The term transpositional can be found in various studies of film adaptations. The introduction to A Pedagogy of Adaptation (Cutchins, Raw, and Welsh 2010) cites Geoffrey Wagner in defining transposition as a situation where "a novel is directly given on the screen, with the minimum of apparent interference" (xii). The word transtextual comes from Genette's Palimpsests (1997) and implies that information is transformed across texts or media.

10. In using the terms fannish and cultist, I draw on Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst's descriptions in "Fans and Enthusiasts" (2014). Fans may show an affinity for a particular author, show, or other object, but they need not communicate with a community of like-minded admirers. Cultists are more active than fans in their dedication to the object of their affinity, and they communicate with others and sometimes—by creating and contributing work such as fiction and role plays—with groups. As Abercrombie and Longhurst explain, they are heavily specialized in their fandom.

11. Here I draw on Busse and Hellekson's catalog of terms in their introduction to Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet (2006, 5–32).


10. Works cited


1. Introduction

[1.1] Lady Gaga—with her gender-bending and bodily transgressive performances, as well as her campaigns for LGBT rights and social work with marginalized young people and her recent further engagement with pop art and avant-garde expressions—is an extremely interesting phenomenon to study. However, the relation between the star and her fans constitutes an at least as sensational case in which Gaga not only is "engendering immense loyalty in fans" through her music but also with "the message she inspires and the community she built around it" (Huba 2013, 3).

[1.2] The intense connection between Lady Gaga and her fans highlights the importance of affect in the field of fan studies. Lawrence Grossberg states that affect is what "gives 'color,' 'tone' or 'texture'" to fan experiences (1992, 56–57). Fans' affective states shape the experience of the object of fandom. Following Grossman, affective fandom may be perceived as an empowering investment that can generate energy and passion, thus potentially "creating a site of optimism, invigoration and passion which are necessary conditions for any struggle to change the conditions" (64–65). Matt
Hills's notion of a "playful potential" (2002, 91) informs an understanding of fans as transgressing boundaries of real and fantasy, thereby permitting imagination of a mutual relation with the object of fandom. Affect shapes fan experiences and enables potential identity and social change; it also plays a big part in the imaginary work of fans. Other scholars have described the bond between fans and their idols as working in "ever decreasing circles of affective connectivity" (Redmond 2006, 36) and as "a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection" (Duffett 2013b, 2) and have described fandoms as fundamentally "intensely personal and deeply affective" (Anderson 2012, 93).

[1.3] The affective relation between an idol and her fans can fruitfully be examined through the lens of the experience economy and how new systems of value are produced in the consumption of experiences. Boswijk, Thijssen, and Peelen (2007) identify three levels of the experience economy. The first level is described as staged experiences, created for the consumer with an aim of personal enjoyment, whether offering Starbucks coffee or music by Lady Gaga. The second is advanced by a co-created level in which the consumer is invited to take part in the creation of the experience in order to create a more personal and thus more meaningful experience. Finally, the third level is self-direction, which encourages consumers to take matters into their own hands and create value on their own. Affect, then, should here be interpreted as a value investment enjoyed by the fans, and, as Nancy Baym has argued, likewise by the idols, since the "power balances" in the communication between the idol and the fans are being negotiated as a result of the arrival of social media (2012, 296). This affective capital is not to be understood as similar to Margaret Wetherell's concept of emotional capital, in which she suggests that "some affective styles (made up of particular combinations of affective practices) offer some groups an advantage" in systems of labor (2012, 112), but rather like Sara Ahmed's idea of affect as nonimmanent in either objects or signs and thereby "an affect of circulation between objects and signs" (2004, 120), which can be exchanged between the idol and the fans. Enhanced by social media, affect can not only circulate but can also be absorbed and transmitted from one body "directly into another" (Brennan 2004, 3) and can "reverberate in and out of cyberspace, intensified (or muffled) and transformed through digital circulation" (Kunstman 2012, 1).

[1.4] In order to examine the experience of being a Lady Gaga fan further, I focus not only on how the fans are invited into the experiences created by Gaga but also on how social media sites enable inclusion practices for the fans as well as processes of othering (Bennett 2013). Besides being spaces where the fans can experience a temporal and personal closeness with Lady Gaga, the online fan communities are also spaces where the fans can develop close relationships with other fans (Baym 2010) and thus experience an intensification of their Lady Gaga fandom. Investigating the various
unwritten rules (Baym 2000) and cultural capitals (Fiske 1992) of the Gaga fandom, I wish to show how fan hierarchies (Zubernis and Larsen 2012) are established online and how the affective investments of the fans not only intensify the positive states of the fandom but also create moments of negative affect for the fans.

2. Methodology

[2.1] The investigation of the fandom of Lady Gaga in this article is based on, first, ongoing online ethnography on Lady Gaga's Twitter profile, the fan forum Gaga Daily (http://gagadaily.com), and the fan Web site Little Monsters (http://littlemonsters.com); and, second, off-line ethnography consisting of recorded semistructured interviews with seven fans (one individual interview and two group interviews), unrecorded talks with several fans, and participation and observation at the ArtRave (a release party for Lady Gaga's latest album, Artpop [2013], held in Brooklyn on November 10, 2013), and at the Artpop POP UP (a 3-day gallery event November 11–13, 2013, in New York City). This means, first, that this study only covers a relatively small part of the whole Gaga fandom, and second, that fans constituting the off-line data in this study represent a specific part of the fandom: fans living in or in the environs of New York and thus close to Lady Gaga and who spend time and money following Gaga. The study is thus not representative of average Gaga fandom but rather an insight into a selected part of the fandom. All fans used as informants for this article were informed of my intentions with the interviews and that the data provided would be anonymized.

[2.2] Despite the fact that the off-line data are collected using classical anthropological methods (interviews and observations) and that this study therefore is not autoethnographical, I have found it useful to a small extent to inscribe myself in the third wave of fan studies, which is characterized by a "willingness to embrace the use of the personal in ways that extend beyond the uncritical limitations of the anecdotal or brief autobiographical introductions" (Monaco 2010, 102), and therefore to engage in an immersion in Gaga fandom. This was done as a result of experiencing how fans can be "mistrustful of academics in general" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 85). In order to get in contact with fans after the field trip to New York was planned, I wrote an entry on Gaga Daily and Little Monsters in which I described my research project and asked for fans who would be willing to meet up with me in New York (I wrote the respective administrations before I did so) and wrote the same on my profile. I also contacted a list of New York–based fans on Little Monsters through private messages. After a couple of last-minute cancellations, I ended up with only one fan willing to meet me in New York and experienced the same when approaching fans during my days in New York. I therefore started to use myself in the fieldwork, first by keeping track of my own bodily responses during the fieldwork and second by sharing, in my interviews
and talks with fans, thoughts of my own experiences of becoming interested in Lady Gaga, listening to her for the first time, being impressed by parts of her social work, and even being touched by performances. My participation in discussions about Lady Gaga meant that I influenced the conversations, but it also encouraged more open conversations. This helped, but the fans still expressed a great deal of suspicion in spite of being very friendly. The fans, then, are not a carefully selected sample but instead are simply the fans who were willing to participate, which again means that the fans presented in this study are not necessarily representative of the average Gaga fandom.

[2.3] The online data are based on observations from August 2013 to February 2014 on two major Lady Gaga fan sites. The first is Gaga Daily, a fan site that was created in 2009 and that has been acknowledged by Lady Gaga, for instance via her occasional visits on the site. This site consists of a news section and a forum with more than 20,000 members with threads either related to Gaga or not. The second site is Little Monsters, a social networking site through which fans can "gather, create, share and inspire," created by Lady Gaga for her fans and launched in 2012. Besides ongoing online observation on Lady Gaga's Twitter profile, I followed the activity around the profile closely on the day before and on the day of the ArtRave party.

[2.4] In my investigations it soon became clear that social media play a huge role in the fandom of Gaga and also that it is impossible to draw a line between the online and off-line fan practices. I therefore follow the scholars of Internet research who have argued that we should not distinguish between virtual and real (Bolter et al. 2007) and that greater advantage will be gained by examining the ways in which online and off-line phenomena influence one another (Orgad 2009) and which, through qualitative Internet research, contribute to studies of the "multiple meanings and experiences that emerge around the internet in a particular context" (boyd 2009, 31).

[2.5] The various statements of the fans have been read first on a discursive level in order to investigate how notions of, for instance, the bad fan are created. The statements are then subjected to content analysis as expressions of affective bodily states. Affect has been addressed from various academic standpoints and with various focuses—for instance, how affect can be used as a political tool to manipulate voters (Thrift 2008), how affect can describe queer struggles (Sedgwick 2003), and how consumer culture depends on affective ideas and beliefs to spread contagiously from customer to customer (Gibbs 2010)—but is generally investigated as bodily responses and the capacity of the body to become affected and to affect others (Clough 2007). Affect has often been described as lying between physical drives and emotion, and as semi- or preconscious bodily responses in the meeting between the subject and the world surrounding the subject (Massumi 2009; Thrift 2008). Although I sympathize with this group of affect scholars who argue that rather than being preconscious, affect
is discursively inscribed into existing social structures—as Judith Butler does when she argues that "we can only claim affect as our own on the condition that we have already been inscribed in a circuit of social affect" (2010, 50)—I find it useful in this article to apply the preconscious affective approach, as this distinction enables a reading of affect in its "qualified and semiotically inserted state" as emotion (Massumi 2002). The affective responses in the bodies of Lady Gaga fans are traceable in their verbalization and thus cognitive impression of the precognitive experiences.

3. Personal engagement and invested passion

[3.1] Lady Gaga is a huge part of the lives of all the fans that I interviewed: she appears on their CD player, on their cell phones, all over their rooms, and she was described as "always there" and "definitely family" (as expressed by fan 1); the ultimate dream for most of them is to become friends with her. Some saw her as "human God" (fan 5) or an artistic "mentor" (fan 2) while one stated that he/she would love to have Gaga as a mother. In other words, the playful potential is definitely brought into play in Gaga fandom, and the performances of Lady Gaga enable the fans to imagine a mutual relation with her. In order to understand the connection to Lady Gaga, the fans were asked to talk about why Gaga means so much to them and in what way.

[3.2] The fans emphasized the realness and genuineness as crucial elements of the experience of being a Gaga fan: "She's not posing, it's just something she does" (fan 6), and "Gaga is there to show you that she is not perfect, that she's a human being" (fan 1), and "for example she was like really serious about the 'don't ask, don't tell,' she wasn't just like 'oooh I'm supporting' with money" (fan 6). It is generally important for the fans that Gaga invests more than money in them: "Most people would be like 'go buy my album'" (fan 2). A competition was announced in February 2014, in which the fans could win a private dinner with Gaga and her family by donating money to the Born This Way Foundation and thus support social work for marginalized youth. When donating money, one is presented with the following options: Fan: $10, Supporter: $25, Monster: $50, Ambassador: $100, Super Star: $200, Monster VIP: $600, and Super Monster: $2,000. This was accepted enthusiastically by most of the fans. However, it also created a lot of frustration, for instance among the fans on Little Monsters who wondered, "So if we don't have $50 it means we are not a Little Monster?...I feel a little sad about the way the amount you donate is labeled as what type of fan you are" (February 25, 2014), "the winner will probably be a wealthy little monster who have met Gaga 100 times" (February 25, 2014), and "read through all the comments here and you will see the wave of sadness those that are not financially well off are feeling" (February 26, 2014). Even though money is unavoidable in most fan practices, it is generally important to the fans that what is invested in the relation
between them and Lady Gaga goes beyond what one can buy or earn. That Gaga invested time in the fans was emphasized as important: "She just takes the time because she cares" (fan 3) and gave the fans the feeling that "she really cares for us" (fan 4). In addition, investing energy in them on a more personal level is also very important for the fans: "She fights for her fans, for equality, and for acceptance" and "she's just a voice for those who can't speak for themselves" (fan 1), and "we all see how she lives for us" (fan 7). The fact that Gaga herself has been through various personal problems was also emphasized as a crucial to the fans: "When you see her and she sings about it and talks about it, she's sharing it with millions of people. And she knows we all go through it. And you start crying because you realize that things can get better" (fan 7). The staged level of the Gaga experience is characterized by an authenticity—here referring to experiencing something as real and genuine and therefore not to whether the experience is actually real—and personal investment by Gaga, and what makes a difference to the fans is the extra effort that Gaga seems to put into her performativity by spending time on the fans, caring about the fans, and laying bare her personal struggles for the fans. The realness of the staged experience clearly has an impact on the fans, and the word passion came up many times when the fans tried to explain how they experienced Gaga: "It hits you...like there's so much passion in what she writes" and "she's a very passionate person and you feel that passion when she's singing" (fan 6). The fans also stated that they had a great deal to say about this matter but often weren't able to put it in words. This suggests a level of something indescribable and thus precognitive in the experience of Gaga. The passion or affect in the performativity of Lady Gaga circulates from the body of Gaga to the bodies of the fans and is absorbed as bodily responses, which take semiotic shape when the fans describe how it hits or is felt.

[3.3] In connection with the People's Choice Awards 2014, where Gaga's fans were nominated as the best followers, one fan tweeted to Lady Gaga "I don't care if we're people's choice as long as we're YOUR choice <3." Gaga then tweeted back, "Too bad I can't choose you, life already chose us to belong together. I am you, you are me, we are each other" (January 2014). What is remarkable here is, first, that Gaga tweets back, and second, that Gaga affirms the fantasies of belonging together among the fans, which is one of her regular styles of communication. This leads to the level of co-creation in the Gaga experience.

[3.4] The level of co-creation is present in all fandoms, for instance as what Jenkins (1992) calls poaching activities and other fan activities that mean, as he later states, that "spectator culture becomes participatory culture" (Jenkins 2006, 60). Many of the fans I interviewed emphasized interaction as very important in their fandom, in which their participation is met with responses from Gaga: "How she interacts with us is something not many others do" (fan 3). There are numerous examples of co-creation...
projects started by Gaga, but one is the creation of Little Monsters, where the fans were encouraged to send an e-mail and request to be "the first to experience a new community only for Little Monsters" and subsequently to send feedback in order to be part of the creation of this site. Another example worth mentioning is Lady Gaga's hiring of two of her fans: a moderator of Gaga Daily and a fan whose fan art was discovered by Gaga on Twitter. On the use of the site today, one fan noted: "She'll log in, she'll comment and talk to us and she'll see what we are up to. And that's really different" (fan 3). Gaga also comments on and talks with the fans on Twitter and via the interactive app created in connection with the release of her latest album *Artpop* (2013). Part of the level of co-creation in the world of Lady Gaga consists of Gaga inviting her fans into the production process, but the co-creation activity, which is highlighted the most by the fans, revolves around Gaga taking part in the lives of her fans. The imagining of a mutual relation with the object of fandom is enabled by Gaga's fulfilling the fantasy of the idol responding. Lady Gaga is not only being watched by the fans but is also reciprocating the awareness. With a chorus repeating, "We could, we could belong together (ARTPOP)" on the title song of the latest album, and responding to Katy Perry's recent statement on not being "a crazy 'I'm gonna die for my fans' type" ("Unbreakable Katy Perry" 2014) with "I would fucking die for my fans" at a concert in Las Vegas on August 1, 2014, Lady Gaga levels with her fans and appears to, like the fans, invest personally in the relation between them. This level of co-creation enables the fans to feel more like a part of the Gaga experience, which thus becomes more of a personal experience. The fans are not only enjoying performed authenticity by Lady Gaga but also are experiencing a mutual emotional engagement in their fandom of Gaga.

[3.5] When I asked the fans how they differed from other fans, they showed awareness of sharing love and passion like other fan bases, but what they emphasized as making them different is what one fan described as self-empowerment. Some of this self-empowerment has to do with creativity and artistic inspiration. The fact that "she's always saying go for your dreams, be who you are" (fan 2) was greatly appreciated by the fans, and the fans agreed that "you don't really hear that a lot from other artists" (fan 2). This encouragement to believe in yourself and what you do gives rise to action among the fans: "She really put the creativity out in us" (fan 3) and "I don't really see other fans make art, because your idol makes you" (fan 4). Being artistic and creative refers here to the production of fan art but also to the artistic work of the fans which is not related to the world of Gaga: for instance, playing an instrument, writing their own songs, and the like. On a more personal level, Gaga also activated the fans: "Her messages created me as I am today. She simply just brought out the inner me" (fan 7); "I never really took bullying and I think that was because of the way I was raised by Lady Gaga" (fan 6); "I try to set an example for honesty like she does" (fan 1); "she inspires people, to inspire other people" and "she gives you the motivation to help
others" (fan 7). Similarly, the changed behavior of the fans does not only count in the fan environment; intentions of treating others and themselves better are also applied to the personal life of the fans, which is not directly linked to the fan community. Contrary to the level of co-creation in the Lady Gaga experience where the fans are also activated and integrated into the construction of the experience, this level has to do with activities motivated and encouraged by Lady Gaga but also carried out in their lives outside the fandom. The passion, which seems to be central in this fandom, is not only located in the fans but also transfers from (fan) body to body: "People don't just worship, they also take all this good energy, this passion and energy and do other things with their lives" and "that passion can spread and motivate people to find something they want to be passionate about" (fan 6). What we see here is an example of Ahmed's (2004) notion of affects of circulation and of how affective fandom can function as an empowering investment and generate energy, passion, and social change for the fans. The performativity of Lady Gaga encourages the fans to self-direct the experience of Gaga and thus to embed the fandom into other parts of their lives.

[3.6] The fandom of Lady Gaga is not experienced as split into three levels. However, examining fan experiences on these levels provides an insight into the different ways in which value production and affective attachment and investment occurs, as performed realness transmitting affect to its fans, as mutual affective investment in the relation, and as passion and energy empowering the fans to change themselves and others. The passion shared and invested by Gaga is crucial to the fans and encourages them to invest further in the fandom on a personal level. Also the sensation of self-empowerment causes the fans to share their passion with other fans, which, often enhanced by social media, is spread, transmitted, and circulated in the fan communities.

[3.7] The fans did not distinguish between their online and off-line fandom. However, it is evident that social media plays a big role in the fandom of Lady Gaga and in the occurrence of affective responses. In order to understand the fan inclusion in the Lady Gaga experience further, the following will examine how social media sites enable not only a closer interaction between the fans and Lady Gaga and among the fans but also how inclusion practices and processes of exclusion take place within the social hierarchies in the online fan communities.

4. Can we build a Twitter country now?

[4.1] When investigating the field of celebrity performativity and fandom today, it is inevitable to come across the use of social media—not only concerning the activities of the fans but also at least to the same degree concerning the media use of the celebrities. For some artists, like Justin Bieber and South Korean singer Psy, fame
depends completely on visibility, spreading, and hyping, facilitated by social media. In April 2008, Lady Gaga released her first single, "Just Dance." Two weeks before the release, Gaga created a profile on the online social networking and microblogging service Twitter, and in the same week of the release, Gaga also joined the online social networking service Facebook. The singer was not discovered via social media sites, and her breakthrough was thus not reliant on online media hype. However, it is beyond any doubt that from the outset, the career of Lady Gaga has been intertwined with and embedded in an ongoing parallel performance online as well as off-line. In 2010 Lady Gaga was the first artist to reach 10 million likes on Facebook (Axon 2010), and in 2011 she was the first artist to reach the magic number on Twitter (Becker 2011).

[4.2] When she reached 21 million Twitter followers in March 2012, Gaga tweeted "Wow 21,000,000 monsters. Can we build a Twitter Country now and all go live there." This wish turned out to be not far from reality. For many Gaga fans, having a Twitter profile is a must. Facebook is considered a copy/paste of Twitter for the fans I talked to, and although many of them had a profile on Gaga Daily and/or Little Monsters, Twitter was undoubtedly the most popular medium. Twitter was considered to be the best way to be updated about Gaga, both because this is the media platform on which Gaga is most active and because it is used by the fans to arrange meetings and exchange information and rumors. Twitter is known for its "high speed of information dissemination" and "the significant influence...as a driver of web traffic" (Bruns and Stieglitz 2013, 161) and therefore as a "real-time social network" (Deller 2011). With its immediacy and post frequency, it is the most obvious media platform on which to follow Lady Gaga if one wants to stay up to date and not miss any communication from Gaga. The tweeting and retweeting of Lady Gaga, as Lucy Bennett has shown in her study of Gaga fans, also enables the fans to experience Gaga as being like them, being "a 'human being' engaged in everyday events" (2014, 113) and a sense of being "directly spoken to, despite this large audience" (116). The Twitter communication of Gaga is highly linked to closeness both personally and timewise.

[4.3] Fans of boy band One Direction reported that they use Twitter in the hope of being recognized by their idol and also hoping to meet new friends. The latter, one Directioner argues, became a lot easier after being followed by a band member (Kerr 2013). The same unwritten social rule is also valid in Gaga fandom, which is evident in statements from my interviews like the following: "I met them [other fans] after I met her" and "now that I got to meet her for the first time, everything changed like I have more friends" (fan 1). In their online socialization, the fans either find each other through Twitter and become friends or meet in real life and then connect via Twitter. Two of the fans I talked to even reported that in spite of living in and attending an art school in New York City, they found it difficult to find other fans without social media. Nancy Baym has concluded in her research that "'online' relationships turn into 'offline'
ones much less often than 'offline' friendships turn into 'online' ones" (2010, 132), but because of the high level of fan interactivity and interest in meeting each other off-line, this does not seem to be the case in this specific fandom. And although Baym argues that Twitter should be not considered a single community (2010, 78) and although Twitter relations have been described as "pseudo-intimacy" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 150), I argue that Gaga fan activities constitute a community within Twitter. Besides being a place through which they make and stay in contact with friends, it is also a place that several of the fans referred to as "one big family" in which they instantly can get support and where "they're just there all the time... they're always thinking of her, that they're always together" (fan 1).

[4.4] Twitter as a communication platform has many limitations, but the online activities of the Gaga fans enable them to create a feeling of a family-like community, with an online liveness (Deller 2011) in which they experience things simultaneously. The fan experience is expanded and intensified by social media since it enables the fans to create personal bonds with other fans and exercise their fandom in a shared room and to experience a temporal and personal closeness with Lady Gaga online as the possibility of meeting and being seen or heard by Gaga comes a step closer.

5. Disempowerment and othering

[5.1] On Twitter and other online fan communities, people can develop meaningful personal relationships online that can make important contributions to their lives (Baym 2010). However, fan communities are also embedded in a system of appreciation, comparisons, and acknowledgment, and thus require an investment of cultural capital, a value of knowledge that is created via exchange and circulation between people—for instance, via enunciative productivity, an adoption of the specific semiotic system of the fan environment (Fiske 1992). Like other social groups, fan spaces "tend to be hierarchical, with various routes 'to the top'" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 30). So fan identities are created via ongoing individual performative work (Butler 1990) and through processes of identification work involving either inclusion or exclusion in social relationships with other fans (Jenkins 2008). Through this social interaction, social norms are being constituted, routinized, and incorporated into online fan practices as unwritten guidelines on the basis of which users can act (Baym 2000).

[5.2] The fans whom I talked to highlighted many of the same positive qualities of being a fan of Lady Gaga, and all agreed that the fan community offers personal support, friends, and a family. However, their statements and the collected online data also indicate sets of unwritten rules in the fandom. First, experience and knowledge proved to be important. I observed newer fans on Gaga Daily getting responses like the following: "Omg the new members *laughing emote*"; "not to be rude, but where
have you been for the past 3.5 months *rolling eyes emote *"; "Gurl get out of here with your 1 post telling us what to do" and "Why are u posting something that happened a few days ago?" Imitating the personal values of Gaga was central too; Lady Gaga frequently turns to various online media platforms to remind her fans that being a little monster means being positive and kind. For instance, she stated, "Any monster that is using hateful language and spreading negativity is not standing truly by me" on Little Monsters (August 7, 2013). This created a discussion thread on Gaga Daily, with many people arguing that the fans who created this negativity are not behaving as fans should: "Most people doing it are Madonna stans pretending to be gaga fans or trolls." But in another thread (January 2014) a fan pointed out to the other fans that "it's like you pointing out people who need to leave the fanbase." Although a couple of fans agreed with this proposal, the majority took exception to it. This "attempting to police other fans" (Zubernis and Larsen 2012, 127) pointed out by the one fan seems to take place regularly on Gaga Daily—for instance, in a thread where a fan states that that it will be an unpopular thread but asks people to keep an open mind and then argues that the new album of Miley Cyrus, Bangerz (2013), is better than Artpop because Bangerz contains more hits than Artpop (November 2013). This created reactions like "stopped reading there because you're obviously delusional & not worth my time bye" and "I think it's time to leave this forum if you really dislike the current Gagz so much." The fan posting this thread has posted several thousand contributions to the forum and has thus supported this fan community for some time. But suggesting that the newest Gaga release could be topped by another album placed the fan on the edge of the community. Also off-line, the policing and self-policing is taking place; however the fans I interviewed were more reluctant to criticize other fans. One fan stated in an interview: "I don't wanna talk junk about little monsters" (fan 4), while another fan asked me to turn off the recorder before stating that not all fans are nice. The fans also discussed whether or not it is okay to disturb Lady Gaga and her family in their private time: "I try not to bother them as much because she is a human" and "We don't [disturb Gaga when she's at her parents' restaurant]. And you know, you gain respect from Joe [Gaga's father] especially" (fan 1). The fans seem be to impelled to act like good fans because of the (potential) satisfaction of being acknowledged in the fan community and of receiving respect from Gaga and her family. The importance of behaving in a way that Gaga would appreciate is also present on Twitter, as this example shows: one fan had been tweeting "spamming Gaga"; "everyday I go on Gaga's account to see if it says 'follows you.'" However, when another fan tweeted, "It's so easy to get her to follow you if you try harder" with an @ to both the first fan and to Lady Gaga, which made the post possible for Lady Gaga to see, the first fan replied, "I don't care that deeply + I don't like spamming her." Being a real fan, for these fans, means living in a Gaga panopticon, where every statement is carefully considered when you're potentially being watched, and the fear of being defined as a bad fan means that the fan behavior depends on who's watching.
Besides using a young language with abbreviations like wtf, omg, and tbh and using many emoticons, the online Gaga community has its own enunciative productivity, which is constantly changing and negotiated. When the song "Fashion!" leaked from *ArtPOP*, the word *slay*, which is repeated throughout the song, became extremely common among her fans: "omg Gaga slays this outfit" and the like. Other codes are not as easily integrated, as for instance the word *yaaasss*, which was created by one of the well-known fans, spread online, and is often used to express excitement about Gaga. This was well received by many fans and integrated into their Gaga vocabulary, but it has also been rejected by many, possibly because the trend was started by a fan and not by Lady Gaga herself. The negotiation of terms even led to an othering (Bennett 2013) of the fan, with statements like "he thinks saying YAAAAZZZ emphasizes he started a fan 'trend' and boosts his fat ego even more" and "he's full of himself like I said and thinks he's a fan leader or something." This term is thus still being negotiated as part of the code.

The "promise of intimacy and authenticity" (Ihleman 2013, 346) and "the potential of getting to know the idol and therefore become more of an insider than the other fans" (350) are also significant to the Gaga fans, and meeting her does undoubtedly result in a privileged position in the fan hierarchy. It is important to add that meeting Gaga online or getting a retweet or a follow by Lady Gaga is equally important to the fans. When interviewing some of the fans, I asked if they tried to get Gaga to follow them on Twitter. The answers were clear: "Yeah, I try all the time. Sometimes I'll just have Gaga spam" (fan 5) and "I was trying to see if she would come here [the POP UP event] and I asked her like 10 times" (fan 3). Although a connection to Gaga is the most optimal, the fans who somehow are closer to Gaga are also acquaintances of interest for the other fans, and as one fan stated in an interview: "A lot of fans are fans of other fans" (fan 1). Meeting Gaga is for many of the fans the ultimate goal, and one fan therefore sought advice on Gaga Daily on how to meet Gaga. The fan interestingly states her credentials as a fan in her advice, seeking to clarify the seriousness of the request: "I went to the artRave, I can rattle off literally any fact about Gaga, basically every spare dollar of my cash goes to her, it's not like I'm some random non-genuine fan." The answers on how to find Gaga then included becoming one of the "Twitter monsters who follow her everywhere." This group was also referred to as the "stalker group, yasssing 24/7." Many of the other replies agreed that a certain group of fans who connect via Twitter and spend a lot of time locating Gaga is too much—"There IS a difference between being a fan and meeting your idol... and stalking"—and that "harming and harassing Gaga" is a wrong way to get her attention. Even though one fan argued back that "it's not that they stalk her, it's that they have connection," the general stance was that this kind of behavior was going too far in the attempt to meet Gaga. What we see here is another example of othering and exclusion in Gaga fandom, but it is also a demonstration that the affective investments
in Gaga fandom are not measured on a never-ending curve but can also lead to exclusion.

[5.5] The intention of this section is by no means to inscribe Lady Gaga fans into the "controversies over the years casting fandom in a poor light" (Duffett 2013a, 300) but to show that the pleasure of being a Gaga fan and experiencing the closeness that this fandom offers can in its hunt for acknowledgment and recognition lead to uncomfortable states of being. The relation to Lady Gaga and to other fans can empower the fans beyond what they can express in words, but it can also exclude them from social relations and can disempower them through the processes of self-policing. This leads to the last point I want to make.

6. Negative affect

[6.1] "WE SHOULD TELL PEOPLE WHAT WE'RE GOING THROUGH!" a girl next to me screamed in a high-pitched voice. People around us joined in: "This is SO ridiculous"; "we have been sitting here for fucking hours"; and "I'm done." Some began crying and some left the queue. We were standing in line for the release party, the ArtRave, of Lady Gaga's new album Artpop and hoping to be let in, in spite of a guest limit of 1,800 people. Grusin argues that we seek positive affect and thus avoid negative affect (2010, 109–10), as do Zubernis and Larsen in their argument that fan activities are, "all temporary frustrations aside, an essentially pleasurable experience" (2012, 71). Gaga fandom is undoubtedly about achieving positive affect; however, the temporary frustrations sometimes seem to be many and strong in Lady Gaga fandom. It had been reported that Gaga would reveal the party location on Twitter during the day, but in the days before ArtRave, people discovered that some fans had received an invitation or had been given one by Gaga when they managed to meet her. The panic began to spread, and those who hadn't got tickets reported on Twitter that they were "desperately looking for the #artRAVE location"; they asked Gaga "why have u forsaken us?" and tweeted bodily reactions like "beyond stressing and freaking out about this weekend"; "so nervous my stomach is in knots. Feel like I'm gonna hurl"; "Uhg I feel so shitty. Just need to sleep"; "If only someone could feel my heart, it's insane how fast it's beating"; "Can't even eat"; and "I can't deal with the stress and the anxiety I'm having from not knowing anything." I could follow the reactions of the fans on Twitter minute by minute but could also detect streams of restlessness and panic in my own fast-beating heart, red cheeks, legs that couldn't stay still, and a knot in my stomach. During the day of the event, a group of people, including me, discovered that one fan who had a ticket had checked in at a pier and stood waiting there for something to happen, and we therefore went there to wait too. After hours of waiting, we were then told that no one would be allowed to enter the party without an invitation. This resulted in a wave of cries, tears, and anger. Luckily 20 or 30 fans and I
waited until the very end and were finally let in, but many fans decided to give up and were very upset. Although the bodily responses I experienced myself were not as strong as those of the fans, the frustration of not getting an update and the dejection caused by waiting on a very cold pier for about 9 hours without access to food or toilets with very little chance of being let in to the party was clear.

[6.2] During my first fan interview in New York, which took place at Lady Gaga's parents' restaurant, my informant was of course talking to me but was at the same time constantly checking the cell phone, looking at or talking to other fans inside the restaurant, fans outside, Gaga's parents, and the staff of the restaurant. This revealed the state of stress linked with being constantly up to date and thus not missing anything. When I later went to Gaga’s apartment to wait with the fans, the atmosphere was not unequivocally positive: the fans talked about how tired and cold they were and about how hard a week it was going to be with all the waiting (since Gaga was in town the whole week). The fieldwork in New York emphasized not only how high is the level of affect invested in this fandom but also that Gaga fandom sometimes includes experiences of very negative affects.

[6.3] From the point of view of experience economy, I have shown how affect can be read as a value invested and enjoyed on different levels by both the fans of Lady Gaga and, according to the sensations of the fans, also by Gaga herself. The affect, or passion and energy, expressed in the performativity of Lady Gaga circulates from the body of Gaga to the bodies of the fans and is experienced as touching sincerity, mutual affective investment in the close and personal relationship, and identity changing self-empowerment. Social media platforms intensify the affective experience of being a Gaga fan, but the hunt for being accepted as a fan and being seen by Lady Gaga can also lead to social exclusion and disempowerment among the fans. The passion that is shared by Gaga and the closeness that is provided through her online and off-line performativity make the fans invest affectively in the fandom. However, this experience of feeling close but not quite there and the hunt for positive affect that is reachable in this inner circle can also trigger various states of negative affect in the Lady Gaga experience. Being invited into as close a relation with Lady Gaga as a fan-celebrity relation allows but often without getting as close as the fans want to (for instance, being followed back on Twitter or meeting Gaga in person) does not seem to change the way in which the fans view Lady Gaga. At the ArtRave the fans directed their anger toward the guards, and in terms of the online relation with Gaga the fans seem to have an understanding of her not being able to reach all of them. The negative states of the Gaga fandom, then, do not point to Lady Gaga as a negative idol for the fans but rather to the guards, media platforms, and other obstacles standing in the way of the meeting that they could be experiencing.
"To see with my own eyes how nice she is to her fans is what makes it all worth it, to be completely honest" (fan 1) was the conclusion of one fan. Affective states of fandom do bring sites of optimism and invigoration but can also—especially with the proximity that social media brings—cause despair. But to the fans of Gaga, the states of negative affect are worth it. One could even argue that the many hours of waiting, the energy spent, and the tears cried bring the fans closer to Gaga, as these downsides of fandom make the autograph, the eye contact, or the picture appear as payoff and thus equivalently intense as the moments of despair. As this study of Lady Gaga fans has shown, the levels of affect invested in fandoms can be very high, but in order to understand them fully, we need to pay attention to the negative affective states too. I encourage further investigation of different states of affect in fandoms in order to understand the complexity of this intense personal dedication.

7. Works cited


Praxis

Real body, fake person: Recontextualizing celebrity bodies in fandom and film

Melanie Piper

University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia

[0.1] Abstract—Comparisons between real person fan fiction (RPF) and film or television texts dramatizing real people have been made in debates over the ethics of RPF as a fan practice. In an effort to direct the scholarly focus on RPF from these ethical issues to the texts themselves, I propose examining the similarities between the textual process of adapting real people to fictional characters on both the cinema screen and the computer screen. This paper examines the work RPF writers do in appropriating the various bodies of their celebrity subjects: the fragmented intertextual body of the star image, and the celebrity's physical body as a signifier of star image and status as a real person in the world. I argue that the fannish textual process of adapting real public figures to fictional contexts shares a common element with adapting public figures to the screen in the biopic: both work to recontextualize the public self of a celebrity through the representation of a fictionalized or speculated private self. To illustrate this, I will be engaging with a case study of The Social Network (2010) fandom through works in its kink meme, and how the adaptations of textual bodies are at work in fictionalized fan writing about real actors performing in the Hollywood fictionalized film about real tech entrepreneurs.

[0.2] Keywords—Biopic; Celebrity; Real person fiction; The Social Network (2010)


1. Introduction

[1.1] There is an ongoing debate in fan spaces as to whether real person fiction (RPF), where fan fiction is written about actual public figures rather than fictional characters, is an unethical denial of a celebrity's personhood or simply a logical extension of the fannish tradition of textually poaching popular culture (McGee 2005, 177). In these discussions, comparisons have been made between RPF and film and television texts, such as biopics, docudramas, and historical dramas, that dramatize real people and events. In a column intended to act as a primer on real person slash (RPS) for a nonfannish audience, Aja Romano (2012) invites readers who judge RPF as "weird" to consider television texts like The Tudors (2007–10) and The Kennedys
(2011) and the behind-the-scenes and off-the-record historical moments that filmmakers construct for viewers. In an essay on One Direction RPF, V. Arrow (2013) declares that "any media 'based on a true story!' is RPF," all with equally tenuous links to actuality. Debates about the ethics of RPF and RPS in fan spaces such as the fail_fandomanon Dreamwidth community have repeatedly included comments that question whether fans who are uncomfortable with RPF fan fiction have similar qualms about biopics and other screen dramatizations of real people.

[1.2] There has thus far been comparatively little scholarly attention paid to RPF in studies of fan fiction (Thomas 2014, 171). The existing body of scholarly writing about RPF has tended to focus on RPF as an ethical gray area (McGee 2005; Arrow 2013; Thomas 2014), a fan practice that interrogates the constructed nature of celebrity and the ways fans similarly construct their own online personas (Busse 2006a, 2006b; Arrow 2013), and an increasingly complicated practice for fans to navigate and maintain the fourth wall as celebrities perform public versions of their private selves on social media (Hagen 2015). A recurring point of consideration in both scholarly work and fan debate about RPF is whether fan fiction based on a real celebrity dehumanizes its celebrity subject or whether the subject of RPF is a textual public persona that is significantly distanced from being a "real person." With this paper, my aim is to turn the focus toward looking at RPF as a textual process of adapting a real person into a character and consider whether this textual process does indeed have similarities to that of adapting a real person to a character in legitimized Hollywood screen texts. To do so, I concentrate on the ways that fan and screen texts dramatizing real people appropriate the various bodies of public figures: both the body of the star image and the image of the physical body. Through an examination of *The Social Network* (TSN), a 2010 based-on-a-true-story movie that spawned a significant online fandom, I highlight how these bodily appropriations work in constructing characters that are the intersection of known public personas and the unknown, speculated, or fantasized private selves of their real person subjects.

2. Appropriating textual and physical bodies

[2.1] Fan fiction, as it has been largely understood thus far by fan studies, is the work of media fans who claim pieces of a favorite text, rewriting and re-presenting it in ways that give themselves and the fellow fans they share the work with something they feel is missing from the original source. Sheenagh Pugh (2005) writes that a common understanding of the motivations of fans to write fan fiction is because they either want "'more of' their source material or 'more from it'" (19). For those seeking more of the original source, this could mean writing scenes missing from the canonical source text, extending the timeline of events beyond the canon itself, or reproducing characters the fans have connected with in order to continue to see more of the same
kind of interaction. For those who want more from the source canon, this could mean pairing together characters who were not in a relationship in canon, bringing into the spotlight minor characters that fans may feel the canon overlooked, or changing the circumstances of the canon entirely with alternate universe settings. With the RPF fan work, because of the dispersed and often contradictory nature of the celebrity image that forms the canon source text, it is possible for a fan work to simultaneously seek more from and more of the celebrities depicted by fictionalizing elements of public and private life.

[2.2]  In RPF, where the names, likenesses, and biographies of public figures are attached to the character in the fan fiction, the canonical source material is made up of textual fragments from the star image. Richard Dyer's (1987) concept of the star image consists of "everything publicly available" about the star in question, including their performances, publicity materials, interviews, gossip, and what others have written about them (2–3). Dyer's concept of the star image is congruent with Cornel Sandvoss's (2007) writing on the textual boundaries of fan objects, in that fan texts are "constituted through a multiplicity of textual elements; it is by definition intertextual and formed between and across texts as defined at the point of production" (23). The disparate and intertextual nature of the public figure as a textual fan object can often produce contradictory readings of the text, as fans define the boundaries of what the celebrity text is to them (29–30). The result is a variety of interpretations or adaptations of the celebrity as character, where individual fan authors can choose which elements of the star image to include, emphasize, or disregard (for example, playing up certain characteristics that may fit their narrative of the celebrity, or ignoring elements of a celebrity's private life, such as real-life spouses in order to write their preferred RPF pairing). Busse (2006b) writes that as no single definitive RPF canon exists, fans can define for themselves what constitutes canon and choose to treat any piece of information as truth, regardless of its objectively true status (215). The place where these disparate elements of the star image and their disparate fan readings and anchors in actuality converge is the physical body of the celebrity. The mediated celebrity body acts as the structure around which elements of the star image are organized and the most obvious visual signifier of that star image as a text. At the same time, the representation of the celebrity's physical body as the fan sees it on screen or in photographs denotes their actual physical self and status as a real person in the world, existing beyond its mediated form. The ways that RPF fan works use the celebrity body appropriates both the signifier of the celebrity's physical, private, off-screen self and the major signifier of the textual star image.

[2.3]  As a subset of fan fiction, RPF has proven to be divisive in fan spaces, regarded as "highly controversial and contentious" (Thomas 2014, 171) and "roundly denounced" as a legal and ethical gray area (McGee 2005, 173). At the same time,
RPF fandoms connected to legitimized narratives or legitimized artists—like TSN—have been described as carrying an expectation of drawing highly skilled fan authors to their communities (Arrow 2013, 325). The biopic as a film genre faces similar critical division, with biopics often attracting acclaim and regarded as an Oscar-bait form while at the same time facing criticism and derision for mistreatment of historical fact (Bingham 2010; Vidal 2014). Mainstream and legitimized works that use the likenesses of real people and public figures as the basis for their characters are not exempt from controversy over their treatment of the truth, with the financial imperatives at stake in such works sometimes leading to public denouncement or legal action by their subjects. In recent examples, Olympic wrestler Mark Schultz, one of the subjects of the film Foxcatcher (2014), publicly threatened the career of Academy Award–nominated director Bennett Miller over the film's gay subtext, which Schultz claimed was "jeopardizing [his] legacy" (Swartz 2014). Scarlett Johansson successfully sued author Grégoire Delacourt over the use of her likeness for a character in the novel La Première Chose Qu'on Regard (2013), and while Johansson's claim that the book fraudulently exploited her celebrity image was rejected, the novel was ruled to be defamatory in its claims about relationships in which Johansson had not actually been involved (Agence France Presse 2014). Incidents such as these suggest that the controversial elements of RPF concerning the ways it uses the likenesses of celebrities to commit author fantasies or speculation about their private lives to writing are present in reaction to mainstream works that are seen to use still-living public figures in similar ways.

[2.4] It is the appropriation of the celebrity's physical likeness that forms the basis of many of the controversies in works such as these and arguments about the unethical status of RPF. Similarly, the physical body and performance of the actor appropriating the characteristics of a real public figure serves as the "emotional hook" and a source of potentially vital authenticity in screen works like the biopic, transforming the film from a recounting of public biographical details to a more rounded portrait of the subject as a public and private individual (Vidal 2014). As the physical body serves to denote a real, private person who exists separately from its mediated public image, RPF fan works' use of the physical body in imagining the private self of a public figure has been considered a dehumanizing process. The appropriation of the physical body in RPF can involve using gesture or expression as a way of showing the character's emotional state, which requires the fan writer to use existing physicality seen in public texts and interpret what they mean for the inner self of the character/public figure. This is a similar form of discourse to celebrity gossip blogs, Web sites, and magazines, where the celebrity body is a "crucial piece of evidence to be read and negotiated" in perpetually seeking a glimpse of the celebrity's "real" self (Meyers 2010, 181). In the case of RPF, however, this "real" self is clearly designated as being a work of fiction.
The physical body can be appropriated in fan fiction for private purposes other than the interpretation of public gesture. When fan fiction contains explicit sex, the physical body of the celebrity is most often appropriated to pair them up with another celebrity, and in the case of publicly heterosexual celebrities who appear in slash fiction, going against the celebrity's expressed sexual orientation. Appropriating the physical body of the celebrity to imagine his or her private life can also involve bringing in characters, such as spouses and children, who are not public figures by choice but rather through their association with the celebrity subject. This can be one place where even fans who enjoy RPF can draw their personal line of taste: public figures are fair game, but writing or reading anything that involves their noncelebrity significant others is off-limits (Thomas 2014, 173).

In reframing the scholarly examination of RPF from ethical debates and ethnographic consideration of fan practices to the texts themselves, I propose that RPF fan fiction follows a similar textual process of adapting a real person to a character as the mainstream biopic film. Clearly, the two forms are vastly different in numerous elements of their intended purpose, audience, medium, mode of production, and degree of public visibility. I argue, however, that in spite of these fundamental formal differences there is a similar textual process at work in adapting real public figures into computer screen characters in RPF or cinema screen characters in the biopic. That is, both appropriate elements of celebrity bodies to recontextualize the existing public self through the representation of a fictionalized private self.

---

3. Recontextualization in RPF

One approach to writing RPF and creating RPF characters that draws heavily on the fragmented star image and the physical body as its anchor is akin to the "recontextualization" method of fan fiction writing that Henry Jenkins (1992) describes. With the recontextualization approach, fan writers seek to fill in the blanks left in the original canon, such as with a missing scene, episode coda, or piece of character backstory, and invite other fans to reread the original media text in light of the context established by the fan work (162). The recontextualization approach is in line with Abigail Derecho's (2006) classification of fan fiction as a form of archontic literature, where the relationship between the canon and fanon is an open, unfinished, and nonhierarchica. Recontextualization in fan writing involves repetition of existing canon and the addition of fanon material that builds the archive of related, interconnected texts among fan works and canonical works (65–66). Often, recontextualization-based RPF fic uses existing textual fragments of the star image—part of an interview, part of a screen performance, part of any other kind of public appearance—to create the imagined or fantasized private moment behind that particular public moment. For example, as will be discussed later, part of an *Empire*
piece about the filming of TSN is used as a starting point for a fic that imagines the emotional states of the actors based on the public record of the magazine article. By recontextualizing the public moment within the fiction, the author invites fellow fans to reconsider the public text in light of the imagined private one. The repetition of archontic literature occurs as the original element of the star image exists in the mind of the readers as they consume the fan fiction. Likewise, if they revisit that element of the star image, the fan fiction continues to exist in their mind. The fan can choose to conflate the two variations on the celebrity's star image and imagine the star image in light of the fictionalization, or keep the two compartmentalized, acknowledging the invented, separate status of the fiction and not indulging in the fantasy reimagining that the fan author has proposed.

[3.2] Recontextualizing public moments serves to regard the fans' celebrities of choice as objects that need to be personalized and made real, much in the way fan fiction about fictional characters works to make the characters more real and identifiable to the fan. By "re-creating the character in an image that humanizes and gives identifying detail to the character," the distant, one-way parasocial interaction between fan and fictional character, or fan and celebrity image, is closed, as fan writers attempt to flesh out the character with traits, thoughts, or actions that they recognize in their own lives (McGee 2005, 165). This method of RPF writing prioritizes the agency of the fan author over the agency of the celebrity subject. Through this creation of "fictional narratives that supplement and enhance those disseminated by the media" (Busse 2006a, 254), the fan author narratively defines an alternate reading of the canonical text of the celebrity public image in creating their RPF character. As Jenkins (1992) writes in establishing the notion of fan fiction as "textual poaching," the fan author does not solely engage with "the preconstituted world of the fiction" (63)—or, in the case of RPF, the preconstituted mediation of the real world—but has the freedom to create his or her own world by drawing together varying combinations of the disparate textual materials available in the broader canon of the star image.

[3.3] I argue that this process of presenting a portion of the known public life alongside the fictionalization of a speculated or fantasized private self is not all that dissimilar from the way biopics recontextualize the public life of a celebrity through the representation of an imagined private self.

4. Recontextualization in biopic

[4.1] In his work on Hollywood screen biopics, George F. Custen (1992) writes that across the variety of biopics in terms of subject, style, and narrative construction, the major consistent factor of what constitutes a biopic is that it is "minimally composed of the life, or the portion of a life, of a real person whose real name is used" (6–7).
Custen argues that in the classical Hollywood era, studio heads, particularly Fox's Daryl F. Zanuck, were integral in shaping the biopic as a text that personalizes history and constructs its "great man" subjects as figures who are relatable to audiences by giving them clear motivation for the actions that led the subject to greatness (18–19). By including narrative elements such as the depiction of the biopic subject's home life and familial and romantic relationships, as well as a retelling of their publicly known achievements, this biopic trope presents the lives of its subjects in terms of greatness that arises from the conditions of everyday life that the subject shares with the audience. Presenting the everyday life of the biopic subject and tracing its connection to their public achievement solidifies the aim of the biopic to "reveal the 'real person' behind the public persona," an aim that has persisted through to the modern era of the biopic (Bingham 2010, 5). Like the RPF character that becomes more identifiable to fans by filling in the fictionalized thoughts and actions of their private self, so too does the mainstream biopic subject become explainable and identifiable to audiences through access to a fictionalized behind-the-scenes representation of the subject's private life that proposes a version of who they "really" are.

[4.2] The biopic viewer, like the fan fiction reader, can choose to compartmentalize the variations on the celebrity's star image. However, the legitimized Hollywood film is branded with a greater connection to truth than RPF fan fiction, with the latter often marked up front by disclaimers deliberately announcing its status as fiction. This is in contrast to the variations on a "based on a true story" title card often seen at the beginning of a biopic. As a for-profit venture, the Hollywood biopic is assumed to have enough adherences to truth in dealing with the likeness of a real person to avoid accusations of defamation. It is understood that the biopic is not a documentary, and thus some degree of fictionalization or invention, such as composite characters or the compression of time, is to be expected (Bingham 2010, 5). Even so, the biopic carries the weight of an intended connection to actuality that RPF fan fiction does not similarly claim. Thus there is less of an expectation that the viewer will strictly compartmentalize versions of the real person, and the recontextualization of the public image in light of the presented private self is less of an invitation to play and more of an argument for a possible actuality.

[4.3] The form, medium, mode of production, subject matter, and intended audience of the biopic and RPF fan fiction are inherently vastly different. The mainstream biopic seeks to not simply recount the biographical details of a person's life but also to uncover some fundamental truth about the person, his or her position in history, and cultural significance (Bingham 2010, 10). It is a publicly visible enterprise, financed by corporate interests, intended for wide distribution and viewership, intended to make money. The subject—or his or her representatives, if the subject is no longer living—can choose to participate in the production of the film, and often the biopic is adapted
by purchasing the rights to an existing text that the subject may have participated in, as is the case with TSN and Ben Mezrich's 2009 book *The Accidental Billionaires*, with Eduardo Saverin serving as a consultant to the latter and Mark Zuckerberg's lack of involvement and public denouncement of both. The biopic can spark a public discourse about its subject and the film's treatment of the subject, open to criticism for the ways it does or does not adhere to truth, and open to having its inaccuracies corrected in the public sphere. Conversely, RPF fan fiction is written by fans for fans to share among a small, specific community. There is no money at stake, and no permission is sought from the subjects of the fiction. RPF fan writers often seek to keep their work hidden, to not only protect the RPF subjects from finding fic about themselves but to protect the writers and their communities from mainstream public attention and derision. This desire to remain covert was seen in TSN fandom when a Dvice blog post about TSN fic, which was subsequently reposted and added to by Gawker, directly linked several fan works while not making a distinction between fan fiction based on the film and fan fiction about the real Mark Zuckerberg. The post's headline described the fic as "strange" and "scary," and resulted in some authors locking their fics or considering deletion, and the mark-eduardo LiveJournal community changing its posting default to locked.

[4.4] In spite of these substantial differences between the production and consumption of biopics and RPF, the textual process of fictionalizing a public figure into a character that blends the known public self with an unknown, speculated, or fantasized private self are quite similar in both. In order to illustrate the similarities between the textual process of creating characters in biopic and RPF fan fiction through the appropriation of celebrity bodies, I am choosing to focus on a kind of fan fiction that may be as far removed from the mainstream as possible—that is, fan fiction generated in the context of the kink meme, where generally anonymous fan writers are ostensibly writing for a potential audience of one by filling specific prompts left by their fellow fans.

5. The kink meme context

[5.1] Kink memes have become a staple of fic generation in contemporary online fic-writing fandom. The typical setup of the kink meme invites fans to post prompts (either anonymously or with user names attached) involving a particular pairing and a story idea. The prompt can be as simple as a one-word kink or trope (despite the name, not all the kinks of the kink meme are of a sexual nature and may simply be based on narrative or character tropes), or a more elaborate story premise. Jamison (2013) describes the kink meme as a "game," a "writing underground where stories start and percolate" (8). Stories developed in kink memes may be perpetually unfinished works in progress, anonymous works that authors would never dare attach
their name to, or ultimately rescued from the arena of the meme and archived elsewhere, such as Archive of Our Own or the author's personal fic archive. As Jamison writes, the aim of the kink meme game is to fill the requests of fellow fans, regardless of how out of character the scenarios may seem: "the writings it produces aren't sacred, nor are they put up to be. It is really no place for purists" (9).

[5.2] With its collaborative and generally anonymous nature, the kink meme exists to put the id first, prioritizing the kink over the kind of well-crafted characterization that Arrow (2003) argues would usually be associated with a fandom like TSN's. The anonymous nature of the kink meme allows authors to write fic they ordinarily would not want attached to their fannish pseudonym. For fans who might be ambivalent or uncomfortable with crossing certain lines in RPF, the kink meme is an anonymous safe space to experiment with writing real people, just as it is a space for experimenting with writing or reading some of the more controversial or divisive fic kinks. By drawing on examples of Jesse Eisenberg/Andrew Garfield slash from the TSN kink meme community, I aim to illustrate the textual process of appropriating celebrity bodies that is at work in RPF fan fiction and how this may not be all that dissimilar from the bodily appropriation of the biopic.

6. Appropriating the physical body in TSN RPF

[6.1] The focus on the body in fan fiction has its roots in performance rather than literature, using the body as the "storytelling medium, the carriers of symbolic action" as theatre does (Coppa 2006, 236). In order for the performative style of fan fiction to be deployed in RPF, the image or sense of the celebrity's physical body is appropriated and used as a key storytelling medium in the fiction. While fan fiction based on fictional or fictionalized screen media objects also appropriate the body of the actor who embodies the character on screen, in RPF the central character mapped onto the appropriated body is composed of the celebrity's public persona and private self as the author constructs them.

[6.2] Rather than the actual physical body of the celebrity being appropriated, in both RPF and the biopic it is the image of the physical body and the use of the physical body as a means of representing character and the "inner self" of the subject. Reading the physicality of others is an everyday part of attempting to determine meaning in social interaction: a focus on appearances to understand the "reality" behind them (Goffman 1997, 21). The physicality of the actor is used to project the inner self, the personalized motivations, behind their biopic character. In the written form of RPF, descriptions of the body are used to convey emotion, whether a generalized gesture, such as wide eyes of shock, a furrowed brow of confusion, or a smile of joy. It may also be something that is particular to the RPF subject, such as Jesse Eisenberg's
anxiety and the way it manifests in fan fiction through the description of fidgeting gestures that have been observed in press material.

[6.3] In appropriating the image of the physical body, the work of the biopic is to present a recognizable facsimile of its subject for the viewers. For the audience, the necessary degree of screen resemblance can vary, depending on how prominent a media figure the biopic subject is. For actors, the degree of physical resemblance in terms of elements such as posture or voice can help them find the character, such as Eisenberg's discussion on TSN's DVD commentary about finding a way into Mark through his rigid upper body posture, something Eisenberg attributes to Zuckerberg's actual background in fencing. In RPF, writers often invoke physical features of the subjects that fans tend to fixate on, such as mentions of Andrew Garfield's "Bambi eyes" and "ridiculous hair" in a Jesse/Andrew fic where the actors role-play as their characters during sex. Perhaps the most obvious distinction in how the image of the physical body is appropriated in biopic and RPF contexts is the intention of adhering to reality behind the appropriation. In film, the physical resemblance and recognition of the biopic subject works to make the fictionalized elements of the film appear more plausible. After all, if the biopic subject has a distinct and well-known voice, the fictionalized dialogue of the film seems more plausibly accurate when delivered in a close approximation of the subject's accent or vocal cadence. In RPF, particularly in the context of slash fic and kink memes, the image of the physical body is given the most attention in sex scenes, which are inherently created by fan fantasy and are not intended to carry any resemblance to the celebrity's actual actions. Invoking the image of the celebrity's physical body in fan fiction works to make the fantasy seem accurate enough to be enjoyable for its readers, but does not have the same weight of making it seem a plausible depiction of behind-the-scenes events as the biopic. The appropriation is used to recontextualize the public image, but not to the extent that it is expected to be believed as a representation of reality.

7. Appropriating the star image body in TSN RPF

[7.1] A counterpoint to the idea that fan fiction about real people denies them their personhood takes the stance that the star image, or the public persona of a celebrity, does not in itself constitute a real person. This public persona is seen by some fan writers as a constructed commodity that is readily available for fictional adaptation, just like any other media text that features fictional characters (McGee 2005, 174). Kristina Busse (2006a) goes so far as to argue that RPF can potentially act as means of rehumanizing the textual object of the star image through the fan activity of "inventing backstories and inner lives" (256), and it is the process of fans rewriting the celebrity based on their own point of view and desires that results in a hybrid that authors and their readers can more readily identify with than the celebrity image.
alone. In one example from the TSN kink meme, a request for fic that shows Jesse reacting to Andrew's performance in the 2010 clone organ donor drama Never Let Me Go personalizes Jesse by having him engaging in similar practices as the fan: viewing the film, and being moved by it to the point where he perhaps becomes a proxy for the fan's own fantasies of hurt/comfort sex with Andrew Garfield in the role of the comforter, following their viewing of the film.

[7.2] In fan fiction generated by TSN's kink meme community, the ties between the element of the star image that has brought the community together—Eisenberg and Garfield's performances in TSN—are readily apparent, with a number of anonymous prompters asking for their fic scenarios to be written with either Mark/Eduardo or Jesse/Andrew. This is particularly unique to TSN, given that the film can be considered a kind of mainstream RPF, making the RPF subset of its fandom "RPF about people acting out RPF," a meta rabbit hole that allows fan writers to further blur the boundaries of fact and fiction (Arrow 2013, 325). This is not universally the case for RPF based on media fandoms, with RPF generally regarded as a separate entity from its fictional canon (Arrow 2013, 324). Where there is crossover between fictionalized characters and their performers, such as in TSN fandom, the distinction between film character and actor is diminished. Qualities of both actor and character's image and physical body can be adapted to the requester's prompt. For example, much fan writing about Jesse Eisenberg characterizes him as socially awkward, a trait that could be said to be shared with the screen portrayal of Mark Zuckerberg. These characterizations of Jesse don't stem entirely from conflating character with actor. There are textual fragments of the star image that include these characteristics as part of Eisenberg's persona, such as mentions in interviews with and profiles of Eisenberg regarding his issues with anxiety, including it as part of his self-performance in his monologue during a hosting stint of Saturday Night Live (1975–), his performances as similarly awkward characters in films such as The Squid and the Whale (2005), and writings about Eisenberg, such the Flavorwire headline that proclaims him to be "more annoyingly awkward than Michael Cera" (Bailey 2013).

[7.3] On the TSN kink meme, prompts asking specifically for Jesse/Andrew fics are often inspired by or incorporate a specific text from the broader body of the star image. There are stories written from prompts asking for Andrew being turned on by Jesse's appearance on Saturday Night Live, Jesse and Andrew sharing clothes after apparently wearing the same shirt at different public appearances, and an epistolary fic that evolves the Jesse/Andrew relationship through text messages that take place after a promotional press conference, to name just a few. In these stories, a text of public record is the canon that the fan molds their fiction around, filling in the gaps of the public record with the imagined private selves of the characters, written with the purpose of fulfilling the anonymous prompter's request. To expand on an example in
detail, a request posted to part 5 of the kink meme in April 2011 asks for fic based on a specific quote from an *Empire* magazine feature about the production of the film. The scene referenced is the climactic final argument between Mark and Eduardo, when Eduardo learns he has essentially been forced out of Facebook and stalks through the office to smash Mark's laptop:

> [7.4] Garfield] leaves to change into his own, casual clothes, before returning to crouch behind the camera as it hovers close to Eisenberg. Just before the camera rolls, he leans toward the *Zombieland* star and hisses, "You're a fucking dick and you betrayed your best fucking friend. *Live with that.*" It's shocking to hear. It certainly helps with the take. And it is evidence both of Garfield's professional generosity and Fincher's nous—for the abuse was at the director's instruction, to help Eisenberg get in the right headspace for the scene. (Pierce 2010)

[7.5] The kink meme request asks for something that reveals the speculated private moments behind this moment of public record (that has itself been mediated and vividly rendered into prose by Nev Pierce, author of the original *Empire* piece): "I just want how [sic] Jesse felt about it, or how Andrew felt about doing it. Just something angsty" (tsn-kinkmeme 2011). It is a moment rife with undertones of angst. The two actors, who by all accounts became friends during the shoot, perform the final moment of destruction of their on-screen friendship, through a long, grueling night shoot in which Garfield has already destroyed 25 computers in take after take. It is a moment that conflates character and actor, even in Pierce's writing itself, as the actors are identified in an off-camera moment (referring to Eisenberg as "the *Zombieland* star," highlighting that he is an actor and this is another role) addressing each other in character (Garfield's assessment of Mark addressed to Eisenberg as "you"). It encapsulates the tropes of role immersion and character bleed that often act as the catalyst for a Jesse/Andrew slash relationship in fan fiction.

[7.6] The fill for the request is written from Andrew's point of view and includes the details of the article, such as how many takes have been done and how late the shoot has gone on to this point. It offers the imagined off-the-record moments that the *Empire* article does not reflect: the specificities of the conversation between Andrew and David Fincher, Andrew's need to show his support for Jesse before delivering his assessment of Mark, and Jesse's apparent state of mind—shown through descriptions of the physical body, such as posture, gesture, and facial expression—before and after Andrew gives him the line. It recontextualizes the *Empire* quote through the lens of the slasher: putting Jesse and Andrew's friendship and possibly more alongside the vitriol expressed in the article, creating a conflict between their "real" emotions and
what is required of them in the scene. The result is a fantasy of the relationship between the two actors anchored in the known canon of the mediated star persona.

[7.7] A similar method of using or recreating elements of public record to act as a warrant for the fictionalized material of the film is at work in the biopic (Lipkin 2011, 3). In publicity paratexts for TSN, such as interviews, press kit production notes, and DVD commentary, there is an emphasis on both differentiating between the actual people and their fictionalized versions, and the film's grounded basis in actuality. While elements of the public image of characters like Mark Zuckerberg that may be more immediately recognizable to audiences, such as his 2008 interview on 60 Minutes, are not present because the events of the film took place largely before Zuckerberg was a public figure, there are elements of Zuckerberg's public image appropriated for the film. With the depositions of two lawsuits brought against Zuckerberg over the formation of Facebook acting as the framing device of the film and its Rashomon (1950)-style structure of multiple subjective narrators, this is perhaps the most prominent element of public record appropriated for the film (aside from the use of the Facebook name and branding). While the depositions are not presented verbatim in the film, their presence acts as an element of Zuckerberg's public image that the fictionalized elements of the film use to fill in the speculated private context: we as viewers bear witness to versions of events skewed by the perspectives of different characters and are invited to make up our own minds about the events of public record from the behind-the-scenes moments the film posits as what has led to the moment of public record. To use the example of the laptop-smashing scene that forms the basis of the kink meme fic discussed above, it is a matter of public record that Eduardo Saverin's Facebook shares were diluted. The behind-the-scenes moment we see on screen that recontextualizes this fact is the sequence of reactions from the characters of Eduardo, Mark, and Sean Parker in this scene, as well as the context of the fictionalized story that has preceded it. Once again, it is a matter of viewers being invited to recontextualize the public elements of the star image in light of the fictionalization of the private moments behind the scenes of the public event: a moment of "let me show you how it could have happened" between author and audience.

8. Conclusion

[8.1] Through a textual process of supplementing the public body of the celebrity star image with the imagined private self of the celebrity, both RPF fan fiction and screen biopic can work to recontextualize public moments. Both forms invite their audiences to reconsider the actual in light of the imagined. Both carry the option to compartmentalize the fictionalized and mediated versions of a public figure, but with the mainstream Hollywood biopic carrying a larger weight of assumed accuracy than
the invitation to play of RPF. While only one approach to writing RPF fan fiction in one fandom has been considered here, it is a step toward considering RPF in terms of its textual process.

[8.2] By refocusing critical attention on RPF fan fiction to the texts themselves, rather than their ethical issues, perhaps some light can be shed on how public figures are textualized, adapted, and remediated as transformative works in both fannish and mainstream contexts. A consensus on the ethics of RPF is unlikely to ever be reached in fan spaces or the mainstream, but the consideration of RPF texts themselves can shed light on what it is that makes a real person into a fictionalized character. The consideration of RPF texts in conjunction with other forms of media that adapt real public figures into characters as well as and how the processes between the two exhibit similarities despite their vastly different conditions of production, can reflect the liminal spaces between fact and fiction that audiences can occupy as both fan fiction writers and readers and as consumers of mainstream dramatizations of real public figures.

9. Works cited


Busse, Kristina. 2006b. "My Life Is a WIP on My LJ: Slashing the Slasher and the Reality of Celebrity and Internet Performances." In Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in


Praxis

Writing the pregnant man

Mary Ingram-Waters

Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, United States

[0.1] Abstract—This article explores how an online community of female fans of Harry Potter creates and maintains scientific and medical knowledge of a novel reproductive technology, male pregnancy. In an effort to illuminate the mechanisms of fandom, I show how fandom participants collectively work to ensure the maintenance of standards for fan products and in doing so also selectively reinforce particular tropes about how male pregnancy is portrayed. Fans' validation of some male pregnancy variations over others results in a fascinating yet recognizable set of fictional reproductive technologies that both queer and accommodate normative gender and sexuality roles.

[0.2] Keywords—Fandom; Male pregnancy; Masculinity; Online community; Sexuality


1. Introduction

[1.1] Only in the realm of fiction is pregnancy possible for human cisgender men. This statement is not meant to diminish either the status of fiction as an important cultural arena for meaning making (Haraway 1989; Ingram-Waters 2006, 2009; Penley 1997; Squier 1994, 2004) or the thought experiment of male pregnancy as a novum (Steinmuller 2003) through which one can explore meaning-making processes. Rather, this initial statement serves as a marker for the transgressive potential of male pregnancy fiction, or mpreg, as it is commonly known in the context of fan works. As a fan fiction genre, mpreg occupies a relatively small yet highly visible and sometimes stigmatized, position (Ingram-Waters 2010). The goal of this article is to consider mpreg as a thought experiment about gender, sexuality, and the male body, as well as to demonstrate the mechanisms by which a small fandom community negotiates this thought experiment.

[1.2] As an initial way into this discussion, I ask what is and is not male pregnancy by looking at the most visible case of male pregnancy in modern history, that of Thomas Beatie (Halberstam 2010; Shapiro 2010). Though I started this essay with a
declarative statement that male pregnancy is impossible, that is not true unless we insist on the word *cisgender*. Men have given birth and continue to give birth to babies. I define men here to include people who identify or are identified by others as men but who also have the reproductive organs necessary to carry a fetus to term. In other words, the term *men* indicates gender and not sex. In this sense, which follows contemporary gender theory, men, or people who identify and can be identified by others as masculine to the point of passing as men, can have babies. For example, Thomas Beatie often identifies himself as a man and not necessarily as a transgender man. In Landau’s study, Beatie, even while pregnant, passed as a man (Landau 2012). Transmen have babies, as do butch women, as do cisgender women, and as do persons who identify or are identified as genderqueer. Men who have the reproductive organs necessary to gestate a fetus do not necessarily identify as transmen. Transmen may or may not identify themselves and may or may not be identified by others as trans. Though transmen and queer-identified people who have use of their female reproductive organs have successfully carried babies to term, prior to Thomas Beatie’s first pregnancy in 2007 the reality of male pregnancy was rendered invisible. Though Beatie publicly insisted on his masculinity as well as his ability to be pregnant, public reactions to Beatie as a pregnant man largely reflected transphobic discourses that reduced him to his former gender identity (Ingram-Waters, forthcoming; Shapiro 2010). Thus, for many, once Beatie was pregnant, he was "exposed" as illegitimately male, and therefore his pregnancy was not genuinely problematic; it did not queer the gendered boundaries of pregnancy (Cruz 2011; Ingram-Waters, forthcoming). That is not to say that Beatie was not criticized for his choices. While many people congratulated him, many others used the opportunity to sensationalize his pregnancy, along with his sexuality and identity, as deviant (Halberstam 2010).

[1.3] To identify the discursive claims associated with gender, sexuality, and bodies that shape male pregnancy conceptually, we could look beyond Beatie’s pregnancy to a small number of cultural artifacts that feature male pregnancy: works of science fiction, the 1994 comedy film *Junior*, and a genre of fan fiction known as *mpreg* and the online communities that produce it (Cruz 2011; Ingram-Waters, forthcoming; Landau 2012; Shapiro 2010; Velasco 2006). In each of these cultural arenas, we can map a range of competing discourses of male pregnancy. But we can look at *mpreg* as a space in which to not only diagram the meanings of male pregnancy but also elucidate the meaning-making processes.

[1.4] Though *mpreg* fan fiction is much older than the Internet (Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1997), Internet-based fan fiction communities organized around the genre of *mpreg* emerged contemporaneously with, though not as a result of, Beatie’s pregnancy and the public reactions to it. While I am not arguing that the two phenomena are related, I do think that *mpreg* communities have a highly
sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of male pregnancy that queers both pregnancy and masculinity in ways that are predictive of but also more far-reaching than the discursive possibilities of Beatie's male pregnancy. Whereas the broader culture often concluded that Beatie was not really male and thus not really a pregnant male, mpreg fan fiction communities seem to offer a relatively unified position on the acceptable interplay of gender, sexuality, and bodies during male pregnancy. In other words, reactions to Beatie's pregnancy demonstrate the breaches of values arising from male pregnancy (Cruz 2011; Halberstam 2010; Ingram-Waters, forthcoming; Landau 2012; Shapiro 2010), while the mpreg fan fiction community studied in this article shows the cohesion of values around mpreg.

[1.5] With this article, I argue that online mpreg fan fiction communities consciously and actively negotiate the concept of male pregnancy in ways that reveal the precise intersection of cultural values of gender, sexuality, and bodies. Furthermore, I argue that the structure of fan communities, particularly during the highly interactive blogging phase of fandom (when it was centered on LiveJournal and Dreamwidth), lends itself to making the network of constructive interactions visible in ways that demonstrate how these negotiations play out. To ground this argument, I will discuss three areas of research: feminist studies of science fiction, fan fiction studies, and studies of mpreg.

2. Science fiction and fan fiction

[2.1] Feminist science studies scholars have long argued that science fiction and science fiction–like engagements with science and technologies can allow for transgressive and nonnormative readings of gender and sexuality (Haraway 1989; Ingram-Waters 2006; Penley 1997; Squier 1994, 2004). Squier (2004) refers to this movement between science and science fiction as liminality. In similar conceptual moves, Kies (2011) and Tosenberger (2008) suggest that some fan fiction tropes, especially those featuring nonnormative relationships such as threesomes and incest, reflect fans' queer readings of source material.

[2.2] For Constance Penley, women's fan fiction for popular science fiction properties, such as Star Trek (1966—69), is a space to critique and reshape the gendered politics of mainstream science fiction and science (1997). Though her remarks about mpreg fan fiction are brief, Penley states that it is "the most extreme retooling of the male body" and that, as a genre, it is largely rejected by most female fans precisely because it too extreme (1997, 131). Though fan fiction is not often thought of as science fiction, it is useful to follow Penley's work and thus situate mpreg fics as science fiction for this analysis. For Steinmuller (2003), the hallmark of science fiction is the "what if?" question that surrounds the novum, a particular science or technology. The genre
of mpreg is organized around the novum of male pregnancy. Mpreg fics ask, "What if the male characters got pregnant?" Thus, mpreg fan fiction communities offer an opportunity to see liminality in practice.

[2.3] Fan fiction studies, an interdisciplinary subfield of fan studies, has primarily been concerned with investigating fans' creative works, the processes by which fans create, and the communities that support fans' creativity. Building on Henry Jenkins's influential 1992 book, *Textual Poachers*, fan fiction studies scholars interpret fans' creative activities as the collective behavior of groups of fans who reclaim the meanings of source texts. Generally, fans participate at a range of levels in fandoms. Different fans might write fan fiction, meta, or reviews, create art or vids, provide editorial and technical support for other fans' projects, engage in both on- and off-topic dialogues with other fans, or curate, circulate, or promote other fans' works (Bacon-Smith 1992; Harrington and Bielby 1995; Busse and Hellekson 2006; Jenkins 1992). All of these activities are robustly visible in online environments (Baym 2000; Bury 2005; Busse and Hellekson 2006; Hills 2002; Jenkins 2006). As fans participate in these activities, they reaffirm the network that ties them together in fandom communities (Hellekson 2009; Scott 2009). Within large umbrella-like fandom communities exist smaller, often overlapping, communities that are organized around genres or character pairings (Busse and Hellekson 2006). These communities can continue for years or only a short while, like challenges or holiday exchanges. For example, on LiveJournal, "HP_mpreg" is a Harry Potter–based fan community devoted to slash pairings of male characters in which one character is pregnant. It has been active since 2003, though activity has been relatively slow since 2011. At present, its membership is about 600, while other communities with broader interests, such as "HP_fanfiction," boast four and a half times as many members.

[2.4] While there is a robust scholarship on fan fiction, including slash, there are only a handful of works devoted to mpreg fan fiction and the communities that produce it. As mentioned earlier, Penley sees mpreg as so extreme in its deviance that it is rejected by most fandom participants (1997, 131). I have similarly argued that mpreg authors are keenly aware of the stigma that their genre carries and therefore take measures to write mpreg convincingly and "accurately" to establish or reaffirm their legitimacy within their genre communities (Ingram-Waters 2010). Stein's 2006 analysis of one Internet-based mpreg role-playing game (RPG) demonstrates how technological interfaces can influence storytelling practices and also shows that mpreg, a fantastical and highly unrealistic phenomenon, can be serialized and combined with domestic and even mundane events to create a compelling and relatable story. (The authors of the RPG she studied are among my informants here.) In her 2010 study of a sample of mpreg *Supernatural* (2005–) fics, Åström finds that authors' inclusion of unconventional reproductive technologies, such as mpreg, does not fully challenge
hegemonic discourse on gender, sexuality, and the body. Thus, when the brothers Sam and Dean are portrayed as lovers or as childbearing fathers, they are often shown behaving in ways that are stereotypically associated with heterosexual relationships and female pregnancy. She concludes that mpreg has more in common with traditional romance genres and their concomitant heterosexual gender scripts than with transgressive science fiction genres. Following Åström, Hunting's (2012) analysis of *Queer as Folk* (2000–2005) fan works, which includes a section on the ways in which mpreg is constructed, demonstrates how what seems like a transgressive trope actually works as a normative agent in the stories, subverting the queer politics of the source text, especially in relation to monogamy and the inevitability of marriage and family. Thus, while a male couple becoming pregnant, or even adopting a child together, is, on the surface, quite progressive, it is not progressive at all in comparison to the politics of the show *Queer as Folk*. In the show, participants in progressive same-sex relationships practiced nonmonogamy and eschewed such heteronormative outcomes as marriage and family. With this work, I hope to contribute further research to this contested genre and its constitutive communities.

[2.5] In the last 10 years, online fandom has changed form several times. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, online fandom spaces could be found and studied on interactive message boards, newsgroups, and fan Web sites, and in e-mail chains (Baym 2000; Bury 2005; Costello and Moore 2007; Hills 2002; Jenkins 2006; Pugh 2005). By about 2005, online fandom had moved to networked blogging sites such as LiveJournal and Dreamwidth (Busse and Hellekson 2006). While fandom communities are still active on both message boards and blogging sites, they are now common on curatorial sites like Tumblr and Pinterest (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Thomas 2013; Turk and Johnson 2012). Though community interactions are not as robustly visible on curatorial sites as they are in the more interactive spaces, online fandom communities also leave their legacies in archives, from small fandom-specific Web sites to massive multifandom ones like FanFiction.net and the Archive of Our Own. Rebecca Black has described these archives as more "affinity spaces" than communities, arguing that technical aspects of the space itself structure the ways that participants can interact (2008). Further, both Hills (2002) and Pearson (2010) remind us that technological platforms, while largely invisible, strongly influence the ways that fandom communities manifest. Thus, mpreg communities on LiveJournal and Tumblr look very different from each other and from the mpreg affinity spaces that are defined largely through tags at archives such as the Archive of Our Own.

[2.6] Fan fiction is the product of a dynamic and collaborative process, and Pugh (2005) calls it a genre in and of itself. Individual fan creators interact with source texts, fandom conventions, other fans, and social norms and values, some of which
could be described as global movements of culture (Lashley 2012; Turk and Johnson 2012). While much work on fan fiction looks at how fan works relate to source texts, fan fiction is increasingly often seen as a site for other kinds of cultural analyses (Black 2008; Turk and Johnson 2012). Thus, by understanding how one fandom community negotiates mpreg, we stand to learn a lot about gender, sexuality, and male bodies, as well as the range of cultural responses to publicized pregnant men, such as Thomas Beatie. It is as part of this trend that I situate this research. Online mpreg communities and affinity spaces structure interactions among fans in ways that define the boundaries of male pregnancy, especially with regard to gender, sexuality, and bodies. Not only do fans' interactions with each other shape the genre of mpreg, much as any other fan fiction genre is shaped (Baym 2000; Bury 2005; Pugh 2005), but these interactions also queer the liminal discursive possibilities of the novum of male pregnancy. Following the work of Foucault (1982) and Barthes (2002), we might consider fan fiction as a genre, mpreg fan fiction as a genre, and the concept of mpreg as a genre. Fan fiction, mpreg fan fiction, and mpreg are thus the discursive products of a sustained, slowly changing series of interactions among fans and of the larger cultural values in which those interactions are embedded.

3. Methods

[3.1] In looking at male pregnancy through the genre of mpreg fan fiction, I have used mixed qualitative methods to measure a community whose performative base of operations is LiveJournal. By mixed qualitative methods, I mean that I used interviews with mpreg authors and content analysis of their fics to generate data about mpreg. I identified a relatively contained mpreg fandom community on LiveJournal and interviewed 13 active members of it. If the interviewees referenced particular mpreg works they had written, then I included those works in my analysis. My research protocols were vetted and approved by a public university's human subjects review board. While these qualitative methods will not yield a statistically significant analysis of the genre or of fandom participants, they do produce data that showcase meaning-making processes and the meanings that are made within this community. As my goal is to discuss how fans' interactions define both male pregnancy as a genre and the genre's parameters, using qualitative methods is highly appropriate.

[3.2] I began this study by identifying mpreg communities in Harry Potter fandom on LiveJournal, which I did by searching the site for "Harry Potter" and "male pregnancy." (I was already familiar with the Harry Potter texts.) I selected the HP_mpreg community because it was active; participants were posting to the community, and commenting on posts, nearly every day. In a quick perusal of the posts and comments, I identified CJ as an mpreg BNF, or big-name fan (Busse and Hellekson 2006), because of the frequency and substantive nature of her posts and the
comments that those posts generated. CJ's personal LiveJournal, subtitled "a mecca for male preg," became my point of entry into the subcommunity of Harry/Draco mpreg. Using CJ's active blog, which had many subscribers, I identified dozens of mpreg authors, artists, and fans. It was from that pool that, through an open call, I recruited the 13 mpreg authors whom I interviewed, either in person at Lumos, a Harry Potter fan convention held in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2006, or online shortly after the conference. Both online and in person, I presented myself as an acafan, an academic who studies fandom while simultaneously identifying as a fan (Ingram-Waters 2010).

[3.3] All 13 interviewees identified as cisgender women. There were 10 Americans, one German, and one Canadian. Twelve identified as white and one identified as Southeast Asian. Four identified as queer, while the others said they were heterosexual. Their ages ranged from 21 to early 40s. All of them said that they had been active in multiple fandoms for more than 1 year. All interviewees are referred to with pseudonyms. Where I have used their online pseudonyms and the titles of their works, I have their explicit permission to do so. I have assigned pseudonyms to those interviewees who did not want me to use their online pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

4. Discussion

[4.1] All 13 interviewees identified themselves as authors, readers, and reviewers of mpreg fan fiction. All of them had authored Harry/Draco mpreg, and three of them had written slash mpreg for other Harry Potter characters as well as characters from other fandoms, including Lord of the Rings and real person slash (RPS). To organize the interview data, I have developed categories that follow from the ways in which most interviewees discussed mpreg. Most interviewees indicated that they and other fans expect "accurate" portrayals of gender, sexuality, and bodies, especially those of pregnant male characters. These three overlapping categories showed up in their discussions of conception, gestation, birth, and sexual relations, and generally manifested in their interactions with their betas (editors of fan works), reviews, comments from readers, and general discussions with other community members. Thus, after a brief discussion of the source text for this particular mpreg community, I will discuss how interviewees perceive their community to work, and how their expectations of mpreg showcase the intersection of gender, sexuality, and the male body.

[4.2] J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, the source text for this mpreg fandom community, is set in a magical universe. There are no instances of male pregnancy in any of her books, but the interviewees find it easy to adapt Rowling's universe to
include the possibility. One interviewee, Amy, a BNF in Harry Potter fandom as a whole, not just the mpreg community, said that "mpreg in a magical universe is just preg." For Snottygrrrl, "male preg in Harry Potter makes a lot of sense—there's more logic to it, to me, because you have magic...There'd be more work to do if you were going to do it in a normal setting." Similarly, Elle, who reads mpreg in Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, and Lord of the Rings RPS fandom, agreed that mpreg is most easily explained in Harry Potter. In RPS, authors have to be "significantly more inventive" to write good mpreg. For instance, she described how the author of a Lord of the Rings RPS mpreg story has to create magic: Orlando Bloom innocently buys an old necklace from a "wizened crone," unaware that the necklace carries the "power of fertility." Once he wears the necklace, he can get pregnant through a sexual act with another man.

[4.3] These fans consider male pregnancy in a magical universe feasible and therefore much easier to create than in a nonmagical one. As we shall see, though, even in magical universes men are pregnant only under certain circumstances. Those male characters are cisgender, meaning that they identify as and are seen as having a normative masculine gender identity that also matches their physical sex. None of them are transgender or genderqueer; they are male, think of themselves as male, and are perceived to be male. As we take a closer look at fans' interactions with male pregnancy, this cisgender nature of mpreg becomes more clearly bounded.

[4.4] The interviewees spoke of their mpreg community as being created through a set of ties, all of which were formed online. They did not know each other prior to their fandom interactions, and they do not live near each other. In an illustration of Black's (2008) concept of online fandom platforms as affinity spaces, their interactions began online as they discovered their mutual interest in mpreg. Their shared appreciation for mpreg was only one part of what tied the community together, though. Interviewees also spoke of each other as allies in a fandom world that abhorred mpreg on general principle. Ociwen, author of Things That Change (which all of the other 12 interviewees called an mpreg classic), said, "If word gets out that you write mpreg, my god, the looks or comments you get!" Interviewees sought to distinguish their mpreg from badfic or plebfic by imposing particular norms on it. Wook said, "I think there are some very influential people with mpreg. And their opinions carry a lot of weight in fandom...And I know I should be, like, no one person should have that kind of power, but at the same time, they do. Since I agree, I like the 'no ass babies' thing...It seems like everybody seems to try to respect the boundaries and respect the characters." Thus the interviewees saw the mpreg community as a place to love mpreg together in safety while also protecting what they mutually agreed was good mpreg.
Well aware of the stigma associated with writing mpreg, Ociwen said, "People automatically assume that all mpreg is badfic, so therefore if you write it, you are a bad author and cannot write anything worth reading." Thus, when she wrote *Things That Change*, Ociwen posted it under a new pseudonym and only at one mpreg-friendly fandom site, even though she was already a BNF with a well-regarded repertoire of fan fiction. CJ read *Things That Change* and immediately reviewed it and recommended it on her blog, effectively bringing Ociwen into the mpreg community. In the process, Ociwen's identity as a BNF was revealed, which then prompted those who knew her nonmpreg fan fiction to try *Things That Change*. CJ was pleased by this: "It always makes me happy if a well-written mpreg gets lots of reviews and recs because the genre is so misunderstood and underestimated."

When talking about writing her first mpreg story, CJ juxtaposed her hesitancy to write in a stigmatized genre against the support of the mpreg community. Like many fan fiction authors, CJ wrote her story as a serial, and readers, including recognizable members of the mpreg community studied here, commented on each chapter both publicly and privately. CJ said, "It's really important to me that that people say here, oh, this is fantastic and I love it...It definitely helped to get many encouraging reviews because I'd been hesitant to even write the story due to the bad reputation that mpreg has." Because she wrote that mpreg story and reviewed others, including Ociwen's *Things That Change*, CJ's blog was mentioned by all 13 interviewees as a primary site of their mpreg community. Akahannah, author of *Genesis* (2005), which was labeled an "mpreg classic" by five of the other twelve interviewees, said, "Everyone I knew in fandom mocked mpreg. But I began to comment at CJ's LJ and I got into the community there."

The interviewees mentioned that they often read and then reviewed or recommended each other's mpreg stories, and they defined good mpreg in terms of shared expectations. When asked directly about their shared expectations, nearly every interviewee talked about comments, reviews, and online interactions with other mpreg community members while writing their own fan fiction or discussing the works of others. However, only one could give a specific example: a time when her beta tried to convince her to leave out a breast-feeding scene. Akahannah described the community's expectations thus: "My writing of mpreg has changed a bit. It's more mainstream, more of what people expect...It keeps people happy." Snottygrrrl said, "When I think about doing mpreg, I do think about the readers, because there are many people who don't read it." Ociwen said that she was inspired by another author's mpreg story but that her own story *Things That Change* had "many elements" that "were...corrections to what" the other author had devised.
For all of the interviewees, good mpreg begins with an understanding of the relationship between sex, conception, and bodies. Unless the fic takes place in a universe that already has established male pregnancy, mpreg authors face the dilemma of explaining how it is possible. CJ said, "As for conception, I've seen a number of explanations—spells, potions, general ability to carry children, or no explanation at all." In a story in her fic series, Precipice, she explains conception in the following way:

"How?" Remus' eyes darted back and forth between Harry and Draco. "I walked in on Granger's group experimenting with restorative spells, and got hit by a stray one...Clearly, the side effects hadn't been too well-researched." Draco's words were laced with sarcasm. (CJ, In Those Days)

Thus, Draco acquires the potential to become pregnant by magical accident. CJ implies that, once the potential exists, Draco gets pregnant in an act of anal intercourse.

Like CJ, Amy told me that she has seen conception made possible by a range of different technologies, including accidents, spells, and potions, and in a variety of circumstances, such as by prophesies and as a result of rape. "I fear I am very boring," she said, because in her fics she usually invokes a "simple spell or potion" to explain conception. Unlike CJ's, Amy's potions and spells give male characters functioning female reproductive organs. But, like CJ, she uses anal intercourse to catalyze pregnancy.

In Ociwen's novel-length fic, Things That Change, Draco takes a potion that gives him some female reproductive organs. Unlike most of the mpreg authors I interviewed, Ociwen writes about the resulting physiological changes in great detail. Although every interviewee named Things That Change as an mpreg classic, several gave caveats in addition to their praise. Akahannah said she is "comfortable with Draco's hermaphroditic condition" because it is so well explained. But Tara, who plays Harry in a long-running Harry/Draco mpreg RPG, responded to Akahannah's comment with, "I could have done without the menstruation." They both strongly agreed that Ociwen's conception technologies and her conceptualizations of gestation and birthing were very well developed. But Psychobarfly, who plays Draco in the RPG, disagreed with them, saying, "People say they want more detail but I say, look at this fic, it's too much." Later, when I asked Ociwen about her mpreg technologies, she said, "I think that if an author wants to do a half-decent job with an mpreg fic, she needs to think about these things and decide just what biological bits the 'mother' would have—ie, Would they be hermaphroditic or not? How would a magical spell alter their body,
etc?" Thus, for these interviewees, pregnancy is a possible result of sexual intercourse for the male characters because of the ways their bodies have been altered.

[4.14] To decide which character in a slash relationship should become pregnant, these interviewees predominantly follow the heterosexual model of pregnancy: the person who receives sperm during an act of sexual intercourse is the one who will carry the pregnancy. Ociwen stated, "The uke/bottom always carries the child." All interviewees echoed her assessment. CJ explained this further:

[4.15] Another thing I've noticed is that a lot of people who have preferences for who tops and who bottoms in the relationship also have preferences as to who carries the children, and I feel that carries an implicit comment on gender roles, as the bottom is often imagined to be the more feminine partner and thus should carry the children.

[4.16] However, if both characters bottom at different times, who might get pregnant is less clear. In Tara and Psychobarfly's RPG, both Harry and Draco bottom; however, only Draco is at risk of getting pregnant, because only he possesses female reproductive organs. Thus, when either male may bottom, the one who gets pregnant may do so for any number of reasons.

[4.17] Despite being fully aware of readers' expectations that the character who bottoms should carry the pregnancy, both Tara and Psychobarfly push what they see as the boundaries of gender and sexuality for male pregnancy:

[4.18] Psychobarfly: In our RPG, Draco is all about being as manly as he can be, given that he's going through this girly thing.

[4.19] Tara: Harry bottoms more when Draco is pregnant. Draco is more dominant when he's pregnant.

[4.20] Psychobarfly: That might be because of all those extra hormones. He's always up for it!

[4.21] They have accommodated the local knowledge that dictates that a male who bottoms should then carry a pregnancy, but they have resisted the gender norms that dictate that the pregnant man should be somewhat feminized by their somewhat transgressive decision to portray Draco as a sexual aggressor. Thus, Draco is feminine because he can be pregnant but even more masculine than usual because he tops.

[4.22] The process of gestation features less prominently in fics than the acts of conception or birth. It is often described concurrently with the development of the relationship between the parents to be. Thus authors tend to spend little time
articulating specific details. CJ explained, "As for the pregnancy, it's no different than a female pregnancy would be." What she meant is that authors will often describe gestation in terms similar to what one might expect if reading about a pregnant female body, offering details such as swollen ankles, chronic heartburn, and overwhelming exhaustion. Jada described gestation in more physiological terms: "For the pregnancy itself, the carrying partner will either have female anatomy courtesy of spells/potions, or will be magically carrying the child in the peritoneal cavity."

[4.23] Both Tara and Psychobarfly said that they are careful not to let the overall story become too boring, especially during the long process of gestation in their RPG. They use a number of tactics to do so, some of which take advantage of the novelty of male pregnancy. Psychobarfly described how her Draco character experienced a difficult, and thus highly interesting, pregnancy with his first child. Similarly, CJ recalled an mpreg fic, Under Fingertips, "that really goes into the difficulty of having a male body undergo pregnancy, something it wasn't built for." These kinds of stories reflect the dangers that might be inherent in such complicated and unusual pregnancies. For these interviewees, gestation requires a pregnant male body to go through a recognizably female-bodied process. However, even under the duress of a pregnancy, these cisgender male characters remain masculine.

[4.24] Even a small and random sample of mpreg fics quickly reveals the preponderance among them of delivery by cesarean section. Jada explained, "For the birth, the most used is the cesarean section, although you see some fics where the sub partner has grown female anatomy solely for the purpose of birthing the child." Amy spoke of "pseudo-uteri," and in Tara and Psychobarfly's RPG, Draco takes a potion that gives him what CJ called a "manly uterus." Despite this, however, the RPG Draco gives birth through cesarean section. In Genesis, Akahannah describes a surgical birth, although she does not use the term "cesarean section." Though both CJ and Wook said that they have read cesarean section births most often, they have also seen other birthing technologies used, including "apparation," a form of magical travel in the Harry Potter universe; the baby is essentially teleported out of the father's body.

[4.25] Although they have repeatedly used cesarean sections in their RPG, both Tara and Psychobarfly recognize its limits. Psychobarfly said, "Cesareans do seem a little foreign for the [magical] world." But Tara countered, "Too much is unknown about the medical world in the Harry Potter universe. We don't know if Molly gave birth, if it was normal." Amy said that the prevalence of cesarean sections signals a line that authors cannot cross "without stretching their own credibility." For her, authors' choices of mpreg technology demonstrate their commitment to a particular imagined world. Akahannah's explanation for using a surgical means of delivery reflects her personal
One birthing technique that readers are highly unlikely to run across is anal delivery of what is notoriously called an "ass baby." CJ said she has never read a story involving "the famous ass baby" and argued, "It can't be as prevalent as people think because I've read a lot." Amy said that any author trying to take herself and her writing seriously would not use anal delivery because "the rectum is inherently funny—it wouldn't work for mpreg that wants to be anything other than crack fic" (i.e., a deliberate farce). Only two interviewees, Wook and WG, had read an ass-baby fic. Wook called the one she read a "train wreck," while WG remembered only that "it seriously put me off."

Birth is a clear line of demarcation for masculinity and bodies. For the interviewees, male characters can conceive and gestate a fetus within their bodies in ways that do not compromise their masculinity. But if those characters birthed their babies through anything resembling a vagina, their masculinity would be threatened in a way that most of the fans I interviewed dislike.

When asked about how gender roles might change during a male's experience of pregnancy, nearly every interviewee responded that balancing masculinity and femininity during male pregnancy was a crucial part of getting mpreg "right." Jada began her answer, "In a lot of ways, mpreg stories force the partners more into traditional het roles by causing one of the males to assume motherly traits." She sees countering such "traditional het roles" as one of the challenges of writing mpreg. Ociwen was even more adamant:

This is one of my personal biggest beefs about the mpreg genre. Usually the bottom/uke is the male in the relationship who carries the baby and takes on, essentially, the role of the mother. Often writers seem to "feminize" this character and take away his masculinity because, I suppose, they can only see the relationship working if there is a man/father figure, or top, and a female/mother figure, or bottom. That defeats the whole purpose of mpreg, in my opinion, because the whole idea is a male being pregnant, not a feminized male, but a real, boyish/manly guy. I think that's one of the parts I enjoyed best about writing mpreg, trying to imagine what it might be like if a male were to be pregnant, how he would feel, mentally and physically, how he would look, etc. I can't imagine that most normal men would be very comfortable with being pregnant and I ran with that concept [in Things That Change].
Ociwen "ran with that concept" in an unusual way; she is one of the very few authors who include breast-feeding in their mpreg fics. Breast-feeding and pregnancy-enlarged breasts are almost taboo in mpreg, and most of the interviewees rejected them. Snottygrrl expounded on this:

Breastfeeding? No, no. For some reason, my brain just can't leap that far. I have no desire to turn the male characters into females. It's a sqick [i.e., a turn-off] for most people. And it's a trend in mpreg—no breastfeeding. They [male characters] don't have functional mammary glands. I don't want them to be there. I don't want to see them.

Snottygrrl also talked about a time that she beta'd for CJ. CJ had written an mpreg fic in which Draco, having given birth, breastfed his baby. Snottygrrl said that she implored CJ to reconsider breast-feeding because it was such "a sqick." Ultimately, CJ did not heed Snottygrrl's suggestion.

For these interviewees, mpreg mirrors real-life pregnancy. For instance, conception happens within the body of the recipient of sperm during an act of sexual intercourse. Authors differ widely in their methods of making male bodies able to carry a pregnancy, but the actual conception remains similar to a normal one. Gestations of male and female pregnancies are also fairly similar. If there are problems in a pregnancy, spells and potions take the place of medical interventions to preserve the fetus. Birthing is both similar and different. Cesarean section is relatively common among actual women (about 25 percent of all births in the United States are by cesarean section), but it is still more common among fictional pregnant men, who overwhelmingly deliver their babies in this way. Less common birthing technologies include the acquisition of a birth canal and nonphysical means such as apparation. Vaginal delivery and breast-feeding are transgressive, and few interviewees choose them. Taken as whole, mpreg as a genre has specific rules about the intersection of pregnancy, masculinity, and sexuality: the pregnancy must be plausible, and it must not compromise the character's masculinity or cisgender male status.

5. Conclusion: Queering masculinity and pregnancy

Åström's (2010) primary conclusion about the mpreg fics that she studied is that while they are transgressive in conceptualizing male bodies as pregnant, they are not transgressive in their underlying themes of the embodiment of gender and sexuality. For Åström, pregnant men are still men. Her finding is tied to her claim that the pregnancy itself is not the focus of the fics; rather, it is the relationships engendered by the pregnancy that confirm the range of possibility for masculinities. Hunting's (2012) analysis of mpreg echoes this conclusion but adds that tropes like
mpreg reflect heterosexual relationship norms that diminish the transgressive politics of queer-friendly source texts, such as *Queer as Folk*. My findings here resonate with those of both Åström and Hunting. Interviewees, as representatives of their mpreg community, demand cisgender masculinity from their male characters, even when those characters are pregnant. This demand may seem like a refusal of queerness; but consider how their version of mpreg redefines cisgender masculinity. This community queers both pregnancy and masculinity because their boundaries have been stretched, broken, and realigned. Thus, my findings also resonate with Landau's (2012) study of cisgender women's experiences of pictures of a pregnant Thomas Beatie. Landau finds that women generally saw Beatie as a pregnant man in ways that both reaffirmed traditional masculinity and transgressed it so that it now included pregnancy. As I indicated in my introduction, one of the ways in which Beatie's pregnancy was rendered illegitimately male was by emphasizing his transgender identity (Cruz 2011; Halberstam 2010; Ingram-Waters, forthcoming; Shapiro 2010). Beatie wanted to be known as a pregnant man, not a pregnant transman. The mpreg fans I studied consider mpreg legitimate when it is convincingly tied to cisgender male bodies and traditional displays of masculinity. While the mpreg community's insistence on cisgender masculinity may not seem queer enough or even queer at all, a closer look at their redefinition of cisgender masculinity shows that it includes bodies that are technologically altered in ways that can be recognized as transgendered. The community's boundaries around the concept of male pregnancy could include Beatie's pregnancy, but at the price of erasing his transgender identity and recognizing his technologically changed body as masculine. Notably, this is how Beatie presented himself: as a pregnant man.

6. Works cited


http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822386285.


http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/030801803225005067.


http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2010.0135.
Abstract—On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered 12 students and one teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in what was then the deadliest school shooting in American history. Despite causing a national panic and serving as a flash point for larger narratives on bullying, gun control, and media violence, both boys have gained active online fans. These fandoms dedicated to the Columbine shooters are widely referred to as dark examples of Internet communities, while the fans are also frequently denigrated as unstable and violent outcasts. Such dark online fandoms are yet to permeate mainstream culture or to challenge the preexisting perception of these communities as breeding grounds for the next wave of school shooters. While studies have covered the types of fans and their myriad interests, the field remains focused on more conventional examples of fan communities. In an effort to challenge and expand the object of focus when we study fandom, this qualitative study examines Columbine fans and their activity in order to understand the dominant motives they appear to have for engaging with and around such controversial figures and then concludes by exploring how this community might help us reflect more broadly on our concept of fandom. Redeeming these fans as part of diverse and complex communities of social relevance can demonstrate how even a dark fandom such as that of these Columbine shooters provides valuable cultural insights and benefits the field of fan studies.

Keywords—Fan community; Fan fiction; Idols of destruction; Reconceptualize; Wound culture


1. Introduction

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (note 1) hoped to spark a revolution. In the month leading up to their massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, that left 12 students and one teacher dead, both of the shooters documented their ideas, feelings, and motives intended for a worldwide audience in a series of home videos that would later become known as "The Basement Tapes." The two boys understood the media's insatiable thirst for tragedies, and they anticipated their posthumous stardom in a video filmed in mid-March 1999: "'Directors will be fighting over this story,' Dylan gushed. They pondered whom they should trust with their
material: Steven Spielberg or Quentin Tarantino?" (quoted in Cullen 2009, 329). "Dylan adds, 'I know we're gonna have followers because we're so fucking God-like!" (quoted in Langman 2009, 58).

[1.2] While there would be no blockbuster Hollywood movie chronicling the boys' rampage, Eric and Dylan did have followers. Their iconic stardom with copycat shooters is undeniable: 17 school shootings have been directly connected to the Columbine massacre as well as 37 planned or attempted shootings, resulting in a total of 66 deaths and 49 wounded (Thomas et al. 2014). But to confine Eric and Dylan's appeal to only subsequent school shooters would critically undermine the importance of their lasting influence. The legacy of these two boys persists not just with shooters but also in active online communities. Their legacy persists with their fans.

[1.3] Although their massacre "pierced the soul of America," in the words of then-president Bill Clinton (1999), Eric and Dylan have indeed developed active online fandoms. Users on social networking sites such as Facebook, DeviantArt, and especially Tumblr post public comments and fan-created texts (e.g., sketches, videos, and blogs) in honor of the Columbine shooters while often fending off remarks from the general public criticizing their fandom. YouTube comments on tribute videos to Eric and Dylan have implored admirers to seek help, and other users have questioned the sanity or mental health of the fans openly professing their atypical interests. It is also common for blogs and Web sites dedicated to these Columbine shooters to have a disclaimer stating that the user does not condone the massacre but merely expresses an interest in the two boys. Despite this resistance, Columbine fans are active in such online communities as "I'm Obsessed with Eric Harris" (Blogspot), "Columbine High School Massacre" (Facebook page), and in arguably the most visible of these fandoms, "Columbiners" on Tumblr.

[1.4] A 2004 article by the Australian news outlet The Age attempted to provide insight into the "disturbing cult" that is Columbine fans ("Cult of Columbine"), but it only succeeded in conveying the common perception that these fans are unpopular, disturbed, and inevitably murderous individuals—just like the idols of their fandom. The specific usage of the term cult rather than referring to it as a fandom immediately denigrates this community. Furthermore, the author contrasts Eric and Dylan's followers with those of Columbine student Cassie Bernall, whose narrative as a heroic martyr for proclaiming her faith in God moments before her execution earned her comparisons to Christian saints as well as praise from a famous Baptist preacher as "the greatest Christian of the 20th century" ("Cult of Columbine" 2004). Despite the fact that Cassie's story was later debunked when surviving students correctly identified Columbine survivor Valeen Schnurr as the student who defended her faith, the
author's choice to contrast these followers to Eric and Dylan's fans further supports the claim that the fandom is stigmatized.

[1.5] There are plentiful academic analyses covering many aspects of fandom, but when examining fans of particularly challenging subjects like the Columbine shooters it appears that it is all too easy to play into the negative stereotypes of obsessive fannish behavior as disconnected from reality. If the first wave of fandom studies could be described as "fandom is beautiful," as Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007, 3) remarked, then this study focuses on the opposite—this study explores the darkness of fandom. Fan studies have covered the various types of fans (e.g., the antifans and nonfans described by Gray 2003) as well as their myriad interests centered on almost any mainstream and even cult text, but less research has been dedicated to the fans of these challenging and even polarizing figures. To address this gap in literature, I examine the Columbine fandom to understand the dominant motives that these fans appear to have for engaging with and around such controversial figures and then conclude by exploring how the Columbine fandom might help us to more broadly reflect on our concept of fandom. I hypothesize that despite the stigma and frequent denigration, the Columbine fandom is comparable to other more conventional fandoms in that it is also a lively and diverse community rich with socially relevant insights that can benefit not just our understanding of Western culture but specifically of the field of fan studies as well.

[1.6] No fans were directly interviewed for this study, but their comments, posts, and fan-produced texts are publicly available via multiple social networking sites. These contents were analyzed for what they appear to reveal about why Columbine fans partake in this particular fandom, although it is acknowledged that this fannish behavior may sometimes stem more from troll behavior and attention seeking rather than from genuine interest. The participatory culture of each specific platform was also taken into account when examining the content. For example, while Columbine fans on Tumblr may use numerous methods of expressing their interests such as comments, images, GIFs, audio clips, and videos, these same fans on YouTube are largely restricted to comments and videos. While many social networks and fan communities were analyzed, the three Web sites that provided the most discussed Columbine fan material in this study were Facebook, Tumblr, and DeviantArt—the last of which served as a plentiful source for fan-produced texts in honor of Eric and Dylan. It is also important to note that the 16th anniversary of Eric and Dylan's massacre occurred during the time period of data collection, in which there was an expected spike in fan texts and activity.

[1.7] Last, it should be stated that the intent of this study is not specifically to defend fans of the Columbine shooters but rather to expand and challenge the object of focus
when studying fandom. In praising the potential of a more participatory culture to lead to critical engagement about key issues and imbalances in our culture, has that caused us to be selective in the fandoms that we study and the cases that we explore? Chen (2012) studies the fandom surrounding James Holmes, the Aurora movie theater shooter who killed 12 people. To understand this question, we must also take a similar journey into the dark heart of Internet fandom.

2. Holmies and a history of fandom

[2.1] Chen's (2012) analysis of James Holmes's online fans, or Holmies as they refer to themselves, followed an article by Buzzfeed's Ryan Broderick (2012) in which he unearthed several fan texts dedicated to Holmes. Broderick presents fan art such as drawings and sketches dedicated to Holmes as well as Tumblr users' photos of themselves wearing plaid shirts in honor of the apparel that Holmes was allegedly wearing during his arrest. Broderick also notes that Holmies have created an inside joke based on a video of a teenage James Holmes discussing Slurpees, while other fans post information and questions regarding how to write to the movie theater shooter in prison. However, Broderick's article does not challenge the stigma associated with this type of fandom and instead simply refers to the community of Holmies as "horrible" and the fandom as a "dark world."

[2.2] Chen's (2012) analysis probes more deeply into the community by drawing comparisons between more accepted fandoms (e.g., Trekkies and Twihards) and Holmies. Speaking of all fandoms, including Holmies, he notes that "they adopt the symbols of their fixation and come up with slang, they create memes based on tiny details of a character and construct elaborate fantasy worlds and fan art." Chen appropriately cites the Internet as an important and enabling factor in such fandoms, and he argues that Holmies are an example of fandoms as their own subculture. His analysis remains focused on this "explosion of internet fandom" and how the field has evolved—or rather, devolved—as a result of the growth of media technologies. While Chen's study does provide useful theory for the expansion of such a controversial fandom, a complementary study would pay specific attention to the fans and would explore the deeper societal meanings within and generated by the activity of engaged fandoms for such challenging public figures.

[2.3] The field of fan studies originated in defending fandoms and arguing for the social relevance of these communities. As briefly discussed earlier, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) examined the three waves of fandom and began their study with the first wave when academics first deemed fans and their activities worthy of critical study. Initial fans were commonly dismissed as Others, yet in-depth analyses later revealed that they could be a part of rich and lively communities for fans to
openly express and engage in their interests while even critiquing the social norms and practices that deemed their fandom as outsiders. Jenkins (1992) wrote that fans are dismissed as atypical of the common media audience because of their resistance and activity such as blurring boundaries of media norms and denying unsatisfactory series endings by rewriting or producing their own fan-made finales. Coppa (2006) also examined this initial recognition by mainstream fan culture in the late 1960s and noted how Star Trek, one of the most popular fandoms, was at first divisive within the science fiction community because it was dismissed as "science fiction for non-readers" (45). She argues that one of the contributing reasons why Star Trek and its fans struggled during this early stage was because it lacked legitimization (i.e., recognition) and noted that "Media fandom...clearly began its life in a very small pool" (44). Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) discuss the concept of "mainstream fandom" dependent on "public recognition and evaluation" that legitimizes the practices of being a fan (4). With this legitimization, devotion to a band or a singer or a public crush on a celebrity has always been considered acceptable (Coppa 2006) because these fandoms have come into the social consciousness and been acknowledged by mainstream culture.

[2.4] The second wave of fandom highlighted the replication of social and cultural hierarchies within fan subcultures and saw these fan practices as "a reflection and further manifestation of our social, cultural, and economic capital" (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 6). In this second wave, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington argue that fans are seen not as a counterforce to existing social hierarchies and structures but rather the opposite: they are seen as "agents of maintaining social and cultural systems of classification and thus existing hierarchies" (6). Jenkins (1992) supports this notion that fan practices can provide relevant social and cultural insights. For example, while on the surface slash fiction may seem nothing more than female fans satisfying their fantasies with male characters of popular series, Jenkins argues that these slash stories comment on the way in which our culture negotiates a complex transition on how it thinks about male sexuality (e.g., Kirk and Spock slash fan fiction may have the two popular male characters engaged in sexual acts).

[2.5] The third wave of fandom departed from yet also built upon the conceptual heritages of the first two waves and aimed to capture the variety of fans and their interests. Gray (2003) calls for a reinvigoration of media and cultural studies of televiusal audiences by arguing for the inclusion of different types of fans, specifically regular "fans, anti-fans, and non-fans" (64) who view texts without any intense involvement. Bird (2011) adds the inclusion of the "non-produser" fan, or the fan who isn't actively producing and engaged in fan activities yet still remains at least somewhat dedicated to a text or public figure (502). This parallels Gray's concept of the nonfan in that they may not be as heavily involved as other more devoted fans.
and may only read texts at a paratextual level (i.e., through promotional materials). Both Gray's and Bird's studies contributed to the third wave of fandom by arguing for the inclusion of often-overlooked types of fans, although these types remain a part of more conventional and socially accepted fandoms such as *The Simpsons* (1989–) and Bollywood films.

[2.6] Despite the three waves of fandom covering a significant amount of academic ground and revealing the types of fans and their myriad interests, few studies have expanded their focus into challenging fandoms such as those of Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. As a result, it seems that this and other dark fandoms remain rooted in the first wave where these fans are dismissed as Others and their communities lack legitimization and acceptance by society. Though Columbine fans and similar communities have at times permeated mainstream culture and been the subject of analyses, they are largely framed to play into negative stereotypes of these fans as "excluded, bullied, murderous, and lost" ("Cult of Columbine" 2004). It appears that rather than investigating these communities for their potential social relevance and valuable insights into media research, most journalists have settled for continuing the stigma attached to these fans, and scholars have largely overlooked or altogether ignored the potential of these fandoms. To understand how these fandoms could be rich sources of knowledge that help us to more broadly reflect on our concept of fandom, the dominant motives of these fans must first be considered in order to understand why they appear to partake in such a frequently denigrated community as that devoted to Eric and Dylan. By understanding these motivations, it is possible to see fans of the Columbine shooters—and of other challenging public figures—not as reflections of the idols of their fandom but rather as part of rich, lively, and socially important communities.

3. Columbine as retribution: Fans identifying with Eric and Dylan

[3.1] Drucker and Cathcart (1994) stated that celebrities need to be a presence, to be the focus of media attention, and to be someone with whom the public can readily identify (268). Eric and Dylan meet the first two of these criteria, and they meet the third one—to be public figures who serve as points of identification—largely as a result of the media's framing of the two gunmen. During the days immediately following the tragedy, numerous Columbine students interviewed with local and national media stations and gave their insights into the shooters' daily lives at their high school. Many of these students were incorrect in their claims and, despite acknowledging almost no connection to Eric and Dylan, continued to report what they thought they knew about the shooters. Mistaken claims included that Eric and Dylan were goth students, that the two boys regularly practiced voodoo and witchcraft (Gibbs and Roche 1999), and
that the two boys were gay (Cullen 1999). But an interview with Columbine junior Bree Pasquale in the moments after the massacre provided the most newsworthy narrative when she frantically informed reporters that Eric and Dylan had specifically targeted athletes. Dave Cullen, a leading investigative journalist on Columbine, noted the effect of Pasquale's and other students' interviews: "The public believes Columbine was an act of retribution: a desperate reprisal for unspeakable jock-abuse" (2009, 151).

[3.2] This lasting public perception of Eric and Dylan's massacre as an act of retaliation against the cruel yet socially superior athletes appears to manifest within the Columbine fandom. This belief is most noticeable in the fan-created texts that reconceptualize Eric and Dylan as victims of the bullies, of the unhealthy social atmosphere at Columbine, or of society for enabling the athletes to torment with impunity. These texts are either entirely fan made using such creative methods as drawing, sketching, or painting. In other cases, fans poach, to borrow a term from Jenkins (1992), existing material of Eric and Dylan—most notably their yearbook photos and self-documented videos—and revise the content to fit their desired purpose (figures 1, 2, and 3).

**Figure 1.** A fan using the name Eric Harris as a Facebook pseudonym uses a photo of Eric Harris from the Columbine High School yearbook to reconceptualize Eric as a victim. "Society Killed the Teenager." (Eric Harris, Facebook fan page, April 2015) [View larger image.]
In the years after the massacre, Eric's and Dylan's personal documents (e.g., journals, videos, and school papers) were gradually released to the public and provided valuable insight into the minds of the killers. Jeff Kass (2014), another leading Columbine journalist, wrote that Eric was "just like Dylan Klebold: sad, lonely, depressive. If Eric truly felt superior, it came from a sense of inferiority" (198). Kass cited one of Eric's journal entries from late 1998 as evidence:
Everyone is always making fun of me because of how I look, how fucking weak I am...I have always hated how I looked, I make fun of people who look like me, sometimes without even thinking sometimes just because I want to rip on myself. That's where a lot of my hate grows from. The fact that I have practically no self-esteem, especially concerning girls and looks and such. (198)

Eric and Dylan's framing as sad, inferior, and bullied outcasts is especially apparent within the Tumblr fan community known as Columbiners. In an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), a self-identified Columbiner offered her insight as to why she believes two of her fellow fans planned to carry out a similar school shooting before they were stopped by local law enforcement. When asked to speculate why she, along with the rest of the active Columbiner fandom, identifies with Eric and Dylan, the young fan cited an understanding of the two boys and their problems: "A lot of people identify with the feelings of the shooters. So we kind of take comfort in it in a way, since a lot of us feel depressed and anxious, and they did too. So it's kind of nice since a lot of people don't necessarily have someone there who understands them and feels the same way as them" (quoted in Bambury 2015).

Figure 4. A Columbine class of '99 photo zoomed in on Eric and Dylan with the words, "We are the Nobodies." (truecrimejunkie77, Tumblr, May 2015) [View larger image.]
Figure 5. A fan defends the Columbine gunmen. (blueeyedtragedy1976, Tumblr, April 2015) [View larger image.]

Figure 6. A fan uses lyrics from "The Kids Aren't Alright" (1999) by The Offspring with images of Eric and Dylan throughout their lives. (jumbie-ist-meine-liebe, Tumblr, May 2015) [View larger image.]

[3.6] On the basis of this claim and the provided fan texts (figures 4, 5, and 6), an argument could be made that Columbine fans not only identify with Eric and Dylan but that they also empathize with them, thus fitting into Kooistra's (1989) argument that real criminals can also serve a cathartic function for their audience. Columbine fans seem to express through their created or poached texts that they understand Eric and Dylan while the general public does not, such as in figure 5, where a fan refutes the claim that the two boys were sociopaths by citing their emotional pain ("Dylan crying under stuffed animals, Eric crying in the basement") as well as their mercy ("both of them letting people go" in reference to Eric telling his friend Brooks Brown to "go home" moments before the massacre, and to both shooters permitting student John Savage to leave the library during their execution of 10 students [Brown and Merritt 2002]). But while these fans may claim an esoteric knowledge regarding Eric and Dylan, they may also be playing into a wider cultural practice that dates back to such notable examples as the rise of Charles Manson in the 1970s. These fans may be specific examples of Western culture's interest in killers that enables such figures as Eric and Dylan to polarize the public and dominate media reports for months and in some cases even years after their committed atrocities.
4. Death, wounds, and the lure of the forbidden

[4.1] In order to challenge and ideally expand the focus of fan studies, Eric and Dylan—in addition to other murderers in Western society who are the subjects of fandoms—must be viewed within the contemporary public sphere in which killers are arguably a defining feature of American popular culture and have achieved a high level of visibility as celebrities. Dave Cullen (2013) addressed the specific stardom of school shooters in an article for Buzzfeed in which he challenged news outlets to "Stop Naming Mass Shooters," to quote from the article's title, and providing them with the glorification of leading news stories. Schmid (2006) also discussed the media's tabloidization and sensationalization of crime that contribute to the killer's appeal, and he cited two additional reasons for their popularity: killers tap into what he terms the "market for death" (i.e., they provide the dual needs for representations of death and of celebrities), and growing media technologies create and disseminate their fame (13–20). This last point is especially important to note when examining how shooters like Eric and Dylan are disseminated as figures within fan communities. In the years prior to the ubiquity and accessibility of the Internet, fans of dark public figures were limited in their resources to express their interests. Now there are numerous online outlets and social networks for these fans to meet other like-minded people and openly declare their interests that fall within the market of death. Although less empirically evident than fans stating that they identify with the Columbine shooters, multiple fan texts do appear to reflect the media's sensationalization of crime as these texts frame the two boys in glorified positions (figures 7 and 8) and, in some instances, as superior beings (figures 9 and 10).
Figure 7. A fan's rendering of Eric and Dylan on the day of the massacre. (jellyfishly, DeviantArt, August 2010) [View larger image.]

Figure 8. The Columbine gunmen glorified by the use of terms like "son of god" and "godlike." Notice Eric's bloody nose in this image, which actually happened during the massacre when his shotgun recoiled in his face. This is one of many examples of the
meticulous attention paid by fans when creating their texts. (SomebodySomeone95, DeviantArt, July 2014) [View larger image.]

![Image of 'Eric Harris is God']

**Figure 9.** A still of Eric in one of his student videos ("Hitmen for Hire") edited by a fan. "Eric Harris is God." (voDKasvengeance, DeviantArt, August 2005) [View larger image.]

![Image of Eric Harris]

**Figure 10.** A memorial text dedicated to Eric Harris using many images of the shooter, including his suicide in the Columbine library (background) and the word "godlike." (Eric Harris, Facebook fan page, February 2015) [View larger image.]

[4.2] It should be noted that Eric and Dylan often referred to themselves as gods in their personal documents, but these fan texts incorporating the shooters' blasphemous claims still provide valuable insight into the fandom. Perhaps the fans who created these texts labeled Eric a god as a perverse way of honoring his legacy, or their admiration for him may be so extreme that they genuinely do consider him to be a higher being. This could also relate to another example of an extreme investment in the Columbine fandom: a physical attraction to either one or both of the gunmen. Gael Sweeney's (1994) description of distinctive features explaining why television teen idols are appealing to women is applicable to Eric and Dylan as well: they are often at odds with the law, they do not fit into the dominant male ideology, and they are male but not phallically male (i.e., they are masculine, but not so masculine as to intimidate their female admirers). These traits, combined with the argued appeal of killers in Western culture, manifest within the Columbine fandom as users post comments and images expressing their attraction to the shooters (figures 11, 12, and 13).
Figure 11. A fan expresses physical attraction to Columbine gunman Eric Harris. (Eric Harris, Facebook fan page, June 2015) [View larger image.]

Figure 12. A Columbiner on Tumblr edited Eric and Dylan's high school photos with flowers, hearts, and compliments. (socio-apathy, Tumblr, April 2015) [View larger image.]
Figure 13. Another text declares a fan's attraction. Data collection revealed that Eric in particular is subject to this type of fan activity more than his partner in the shooting spree. (Eric Harris, Facebook fan page, May 2015) [View larger image.]

[4.3] The glorification of Eric and Dylan and fans' claims of their physical attraction to one or both of the shooters provide an intersection between fandom and a fascination with death. Seltzer (1998), in a complementary argument to Schmid's (2006) concept of the market of death, claims that this intersection occurs because the American public collectively gathers around shock, trauma, and the wound because of a fascination with scenes of violence in what Seltzer calls a "wound culture" (21). Seltzer cites the everyday occurrence of a car accident and how it's common for drivers and bystanders to convene around (or at least gaze at) the accident to satiate their curiosity. Evidence of this intersection may be most evident in fan texts that recreate or reinterpret Eric's and Dylan's suicides in the Columbine library 49 minutes after they began their massacre. Although the actual crime scene photo of the aftermath of their deaths is extremely graphic, it is also easily accessible via a quick online search—so any Columbine fans curious as to how the idols of their fandom met their end can quickly find the image. Fan texts of this photo often add an artistic spin by contrasting colors (most notably white, black, and red) as well as playing with positioning and juxtaposition (figures 14, 15, and 16).

Figure 14. In an accurate drawing of the actual crime scene photo from Eric and Dylan's massacre, a fan draws the two gunmen after their deaths in the library. (LittleSkrillexKid, DeviantArt, September 2011) [View larger image.]
Figure 15. A fan either reimagines the Columbine gunmen’s deaths or plays with their positioning by placing their heads side by side, likely for dramatic effect. (Artist unknown, DeviantArt) [View larger image.]

Figure 16. A fan juxtaposes the deaths of Eric and Dylan with photos of the gunmen as young children. It appears that this fan also labeled which career each of the gunmen may have pursued: Video game producer for Eric and computer scientist for Dylan. (Artist unknown, DeviantArt) [View larger image.]

[4.4] Whether or not killers like Eric and Dylan have a mass appeal in Western culture is becoming increasingly difficult to argue against as they continue to take center stage in the news and entertainment media, and recent reports covering similar tragedies seem to have ignored Cullen’s (2013) challenge to cease the glorification of the perpetrators. Consequently, the aforementioned market for death and wound culture, as well as the intersection between fandom and violence, do appear to manifest in some of the fan texts within the Columbine community. Thus, part of the
appeal of partaking in a Columbine fandom may stem from exploiting this lure of the forbidden and tapping into our curiosity for scenes (and people) of violence. Fans who claim that killers are godlike or attractive, and especially fans who are interested in images of violence such as Eric's and Dylan's suicides, are often denigrated and labeled as social outcasts. Such iconoclastic interests frequently attract attention, and although it's often negative attention, these fans can almost certainly expect a reaction from the public. While this lure of the forbidden and identification with the killers may constitute two of what appear to be the most dominant motives for Columbine fans, there is a third and equally important potential motive that must be considered: that these fans are trolling.

5. Columbine fans trolling for the spotlight

[5.1] On March 1, 2012, Tom Mauser—the father of slain Columbine student Daniel Mauser—uploaded a video to YouTube titled "Columbine dad responds to H&K admirers."

[5.2] I'm posting this message in response to the dozens of Youtube messages I've received over the past few months from people claiming to be admirers of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold...There are two primary kinds of people who have responded: internet trolls, and Harris and Klebold sympathizers. First, internet trolls are basically people who are thoughtless, compassionless people who have nothing better to do with their time than to troll the internet and find ways to disturb people—they poke them in the eye with a stick. They especially do this on memorial websites like the one I have for my son, they try to elicit a reaction of outrage or fear. They are basically trying to get attention for themselves, they try to exert, feel power over people, they can do this impersonally on the internet, and they can do it without having to identify themselves. (Mauser 2012)

[5.3] While this example of fans going out of their way to upset the father of a Columbine massacre victim may be a more insidious instance of trolling—that is, when online instigators post abusive comments and images for attention—it is still a worthy point of entry into a potential reason for fannish engagement within the Columbine fandom. The concerns about trolling expressed in Mauser's (2012) video echo Whitney Phillips's (2011) analysis of trolling specifically within Facebook memorial groups and fan pages, which she labels "RIP trolling." Phillips argues that there is a "parasitic relationship between memorial trolls, Facebook's social networking platform and mainstream media outlets" and that these trolls present a "pointed critique of a tragedy-obsessed global media." Whether or not these trolls do critique the global
media, they are evident in Columbine fan communities and, as Tom Mauser discussed, have also infiltrated numerous memorial Web sites.

[5.4] In one of the most ambiguous Columbine communities, the Facebook page Columbine High School Massacre appears to draw both sympathizers and fans (i.e., trolls) alike. Two of Facebook’s features complicate an analysis of the purpose of users on this page: the "like" button and the ability to rate the page with 0 to 5 stars. At the time of writing, this page has over 8,500 likes from Facebook users around the world, although what exactly these users like certainly varies. While some may have been trolling for attention, others may have liked the page out of either a genuine interest in the case or as an act of support for those affected by the tragedy. The ability to rate the Columbine High School Massacre Facebook page further complicates the intent of this community, though the current rating of 4.3 out of 5 stars (on the basis of 232 ratings) arguably conveys a clearer, more sinister message than does the number of likes. The comments section, however, provides more clarity. Numerous users post messages of remembrance ("R.I.P. to the innocent people who were killed"), some post messages of hatred towards Eric and Dylan ("Those two were monsters"), and one user even claims that his cousin was killed in the massacre. Trolls, expectedly, also figure prominently into this section as they comment in numerous incendiary messages on the page, even posing as one of the killers (figure 17):

[5.5] By far the best event in history. (Dustin Vanharn, March 2014)

Good for a giggle. (Mick Halcrow, October 2013)

Amazing, I absolutely adore it. 5/5 would watch again (Benas Maskaliovas, May 2015)

10/10 would hug Eric and Dylan. Best Massacre in the world. (Vincent Olivieri, April 2015)

The chemistry between the shooters and the victims' faces were amazing. (Pierce Thomas Soulsby, March 2014)

**Figure 17.** A screenshot from the Columbine High School Facebook page of a fan trolling by using Eric Harris's junior yearbook photo and name to assume the identity of the gunman (note 2). (May 2015) [View larger image.]
These trolls, similar to those who have harassed Tom Mauser, meet the description of Phillips's RIP trolls who blatantly seek to disturb online communities and provoke heated reactions from other users. But not all trolls appear as transparent with their motives, and some Columbine fans may even be partaking in the fandom in order to be a part of something that in and of itself often incites reactions from the public. As Chen (2012) noted in his analysis of James Holmes fans, "Nothing brings a fandom together better than their weird passion being mocked by outsiders. Now that fandom is largely about the act of being a fan, this mockery can be the very thing the fandom is after." Like the Holmies fan community on Tumblr, Columbiners also face ostracism and mockery from others who don't understand their different interests—a theme that ironically parallels Eric and Dylan's lives as they too were frequently ridiculed. Within this community, it is not a rare occurrence for outside users to police the Columbiners and insult their fandom:


You guys are all huge fucking weirdos. (captainbeefheartandhismagicband, Tumblr, April 2015)

Columbiners need to chill they're scaring outsiders lol. (sick-boy, Tumblr, March 2015)

I wonder how many of you columbiners/fangirls/boys would actually lose your mind if you went to jail. You're softer than baby shit. (panzerterror, Tumblr, April 2015)

Me: *finds out about the columbiners tag and goes through it*...When will the aliens come and abduct me from this horrible planet? (badasskujo, Tumblr, April 2015)

[5.8]  Columbiners are often quick to defend their interests in response to these criticisms, thus inadvertently supporting Chen's (2012) point that mockery may be a dominant and unifying motive in this type of fandom:

[5.9]  Why are Columbiners demonized so hard?????? We're all kind and supportive of each other but we get so much hate I don't understand???????????? (twistedlosers, Tumblr, April 2015)

Maybe my moral compass has disappeared or something but why the fuck do you need a reason to be interested in true crime or more specifically Columbine? (socio-apathy, Tumblr, May 2015)
I don't understand why people think that all columbiners are psychopaths. 9 out of 10 times, the person you're sending hate to is a completely normal teenager! Most columbiners are interested in the story and don't condone what Dylan and Eric have done. Even if they do, that still doesn't make the person a fucking murderer. We are normal people, interested in something that should, and I hope one day will be considered normal. We have our interests and you have yours, ours is just a little different. So please, don't send hate just because we have our differences. (darkenwonders, Tumblr, March 2015)

Columbiners and most other comparable fan communities are ostensibly private but in actuality more closely identify as public social spaces. That is, these fandoms are mostly open to the public and require minimal effort to become members, such as joining a group or clicking the "like" button. As a result, it's difficult to note which online users are genuinely fans and which others are merely fans partaking in something that will inevitably garner attention (albeit negative attention). That people who greatly dislike Columbine fans can easily infiltrate these communities with their comments of mockery and ridicule attests to the ease and accessibility of such fandoms. But that isn't to discredit those who are interested in Eric and Dylan, and that especially isn't meant to discredit those who truly do consider themselves fans of the gunmen. It's simply to note that with constantly rising media technologies that enable anonymous and pseudonymous behavior and with the simplicity of partaking in such controversial fandoms, it's becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish among trolls, genuine fans, and everyone in between.

6. Conclusion and takeaways for the field of fandom

The 16th anniversary of Eric and Dylan's massacre at Columbine High School occurred during the period of data collection for this study. A quick Google search on this day using the sole term *Columbine* returned many results, most of which focused on the anniversary and provided fast facts for inquiring readers. One result in particular stood out: "Student in Spain Kills Teacher, Wounds Others, Possibly Inspired by Columbine" (2015). Although a police spokesman acknowledged that it's "too early to determine whether the incident...was an attempt to copycat the April 20, 1999, attack in Columbine," the fact that this notion is even entertained attests to Eric and Dylan's long-lasting—and apparently far-reaching—influence. But as argued in the beginning of this study, confining Eric and Dylan's appeal to only psychopaths and aspiring school shooters would critically undermine what they can teach us about Western culture and, more specifically, about the field of fandom. It is true that some of the more recent shooters—from Sandy Hook Elementary gunman Adam Lanza to Virginia Tech shooter Seung-Hui Cho—documented their admiration for Eric and Dylan
and appeared to be fans of the two Columbine killers (Thomas et al. 2014), but they represent only one method of entry into the Columbine fandom. As this study has intended to prove, there are multiple methods of entry into such a complicated and challenging fandom as that of the Columbine shooters. Fans may appear to identify or even empathize with Eric and Dylan as social outcasts, or perhaps they are more drawn to the lure of the forbidden of joining such a provocative fandom. Or, and this is especially relevant considering the ubiquity and accessibility of technology, they might just be doing it for the attention—to incite reactions from the public and, as Tom Mauser (2012) said in his video, to "poke them in the eye with a stick."

[6.2] While these reasons appear to be three of the most prevalent motivations for joining the Columbine fandom, it is in no way an exhaustive list of all of the reasons. These are provided in an effort to challenge and expand the object of focus when studying fandom to include less conventional fan communities that arguably remain stuck in the first wave. Though fan studies has made great progress since science fiction and action-adventure shows such as *Star Trek* (1966–69) and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964–68) first permeated the cultural zeitgeist in the late 1960s, fandoms such as that of the Columbine shooters still lack acceptance and legitimation by society, and their fans appear to still largely be dismissed. Perhaps this is because the objects of such fandoms are particularly challenging and often play into negative stereotypes. The fandom of the Columbine shooters expectedly evokes extreme and derogatory images of fannish behavior that most often manifest in crime procedurals and news reports. Furthermore, this negative stereotype seems to be validated every time another Columbine happens (note 3); that is, such headlines as the student in Spain who was possibly inspired by Columbine to kill his teacher often validate the stigma and denigration associated with Eric and Dylan's fan community. As with the other initially dismissed fandoms during the first wave that were later proven to be rich and lively communities of social relevance, the Columbine fandom consists of diverse individuals united by their specific interest in Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

[6.3] This brings us to the bigger question: why does any of this matter? Specifically, why does this matter to the field of fan studies? The Columbine fandom, while one of many of its kind centered on dark public figures, is part of a larger trend of admiring controversial figures that continues to develop over time. While it's easy to argue against the morality of placing prisoners, murderers, and terrorists in the same public spotlight as more conventional celebrities, it is getting increasingly difficult to argue against the existence of their public appeal. Jeremy Meeks, who rose to fame as the Hot Convict when his mug shot went viral in June 2014, has over 306,000 likes between two Facebook fan pages, and *Rolling Stone* experienced a sales increase of 100 percent with their controversial July 2013 issue displaying Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev on its cover (Kavilanz 2013). But as former Columbine
student Brooks Brown noted, the media "makes money by giving people what they want...it feeds on who we are and how we live" (Brown and Merritt 2002, 16). So if there was no demand for murderous public figures like Eric and Dylan, and if there was no audience to partake in a fandom dedicated to these shooters, then their images and influence would cease to permeate the public sphere. These figures do continue to dominate news reports and influence fans for years after their crimes, yet fan studies has largely overlooked the importance that these polemic figures can have to the field. To better understand this appeal as well as the field of fandom as a whole, studies must expand to include challenging and often denigrated fan communities such as that of the Columbine shooters. To better understand Internet fandom, the field of fan studies must be willing to journey deeper into the darkness.

7. Notes

1. As most fans refer to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold by their first names, I do the same here.

2. The fan trolling the Web site using the name of Eric Harris is not the same fan using the name Eric Harris as a pseudonym previously referenced.

3. "Columbine" has become a euphemism for school shootings, such as Santana High School shooter Charles Andrew Williams who said he intended to "pull a Columbine" when he opened fire on his classmates in March 2001. (http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,102077,00.html)

8. Works cited


Praxis

Mimetic fandom and one-sixth-scale action figures

Victoria Godwin

Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas, United States

[0.1] Abstract—Within material practices that emphasize reproduction, customizers often extrapolate, creating new material to fill in gaps. Bricolage transforms mass-produced items into individualized creative works by improving the perceived accuracy of licensed merchandise or by recycling and repurposing items to achieve realistic and imaginative results. Customization's material fan practices reproduce items in order to create transformative narratives. After duplicating a beloved fan object's definitive appearance, clothing, and/or accessories in one-sixth scale, customizers often pose and photograph action figures in recreations of iconic scenes. Other images and photostories use miniature reproductions of material objects to rework existing media texts and characters or to tell completely original narratives. Images also disrupt and deconstruct the valorization of accuracy. Living rooms, pets, and other aspects of everyday life intrude into photographs of accurately reproduced items and characters. Figures in photostories may be made to break character. Such transformative moments call attention to the toys' status as toys and to the constructed nature of poses, dioramas, and narratives.

[0.2] Keyword—Action figure customization; Affirmational fandom; Bricolage; Material culture; Material fan practices


I. Introduction

[1.1] Matt Hills (2010) highlights a tendency within academic studies to privilege texts over material culture and transformational over affirmational fan practices. Text-based fan fiction and image-based fan vids fit more comfortably within academic fan studies paradigms, and thus they receive more scholarly attention than costuming, prop replica building, model building, action figure customization, or other material fan practices. Textual practices supposedly demonstrate agency because fans "transform a media product via their creativity" (2010). Yet within fan fiction's transformative efforts, authors still receive praise for accurately replicating characters' speech, personality, and habits. Furthermore, some fan fiction performs affirmational functions, reinforcing existing narratives, gender norms, and so forth.

[1.2] For Hills, "obsession_inc's...analysis of affirmational fandom defines it strongly against its transformational other." Affirmational fans are "sanctioned" because they "restate the source material...affirmational activities supposedly reinforce the official author's power and control over their own works" (Hills 2014, ¶2.1). In general, sanctioned affirmational fandom supposedly "is culturally privileged" because it does not challenge "forms of industrial power—whereas nonsanctioned, transformational fandom is disempowered and marginalized, and thus deserves academic attention and valorization" (2014, ¶2.2). Henry Jenkins explains "the now widely accepted distinction between 'affirmational' and 'transformational' fandom is increasingly problematic," especially as a result of its representation of supposed "gender distinctions" and "either or choice" (2014, 101). Hills (2014) espouses mimetic fandom as a more productive option...
than this binary because mimetic fandom includes aspects of both affirmational and transformational fandom, deconstructing any supposed binaries or hierarchies between the two.

[1.3] Customization of one-sixth-scale action figures (which include, but are not limited to, GI Joe and Action Man) offers a means to explore mimetic fandom. A wide variety of fan texts inspire these multidimensional projects, often simultaneously: film, television, books, comic books, video games, anime, manga, the histories and mythologies of various cultures, and many others (Godwin 2014). There is a complex interrelationship with fashion dolls, in which "fans of one-sixth scale action figures attempt to distance their fan objects from dolls and fashion even as they simultaneously blur these supposed boundaries by incorporating both within their own fandom" via "custom costumes, head swaps and similar fan practices" (Godwin 2015, 119, 131). Briefly, Barbie influenced the creation, naming, and scale of such items. Hasbro borrowed Mattel's "razor–razor blade" concept, wherein additional merchandise supplements a basic item. GI Joe's first prototype was carved from a Ken doll. Hasbro dubbed GI Joe an "action figure" to avoid the word "doll" (Michlig 1998, 31, 32, 28, 38, 27). The term spread to other so-called boys' toys, including one-eighth-scale superheroes from Mego or the immensely popular 3¾-inch Star Wars toys. Most scholarly discussion of action figures involves such smaller-scale toys, which usually remain under 6 inches in height.

[1.4] Existing studies of material fan practices such as prop replica building and cosplay (Gilligan 2012; Joseph-Witham 1996; Hills 2010) offer useful insights because one-sixth-scale customizers recreate and embellish media experiences by replicating props, costumes, characters, and environments in miniature. They also use such recreations to make their own variations and interpretations recognizable. For example, one-sixth-scale steampunk versions of Stanley and Livingstone (sampol 2011) and of Gepetto and Pinocchio (zebraten 2011) parallel cosplayers creating steampunk versions of familiar characters. Accurate recreations of familiar elements ground original characters in specific locations, times, or story worlds. For example, miniature tatami mats and paper screens visually signal a Japanese setting. Clothing and props also indicate whether original characters are Jedi, wizards, or other character types living in historical, modern, or futuristic eras. In addition to participating in multiple existing narrative worlds, customizers also invent new ones via material culture, as evidenced by photostories. Photostories are an example of fannish fiction, "original narratives produced by fans incorporating frequently multi-dimensional genres, tropes and so forth popular with fans. However, unlike fan fiction, fannish fiction is not defined by or dependent upon existing mass media texts, characters, narratives or worlds" (Godwin 2014, 112).

[1.5] Jason Bainbridge (2010) uses GI Joe as an early example of transmedia storytelling and action figures in general as emblematic of media convergence. Action figures unify affirmational and transformational story telling via "structured narratives and free-ranging play" (839). Dan Fleming (1996) and Jonathan Gray (2010) discuss mass-produced toys that both reproduce popular culture artifacts and enable transformative play within established universes. For Gray, "Toys contribute to the storyworld, offering audiences the prospect of stepping into that world and contributing to it" (2010, 187–88). Bob Rehak's (2013) "object practices" include model building, collecting, and customizing (whether from scratch or by modifying existing material) of a variety of material artifacts. Although he focuses on model building and garage kits, many of his observations can be applied to one-sixth-scale customized action figures. For example, even as each object "deriv[es] value from the degree to which it captures the subject's distinctive iconography" (2013,
Rehak emphasizes the simultaneous "multivalent potential of object practices—material 'mash-ups' in which characters and settings were reconfigured into novel situations" (34). Affirmational impulses facilitate transformative play. Each relies on the other instead of existing as separate or even opposed types of fan activities.

One-sixth-scale customization challenges problematic divisions of fandom into either affirmational or transformational, thus illustrating the usefulness of mimetic fandom. No matter how much they seem to be mere reproductions of characters and items seen on screen, the existence of customizations challenges rather than affirms producers' power. These customizations are not sanctioned, as evidenced by a cease-and-desist order Showtime sent to a customizer offering accurate reproductions of clothing from one of their television series (Kato.E 2011). This also could have been an attempt to eliminate potential competition because Triad Toys has a license to make official one-sixth-scale merchandise for that series, although none has yet materialized over the years. Life-size prop replica builders can experience similar concerns.

Hills describes how "by positioning mimetic fandom as concerned with reproduction, and by nailing down the original...the productivity of mimetic fandom is thus contained and foreclosed" by fan studies (2014, ¶3.2). Hills claims mimesis also involves understanding and duplicating production processes. One-sixth-scale customizing cannot always use the same materials and methods as life-size recreations, forcing customizers to modify patterns, instructions, and techniques for one-sixth scale. Such modifications require the comprehension and creative alteration of multiple techniques or the invention of new ones. For example, sewing a tubelike sleeve into a round armhole would be a nightmare in one-sixth scale, so seamstresses often sew flat instead.

One-sixth-scale customization expresses mimetic fandom in its use of bricolage in pursuit of accurate reproductions of props, characters, and so forth. Bricolage, as Claude Lévi-Strauss ([1962] 1966) has famously noted, involves subcultural groups making do by combining existing cultural materials to meet their own needs. Because one-sixth-scale versions of beloved fan objects or even ordinary everyday items do not always exist, customizers create desired items via bricolage, adapting commodities to different uses in different contexts. Bricolage transforms mass-produced items into individualized creative works, whether improving the perceived accuracy of licensed merchandise, or recycling and repurposing unrelated items in a quest for ever more realistic and imaginative results. Customization's material fan practices reproduce items in order to create transformative projects and narratives such as photostories. Furthermore, even within material practices that emphasize reproduction, fans often extrapolate, creating new material to fill in gaps. Fans mark these differences, privileging screen-accurate work in contrast to academics' emphasis on transformative efforts. This emphasis on realism and accuracy explains previous academic devaluation of material fan practices such as replicating props or costumes as mere imitation.

Images replicating iconic poses, lighting, and other factors likewise express mimetic fandom. After duplicating a beloved fan object's definitive appearance, clothing, and/or accessories in one-sixth scale, customizers often pose and photograph action figures to highlight their extensive attention to detail or to recreate iconic scenes. However, other images and photostories use these miniature reproductions in order to rework existing media texts and characters or to present completely original narratives. Other fan images feature aspects of the real world that call attention to the small scale of customized projects and thus disrupt any illusion of perfect
reproduction. Such fan images reinforce yet often simultaneously disrupt and deconstruct one-sixth-scale customization's valorization of accuracy. Mimetic fandom thus offers a more productive means of discussing material fan practices than existing dichotomies between affirmational and transformational fandom.

2. Bricolage in pursuit of accurate fan objects

[2.1] One-sixth-scale action figure customization, like other types of mimetic fandom, "is focused on the creation of highly screen-accurate prop replicas" (Hills 2014, ¶1.2), albeit in miniature. Customizers try to produce the best version of beloved popular fan objects. For some, this is a matter of bragging rights, or of being able to demonstrate skill. For some, it is an effort to create the most accurate reproduction of a favorite character. Some customizers revisit certain projects multiple times, refining small details that no one else notices but that they perceive as imperfections marring the work. For example, one fan's efforts to reproduce the robot from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927) in one-sixth scale suffered a setback when reference images did not show certain angles. He specifically mentioned this lack in his updates. He celebrated when additional research finally uncovered images of the robot's back. He also scrapped work he had already completed, beginning afresh on a version that more accurately reproduced the original fan object (shadowcrane 2011). Like many fans, he preferred accurate recreation to his earlier extrapolations.

![Figures 1 and 2.](image1) [View larger image.]

[2.2] Action figure customizers privilege realism. For example, Jun Ho Kim, also known as Zuno, emphasizes "life-like details" in attempts "to craft the most human-like skin...lifelike expression and posture, as if to emulate God's breathing of life into Adam, I seek to attain the complete analog" (2013b, 105, 2). Tutorials and progress reports emphasize accuracy, whether for one-sixth-scale
clothing, diorama elements such as ancient Roman wells and muddy streets (Baltes 2009), or media props such as the TARDIS or sonic screwdriver from *Doctor Who* (1963–89, 1996, 2005–) (Huxter 2002). As in cosplay and prop replica building, photos accompany the text to explain the production process step by step, with comparisons to screen grabs of the item and reveal shots of the finished miniature action figure, diorama, prop, or clothing. Online, posters joke that customizers must own a shrink ray in order to achieve such a level of detail and accuracy. The highest praise a customized action figure can receive is that it looks real. In the documentary film *Marwencol* (2010), miniature artist Mark Hogancamp emphasizes how real everything is. Miniature guns can be loaded and cocked. Such realism helps him to get into the narrative. If mass-produced items disrupt this process, Hogancamp modifies them to better suit his needs. For example, in *Marwencol*, he drags a toy jeep for miles to make it look more weathered and realistic, and he even calculates how many equivalent miles an actual jeep would have driven in the real world. Action figure fans weather one-sixth-scale items to replicate their real-life counterparts more accurately. Soldiers' uniforms do not remain dress-parade pristine on patrol or in combat. Weathering reflects this reality. Much as replica prop builders try to reproduce screen-accurate versions (Hills 2010), so too do customizers try to imitate life-size counterparts as perfectly as possible in miniature. Both require creative transformation of mass-produced material goods by modifying them in ways unintended by their original producers.

![Figure 3. Mark Hogancamp's weathered one-sixth scale jeep, a mass-produced item modified to better suit desires for accuracy and authenticity. Photo by Mark Hogancamp (2012), posted on an earlier version of the Marwencol Web site accessible via the Wayback Machine.](View larger image)

[2.3] Even amid fan emphasis on accuracy, "replicas can be customized, personalized, and stylized" (Hills 2014, ¶3.3). After all, mimetic fandom incorporates both "affirmational authenticity via the pursuit of screen-used looks" and "transformational agency via customization and stylization" (¶3.16), thus transcending and reconciling such problematic divisions. Although accuracy predominates, stylized head sculpts characterize some customized action figures and mass-produced merchandise, such as the Gangster's Kingdom line from Dam Toys. However, clothing and accessories on such figures often reproduce life-size versions, thus continuing the combination of transformative and affirmational elements prevalent in this fandom. Stylization is far more common among collectors and customizers of ball-jointed dolls and similar dolls, drawing on the aesthetics and subject matter of anime and manga. Even when one-sixth-scale action figure customizers do draw on such media texts, this fandom's preference for realism can influence projects. For example, instead of recreating the stylized aesthetics of anime and manga, one customizer's "side history" for the Ghost in the Shell franchise (beginning with manga first serialized in 1989 and continuing in additional media) is a transformative narrative using head
sculpts and repaints that heighten human resemblances instead of recreating the official appearance of transplanted characters or forcing original characters into that same visual mold. The customizer notes, "Almost always I try to steer towards a more real life rendition instead of staying too close to anime style" (gaiagear 2006). A realistic aesthetic suits this fan's needs and interests. Instead of pursuing Hills's "screen-used looks," in such examples, both affirmation authenticity and transformational agency manifest in the selection and customization of head sculpts, wardrobe, weapons, and vehicles to resemble real-world versions. This perceived realism enables immersion within a customized version of a beloved story world. Thus, affirmation reproducions of items from the real world both support and are part of transformative elements in this project.

[2.4] Recreations of anime and manga characters are possible. Asian companies such as Obitsu and Volks offer highly articulated one-sixth-scale bodies, as well as heads in which the space allocated for the eyes and the shape and size of both nose and chin are appropriate for the "big eyes, small mouth" aesthetic of these media texts. However, those same structural features work against the extremely realistic look favored by most one-sixth-scale action figure customizers. In contrast, fashion doll heads offer more accurate proportions, unlike their bodies, which also suffer from limited articulation. Thus, Obitsu and Volks are some of the many body donors for "head swaps...Such hybrid creations draw upon the best features of both categories: action figures and fashion dolls. Yet they no longer belong exclusively to either" (Godwin 2015, 128). In this instance, fans make do by combining existing materials from different cultures to meet their own needs.

[2.5] Bricolage is one of the means by which fans use customization to pursue authenticity. For example, in order to reproduce objects, characters, or scenes, customizers modify mass-produced merchandise. Just as fans create popular culture from what they have available (Fiske 1992), so too do people use "mass-produced goods of consumer society" as "material forms to express individualism" (Thomas 2003, 133). Fan fiction and fan vids draw on mass media texts. All customized action figures start out as standardized mass-produced goods, sometimes based on mass media texts, but customizers' creativity and imagination transform this raw material into something visually and functionally different from every other item straight off store shelves.

[2.6] The pursuit of accuracy, whether of items from media texts or from everyday life, leads to creative output, learning or inventing new techniques to modify or to create desired items. Fans alter existing material to replicate items they want or need for certain projects. For example, if mass-produced plastic swords do not look realistic enough, customizers create their own swords by grinding broken metal tines from forks or rakes into blades, then assembling hilts and pommels from beads and other material originally intended to make jewelry. Trash becomes treasure. Action figure fans criticize Barbie and other fashion doll furniture and accessories for their unrealistic bright pink coloration. However, such criticisms typically accompany customizer posts on how to salvage these items by repainting them. Such bricolage produces new contradictory meanings, redefining mass-produced items as individualized creative works. Among fans' emphasis on naturalism and realism, seemingly appropriate for an affirmation fandom celebrating a text as it is, custom projects reveal how transformative practices help achieve such accurate recreations, thus highlighting the effectiveness of mimesis.

[2.7] Customizers modify existing products or create their own if they cannot find or afford desired items, or items of appropriate quality. Items' value comes not from their exchange value but from their use value as "bash fodder" for future projects. No matter how expensive or rare an
item, tutorials note how to alter it to better suit customizers' needs and desires. Source material obviously includes mass-produced one-sixth-scale merchandise such as guns, helmets, goggles, and action figures. Yet customizers receive praise for using items in unexpected ways. For example, an alternate history rendering of Stanley and Livingstone repurposes limbs from a high-tech droid from the Star Wars franchise (1977–) to create steampunk prosthetics (sampol 2011). Guessing what items originally were is a popular game—one that displays forms of fan knowledge and thus cultural capital. One must be familiar with a wide array of merchandise from multiple franchises and manufacturers in order to identify original elements in their new customized context correctly.

Figure 4. An alternate history rendering of Stanley and Livingstone by sampol (2011) repurposes limbs from a high-tech droid from the Star Wars (1977–) franchise to create steampunk prosthetics that hint at adventures unseen during the lengthy journey to find Dr. Livingstone. [View larger image.]

[2.8] Customizers' creativity is not limited by official merchandise. They also excel at making do with items never intended for one-sixth-scale use. Customizers sometimes refer to such bricolage as developing a one-sixth eye. Halloween decorations are popular sources, as in a cemetery diorama built by Mick Baltes (2008). Male customizers joke about getting odd looks during visits to craft stores. Beads and other material originally intended to make jewelry form hilts and pommels for one-sixth-scale swords or barrels for steampunk guns. Hours of labor link hundreds of tiny jump rings into chain mail. Frequently other people's trash becomes customizers' treasures. Cut-down Styrofoam cups and bowls become roundels in the walls of the TARDIS (Huxter 2002, 2005). Yogurt lids become warriors' shields. Paint stirrers become wooden planks for walls and floors in pirate ships, medieval taverns, and so forth. Foam cups and balsa wood become beer kegs (klyysheros 2007). In a disposable consumer culture geared to throw away items to make room for new purchases, customizers reuse and recycle. However, they do not reduce. Work spaces regularly overflow with boxes and bins full of bits and pieces that might prove useful someday. Recycling and repurposing exercises customizers' creativity and imagination in a quest for ever more creative and realistic results. Bricolage helps the customizing subculture meet their needs to
transform the ordinary into the extraordinary by combining together existing cultural materials to recreate characters, props, and dioramas or to create new ones. More importantly, such bricolage simultaneously creates new contradictory meanings, redefining uniform mass-produced items as individualized creative works.

**Figure 5.** An example of bricolage: foam cups and balsa wood become beer kegs in a tavern by *klysheros* (2007). Paint stirrers become wooden planks on the floor and elsewhere. [View larger image.]

[2.9] Customizers appropriate mass media texts and use bricolage to repurpose mass-produced consumer goods, only to have their realistic transformations appropriated in turn by producers. Customizers emphasize realism and use it to justify their alteration of existing products. Collectors often purchase mass-produced figures, then pay customizers for more accurate head sculpts, repaints, outfits, or props. Such practices rework these fan objects to imitate other fan objects more closely. Manufacturers readily exploit this market, offering head sculpts, clothing, and accessories of ever-increasing realism, often to supplement merchandise produced by their competitors. For example, Hot Toys offers various characters and accessories from *Batman Begins* (2005) and subsequent films in that series. Collectors can create additional characters by purchasing merchandise from other companies. Pop Toys offers the Ninja Master set containing a head sculpt and clothing for Ra's al Ghul. Custom Studios sells sweaters for Alfred to wear because Hot Toys did not include any with their version of Bruce Wayne's butler. Alternatively, perceiving existing merchandise as not perfectly reproducing beloved fan objects, some customizers refuse to buy it, choosing instead to create their own versions. To counter such potential loss of income, manufacturers appropriate fans' emphasis on accuracy and highlight their products' attention to detail in their advertising. For example, promotional material for ACI Toy's Flamma the Gladiator specifically mentions visible pores, blood vessels, and other realistic elements (acitoys 2011). This provides yet another example of ways in which "fan works can no longer be understood as simply derivative of mainstream materials but must be understood as themselves open to appropriation and reworking by the media industries" (Jenkins 2006, 153).

[2.10] In order to compete with improved mass-produced merchandise, fan projects have to be even more accurate and realistic. It's like an arms race. With beginners' work less likely to be praised or noticed against the higher standards of mass-produced merchandise, official producers potentially could eliminate future competitors before they truly begin. A lack of praise within a fan community can discourage participation. Why share work online, or even produce projects, if they are ignored in favor of current big name fans or official licensed merchandise?

3. Iconic images: Accuracy and its disruption
This arms race of realism continues within customizers' displays of their projects. The high production values of media texts exert pressures for customizers to duplicate dramatic lighting, high-resolution photography, and other factors. A dynamic pose evokes a sense of motion and action. Positioning an action figure in a diorama, or even on a stand with sufficient details to evoke specific terrain, furthers the sense of accuracy and immersion. A project's accuracy can be undermined by a failure to reproduce its original context. However, not every still image and photostory slavishly reproduces its initial inspiration.

Figure 6. Dioramas can increase the sense of accuracy and immersion. Recreating iconic scenes or images, like this Breaking Bad (2008–13) diorama assembled by Wake of Destruction (2013), offers a way to freeze a text's action and make the immaterial cult text material. [View larger image.]

Customized action figures offer fans a means to extend their entertainment experience from films, books, and many other media texts into their own hands. For Hills, in contrast to fan fiction and fan vids, prop replicas connect "the branded story world or hyperdiegesis and the fan's everyday life" and cross boundaries "from textuality to reality" (2014, ¶3.3). Rehak describes a related phenomenon. An advertisement promises a model that so accurately recreates its "iconic content" that it "would appear to 'walk right off' its base" (2013, 28). The story world enters the real world. Gilligan labels "bridging the gap between the virtual 'worlds' on screen and the lived material body" via material practices such as cosplay and collecting merchandise "tactile transmediality" (2012, 25). Wearing costumes or handling replica props such as light sabers from the Star Wars franchise or wands from the Harry Potter (1997–) franchise allows fans to enter media narratives vicariously. Not limited by "consumption practices of viewing or buying," transmedia narratives include "participatory practices in which the audience immerses themselves within the cinematic world, creating new meanings and pleasures beyond the" original media text (Gilligan 2012, 22). As such, they are transformative practices. Customized action figures likewise
allow fans to enter media narratives, albeit in miniature. One-sixth-scale versions of props and characters also bring these story worlds into fans' homes, as the following examples illustrate.

[3.3] One customizer describes one-sixth-scale projects as creating "the perfect analog" and "a channel through which everyone...can...touch and possess to their satisfaction." His customized figures based on popular media characters like "the actor's autograph or an item from the movie set can even evoke a sense of exhilaration, as tangible objects help bridge our reality and the imaginary world. It is as if the characters are brought to life with our every touch...With utmost detail, I recreate the characters into tangible objects and draw them to our own reality." Collecting memorabilia strengthens "our emotional connections with those characters" (Kim 2013b, 2, 4). Creating one-sixth-scale versions and photographing those completed projects does too.

[3.4] Images of customized action figures reinforce the pursuit of screen-accurate reproductions. As with cosplay tableaux vivants (Duchesne 2005), it is important not only to recreate a beloved fan object's definitive appearance, clothing, and props in one-sixth scale but also to strike an accurate pose for it in a diorama. Customized action figures offer a way to freeze a text's action. They make the immaterial cult text material. Customizers pose their projects to recreate favorite or iconic scenes. For example, a change in lighting and additional props evoke the robot's transformation in *Metropolis* (shadowcrane 2011). Customizers use the visual vocabulary of the wide variety of fan texts that inspire them. They learn and use additional skills to showcase their figures even more effectively. Using dramatic lighting, or adding special effects such as glowing eyes, motion lines, or a nimbus of light around a superhero's or wizard's hands, helps figures look as much like definitive images from media texts as possible. Forced perspective and other photographic techniques also prove useful.

[3.5] Some customizers shoot in front of a green screen or blue screen. Photoshop or similar photo-editing software allows the insertion of more elaborate backgrounds if time, space, skill level, or financial resources do not allow for the material creation of multiple elaborate dioramas, like those Baltes built for *Memento Mori* (2010–12), a photostory he wrote and photographed. Digital manipulation of a figure is not considered customization, but it still occurs in photostories. For example, a character can sleep without the need to paint over highly detailed eyes for a single panel's worth of material. Some storytellers airbrush photographs to conceal joints and cut lines in order to make action figures look more lifelike. Cut lines below the chest or breasts, knee joints, elbow joints, and elsewhere increase a figure's articulation, and thus its ability to reproduce the range of human movement more accurately. However, they do not reproduce human appearance, thus marring realism even as they increase it. Manufacturers offer body stockings and nude hose to cover points of articulation and improve the accuracy of this one-sixth-scale reproduction of the human form. Visible joints throw some readers and viewers out of narratives, disrupting their pleasure and their suspension of disbelief.

[3.6] Although customizers do try to replicate iconic poses and scenes, far more often they create their own original images and stories, whether with all-new characters or alternative versions of familiar ones. Sometimes single images present original narratives. Photos of various figures evoke untold stories joined in media res. They seem to be screen grabs from films or television episodes never made. Stanley's weary posture hints at his lengthy journey to find Dr. Livingstone, albeit too late; Stanley's artificial arms and legs hint at adventures unseen, before or during this journey (sampol 2011). Steampunk versions of Gepetto and Pinocchio, reimagined as assassins, await their next victim on a cobbled street beneath a gas streetlamp (zebraten 2011). Digitally added sepia
tones and scratches alter the original images to look more authentically Victorian, although the unmodified original images also appear in order to highlight the attention to detail involved in the project.

Figure 7 and 8. Steampunk versions of Gepetto and Pinocchio by zebraten (2011), with one version (figure 7) of the image altered to look old-fashioned and aged. [View larger image.][View larger image.]

Likewise, Frankenstein's monster interacts with realistic props and diorama elements that replicate life-size originals in miniature. Amid cemetery tombstones, he digs up a grave, removes a coffin, and holds a skull (Baltes 2008). Even the lighting and use of black-and-white photography replicate a Boris Karloff horror film. However, these same images create situations and meanings not available in the original novel or films. Baltes invokes the original black-and-white look of
James Whale's iconic film 1931 *Frankenstein*, which starred Karloff, to produce his own transformative narrative of the monster contemplating the skull of someone less (or more) fortunate than himself—someone for whom death held no monstrous resurrection. As in Hills's (2014) discussion of mimetic fandom, and like customizers' bricolage, photostories combine customizers' supposedly affirmational pursuit of screen accuracy with transformative fan practices.

**Figure 9.** A diorama by Mick Baltes (2008) evokes the original black-and-white look of James Whale's 1931 film *Frankenstein* to produce his own transformative narrative as the monster contemplates the skull of someone for whom death held no monstrous resurrection. The cemetery diorama includes many repurposed and modified Halloween decorations. [View larger image.]

[3.8] Photostories likewise illustrate how the concept of mimetic fandom offers more productive readings than supposed binaries between affirmational and transformative fan practices. Customization's material fan practices reproduce items, yet they do so in order to create transformative narratives, which in turn rely on those accurate elements. For example, for photostories featuring an incarnation of the Doctor he invented, Huxter replicates costume, sets, and props from *Doctor Who* such as the Doctor's costume, TARDIS, and sonic screwdriver. He even imitates the lighting and shot composition of an important scene. Yet his photostory, "The Second Key," rewrites the televised Key to Time sequence (season 16, 1978–79) not as a noble quest by a heroic figure but rather as a test to prove the Doctor's worth. He does so to address several problematic aspects of the original media texts that left him unsatisfied (Huxter 2005). This simultaneous fascination and frustration with a text characterizes fandom, prompting a simultaneous "desire to engage with it" and "drive to rewrite or remake it" (Jenkins 2006, 258). Photostories use miniature reproductions of material objects to rework existing media texts and characters. Customizers modify and create action figures, props, and clothing to suit their needs and desires better than mass-produced items and texts.
Figure 10 and 11. Styrofoam cups become roundels in the TARDIS walls. For an incarnation of the Doctor he invented, Sean Huxter (2005) recreates costumes, sets, and props, as well as the lighting and shot composition of an important scene from Doctor Who's 1978–79 Key to Time sequence (figure 10) in order to address several problematic aspects of Doctor Who episodes that left him unsatisfied, leading him to create an original narrative, "The Second Key" (figure 11).

[View larger image.][View larger image.]

[3.9] Images of customized projects also disrupt and deconstruct customizers' valorization of accuracy. Customizers intrude into the frame, using their fingers to give a sense of scale or holding items up for the camera. Faces appear, smiling next to the project. Pets investigate. Living rooms and other details of everyday life intrude into photographs. One customizer shows off reproductions of medieval armor and furniture, a computer printer on the same table. Also visible are what looks like exercise equipment and a doorway leading to another room (tomste 2011).
**Figure 12 and 13.** Background details disrupt images of accurate reproductions even as they highlight the small scale of those projects (figure 12, a knight in armor in a chair, both created by tomste [2011]). Such seemingly artless images strip away the illusion and remind viewers that ultimately these are toys in ordinary homes (figure 13, Ancient Roman Versus Predator [author unknown]—in a living room near you!). [View larger image.][View larger image.]

[3.10] These background details disrupt the image and highlight the small scale of these projects. Such seemingly artless images strip away the illusion and remind viewers that ultimately these are toys in ordinary homes. Despite stringent efforts to attain and maintain realism, customizers still playfully have action figures break character in photostories, as with Baltes's (2010) behind-the-scenes features for *Memento Mori*, in which characters address readers directly. Such transformative moments call attention to the toys' status as toys and to the constructed nature of poses, dioramas, and narratives. Some images do this consciously, as when action figures know they are in packages shipped to other homes to interact with other collectors and their toys (Baltes 2010). It is doubtful that such self-awareness is deliberate in most images. Nonetheless, such images function as reminders of the extraordinary flights of imagination possible within ordinary homes, using mass-produced toys and narratives. The material practice of recreating characters, props, costumes, and other items in one-sixth scale liberates these items from their originating texts, bridging the gap between fan texts and the material world, from limited or liminal times and places (only while reading or watching a text, only while attending a convention) into constant contact (every day, in one's own home). Mass-produced toys based on mass media narratives enter fans' homes, where customization and play emphasize the interreliance of both reproduction from original texts and the transformation of toys to address individual meanings. Such mimetic fandom illustrates the interdependence of affirmational and transformational forms of fan creativity: each contributes to the creation and meaning of the other.
4. Conclusion

[4.1] Even when fans strive for the most accurate photographic portrayals of the most accurate one-sixth-scale reproductions, it is important to remember that there are multiple different but valid goals that motivate or inspire fan practices. For some, action figures offer an opportunity to practice their photography skills on models that rarely move, barring the occasional shelf dive. For others, photographs are a means to show off the fine detail in their work, such as a seamstress or tailor's inclusion of a lining in a garment, or a painter's inclusion of miniscule freckles or age spots. Turning garments to expose linings that typically remain invisible, or zooming in to reveal fine painted details, highlights customizers' attention to detail and the skill required to reproduce such details accurately in miniature. Some images deliberately are presented as art. For example, Jun Ho Kim self-published two books (2013a, 2013b) collecting images of customized action figures photographed in carefully constructed dioramas. The earlier version of the Marwencol Web site, available via the Wayback Machine, originally began as therapy, not art, yet its images wound up in an art gallery, a documentary about the project (2010), and a book (Hogancamp and Shellen 2015). In these contexts, viewers examine Marwencol's images for very different reasons and by very different criteria than those for which they originally were created.

[4.2] Scholarly analyses within fan studies emphasize transformative works but often overlook the interdependence of affirmational and transformational fan practices. Each depends on the other for meaning. Textual practices such as fan fiction or fan vids rely on accurate reproduction of characters' speech, personality, and habits. Affirmational authenticity, in the form of extremely accurate reproductions of props, characters, costumes, and scenes provides the foundation for
transformative practices, images, and narratives via bricolage, still image vignettes, and photostories. In turn, those transformational practices would make no sense without their underlying affirmational support. Creating original characters or variations on familiar ones still requires recreations of clothing and props accurate enough to be recognized. Even if Jedi robes are orange or some other atypical color, the cut and fit still would need to recreate versions seen on screen closely enough to look right even as they look different.

[4.3] Mimetic fandom offers more productive means of examining material fan practices than a simplistic binary dismissing these efforts as either affirmational or transformative. As with transmedia narratives (Gilligan 2012), the original media text is merely a starting point, leading to individuals' own creative interactions with a narrative world via cosplay, prop replica building, action figure customization, and other material fan practices. One-sixth-scale action figure customization illustrates the blurred boundaries between fans' own emphasis on reproduction and scholars' emphasis on transformation, emphasizing the creativity inherent in mimetic fandom.

5. Works cited


Metropolis. 1927. Directed by Fritz Lang. DVD. Babelsberg, Germany: UFA.


Symposium

Patti Smith: Aging, fandom, and libido

Maud Lavin

School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, United States

Abstract—This essay traces a lifelong fandom of Patti Smith in light of issues of aging, femininity, and libido. It also considers the paucity of transformative images in Western mass culture and its fandoms of aging women. Personal narrative is brought into play, fans' experiences throughout the life cycle are referenced, and gender issues are emphasized.

Keywords—Aging women; Androgyny; Fan studies; Gender

1. Introduction

For me, at 60, aging gracefully is both a desire and a resented dictate. Gracefulness sounds so tame, mild. I'm a libidinal person, I enjoy that, and I don't plan on giving that up. I mean libidinal in a broad sense—libidinal as a cultural producer and libidinal as a sexual woman. The cultural standards for older women range from grace to nurturing to invisibility. This range is small and feels constricting. I want to age in ways that rescript, expand, and add on to these representations according to my own desires. What does Western mass culture have to say about possibilities for transforming restrictive older female images? Not nearly enough. If fandoms are cloths from which we can choose to cut and shape different personae for ourselves, what do they have to offer to a woman well along in her life course?

[1.3] Just as Nick Stevenson (2009) has written about lifelong fans of David Bowie, I've seen Patti Smith go through life changes, I've seen her age, I've seen her adapt to new stages while retaining her (or so it appears in her public appearances) sense of self. I've seen her negotiate her gender and sexuality. I've used my images of her at times in my own autobiographical storytelling to confirm either my own changes or steadfastnesses. I lose track, I forget about her, then I rediscover her. She excites me. I don't mirror her. I don't even understand all of her public personae. But I recognize glimpses of the ones I do, and how they shift, and how I do, as we meet and remeet over the years.

2. Meeting and desire

[2.1] We first met in the mid- to late 1970s—it must have been sometime after the release of Horses in 1975, when I was still in college. I loved her '70s music: "Jesus died for somebody's sins, not mine"—no guilt, nobody's martyr, no victim. Looking back now, I realize I'd been looking for Patti for a while when I was in my late teens and early 20s. The women rockers and crooners I was listening to then had too many victims among them. No matter how strongly Janis Joplin belted, how forceful, how complex she dared to be on stage with that beautiful mix of strength and vulnerability, she was still pleading and plaintive: "I'd trade all of my tomorrows for one single yesterday / To be holding Bobby's body next to mine," she sang in 1969's "Me and Bobby McGee." Bonnie Raitt was complaining in 1972 in "Loves Me Like a Man," "I want someone to love me / Don't think I haven't tried; / Tried to find a man to take me home / 'Stead of taking me for a ride." And Joni Mitchell, in her sweet, self-effacing way, was declaring in 1971 in "Blue All I Want," "I want to shine like the one you want to see; / Want to knit you a sweater; / And want to write you a love letter; / Want to make you feel better." I didn't want to stay home knitting anyone a sweater. Only Aretha Franklin was standing her ground, and had been since she covered this song and made it an anthem in 1967: "R E S P E C T / See what it means to me." As for the rest, although they were headliners, they were drippy, weepy.

[2.2] This is not to say that women, like men, can't sing the blues or pine in song, but what drove me mad was it seemed like that's all most of the women I listened to sang. I came of age in the 1970s and was hungry for women who knew who they were and what they desired, with no shame but instead glint—women like I wanted to be. Women like me but a couple of steps bolder, one step older, many steps more a star. Women who rolled out their libidos when and how they felt like it.

[2.3] Patti was androgynous, although that was not a word I used much at the time. But I wore it too. I had in the mid-1970s a maroon velvet man's smoking jacket, found in a thrift store, that hung loose, large, and soft on me. I wore it almost every day...
over T-shirts or button-down shirts and jeans. My brown hair was straight and layered
to above my shoulders in that kind of '70s cut that looked like you cut it yourself in
front of a mirror, and sometimes I did. I didn't wear makeup. I loved sex and was very
selective in my partners, having no trouble in saying no. I was shy but also blunt. I
didn't think I was wearing mannish clothes, just dressing my own way. In retrospect,
in addition to loving that jacket, itself an androgynous mix of feminine and masculine
signs, I think the looseness helped me declare that my curves were mine and I'd show
them, or not, when I felt like it and not for anyone else's parade. My cleavage was
private; my clothes, layered.

[2.4] So to me, Patti Smith's look of loose men's shirts over stovepipe pants wasn't
so much new as it was recognizable. She was more stylish than me, thinner than
anyone, with hair as messy as the rest of us. Large eyes, large mouth, beaked nose.
No little Blondie, her. Libido on tap, released through the voice, the command of the
stage. Stare straight ahead. No eyeliner. Her androgyny was part of her confidence to
rewrite the girl script. At the same time she had lust—she owned it—she decided when
to strut and show it. She wore her androgyny as the curtains to a semiprivate, at-will
public, female hetero sexuality. Loved. Love.

[2.5] After college I worked full time at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis making
videos and doing TV projects. I also taught one night a week at Film in the Cities, part
of Inver Hills Community College. I was the youngest staffer at the Walker in 1977–
78. I loved my job, but I wanted to hang out with people my own age outside work. I
found Jay's Longhorn Bar, at 14 South 5th Street, in downtown Minneapolis, a dark,
friendly, wild, innocent, punk bar showcasing bands on the same circuit as CBGB's in
Jumped up and down dancing, pogoing. Knew people by first names only. Because
Minneapolis was what it was, I ended up swimming in lakes with some of them and
barbecuing. But mainly I hung out at the Longhorn, shooting the shit, dancing. And
dancing.

[2.6] 1978. Patti Smith came out with Easter, including "Because the Night,"
cowritten with Bruce Springsteen. She toured with her Patti Smith Group. I heard at
the Longhorn she was coming, but I went to get a ticket to her auditorium show by
myself. Not about sharing, this. I remember being in the audience, Patti on stage, a
packed auditorium. Patti in black, legs astride, hair messy, powerful and
straightforward, sexy but revealing nothing. Loose clothes, deep voice, commanding
desire. "Because the night belongs to lovers; / Because the night belongs to love… /
Love is an angel disguised as lust; / Here in our bed till the morning comes." Here was
someone who enjoyed sex and love. Enjoyed her lover (I neither knew nor cared at
that moment whom he might be, although it probably mattered to me in an
identificatory way that she was hetero and especially that she was hetero and enjoying sex and romance, not whining). Here was someone who took the stage.

[2.7] I was so excited I went back the next night—Patti Smith's last in the Twin Cities for that tour—on my own again to see if there was any chance of a ticket. Sold out. The guys who worked there told me to wait until after he concert started, snuck me in for free to stand at the back. Bliss.

[2.8] Didn't see Patti for a while after that, but kept track. She was married with children, she became a more vocal Christian, neither of these my things. But I saw, through the coverage and my imagination, that she stayed blunt, honest—the rock poet who could bend words and music and who could also claim the stages of her life without apology.

[2.9] In 1994, her husband died. She moved with her son and daughter to New York. Resumed performing live after a 16-year hiatus. A middle-aged artist doing rock on her own terms. Her work showed up in different media in different forms. Not a snob, not a stereotype. Someone who kept producing and creating, I loved that.

[2.10] And then I really did meet her.


[2.12] Briefly, as in got to say hello. In 2011, I was one of the people who'd put Patti Smith's name forward to be our graduation speaker at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where I teach. I was 56 then, Patti 64. Our dean, herself a fan, made it happen. Patti came, she sang "Grateful" and "My Blakean Year," she was gracious, and she really let loose when she chanted to the students at the end of her speech, "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid!" I was moved to tears. But it was a misreading of Patti's life—a wrong rumor about John McEnroe and her—that also meant a great deal to me, stirring my pleasure and curiosity, and keeping the libidinal thread spinning.

3. Sexuality and aging

[3.1] Tonya Anderson (2012), writing about long-term female fans of Duran Duran, analyzes the sexual attraction for the band that many felt in their early teens, as they entered into a cognizance of their own sexuality, and how, for those continuing or rediscovering their love of the band in middle age, there was a nostalgia for that kind of initial self-empowerment of desiring. What might seem a relatively mild thing—an expression through accepted fan behaviors like screaming of a sexually tinged crush in public—was actually powerful, especially for girls, who were then often tightly
regulated in claiming their own (in this instance, heterosexual) desires. Anderson is persuasive. For me, though, as an ardent 20-something fan of Patti Smith and a hetero woman—and knowing that Patti Smith was a hetero woman—my younger self loved the performer for having agency in general—with words, with her gender persona, with rock, with the spotlight—and in particular for celebrating herself as a sexual subject. Celebrating it with no mewling. I was for that—in her, in myself.

[3.2] Rediscovering Patti at different times in my life has been about celebrating her continuing and varying ownership of sexual agency at different ages, as well as and as tied to her changing and often renewed dedication and exploration of expressing herself creatively. Anderson (2012) talks about nostalgia, and surely there must be a shade of that in my lifelong fan attachment to Patti. But much more it's an attachment to my own renewal and changing while also continuing to embrace the intensity of my sexual desire and my creative, multiform production as a writer—all qualities written large in Patti Smith's art and performance.

[3.3] When in 2011 I heard that Patti Smith was definitely coming as graduation speaker at SAIC, I went around telling friends at work the gossip someone had told me—that she was then married to John McEnroe. I found out much later that it wasn't true; another singer with a similar name, Patty Smyth, is married to the former tennis star. Patti's biographer, Dave Thompson (2011), says that after her husband's death, she had a 10-year relationship with a much younger male musician. Younger men don't interest me—I like same-age men myself. But the fact that Patti has continued to do what she wants—what she desires—interests me a lot. I want her to have a lover or lovers at 68 too, even though politically I feel it's up to women at any age to decide when or even if they have sex. But at my current age of 60, I love sex, and I want Patti as my self-appointed older sister/ego ideal to lead the way, shining a light on libido at all her ages. This seems a bit unfair; Patti publishes poems, tours, does benefits, sings at the Vatican, sings on a Hunger Games movie soundtrack, does TV appearances, sings, sings, sings. Do I want to reduce her to a sex object? Maybe. At moments. But much more, I want her—need her—to keep representing as a sexual subject.

[3.4] Leni Marshall and Aagje Swinnen signal the potential for film to expand "visual representations of possibilities for aged, gendered sexuality" (2014, 168). Yes, please, that would be a welcome change. Meanwhile, in private, the explorations go on. In the cultural public, we try to represent outside the arena of plastic surgery and Chanel-like jackets we 60-something women have been assigned to inhabit. We invent ways to glint. One of many ways is to elect, fantasize, enact a bond with Patti Smith.

[3.5] So I saw her in concert recently—November 2, 2014, in the evening performance at Chicago's Old Town School of Music. I loved the concert. I yelled. I
cried. I saw it with my lover, who loved it too. It brought up so many emotions. During the concert, I intently studied Patti to see how she was dealing with her aging. She jokes about forgetting some lyrics but is unashamed, she spits on stage like she always did, she wears her hair shoulder length and messy like she always did—now it's gray, she laughs at her own jokes, she swears, she glints, she tells stories, she commemorates the dead, among them one of her lifelong loves, Robert Mapplethorpe (she's straight but not that straight), she wears the loose jacket (now created by a designer friend), she sings, she sings, she sings. I don't know who she's fucking. I know her libido is alive.

4. Works cited


Symposium

Dead links, vaporcuts, and creativity in fan edit replication

Joshua Wille

University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, United States

[0.1] Abstract—In my examination of a Star Wars prequel trilogy fan edit reportedly made by Topher Grace, I introduce the term vaporcut to describe fan edits with reputations that may generate critical discourse but that are not publicly released. I explore the ways some fan editors attempt to recreate intangible projects but inevitably produce variant works that reflect their own creative perspectives.

[0.2] Keywords—Copyright; Marvel; Megaupload; Pirate Bay; Remix; Star Wars


1. Introduction: Access denied

[1.1] Fan edits are essentially alternative versions of feature films and television shows created by fans using desktop video editing software. Fan edits take many forms, often to refine or expand a narrative, to shift genres through aesthetic and structural changes, or even to create recombinant story lines using multiple films and television episodes, among other approaches. Fan editing practice has evolved much since the controversial reception of Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Edit (2000), which was a seminal fan edit based on George Lucas's Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace (1999). As I argued in a 2014 essay, "Fan Edits and the Legacy of The Phantom Edit," fan edits have frequently been misinterpreted as poorly executed reactionary works made by disgruntled fans. On the contrary, many fan edits are the products of talented people who creatively reinterpret existing media in the spirit of narrative and aesthetic experimentation.

[1.2] In that essay, I also explained how ethical and legal questions have stigmatized fan edits since the public breakthrough of The Phantom Edit (Wille 2014, ¶4.6). Fan editors maintain that their works are noncommercial, while communities like Fanedit.org (http://www.fanedit.org) and OriginalTrilogy.com (http://www.originaltrilogy.com) collectively stand against media piracy by forbidding the sale of their transformative works. These communities also mandate that prospective fan edit viewers should purchase legitimate copies of all films and television titles before downloading fan edits based on them. This legally untested strategy assumes that the creation and consumption of fan edits would be protected under the fair use provisions and first-sale doctrine codified in the US Copyright Act of 1976 (Wille 2014, ¶4.7).

[1.3] However, not all fan edits are easily accessible, and fan editors often struggle to find trustworthy means to distribute and store their works online. Despite ongoing efforts by the Organization for Transformative Works to maintain exemptions for transformative video projects under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, popular third party media storage and delivery services like YouTube (https://www.youtube.com), Vimeo (https://vimeo.com), and Dailymotion (https://www.dailymotion.com) frequently purge transformative videos on grounds of copyright infringement (Fraimow 2014, ¶2.6). Thus, to avoid such takedowns, fan editors typically rely on less regulated distribution channels such as file locker Web sites, newsgroups, and torrents, but these methods require the use of specialized software that may deter some casual viewers: "Flat-out pirates are more open with distributing their stuff than these fan-editors. Like 'Here's a page all about this thing that you have to solve the fucking da Vinci code to download’" (Bkwordguy 2014).

[1.4] Contemporary procedures for finding, downloading, and preparing fan edits for viewing are understandably daunting for uninhibited computer users. Fan edits are generally feature-length creations that account for several gigabytes of data on disk. Large file sizes often mean that the most viable online distribution channels for fan edits are the same as those commonly used to share pirated digital copies of feature films, television episodes, and software. Prospective viewers must wager their interest in procuring fan edits against any risks of using these legally contested online services.
Furthermore, the mercurial nature of file lockers and BitTorrent indexers can make access to fan edits unreliable, and as platforms for storage and distribution they can be difficult to maintain. When Megaupload was shuttered in January 2012 following a raid by the United States Department of Justice on charges of facilitating copyright infringement, many fan edits that were coincidentally housed on Megaupload's servers were irrevocably lost. Similarly, the December 2014 raid by Swedish law enforcement on the popular BitTorrent indexer The Pirate Bay consequently disabled access to many fan edits.

Problems in accessibility have also been exacerbated by the association of prominent persons in the entertainment industry with fan editing. For example, it is likely that demand for illicit DVD copies of The Phantom Edit increased when filmmaker Kevin Smith was initially suspected to be its maker (Wille 2014, ¶3.3). More recently, celebrity fan editors like Steven Soderbergh and Topher Grace have attracted a remarkable amount of public interest in fan editing, but they have notably taken steps to limit access to their work, most likely due to legal concerns (Sciretta 2012; Bernard 2014). I introduce the term vaporcut in this essay to account for intangible fan edits such as Grace's much-publicized yet unreleased editing projects.

In response to the demand for inaccessible fan edits, some industrious fans resort to replication as a means of appreciating scarce works. However, the process of reconstructing fan edits, which typically involves retracing the steps of a previous editor, inevitably leads to creative variations. The following sections of this essay provide examples of how replicative approaches to fan editing have been the impetus for new transformative works.

2. Rebuilding and remixing Psycho: The Roger Ebert Cut

In a review of Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho (1960) that coincided with the release of Gus Van Sant's nearly shot-for-shot remake version, Roger Ebert (1998) criticizes Hitchcock's use of a psychiatrist character (Simon Oakland), whose monologue near the conclusion of the film diligently explains Norman Bates's (Anthony Perkins) psychosis. In defense of the scene, Wood (2002) argues that the psychiatrist's evaluation "crystallizes for us our tendency to evade the implications of the film, by converting Norman into a mere 'case,' hence something we can easily put from us. The psychiatrist, glib and complacent, reassures us. But Hitchcock crystallizes this for us merely to force us to reject it" (149). The original scene from Psycho is provided in video 1.

Video 1. Original ending of Psycho (1960), including the complete psychiatrist monologue.

Ebert (1998) rejected the scene and described it as "an anticlimax taken almost to the point of parody" that "marred the ending of a masterpiece." He concluded his review by suggesting an alternative:

If I were bold enough to reedit Hitchcock's film, I would include only the doctor's first explanation of Norman's dual personality: "Norman Bates no longer exists. He only half existed to begin with. And now, the other half has taken over, probably for all time." Then I would cut out everything else the psychiatrist says, and cut to the shots of Norman wrapped in the blanket while his mother's voice speaks ("It's sad..."
when a mother has to speak the words that condemn her own son”). Those edits, I submit, would have made "Psycho" very nearly perfect.

[2.4] In 2009, Stomachworm released *Psycho: The Roger Ebert Cut*, a fan edit that strictly adhered to Ebert’s suggestions for modifying Hitchcock’s film (figure 1). In a Twitter post on October 16, 2011, Ebert (@ebertchicago) acknowledged the work, writing, "I’m opposed to piracy but find this fanedit of 'Psycho' proves a point: Hitchcock didn't need the psychiatrist. [http://t.co/wrzVhRBM](http://t.co/wrzVhRBM)." At that time, Ebert’s tweet linked to a torrent that eventually became inactive and, like many torrents exclusively indexed by The Pirate Bay, this link to *Psycho: The Roger Ebert Cut* was also broken after the December 2014 raid. Because of the lack of access to Stomachworm's fan edit, I reconstructed Ebert's version (video 2).

**Video 2.** Ebert's speculative version of the ending to *Psycho* (1960) with a truncated monologue from the psychiatrist, reconstructed by Joshua Wille to substitute for Stomachworm's earlier work.

**Figure 1.** Three-dimensional mock-up of the custom DVD box art designed by CBB for Stomachworm's *Psycho: The Roger Ebert Cut*. [View larger image.]

[2.5] In the process of replicating Stomachworm's work, I was inspired to make another version of the conclusion to *Psycho* in which the psychiatrist is completely removed from the film. In this third version, Norman Bates is captured and moved to a holding cell at the local police station. Without a psychiatrist to lend any explanation of Norman's actions to the surviving characters or to provide treatment for Norman, he is hopelessly lost in his own mind with his mother's haunting voice (video 3).
Video 3. Alternative version of the conclusion to Psycho (1960) by Joshua Wille.

3. Steven Soderbergh and Heaven's Gate: The Butcher's Cut

[3.1] Since February 2014, Steven Soderbergh has released his own fan edits on his Web site, Extension 765 (http://extension765.com). The first was Psychos, a mashup of Psycho (1960) and Psycho (1998). Two months later, working under his film editor pseudonym, Mary Ann Bernard (2014), Soderbergh posted a reedited version of Michael Cimino's Heaven's Gate (1980), which Soderbergh claimed that he created in 2006. He restricted this and his other streaming videos from being embedded elsewhere on the World Wide Web or downloaded, which may have been a precaution against potential claims of copyright infringement.

[3.2] Soderbergh's fan editing endeavors have been criticized by some as hypocritical because he was a prominent participant in a 2006 lawsuit that consequently shut down CleanFlicks, a company that resold unsanctioned versions of Hollywood films in which depictions of sex, violence, and profanity were edited out (Masnick 2015). Contemplating whether Soderbergh's fan edits would fall under the same fair use provisions that CleanFlicks unsuccessfully claimed in its legal defense, Post (2015) asks if Soderbergh "thinks that he has some kind of 'artistic license' to do what he denies to others, that his creativity is somehow more valuable than the creativity of others?" Perhaps in deference to those who might challenge his unauthorized version of Cimino's film, Soderbergh preceded this fan edit with a cheeky disclaimer (figure 2).

Figure 2. Screen grab of the disclaimer in Heaven's Gate: The Butcher's Cut by Mary Ann Bernard (Steven Soderbergh), which reads: "I acknowledge that what I have done with this film is both immoral and illegal." [View larger image.]

[3.3] Ironically, by attempting to limit the consumption of his fan edit, Soderbergh inspired further transformative work. Fan editor Take Me To Your Cinema (2014), also known as TM2YC, wanted to appreciate Heaven's Gate: The Butcher's Cut but felt hindered by some of its technical deficiencies; it was based on an unrestored DVD edition of Heaven's Gate and highly compressed for online video streaming, which contributed to general degradation of its image quality. Thus, in August 2014, TM2YC released a frame-by-frame, downloadable reconstruction of Soderbergh's fan edit using the restored 2012 Blu-ray edition from the Criterion Collection (note 1). However, his process of reconstruction led to some variation from Soderbergh's version (figure 3):
While every care has been taken to reproduce the 180 or so visual cuts exactly, some shots differ by a frame or two. This is due to tiny differences in the source movie from the DVD to the Blu-Ray. I have also tried to reproduce the "spirit" of Soderbergh's soundmix. However, I've made my own adjustments to the mix, to further smooth transitions and improve small areas, when I thought it necessary. (Take Me To Your Cinema 2014)

Figure 3. Split screen that compares a frame from Heaven's Gate: The Butcher's Cut by Mary Ann Bernard (aka Steven Soderbergh), which was based on an unrestored DVD edition of Michael Cimino's film, and the reconstruction by Take Me To Your Cinema, which was sourced from the restored Blu-ray edition. Image: Take Me To Your Cinema.

As of this writing, Soderbergh has released two more fan edits since Psychos and Heaven's Gate: The Butcher's Cut, and he has received a listing in the Internet Fanedit Database (http://www.fanedit.org/ifdb/jreviews/tag/faneditorme/steven-soderbergh) that includes custom DVD art for his projects provided by TM2YC. Raiders (2015), for which its accompanying blog post bears the disclaimer "Note: This posting is for educational purposes only," presents a meditation on film direction and editing rhythms by rendering Steven Spielberg's Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) in black and white as well as resoring the film with music by Trent Reznor (http://extension765.com/sdr/18-raiders). Reflecting on this transformative approach, Soderbergh playfully retorts, "Wait, WHAT? HOW COULD YOU DO THIS? Well, I'm not saying I'm like, ALLOWED to do this." This humor continues into a subsequent blog post in which he introduces The Return of W. De Rijk (2015), in fact a fan edit of 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). Soderbergh later removed that fan edit from his blog (http://extension765.com/sdr/23-the-return-of-w-de-rijk) "at the request of Warner Bros. and the Stanley Kubrick estate."

4. Coup de Grace: variations on a vaporcut

It has been widely reported (Sciretta 2012; Cheney 2012; Goldman 2012; Ryan 2012; Doctorow 2012) that actor and Star Wars fan Topher Grace reedited the Star Wars prequel trilogy to form one 85-minute fan edit entitled Star Wars Episode III.5: The Editor Strikes Back. Grace's project, which he has never publicly released, inspired the production of several variant works that generated further discourse (Ratcliffe 2014; Lambert 2014; Jagernauth 2014), including this sardonic exchange in the Fanedit.org (2014) forums:

DominicCobb: How/why did this gain so much publicity?

T-Bone: I blame Topher Grace...he invented fan editing, didn't he?? But yeah, from reading up, apparently whoever did this one was heavily influenced by Grace's much hyped hardly seen PT [Star Wars prequel trilogy] edit.

Two years earlier, Sciretta (2012) praised Grace's work as "probably the best possible edit of the Star Wars prequels" and recounted how he had joined actors, filmmakers, and other glitterati at an exclusive screening in Los Angeles:

The screening last night was a private gathering of Topher's industry friends—an event that feels like it will surely become part of Hollywood quasi-urban legend. I wish you all could see Topher's version of the Star Wars prequels, but we were told that this would be the one and only time he would screen his cut. Of course, there are tremendous legal issues which would prevent him from screening the edit in public. He
In lieu of a public release of *The Editor Strikes Back*, Sciretta (2012) provides a description of its alternate narrative structure, adding that "Grace hopes that other actors, editors and filmmakers will run with the ball, produce and showcase remixed films on a annual basis within this private community." Although no such group has apparently formed, Grace’s editing projects remain inaccessible to those outside of his social circle (note 2). As evidence of his work, Grace posted a trailer on his blog (http://cerealprize.com/trailers/redux-of-the-jedi), but like Steven Soderbergh’s version of *Heaven’s Gate*, access to the video was restricted to his own Web site.

Perhaps the term *vaporcut* could describe a much-publicized fan edit like *The Editor Strikes Back* that is made unavailable to fans. In a Twitter post on October 3, 2014, fan editor HAL 9000 (@KirkAFur) referred to *The Editor Strikes Back* as *vaporware*, a term commonly used in the computer industry to describe software and hardware products that are publicly announced but not actually manufactured or released. In discussions about the "George Lucas Generation" and a wider acceptance of film revisionism, digital cinema has been compared to software because of its mutability (Solman 2002, 22); thus, it follows that more computer terminology could be adapted to describe aspects of transformative media. As the concept of reediting films and television shows becomes more commonplace, the term *vaporcut* may prove useful in subsequent discourse for differentiating authentic fan edits from unsubstantiated works (note 3). This is not meant to suggest that *The Editor Strikes Back* is a hoax, but it has not been released outside of Grace’s coterie of friends and industry professionals. Because its existence cannot be independently verified, it is disconcerting that an unsubstantiated work has been widely accepted at face value. In order to conscientiously study fan edits, we must not give credence to sensationalism about unproven texts (note 4). *The Editor Strikes Back* is a vaporcut because it exists merely in rumors recycled by entertainment blogs and through the conjecture of fans who read them. In spite of this fact, "Topher Grace is typically credited with starting the trend of re-cutting the Star Wars prequels into one movie" (editorbinks 2015).

Quite the contrary. There are various fan edits predating Grace’s vaporcut that combine the films in the Star Wars prequel trilogy, but they contain more extended versions of the narrative. For example, *Blankfist’s Star Wars—Fall of the Republic* (2007) runs 180 minutes; Lewis866’s *Star Wars: Rise of the Empire* (2007), 240 minutes; The Man Behind the Mask’s *Star Wars 30’s Serial Edition Part 1* (2008), 132 minutes; Insignia34’s *Star Wars: A New Beginning* (2010), 95 minutes; and JasonN’s *Shadows of the Old Republic* (2010), 147 minutes. Moreover, all subsequently released prequel trilogy edits are longer than the reputed 85-minute runtime of *The Editor Strikes Back*.

The promulgation of *The Editor Strikes Back* since 2012 has compelled some fans to create surrogate works based on what Grace reportedly accomplished (note 5). Often, these replicative fan edits were initiated because fans wanted to see for themselves what is essentially nonexistent: Topher Grace’s vaporcut. Unlike TM2YC’s reconstruction of *Heaven’s Gate: The Butcher’s Cut*, for which there was a reference text on which to base his work, the intangibility of *The Editor Strikes Back* required fan editors to make significant creative decisions. Thus, fan editors’ efforts to realize Grace’s vaporcut produced a series of variants that reflect more of their personal visions of a Star Wars prequel trilogy edit than the unattainable object they attempted to replicate.

In May 2014, Double Digit described their 167-minute *Star Wars: Turn to the Dark Side—Episode 3.1* as "a reimagining of the Star Wars prequel trilogy edited into a single movie, based on the structure conceived by actor Topher Grace." In the same month, Jared Kaplan’s similarly designed 129-minute *Star Wars: A Last Hope* also appeared. In October 2014, Double Digit produced a second version of *Star Wars: Turn to the Dark Side* that runs approximately 160 minutes, while TJTheEmperor released a 208-minute prequel trilogy edit entitled *Star Wars: The Fall of the Galactic Republic*. The following month, Andrew Kwan (2014) released a 124-minute edit, *Star Wars I–III: A Phantom Edit*, which he explains was based on "the format description of Topher Grace's edit." Like those fan editors who preceded him, Kwan most likely attempted to conform to Sciretta's synopsis of *The Editor Strikes Back*, but through some creative divergence he produced a unique permutation (note 6).

There have also been creative responses to the trend of replicating Grace’s vaporcut. In December 2014, Zantanimus produced *Star Wars: The Last Turn to the Dark Side*, a hybrid cut that combines portions of Double Digit’s *Turn to the Dark Side* and Kaplan’s *A Last Hope*. The genesis of this project can be attributed to a May 10, 2014, Twitter post by disingenious (@disingenious), who suggested that fans should watch *A Last Hope* until 1:15:02 of its run time, then continue with *Turn to the Dark Side* from 1:19:59 to its conclusion. Zantanimus (2014) shared his initial assembly of *The Last Turn to the Dark Side* with fans on Reddit and announced plans to recreate it using Blu-
ray source material; the subreddit /r/starwarsprecut (https://www.reddit.com/r/starwarsprecut) tracks the
development of this shot-for-shot reconstruction. However, in introducing their own 140-minute project Star Wars: A
Vergence in the Force, editorbinks (2015) criticized works like Turn to the Dark Side and A Last Hope: "A few fan
edits were made in the spirit of Topher Grace's cut, but none of them fully satisfied me. They went on too long or the
quality of the editing wasn't strong enough. They also cut too much out of Episode 1. I decided to do one myself" (note 7).

[4.11] Ironically, Topher Grace's The Editor Strikes Back has made fan editing practice more accessible despite the
work itself being inaccessible. The sheer prominence of The Editor Strikes Back, a fan edit made famous because of
its famous creator, overshadows the tangible fan edits it inspired. This dysfunctional effect is somewhat akin to the
breakthrough of The Phantom Edit, a complicated case that propelled fan editing into the mainstream. However, as
cultural touchstones, both The Phantom Edit and The Editor Strikes Back continue to distract from an expanding body
of innovative work made by other fan editors (Wille 2014, ¶1.6–7).

5. Conclusion: Access redefined

[5.1] Like other transformative practices, fan editing continues its development amid ongoing challenges to
accessibility that are complicated by legal and ethical disputes in online media. Because of their technical
characteristics, fan edits are typically distributed through the same channels as are pirated works. However, when
BitTorrent indexers and file lockers are seized by law enforcement agencies on grounds of piracy or are otherwise
deactivated, fan edits like Psycho: The Roger Ebert Cut can be counted among the collateral damage. In other cases,
access to high-profile projects such as Heaven's Gate: The Butcher's Cut and The Editor Strikes Back may be
intentionally restricted by their creators. Fan editors have attempted to manually recreate these elusive works, but
they naturally produce variants that reflect their own creative choices, similar to the way in which an inspired cook
may deviate from a recipe.

[5.2] As an example, in December 2014, Mike Furth published instructions for making Marvel Movie Omnibus—
Phase 1 and Marvel Movie Omnibus—Phase 2, which are chronological fan edits based on the films and television
series in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (note 8). In addition to listing precise time codes from each source, Furth
provides companion videos that guide fans through the editing process and invite them to modify the work to fit their
own tastes (video 4).

How To Make A Marvel Movie Omnibus - Phase 1

Video 4. In this video, Mike Furth discusses the various cuts and combinations involved in making Marvel Movie
Omnibus—Phase 1 and superimposes relevant time codes from each video source on screen. Furth also released a
subsequent video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adTQ8KrYozM) to accompany Marvel Movie Omnibus—Phase
2.

[5.3] The aforementioned home-brewed replications of fan edits, which stimulate creative variation, are procedurally
different from the way in which most professional video projects are cloned between multiple parties by sharing
software-based project files and edit decision lists (EDLs). These crucial files record every cut, trim, and
reconfiguration of media in a video editing project, and subsequent editors can use them to reproduce the same
project by automatically conforming (autoconform) identical source material. In answer to the access problems and
6. Notes

1. In continuation of the work he began by replicating *Heaven’s Gate: The Butcher’s Cut* by Soderbergh, TM2YC released *Heaven’s Gate: The 2nd Director’s Cut* in January 2015, which is a high-definition reconstruction of a rare version of *Heaven’s Gate* that was not included in the Criterion package. Hybridizing Blu-ray material and some footage available exclusively in a French DVD release, *La Porte du paradis*, TM2YC (2015) recreated “the result of 6 months of Director Michael Cimino’s further work in the cutting room, trying to perfect the film...For whatever reason he did not chose [sic] to restore this cut of the film for Blu-Ray and opted to present his first much longer cut that he himself had withdrawn.”

2. Sciretta (2014) reports that he attended the private screening of Grace’s subsequent editing project, *Close Encounters: The Remix*, which is also unreleased. Grace posted a trailer for this vaporcut on his Web site ([http://cerealprize.com/trailers/close-encounters-screening](http://cerealprize.com/trailers/close-encounters-screening)), accompanied with a brief note: "Wish you all could’ve been there last night, so much fun."

3. A vaporcut like *The Editor Strikes Back* is fundamentally different from a genuine fan edit that later becomes inaccessible, such as *Psycho: The Roger Ebert Cut*. Also, a vaporcut is not necessarily a permanent condition; had he not eventually substantiated them in 2014, some of Soderbergh’s fan edits could have been characterized as vaporcuts. In an interview with Pierce (2009), Soderbergh claimed, "I edit stuff on my own, things that don’t belong to me, just for fun, because it gives me that much pleasure. I have an hour-and-50-minute version of Heaven’s Gate. I’ve got a mash-up of Hitchcock’s Psycho and Van Sant’s Psycho, which I call Psychos."

4. I have contacted Topher Grace to request an opportunity to view *The Editor Strikes Back*, but as of this writing I have not received a response.

5. Apart from this replicative trend, HanShotFirst’s 158-minute *Star Wars: Downfall of the Old Republic* (2014), TJTheEmperor’s 208-minute *Star Wars: The Fall of the Galactic Republic* (2014), octorox’s 169-minute *Star Wars: Rise of Lord Vader* (2015), and OnlyYodaForgiven’s 100-minute *Star Wars: Fall of the Jedi (Neon Noir Fan Edit)* (2015) are examples of contemporary fan edits that combine the prequel films in distinctive measures but are not expressly influenced by *The Editor Strikes Back*. Notably, the narrative structure of Jorge Luke’s 100-minute *Star Wars Episode I–III: The Fandom Edit* resembles *A Last Hope* and *Turn to the Dark Side*, but its accompanying description makes no reference to Grace’s elusive project.

6. It is important to note that the fans who have attempted to replicate *The Editor Strikes Back* are generally unassociated with the major fan editing communities at Fanedit.org and OriginalTrilogy.com. Therefore, the reports of Grace’s project may be their earliest introduction to fan editing, as copies of *The Phantom Edit* were for many other fan editors (Wille 2014, ¶1.7).


8. Furth’s 2014 *Marvel Movie Omnibus* is not the first recombinant Marvel franchise project. In 2008, Remixed by Jorge released *Marvel 24* and Uncanny Antman followed with *Marvel 24—Episode 2*, both of which reassemble portions of the Marvel Cinematic Universe films in the style of the television series 24 (2001–10). In 2012, juice420 released *Marvel Origins: Avengers* in three feature-length parts and Sunarep produced *The Avengers Initiative*. In 2015, more expansive, chronologically structured Marvel Cinematic Universe fan edits emerged, such as the *MCU Chronological* edit by jinhush, *Marvel Cinematic Universe: A Chronology* by Dirty30m, and Alex Daily’s *The Marvel Age*, the latter of which is a serialized recombination of the Marvel films and television programs.

7. Works cited


Zantanimus. 2014. "TIL That Topher Grace of 'That 70's Show' Edited All Three 'Star Wars' Prequels into One Condensed Film That Has Been Highly Praised as a Better Version." *Reddit*, December 1. https://www.reddit.com/r/todayilearned/comments/2nxx20/til_that_topher_grace_of_that_70s_show_edited_all/cmi5cf3
The transformative world of winter fashion in a Nunavik village

Jasmin Aurora Stoffer

Kuujjuaraapik, Quebec, Canada

Abstract—An essay/observation of the traditional winter clothing that has been created recently by some of the Inuit of Kuujjuaraapik, Nunavik. Also includes interviews.

Keywords—Clothing; Culture; Fashion; Inuit; Transformation


1. Introduction

For nearly 3 years, I have worked in Kuujjuaraapik. Great Whale River, as it is known in English, is a geographically isolated village in the Nunavik region of Northern Quebec. With a population of approximately 1,300, it has been my home for 10 months out of the year since August 2012. I am a Special Education and Nurture Group teacher at the local Inuit school. Known as the last Cree village and first Inuit village of Northern Quebec, Kuujjuaraapik has different names in four languages (Cree, Inuktitut, English, and French).

I've decided to write about the beautiful handmade clothing of the Inuit people here and have included interviews with two of my colleagues, whom I asked to comment on the changing styles of the traditional Inuit clothing.

Today, Kuujjuaraapik is both culturally and geographically at a crossroads, walking the line between preservation of old traditions and culture, and the encroachments of the modern technological era. This place is in a "past-present-future" limbo of traditional Inuit and Cree culture, mixing and melding with the "southern" Canadian culture of the 21st century.

This, I believe, is what makes this place so special. Not many people in 2015 can say they have witnessed a culture in the midst of a great changing, but I have been lucky enough to say that I am not only witnessing it but I also have the honor of
working with and for the children and youth of this generation of Kuujjuaraapik Inuit who are in the middle of this artistic and cultural transition. Here, First Nations and Inuit culture collide with the Eurocentric and popular culture of North America. This is shown brilliantly in the beautiful winter clothes as well as artwork that the Inuit have been creating for generations. The young people here are the ambassadors of a culture that has embraced the past as equally as the future.

![Indoor kamiks](image)

**Figure 1.** *Indoor kamiks (which I purchased this winter)—made of red leather, with butterflies.* [View larger image.]

[1.5] For these northern inhabitants, it hasn't been a cultural evolution into the modern era, it's been a revolution—fast-paced and dramatic. It's a transition that has been riddled with violence, racism, and trauma, at an unbelievable speed that very few other cultures in the world have experienced. Within only a few generations, the Inuit of Kuujjuaraapik have been thrown from a traditional, migratory, hunter-gatherer existence into the technological age of the 21st century. This leap is evident throughout the village, but it is most evident (and fantastically so) in the traditional clothing of the Inuit people, which is still being made by many of the women and girls here.

[1.6] Traditionally, these winter clothes would have had traditional geometric patterns on them, and the fabrics would have been what was available locally, such as animal skins. But with the present generation of creators, their modern tastes are reflected in the clothing they are producing. Mittens lined with fur now also display embroidered hockey logos or butterflies and Disney princesses. Anything and everything can be depicted on the fabric of a parka or a handmade sealskin purse.
Figure 2. Judy wearing a parka one of her friends made; leopard print is her favorite.

The traditional patterns are still evident, but they share space with Western pop culture icons and imagery. Kamiks (boots) have beautiful lace detail and also feature these modern additions. Teenagers beg their mothers to sew on their favorite hockey player's number or athletic wear logo. Almost every day, watching the parade of "traditional-modern" Inuit wear brings a smile to my face. I find it amazing that the people here are able to proudly display their history and at the same time celebrate the aspects of pop culture that they also adore.

2. Speaking to the artists/creators

I wanted to speak to some women who are responsible for the creation of these clothes. First, I asked a colleague of mine, Judy (she wishes to remain anonymous). Judy is a 20-something mother of two and has been working for a few years at the school. Recently, she completed a course on Aboriginal Special Education and has also worked at the local day care. Judy, like many of the local mothers, makes baluks (mittens), kamiks, and parkas for her children as well as for friends and herself. Judy now works as the Girl's Culture teacher, a position that instructs the girls in school on how to create many of these traditional clothes, although the students put their own fashionable spin on their creations.
[2.2] I asked Judy how important maintaining her culture is to her.

[2.3] The Inuit culture is important for us to keep. The Elders tell us to never lose our abilities, like sewing parkas, making kamiks, baluks, snow pants, and Amautiks (special parkas with large hoods that mothers can hold their babies in). It's a lot different now because there's all kinds of materials like leather, fur, and other fabrics more easily available to us these days.

**Figure 3.** The Girl's Culture class, where students learn how to create traditional clothing and jewelry. [View larger image.]

[2.4] I also asked Judy how she would describe her own sense of style.

[2.5] My style is pretty much the same of what other people my age like (mostly what's popular). I like the trendy stuff same as the people down south [anything below the 55th parallel is down south]—as long as it can keep me warm in winter! I really like leopard print fabric, and I can put all different sorts of designs on the clothes and boots I make. For example, [if we want] patches with sports logos, butterflies, etc. to put on kamiks, baluks, etc.; I can order them online. I can also use an embroidery machine to select what kind of designs I want on the clothing I create. The embroidery machine makes it much easier to make whatever designs I, my kids, or my friends like.

[2.6] Last, I asked her what she thought of the new styles being found on homemade Inuit clothing.

[2.7] I think it's awesome, we can still use the old patterns that have been used before for generations, and we can still use it now—but we put our own stylish spin on it. There are just so many more materials available to us in the North, it makes it easy to be creative and to make it our own.
Dinah Napartuk is another colleague of mine at the school, where she teaches the Secondary Inuktitut class. She is from an older generation of Inuit women than Judy. Dinah remembers what Kuujjuaraapik was like before a lot of the modern southern amenities, as well as Internet and satellite television, were so readily available, so I thought she would bring another perspective to Inuit culture and the change that it's going through.

I asked her the same questions I asked Judy. Dinah said, "Most families used to go out camping, now they don't...most are waiting for money to come in....fewer [Inuit people] go out hunting." She also described how the village used to have many social gatherings, like a weekly square dancing night. "Our dog teams have disappeared, and we no longer see Elder women outside during the summer doing their 'women works' like sewing Qajaks and making tents."

I also asked Dinah what she thought of the new styles of traditional clothing that young women like Judy are creating.

Although [I like the new styles of clothing]...it's still not our way of making traditional clothing. The amautiks don't have akuliaks (on the back)
they are making them instead look more like coats. We have lost the real way to make seal skin kamiks and small children don't wear parkas as well as they used to.

[2.12] She also mentions that she notices that Nunavik is copying a lot of the Nunavut styles of clothing. Although both territories are Inuit, the dialects and cultures have many differences.

![Figure 5. Earrings I purchased up north—just a small sample of my collection.](View larger image.)

3. Conclusion: Cultural crossroads

[3.1] The Inuit people are at a crossroads, and today it shows on their traditional clothing, evidencing a desire to preserve their culture that is equally matched by their desire to enter into the 21st century with as much enthusiasm as any other people in North America. Women who create clothing, like my colleague Judy, are choosing to represent the old and new in their artistic and wearable works. The people whom I have had the pleasure of knowing and of calling both colleagues and friends are facing that crossroads with a creativity and imagination that makes me smile every day I work here. Even though there are many socioeconomic obstacles that northern communities such as Kuujjuaraapik face, women from different generations are continuing to create and celebrate their culture through the creation of traditional clothing. Young women, like my friend and colleague Judy, are representing their culture, their personalities, and their hope on their clothing and art. The north is rich in culture, and Inuit culture is one of the richest and most beautiful cultures north of the 55th parallel. That, I'm certain, will remain so well into the 21st century.
**Book review**

*Understanding fandom: An introduction to the study of media fan culture*, by Mark Duffett

Suzanne Scott

*University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, United States*


[0.2] *Keywords—*Celebrity; Fan pathology; Fan representation; Methodology; Music fan culture


[1] To write a comprehensive introductory text on media fandom and fan studies is a daunting task, particularly in a cultural moment marked by rapid changes in fan culture, industry-fan relations, and fan studies as a field. Henry Jenkins's seminal 1992 *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* and Matt Hills's *Fan Cultures*, published a decade after Jenkins's text, both still perform admirably as introductions to the study of media fans. However, the fact that both were published before the proliferation of digital fan culture inevitably limits their applications to studies of contemporary fan culture. Mark Duffett's *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* endeavors to be a spiritual successor to these two books while simultaneously training its focus on two historically undertheorized components of media fandom: music fandom and celebrity.

[2] There is fascinating book within *Understanding Fandom*, in which Duffett's scholarly investment in music fandom (most recently as the editor of the 2013 anthology *Popular Music Fandom: Identities, Roles, and Practices*) is mobilized to critically reexamine and reimagine the theoretical preoccupations of fan studies through an analysis of music stars and fans. Certainly, media fan studies' historic,
borderline medium-specific emphasis on television fans and fandom is something that deserves to be interrogated and expanded, and *Understanding Fandom* succeeds in offering a more expansive view of the field. Unfortunately, this expansive view often problematically chafes with the book's stated project. The titular framing of the book as an "Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture," coupled with Duffett's reticence to engage some of the core critical preoccupations of the field and fan culture's digital incarnations, ultimately make it difficult not to focus on the book's failings as well as—or perhaps rather than—its strengths.

[3] *Understanding Fandom* opens with a foreword by Matt Hills that frames Duffett's intervention and the significance of his refusal to "view or define fandom as one thing," conceptualizing it as "partly private and partly social" (viii). The book is subsequently divided into 11 chapters, each framed by a series of questions the chapter intends to address. These "Starting Points," though not overtly positioned as discussion questions, are broadly framed and would be most efficiently used to engage Duffett's own analysis in a classroom setting. The book concludes with an extensive glossary in which fannish jargon ("squick") peppers a much broader array of references to scholarly methodologies ("auto-ethnography"), theories ("uses and gratifications"), and concepts ("affect") that have informed studies of fan culture. These keywords, presented in boldface type in the text to denote their significance and parsed in simple terms, clearly mark the book's primary audience as undergraduates who are perhaps unfamiliar with fan studies specifically, and media and cultural studies broadly.

[4] As a survey of how fans have historically been understood, across disciplines and media forms, the first four chapters of *Understanding Fandom* are impressive in scope. In the introduction, Duffett details both the complexities of fandom as a phenomenon and the study of fans as a discipline, demarcating between "fandom research," a "multi-disciplinary body of scholarship that takes fandom as its primary focus," and "fan studies," a "much narrower" field emerging from cultural studies traditions that endeavors to portray fans in a positive light through an emphasis on fan communities and practices (2). Duffett's pointedly flexible definition of "media fandom" as "the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture" (2) and his stated desire to move beyond the televisual, textual, and transformative preoccupations of fan studies suggest the book's conceptual placement in the former category of fandom research. Though the introduction draws somewhat arbitrary lines about which fan cultures will be emphasized (popular music) or excluded (sports), presumably based on Duffett's own fannish investments, it offers a concise overview of the history of fandom across media and time. Duffett then moves on to grapple with whether or not fandom can be considered a coherent object, if the fan can or should be conceptually "pinned down" (as an identity, a set of practices, a community, or a mode of performance). Duffett
concludes that "there might be much to gain from exploring fan theory as a kind of template...a yardstick against which to measure interest in particular objects or in particular contexts" (19). Thus, while he cautions against generalizing, particularly in terms of identifying fans as mere consumers, Duffett also adheres to a far more generalized vision of a fan than fan studies has historically adopted.

[5] Chapters 2 and 4 both address fan representations, and the stereotypical or pathologized nature of these representations and theorizations of the fan as a cultural subject. Though Duffett should be commended for devoting all of chapter 4 to the "Pathological Tradition" that accompanies the fan's representation within popular culture, he does so at the expense of developing meaningful interconnections with chapter 2's focus on stereotypical representations of fans. Because chapter 4's discursive analysis of this pathologic tradition is in many ways foundational to chapter 2's discussion of "Fan Stereotypes and Representations," which helped promulgate the fandom-as-pathology trope, the structure of the book as a whole suffers from both the ordering and gap between these two related chapters. The pathologic tradition is also essential to an understanding of why so many first-wave fan scholars framed fans as textual poachers and resistant readers, a tendency discussed in chapter 3 as part of a broader effort by Duffett to move studies of fandom "Beyond the Text." Chapter 4's discussion of this pathologic tradition could have been more productively situated to frame chapter 2's discussion of fans as other, their delineation from ordinary audiences, and how internal hierarchies within fan culture are established and maintained. Likewise, rooting chapter 3's historical survey of audience research as either enabling or speaking back to this pathologic tradition would have helped support Duffett's critique of academics' emphasis on textuality and its ongoing connection to concepts of passive or active audiencehood. Thus, though chapter 4 offers some thoughtful insights into the slippery-slope metaphor of fannish obsession (particularly as applied to celebrity culture) and closes with a wonderful close reading of Mark David Chapman's tenuous status as a fan, its placement often makes it feel redundant to previous chapters.

[6] If the first four chapters of Understanding Fandom offer a thorough history of audience studies and overview of the core conceptual preoccupations of fan studies, then chapter 5 ("How Do People Become Fans?"), chapter 8 ("Myths, Cults, and Places"), and chapter 10 ("Researching Fandom") are more successful in their call for a renewed interrogation of key questions for the future expansion of the field. Chapter 5 critically works through the lingering analogies to describe fandom (contagion and religion) in an effort to answer the question that too few fan scholars pose, namely, "How Do People Become Fans?" In doing so, Duffett places emergent and evolving theories within fan studies (particularly surrounding affect) in conversation with canonical texts that have long informed scholarly work on fans, such as Bourdieu's
work on taste as a social system and Gramsci on hegemony. Chapter 8 also takes up discursive significance of fan pilgrimages and the cult connotations of fans and fan objects. The chapter's most interesting contribution to studying fans is Duffet's repurposing of the concept of "imagined memory" to discuss "the product of a fan's desire to have experienced one of the early performances of their favourite star" (229). Here, as elsewhere, Duffet's language binds this theory explicitly to musical performances, but the concept of these necessarily contradictory instances of emotional investment could be productively applied to fannish memory or nostalgia broadly, as well as to a range of specific fannish encounters, events, texts, and paratexts.

[7] In particular, graduate students or fan scholars will find several concepts from chapters 5 and 8 generative for future work, and chapter 10 poses important questions for debate, particularly about methodologies for the study of fans and fan cultures. Duffett suggests that neither the situated knowledge of insider accounts, nor the presumed objectivity of outsider accounts is optimal, suggesting that the various liminal scholarly identities taken up by acafans or scholar-fans and their often autoethnographic approaches may present too limited a perspective. Moreover, he calls for a renewed investment in (or at least a need to interrogate the lack of) data gathered from actual fans within these studies. Along these lines, Duffett positions digital ethnographies and the reliance on unsolicited data (such as online fan forums) as especially problematic. The book's conclusion, addressing "The Frontiers of Fan Research," expands on some of these issues, in particular the need to consider marginalized audience segments within fan studies (lapsed fans, fans of regressive objects), the life cycle of the fan, their connections to family and society, and a call for more historical research.

[8] Given their historical place of prominence within fan studies and their centrality to our evolving fan culture and academic accounts of it, the chapters addressing "Fan Practices" (chapter 6), "Fandom, Gender, and Sexual Orientation" (chapter 7), and "The Fan Community: Online and Offline" (chapter 9) are simultaneously some of the shortest chapters in the book—and those that most directly call into question the book's titular promise to function as an introduction to the study of media fan culture. Chapter 6 taxonomically sorts fan practices within three broad categories of pleasure that Duffett associates with fandom. Specifically, Duffett demarcates between pleasures of connection (autograph hunting, star encounters), appropriation (spoiling, fan fic, slash), and performance (participating, collecting, zines/blogging, fan vids, filking, cosplay). Duffett's effort to comprehensively address such a wide array of fan practices in such limited space means that the discussion of each of them is inevitably cursory. This limited discussion of fan production and appropriation would be less problematic if fans' transformative works, and their place within fan studies, didn't
present a structuring absence throughout many earlier chapters. This erasure is compounded by Duffett's introductions to the various sections on slash, which begin with disclaimers about its "controversial reputation" (173), noting that "not everyone is comfortable with it" (174) and that fan scholars have historically "overplayed the importance of" (178) these fan texts that are "consumed by only a fraction of the fan audience" (176). Although some fan scholars have issued similar critiques of first-wave fan studies, these statements belie the significance of this subgenre of textual production to both fandom and fan studies as they have been historically conceived and studied.

Chapter 6's reticence to fully account for the roles that texts produced predominantly by and for marginalized audiences have played within fandom and fan studies carries over into the following chapter. Chapter 7's discussion of "Fandom, Gender, and Sexual Orientation" focuses on concerns around textual essentialism and fan scholars essentializing audiences. Duffet's point that personal fandom might function similarly for people of different genders, and that the "focus on gender as difference is in danger of hiding this similarity" (193), is a good one. Again, though, this emphasis elides a more nuanced discussion of how these differences have often been structured both in fan culture and fan studies. Duffett's choice of test cases for this chapter, such as exploitation films, horror movies, and other highly "masculine" genres, along with his emphasis on more "feminine" fannish expressions like "squee" and "shipping," falls short of his own call to address how these "socially coded" "male" and "female" fan spaces are "historically contingent" (197). Problematically, Duffett's discussion of sexuality in the chapter almost universally focuses on gay men, taking a more classical cinema studies approach to address instances of queering representation and stardom.

Considering the previous chapters' emphasis on analog or lived/experiential instances of fandom, chapter 10's focus on "Fan Communities: Online and Offline" could have reasonably chosen to focus on the former exclusively. Though Duffett discusses the significance of sites like YouTube to the development of digital fan culture, the emphasis is placed on its capacity as an archive rather than a distribution platform for fan works. Duffett suggests that ultimately the emergent "intimacy" with celebrities that social media purports to produce differs little from the small collective of fans who were able to encounter their celebrity object in a predigital age (239). What has changed is the visibility and temporalities of fandom itself, and its propensity toward self-commodification or self-branding within convergence culture. Though Duffett's subsequent discussion of fan communities within the context of sociological studies of alienation in modern society raises important points about what's overlooked when we focus on fan communities (for example, closet fans, its distinction from a fan base, discord and hierarchies within those communities), further discussion
of the place of the fan and fan studies in a post–convergence culture era, and an overview of the key platforms fans coalesce around, would have been necessary for the book to become a meaningful successor to *Textual Poachers* and *Fan Cultures* as an introductory reader for fan studies courses.

[11] *Understanding Fandom*’s most significant contributions and claims, predominantly about the need to expand our conception of the fan and fan studies as a field, serve to explain but do not wholly excuse Duffett’s reticence to engage transformative fan texts in detail and the roles that gender has played in fan studies. Nor does this emphasis fully explain Duffett's failure to engage the impact of digital technologies and platforms on fan culture, or how the accordant shifts (in industry-fan relations, modes of celebrity performance, and fans' textual production and social engagement) are affecting study of fan culture. If anything, Duffett’s focus on music fandom and celebrity as historically undertheorized corners within media fan studies is tailor made for a sustained engagement of these issues. Likewise, Duffett’s radical suggestion at the end of chapter 10 that there is increasingly a "crucial role for researchers who do not proclaim their own fandom" (275), and that one's own fandom or fannish identity should be incidental to the study of fans, provided they treat the object respectfully, is undercut by his own highly selective, and decidedly fannish, understanding of fan culture as an object of study.

[12] By Duffett's own admission, *Understanding Fandom* does not (as its title would suggest) claim to be "a comprehensive survey of the field," but rather has "a more modest aim: introducing some key themes and thinkers and exploring commonalities that connect the different kinds of fandom for various media objects" (34). Though the book's bibliography features a healthy array of key writers within fan studies, the citational burden placed on work by Jenkins, Hills, and Bruce Springsteen fan scholar Daniel Cavicci throughout is jarring at times. This is especially the case in the chapters addressing fan production and studies of gender and sexuality within fan culture, which would have benefited from a more diverse array of voices, from canonical scholarship to emergent work on these topics. Jenkins's and Hills's undisputed positioning as two of the most influential and prolific scholars in the field makes their prominence understandable, but when coupled with Duffett's own acafannish agreement with nearly all of Hills's perspectives on the subject, it occasionally reads as overly indebted to, and ultimately somewhat redundant with, Hills's own work. Duffett's own intervention and critical voice comes through most forcefully in his discussions of music fandom, and I look forward to reading more from him on this topic.

[13] For fan scholars, Duffett's book will be most useful as a tool to interrogate the shifting space of the field itself, to contemplate what fan studies has historically
overlooked or oversimplified, to its detriment, and to assess which of the field's core concerns and values it is important to reassert or reconsider. We might consider a similar approach to *Understanding Fandom*’s implementation in undergraduate courses on media fans and fan studies. Though it would require much supplementation around the topics of fans' transformative works, identity politics within fan studies, and how digital media has impacted fan culture to serve as a primary introductory text, selections will function ably to productively broaden conversations around what fandom is and how it is studied. In particular, the chapters concerning fan stereotypes and representations (chapter 2) and researching fandom (chapter 10) productively survey fan studies' past, and the chapters on how people become fans (chapter 5) and fan myths, cults, and places offer potential road maps for its future.
**Book review**

*Fan studies: Researching popular audiences*, edited by Alice Chauvel, Nicolle Lamerichs, and Jessica Seymour

Katie Wilson

*University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, United States*


[0.2] Keywords—Connectedness; Construction; Cosplay; Fandom; Global; Identity; Internet


[1] As the discipline of fandom studies grows and more academics turn their research to participatory audiences, the number of texts on the state of fandom today increases. Some, like the Intellect Fan Phenomena series, focus on fan engagement with a particular character, media property, or narrative. Others, like Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse’s *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (2015), concentrate on a particular fan activity. *Fan Studies: Researching Popular Audiences*, edited by Alice Chauvel, Nicolle Lamerichs, and Jessica Seymour, is a collection of essays that attempts to provide an overview of the field of fandom studies. The book is well suited for an introduction to this field, as it provides a concise and accessible overview of who fans are, how they define themselves, and how they relate to their communities. It does not examine the scope of current research and theory in the field; very little mention is made of the state of fan studies as a discipline. It does, however, synthesize current ideas about the fan, providing succinct definitions of fans and fan theory, which can often be hard to find.

question from Agata Włodarczyk: "Is There a 'Fan Identity'?" Włodarczyk's essay utilizes psychological methods and theories derived from behavioral physiology and sociology to demonstrate that while fans are often perceived as overly obsessive or pathological, in reality the personalities of self-identified fans are no different from the personalities of self-identified nonfans. Belonging to a community can be beneficial to one's own identity formation, but the stigma associated with fans might influence individuals to avoid claiming or performing their fandom. Włodarczyk looked at people's relationship to Asian pop music. She asked 68 respondents (predominantly female, and all living in Poland) to identify themselves as a fan of this music, nonfan of it, or nonlistener to it, and then fill out two personality questionnaires: the NEO-FFI, which seeks to identify a person's relationship to the "Big Five" personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience), and the Schwartz's Value Survey, which investigates a person's life goals and priorities. What emerged was that fans and nonfans were, on the whole, not much different, though fans did tend to score higher on questions measuring conscientiousness and planning, and lower on questions measuring conformity. Włodarczyk believes these personality traits emerge because of the amount of planning and cooperation that must occur in fan communities, especially those where fan events and media are not readily available. Her study was small and is presented as a pilot study, but the essay gives a strong theoretical and methodological base for further research in this area.

[3] The next essay, by Christine Lundberg and Maria Lexhagen, is also a call for more research, this time in the field of fan tourism. "Pop Culture Tourism: A Research Model" provides a theory of what makes a tourist attraction appeal to fans. While traditional theories of tourism follow a push-pull model (the push of the tourists' psychological and social characteristics paired with the pull of the attractive destination), Lundberg and Lexhagen argue that to be successful the popular culture tourism industry must understand fans and their culture, offer innovative destinations and attractions, and utilize technology as a mediation tool. They demonstrate that fans are exacting tourists, demanding that their destinations be authentic and inform them about the object of their fandom; fans want tours of the real sites of their fandom, actual filming locations, led by guides who seem fannish themselves, not patronizing or motivated purely by commercial interest. While the theory does offer insight into the desires of fan tourists, Lundberg and Lexhagen's mathematical approach reduces the motivations of all fans into an overly simplistic formula for success. They develop the following formula:

\[
\text{Pop Culture Tourism Success} = (\text{Pop Culture Phenomena} + \text{Technology-Mediated Fan Experiences} + \text{Strong Ties} + \text{Destination Innovation and Product Development}) \quad (\text{Eq. 1})
\]
While this formula does include the motivations of many fans, it does not take into account the varying needs of fan communities. Many fan communities will particularly value one of these factors and may take offense at another. Nor does it account for the many reasons why individuals form a relationship with a text, for even within the strongest fan communities there are factions. Still, despite its oversimplification, the article is a strong primer on theories of fan tourism and the commercialization of fans.

The final article on fan practices is Hattie Liew's "The Pleasures of Fandom and the Affective Divide: Chinese Pop Fandom in Singapore." Liew's study looks at fans of Mando/Canto pop (also known as Chinese pop) living in Singapore. Through interviews, she examines five axes of fandom—Decentered/Centered, Shame/Pride, Separation/Integration, Nostalgia/Renewal, and Desired reality/Perfect fantasy—among fans of two iconic Chinese-pop stars: Kit Chan and Sandy Lam. She depicts fans as diverse and complex as a result of their communities, the context of their fandom, and even the source of their fandom. Liew's strongest argument is that fan activities need not be political: while fans of a particular text in one country might engage in fan activities aimed at social or political change, fans of the same text in another country might not do so—even if the text calls for such a change.

The second part of the collection looks at female fans. "Mommy Porn and Regurgitated Fiction: The Silencing of Women in Fan Debates about Pulled to Publish Fan Fiction," by Monica Flegel and Jenny Roth, looks at the phenomenon of pulling to publish (P2P), in which fan fiction is removed from free Internet databases and published for profit. Flegel and Roth see fan criticism of this activity as part of a larger societal problem: female authors being discouraged from writing for profit. They insist that this criticism, particularly when it comes from fellow fan fiction writers, furthers a misogynistic view of writing in which women are welcome to write as a hobby but are seen as selfish when they want compensation for their work. Flegel and Roth's condemnation of such fan criticism demonstrates that fan fiction is far from a perfect feminist medium.

Barbara Braid's "'Fassination,' Fandom and the Crisis of Hegemony: Michael Fassbender's Performance of Masculinity and the Female Gaze" continues this examination of feminism and fandom. Braid uses the fandom of film star Michael Fassbender to demonstrate a shift from hegemonic masculinity toward an inclusive masculinity. Fassbender is open about his feminine side, and his femininity helps to establish his masculinity and attract a female gaze. Braid argues that the female gaze helps to validate the idea of inclusive masculinity, making the concept mainstream. Braid's argument is strong, but a larger study of depictions of masculinity, examining fandoms surrounding other celebrities, is needed before we can conclude that inclusive
masculinity is becoming mainstream. Is it Fassbender's identity as European that creates this femininity in the minds of viewers, and do other European celebrities, such as Benedict Cumberbatch and Jude Law, therefore also appear feminine? Is it Fassbender's roles in diverse films, from independent dramas to blockbuster action movies, that create this inclusive masculinity? Understanding the elements of Fassbender's career and identity that invite the female gaze may help to support Braid's argument.

[8] The final work on female fans is Ann-Marie Cook and Deirdre Hynes's "From the Football Terraces to the Television Screen: Gender, Sexuality and the Challenges of Online Fan Communities." This essay looks at media fandom as it intersects with sports fandom. Cook and Hynes first examine female posters on European football forums. These women typically try to hide their gender because these sites have a history of sexism and exclusion of women. They therefore take on neutral identities and assume the speech, mannerisms, and norms of the masculine community. In contrast, the online communities that formed around the German television program Hand aufs Herz (2010–11) are extremely diverse and accepting of many different identities. Cook and Hynes help to show the diversity of fan communities but fail to highlight the inherent cultural differences between sports fandom and media fandom. While they do attribute the openness of the Hand aufs Herz forums to the inclusion of a lesbian couple in the show, they do not spend much time discussing the historical acceptance of diverse identities in online media fandom (for example, the inclusion of nonheterosexual characters in slash fan fiction). Likewise, they do not discuss the historical homophobia and sexism of professional sports and how they might affect fan communities.

[9] The final part of Chauvel, Lamerichs, and Seymour's collection examines alternative fan practices and engagement. The term alternative requires an explanation, and the editors quickly define it as referring to off-line fan activities. While fans and fan theorists do devote much of their time to online pursuits, the classification of off-line activities as alternative seems a bit hyperbolic. The first essay, written by Alice Chauvel, examines how fans use their fandom to support social causes. "Fandom and Civic Engagement: From Fan Fiction to Fandom Led Social Causes" makes the case that fans are not the solitary figures of stereotype because they tend to engage in fan activities as a way to raise funds for causes they support. Chauvel's case study looks at the blog Fandom4Causes and the Twilight fans who utilized their fan communities to help make the world a better place. The essay serves as a wonderful introduction to both fandom and fan activism, but its ethnographic research is a bit lacking.
[10] Jessica Seymour's "Lizzie Bennet: Breaking the Fourth Wall since 2012" looks at transmedia storytelling not as a medium but rather as a narrative device. Seymour defines transmedia storytelling as using video, text, and audio together to tell a story. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012–13) is one such transmedia text, a fictional YouTube vlog that retells Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) in an episodic and interactive way. Seymour discusses how the multiple viewpoints displayed in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offer new insights into the text and allow for fan participation, a participation that many fans felt was stifled when the producers of the series began to overengage with and police fan discussions and spaces. Seymour concludes that transmedia storytelling creates a new and more interactive relationship between fans and producers, but, like other authors in this collection, she insists that more research is necessary, in this case to really understand the meaning of transmedia storytelling.

[11] The final essay in the collection is Nicolle Lamerichs's "Cosplay: The Affective Mediation of Fictional Bodies." Lamerichs uses her own expertise as a cosplayer to guide her ethnographic study of cosplay communities. She is concerned with the way cosplay makes fans feel emotionally connected to the objects of their fandom. These feelings are not necessarily related to the actual object of their fandom but rather are connected to the act of cosplaying. Lamerichs's argument is an interesting look at the way cosplayers construct their identity, but it offers little evidence to support the idea that the act of cosplay itself creates emotion.

[12] As a whole, *Fan Studies: Researching Popular Audiences* is a fun and easy-to-read collection whose contents tackle many of the trends in fan studies, giving entry points for further research in fandom studies. Although the essays are diverse, they cohere in all taking new approaches to contemporary trends in fandom. Where the collection disappoints is in the lack of exhaustive analysis, as many of the essays seem more like research proposals or pilot studies than fully expressed ideas. But perhaps "disappoints" is the wrong word, as this work demonstrates that the field of fan theory is a young, vibrant, and growing field whose cross-discipline appeal will consistently create new entry points for research and study.
Book review

*Transmedia storytelling and the new era of media convergence in higher education*, by Stavroula Kalogeras

Katherine E. Morrissey

*Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, United States*


[0.2] Keywords—Convergence; Digital humanities; Digital pedagogy; Digital storytelling; Participatory culture; Pedagogy


[1] *Transmedia Storytelling and the New Era of Media Convergence in Higher Education* introduces transmedia storytelling edutainment (TmSE), a pedagogical framework emphasizing the role of story in learning. In light of the rapid changes occurring in media and the growth of online education initiatives, Stavroula Kalogeras calls for an overhaul to higher education practices. Pointing to the power of stories to engage and to the reader's desire to explore, *Transmedia Storytelling* argues that incorporating stories into education can "lead to ground-breaking pedagogies in today's media-rich environments" (xiii).

[2] TmSE is offered as a model "for developing entertainment media franchises that can be incorporated into pedagogical practice" (xiii). To begin testing the concept, Kalogeras wrote the screenplay *The Goddess Within* (n.d.), converted it into a hypertext, and piloted an online education module (e-module) using story-based materials. Kalogeras reflects on her own script writing, using her personal experience to speak eloquently about the transformational power of writing. *Transmedia Storytelling* also explores research on the state of media production/engagement after digitization, on a variety of education practices, and on the power of story. *Transmedia
Storytelling begins with more theoretical chapters before turning to the TmSE materials produced by Kalogeras (the screenplay and e-module) and her reflections. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the effects of media convergence on education and the production/reception of stories, including aspects of social networking and peer production. Chapter 4 addresses challenges and criticisms that TmSE may face. Finally, chapters 5 through 7 on the materials which were tested by Kalogeras, as well as feedback solicited on TmSE.

[3] Transmedia Storytelling's call for story-based edutainment is grounded in two assumptions. First, Transmedia Storytelling takes the position that higher education practices have not changed for "several hundreds of years" (213). Education has been guilty of "ignoring the rapid changes in media currently unfolding," but Kalogeras believes that media convergence will now force it to undergo radical transformations (xiii). Transmedia Storytelling is also built on the idea that the Internet has "ended media dictatorship" (10). Here, Transmedia Storytelling is specifically referring to a shift from a media landscape "controlled by a few" and instead toward an era of "choice in entertainment" (10). These are charged claims, and the book's optimism that the Internet will "end educational inequalities" (10) may be challenging for some readers to overcome. Nonetheless, it is clear that Kalogeras is passionate about revitalizing education and "finding engaging methods that will interest learners" (214–15).

[4] Chapters 2 and 3 both use Henry Jenkins's theory of media convergence as their launching point. Media convergence encompasses "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins 2008, 2). Given the effect of digital media and the Internet on media industries and media engagement, Transmedia Storytelling argues that it is time to revisit educational curriculums and transform them (213).

[5] Chapter 2, "Media Convergence's Impact on Storytelling, Marketing, and Production," introduces readers to a range of theories on transmedia texts and discusses the rise of online knowledge communities. Significantly, Kalogeras argues that adaptation is a kind of transmedia storytelling, a connection against which Jenkins (2003, 2008) has argued. In Jenkins's (2015) model for transmedia storytelling, "ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution" to a larger story. Kalogeras sees her screenplay as both adaptation and transmedia text. The Goddess Within adapts "because it uses...myth to create something entirely new" (26–27). Kalogeras argues that "adaptations that add something new can also be considered transmedia" (27). Given the Greek myths influencing it, the screenplay is also intertextual and
inherently connected to a larger set of texts (27). Emphasizing its intertextual nature, global context, and embedded hyperlinks, Kalogereras frames *The Goddess Within* as a transmedia text, one specifically designed for edutainment.

[6] This approach to transmedia storytelling holds that transmedia "takes the narrative of a story and, as seamlessly as possible, extends it to different platforms" (24). In particular, transmedia's extensions facilitate audience participation (24). Chapter 2 points to fan cultures as an example of the "behaviors of virtual communities" (62). Kalogereras believes that "in an educational setting, collaborative learning environments are ideal for story-based curriculums as well as TmSE" (64). The same "desire to 'fill in the gaps' and to collaborate" witnessed in fan communities lends itself to online learning (64).

[7] Chapter 3, "Media Convergence's Impact on Education," reviews past efforts by the film and television industries to create products that both entertain and educate. TmSE is placed in line with this history, but *Transmedia Storytelling* argues that, given the current environment of media change, "the time is now ideal" for merging entertainment, educational, and commercial interests (71). The remainder of chapter 3 reviews research on the skills that students will need in coming years as well as teaching strategies that may help them to learn more effectively. With digital and cross-cultural communication becoming new norms, *Transmedia Storytelling* highlights "the benefits of a multimodal approach to learning" (80).

[8] *Transmedia Storytelling* particularly emphasizes the need to incorporate images and story into education. Chapter three discusses the potential for screenplays to be a new kind of textbook. Citing John Medina on the important role of visuals in memory recall, *Transmedia Storytelling* recommends "using less text in educational environments" as, according to Medina, words and letters are still visuals and an abundance of text can overwhelm the reader, stalling learning (quoted in Kalogereras 2014, 81). Observing that "less-dense text is characteristic of the screenplay," Kalogereras argues that a screenplay is less likely to overwhelm the reader with text while simultaneously using story to engage the readers and conjure images in their minds (81). For these reasons, the TmSE e-module uses a screenplay rather than a traditional textbook (81). Hyperlinks are also added to connect readers to additional information and facilitate self-directed learning.

[9] This portion of *Transmedia Storytelling* concludes with "Ten Mandates of Transmedia Edutainment in Higher Education" (110). Despite its hefty title, the list is somewhat general. Suggestions include "instruct/moderate with passion" and "incorporate multimedia and new forms of reading material" (110). Many of these recommendations will feel familiar to scholars of digital pedagogy or those working in the digital humanities. This raises an important point regarding the areas of study that
have been omitted from Transmedia Storytelling's survey of relevant literature. The book does not directly address the breadth of experimentation with online learning and digital pedagogies already occurring in higher education today. In particular, the digital humanities are largely omitted. The closest the book gets to such a discussion is its coverage of Oppermann and Coventry's digital stories research (https://pilot.cndls.georgetown.edu/digitalstories) at Georgetown's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (https://cndls.georgetown.edu). The Center for Digital Storytelling (http://storycenter.org) and their more auto/biographical approach to digital stories is also notably absent. Other areas left unaddressed include various creative writing pedagogies; the use of personal identity narratives in gender, sexuality, and race studies; reflective writing in composition/rhetoric; and reflexive writing in the social sciences. To address all of these areas would clearly overwhelm the text and be unproductive. However, given the amount of research that Transmedia Storytelling does include, the absence of this work in particular and the digital humanities generally is notable. It suggests that Transmedia Storytelling is primarily targeted toward media professionals and education specialists outside of higher education rather than aiming to participate in conversations on pedagogy already taking place within many academic disciplines.

[10] Addressing "Challenges, Concerns, and Critiques of Transmedia Storytelling Edutainment" in chapter 5, Kalogeras suggests that "the fusion of education and technology...be student-centered rather than technology-centered" (112). Essentially, students, not technology, should be shaping the design of online education courses. Other concerns include making TmSE viable for investors. This chapter introduces a business model for TmSE, including recommendations on possible payment schemes. Finally, the discussion turns to Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968). Explaining that Freire's pedagogy "can be considered an act of 'creation and re-creation' and self-transformation," Transmedia Storytelling argues that this pedagogy directly parallels the process of storytelling (149). Storytelling is informational and transformational; it facilitates dialogue, increases knowledge, and "transforms an individual, both in the act of creation and as spectator" (149).

[11] Kalogeras's voice is strongest when discussing her own experience with storytelling. Transmedia Storytelling argues that through storytelling, "learners can integrate knowledge into their mental models in meaningful and compelling ways" (157). Kalogeras sees The Goddess Within as autobiographical myth, a form where "narrative structure intersects fantasy and autobiography with the person the writer is and the person the writer wishes to become" (161). In this context, writing operates as a "space where the identity dilemma is fictionally staged" and fiction serves as a platform that allows a writer to express "the complexities of the person who is split between foreign and native, writer and character, truth and fiction" (165). These are
powerful reflections. Clearly, the writing process was a transformative learning experience for Kalogeras. While Kalogeras's experience and the book's earlier discussion of Freire's transformative pedagogy are not directly linked, it is easy to speculate that this is the type of transformative experience that TmSE seeks to produce.

[12] Up to this point in *Transmedia Storytelling*, the screenplay seemed to be a text that students read to learn about Greek history. However, this discussion on writing hints at other possibilities. Kalogeras describes story production as an experience where what she terms "the realities of fiction," and the characters and experiences that a story represents "take on therapeutic roles" (162). Is *Transmedia Storytelling* also arguing that student-produced autobiographical myth should also be integral to the learning process? The e-module does include a unit where students create something labeled "digital story." However, the specifics of this are not relayed. There are many different genres of digital storytelling—digital essay, auto/biography, hypertext narrative, and others. What kind was included in the e-module? What were the students' experiences with story production? What did the students produce? These details are not provided. It would be exciting to see Kalogeras's own writing experience connected with specific e-module assignments and student work.

[13] Given the limited information provided on the e-module's content, it will be challenging for others to fully replicate or test it. Readers are told that students looked at five different texts: *Troy Story* (n.d.) (digital story), *The Goddess Within* (screenplay/hypertext), *Troy* (2004) (film), *Virtual Tour of Troy* (Web site) (note 1), and *National Geographic's Beyond the Movie: Troy* (2004) (documentary). A brief lesson plan consisting of three units from the e-module is provided in an appendix: "What is digital storytelling?"; "What are the components of story?"; "How do we create a digital story?" (217–24). While the success of the e-module is based on students' "aptitude in the subject matter" and on their performance on a comprehension test, little information is given on the content of this test. It is unclear whether the students were being assessed on their knowledge of Greek history, on storytelling practices, or on both.

[14] *Transmedia Storytelling* closes with feedback on TmSE from five "entertainment, education, and enterprise" experts (198). The responses primarily express interest in the educational possibilities for transmedia storytelling. Also worth noting is a common point of concern raised by Aaron Smith (Digital Media Planning, Wieden + Kennedy) and by Henry Jenkins. Both ask about the motivation for transmedia storytelling edutainment. Smith notes that there is a "difference between saying: 'I want to use TmSE...because it will engage my students' and 'I want to use TmSE...because it is the very best way to convey the course materials and meet my pedagogical goals!'" (201).
Similarly, Jenkins asks in an e-mail to the author, "Is transmedia a means to an end or is it a set of research and literacy skills you want to foster" (quoted in Kalogeras 2014, 206). _Transmedia Storytelling_ argues that TmSE is a means rather than a means to an end (206). Kalogeras responds that "experiential learning combined with story-based curriculums can be a highly effective means for educating" (206). This leaves the question somewhat unresolved. A means for what, specifically? What is it being used to teach? _Transmedia Storytelling_ does not seem entirely sure. The book is more invested in the idea of transmedia edutainment as a method and as a possible business model. However, in addressing so many different pedagogical issues, the book also poses many questions. What are the different affordances that transmedia texts can offer in the classroom? In what ways are fan and participatory communities already transforming the ways in which we learn? Perhaps _Transmedia Storytelling_ will serve as a call for others to explore how fan practices contribute to digital learning. This outcome would pair well with the book's closing hope that it serves as the beginning for "a new educational story" (215).

Note

1. The Web site mentioned by Kalogeras is no longer available at the provided address.

Works cited

