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Editorial

Envisioning queer female fandom

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[0.1] Abstract—Editorial for "Queer female fandom," edited by Julie Levin Russo and Eve Ng, special issue, Transformative Works and Cultures, no. 24 (June 15, 2017).

[0.2] Keywords—Fandom history; Femslash; Lesbian representation


1. Origins

[1.1] Imagine early March 2015. Julie was teaching science fiction and watching a lot of Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries (ABC [Australia], 2012–15). Eve was still enjoying Person of Interest (CBS, 2011–16) and The 100 (CW, 2014–), not knowing the bloodshed that was to come. Somewhere in the ever flowing tide of social media, a fan of femslash (female-female couples) tweeted about feeling ignored and erased by the field of fan studies. Fans have had a complicated, ambivalent, often conflicted relationship to the academic study of their texts and communities. That history was part of the impetus for this very journal, as a flagship project of a fan advocacy organization. But femslashers, at least since the era of Xena: Warrior Princess (Renaissance Pictures, 1995–2001) fandom on the Web, have been perhaps uniquely attentive to the public face of their activities.

[1.2] [1997] A member of the newsgroup alt.tv.xena compiled answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ) about lesbian subtext on Xena: Warrior Princess and put it up at the new fan site Xenite.org. In response to frequent harassment by homophobic skeptics, Xena/Gabrielle 'shippers offered "proof" in the form of "interviews with the cast and crew" of the program wherein they "flatly stated...that they put subtextual scenes and dialogue in the shows intentionally" (https://web.archive.org/web/20051031202026/http://www.xenite.org/faqs/subtext.html).

[1.3] In defining the topic of this issue as "queer female fandom," we acknowledge that femslash has been paradigmatically tied to a broader concern with the representation of gender and sexuality and its social impact. It may be this general tendency among online
communities around queer female media (however textual or subtextual) that can inspire tracking of academic research as a particular form of representation. This special issue, coming to fruition more than 2 years later, is for the author of that 2015 tweet—for femslashers and those passionate about fictional female-female couples who have felt that their identities and practices are marginalized. There's a certain ambiguity to the term "queer female fandom," which is sometimes used in reference to predominantly female communities engaged in queer activities such as male slash. Here, we recenter queer women as the object of fannish cathexis.

[1.4] Certainly there are exclusions embedded in the terms "queer," "female," and even "fandom" that risk flattening the discourses and demographics at hand. We don't wish to reinforce gender binaries, identity politics, tacit whiteness, Western dominance, or audience hierarchies. These limitations are addressed to some degree by the range of essays in this special issue, and the credit for that goes to the authors who have entrusted their work to this collection. In offering "queer female fandom" as an aspirational frame for new scholarship, we aimed to give form and cohesion to an underpopulated gap in the matrix spanning fan studies, LGBT media studies, online community studies, and production or industry studies (insofar as it is concerned with LGBT markets and creators).

[1.5] While there is substantial research encompassing lesbians and queer women in many of these areas—including queer representation and spectatorship, queer community formations and erotic networks in the digital era, market forces directed at LGBT consumers and corollary opportunities for independent media producers—fan communities around queer female characters and relationships, and their creative practices, have gotten comparatively little attention. If femslash anchors this topic for us, it is a genre that can have fluid boundaries, and we hope to define a field of inquiry without being overly prescriptive of its contours.

[1.6] [2015] "As mainstream representation and online platforms have evolved, fan practices around female-female couples are becoming increasingly vibrant and visible, and a proliferation of explicitly lesbian or bisexual characters in film and television has captivated fans and researchers alike. This work points the way to a productive investigation of the turbulent boundaries between canon and subtext, between femslash and slash communities, between erotic and political interventions, and between different methodological approaches to queer female audiences (broadly conceived)—boundaries that femslash itself troubles" (TWC, "Queer Female Fandom" call for papers).

[1.7] In terms of origins—when invited to collectively generate a historical lineage of queer female fandom at the second TGIFemslash convention (April 2017), literary reference points went back over 100 years (finally landing at Sappho) and media to Hollywood film from the 1930s onward. In a chapter in the 1998 volume Theorizing Fandom, Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins chronicle discussions about "female slash" that predates the Web. Writers in their apas (amateur press associations, a collaborative postal zine exchange) wrestled with the queer politics of male slash and with its exclusion of women:
As an experiment last week, I gathered all of the female slash I had into one pile (largely Blake’s 7 [BBC/BBC One, 1978–81], since it has more strong females than the rest of slash fandom’s favorite shows put together...) and read it all one after another. I realized that my distance from the material is different in female slash." —Sandy Hereld (18)

A thought occurs to me about the unfortunate lack of female slash stories. The majority of slash is based on characters who have a preexisting, strongly emotional relationship in the show where they appear: a lot of slash is expansion on something to be seen in the show (as the slash fan sees it). Female characters, even if you can find more than one in a given show, are unlikely to have an intense, highlighted friendship with each other." —Barbara Tennison (20)

These fans’ diagnosis underscores the watershed embodied by the 1995 premiere of Xena, an epic fantasy series centered on the intimate relationship between two female heroines. This historical moment happened to converge with a critical mass of new online communications tools (initially Usenet groups that had transitioned to e-mail lists, complemented by static Web sites, Web rings, and chat rooms) to engender the first contemporary femslash-centric fan community. Notable femslash subcommunities also existed in major ongoing fandoms, like Star Trek (NBC, 1966–69), around this time, and other points of origin such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB/UPN, 1997–2003) followed soon after. The crystallization of femslash as a unique subculture is thus intertwined with transitions in both old and new media.

Because these first-generation platforms were topically defined, however, there was limited permeability or movement across media texts. This relative autonomy is evidenced by a proliferation of terms for F/F (femslash, femmeslash, or girlslash; subtext fic, altfic [from "alternative"], or saffic [a pun on Sappho]). With the rise of social blogging platform LiveJournal as a home base for media fan cultures beginning around 2001, an environment with more porous boundaries between fandoms (and between fan activity and other domains of life) developed, laying the groundwork for femslash to become a unifying investment that transcends any particular show or couple.

With the inaugural post of the LiveJournal community femslash_today (http://femslash-today.livejournal.com/644.html), fandom gained a centralized archival consciousness of the contours of F/F at large. A collaborative team posted lists of new fan works and other links of interest almost daily through 2013 (and sporadically up until the present).

The coalescence of femslash as a metafandom unto itself may have paradoxically contributed to a bird’s-eye view of its marginality. As we might glean from the primacy of slash as the unmarked term (denoting same-sex couples in general and male-male couples in particular), F/F remains underrepresented not only in scholarly research but also arguably in fandom overall (compared to M/M and also to het [heterosexual] and gen [nonsexual] fiction and art). Femslash fans often frame their experience in this way, as was the case at the
"Where's the F/F?" panel at the May 2015 WisCon feminist science fiction convention in Madison, Wisconsin. The conversation took as a jumping-off point detailed statistics, compiled by destinationtoast, on fan fiction posted at Archive of Our Own (AO3; https://archiveofourown.org/).

[1.14]  **[February 2016]** According to ToastyStats, "F/F as a whole is strongly on the rise," with about 60K fan works produced in 2015, but it still makes up only 9 percent of the total works on AO3 (up from the previous year, but dwarfed by M/M at 50 percent) (https://archiveofourown.org/works/6045463).

[1.15]  Of course, it's possible that AO3 isn't the site of femslashers' most active participation—destinationtoast notes that popular archives FanFiction.net and Wattpad (not to mention social network platform Tumblr) are impossible to profile as accurately because they have no femslash category, and authors use a wide variety of tags to identify content. Presuming that femslash does lag behind other genres, the abridged history above suggests that contributing factors may include its late blooming within media fandom and the dearth of significant female relationships in popular media. (This deficit has been gradually decreasing.) Participants at the WisCon panel also cited internalized or systemic sexism as a potential barrier, and the LGBTQ tradition of separatism or "safe space" as a factor that may make femslash less visible.

[1.16]  Whatever the demographic realities, however, we resist the narrative of scarcity as a framework for understanding femslash. It is the foundation of a vibrant online community that deserves to be considered on its own terms. In today's Tumblr era, the consolidation of queer female fandom as an overarching modality has catalyzed a renewed efflorescence of beloved 'ships from the past two decades (like Xena/Gabrielle). Fans (many of them youth) are engaging with the genre's history and collectively extending a critical awareness of its imbrication with the history of queer female representation. As lesbian story lines became incrementally more common in mainstream media (television, film, video games, comics, and so on), these scintillating objects were seamlessly integrated with ongoing fan communities and practices while also reshaping the terms and discourses of a femslash worldview.

2. Savior, slayer, soldier, spy
Queer female fandom is making a splash. In the first half of 2016, lesbian or bisexual characters were killed off on several popular television programs, culminating in the dramatic murder of rival commander Lexa on *The 100* just after she consummates her romance with the heroine, Clarke. In response, enraged fans leveled criticism and demands not just at the show's writers and producers but at the representational system that puts queer women perpetually in the crosshairs. This outcry that originated in fandom led to articles condemning the "Bury Your Gays" trope ([http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays](http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays)) in cultural news outlets like the *Washington Post* (Butler 2016), *Wired* (Watercutter 2016), *AV Club* (McNutt 2016), *Variety* (Ryan 2016), the *Hollywood Reporter* (Stanhope 2016), and *Vox* (Framke 2016). Many of these journalists emphasized fans' direct interaction with *The 100* show runner Jason Rothenberg and producer/writer Javier Grillo-Marxuach, and, in a broader sense, the industry's growing responsibility to understand and respect slash fans' expectations. Male slashers have made similar interventions, for example regarding characters Derek and Stiles on the show *Teen Wolf* (MTV, 2011–), but they are less typical and arguably less effective than instances from femslash communities. The fusion that femslash presumes between fans and characters in terms of sexual and gender identities affords it this powerful platform for literal campaigns of resistance to heteronormative structures.

"LGBT Fans Deserve Better is a movement aiming to educate people on the importance of positive LGBT representation in the media. This website's goal is to provide information, statistics and resources to enable media creators, production staff, critics and viewers to learn about the history of representation, the tropes encountered and the current state of representation on TV...The tipping point was the unnecessary death of Lexa, a lesbian character on *The 100*, killed by a stray bullet, by her father-figure, immediately after reuniting with her love interest. Lesbians are not unfamiliar with dying—and dying violently—in the
media...Storytellers can do better, and we want creators and viewers alike to commit to demanding better" (http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/about/).

[2.3] To agitate for their interests as lovers of queer women, fans have collectively developed both brash guerrilla tactics like rapid-response Twitter storms and sophisticated forms of critique, which increasingly generate enough impact to gain mainstream attention. *Glee* (Fox, 2009–15) was a proving ground for direct action; as one chronicler notes about the Brittany and Santana (Brittana) relationship, it "was born out of one throwaway line about two featured extras and a group of women's yearning to see themselves on TV. It was fandom willing a pairing into canon. And fandom's reason? Queer women deserve representation. The cry for representation wasn't new, but *Glee* fans had, at the time, unprecedented access to the creators of their show" (Cranz 2016). And yet this teleology of visibility could happily coexist with the celebration of subtextual pairings like Quinn Fabray and Rachel Berry, the winners of E! Online's TV's Top Couple poll in 2012 (where they triumphed over Brittana and popular male slash couple Dean and Castiel). Although television isn't ultimately a democratic medium, femslash fans were flexing their collective influence in ways understood as going beyond a bit of tabloid fun.

[2.4] **[February 14, 2012]** "The fans for 'Faberry' (Fabray/Berry) as they call themselves, set a new record high for page turns on E! Online for any single post in the entire history of the website. Umm...yeah, we are just as stunned as you. Also, we did an investigation into this voting and it showed no signs of false play among 'Faberry' fans: Just a group of hardcore, dedicated shippers who organized mass-voting times (all hours of the night), and obviously took this thing very seriously. Now, I know what many of you who casually watch *Glee* are thinking: What the what?! Are Rachel and Quinn even a couple? And wait a minute, aren't they straight? Why yes, yes they are, as far as we know. But the 'Faberry' fans believe these two belong together" (http://eonline.com/news/294212/tv-s-top-couple-tournament-and-the-winner-is).

[2.5] Similarly, "save our show" campaigns have been a fixture of media fandom for decades and are frequently remarked on as a baseline example of fan activism. Nowhere more than femslash is it evident that such finite demands can be strategically linked to broader political concerns. Despite existing largely on Tumblr, the *Warehouse 13* (SyFy, 2009–14) Bering & Wells fandom ('shipping the characters of Myka Bering and Helena G. Wells) was exceptionally organized, as demonstrated by their extensive and witty in-character manual for new fans (http://absedarian.tumblr.com/post/47643571393/). One researcher modeled this network using data visualization to help understand "how new information travels through a small community, who were able to learn new information about their favorite shipping couple" (Krisi 2013). The information at issue was a remark by actress Jaime Murray (Helena G. Wells) about her disagreement with the program's executive producer, Jack Kenny, over the status of the Bering & Wells 'ship (she and costar Joanne Kelly [Myka Bering] were in favor of its canonicity). Said informally by Murray in an autograph line, this comment was recorded and posted to YouTube, then transcribed and circulated on Tumblr. Krisi concluded that "the nodes in this particular network are socially
aware and active, they are ready to forward the message...Many of the users additionally started blogging only parts of the gifs, or created their own art about the quote from Murray." When the program's ratings lagged in season 4, these "socially aware and active" fans mounted an extremely well-informed and professional campaign to renew that hinged on gathering quantitative data, generating qualitative engagement, and leveraging the morass of television metrics in the digital era. Although the official materials strategically deemphasized femslash, members of the Bering & Wells network were the primary organizers.

![Figure 2. "Artifact" record for fan survey. Courtesy of Renew Warehouse 13](http://renewwarehouse13.com/). [View larger image.]

[2.6] "Renew Warehouse 13"'s victory was bittersweet, as the show's fifth season was only six episodes and concluded with an authoritarian gesture toward Myka's heterosexuality (ironic, given that Kenny is a gay man). Still, by placing mainstream portrayals, independent media, and transformative works in dialogue, femslash communities have been leaders in positioning themselves as a critical counterpublic with an investment in shifting the dominant terms of representation. This stance was an organic outgrowth of fan activity precisely because of the privileged correspondence between being queer women and transforming queer female characters, which animates an imperative to see oneself reflected on screen.

[2.7] [2014] "I couldn't find enough lesbians in the media who actually got the girl and came out on top and didn't kill themselves, but on the Internet, femslash was giving me more than just a queer character who made it to the end of the story. Femslash characters got to thrive and survive and have messy beautiful love. I finally saw the happy endings I didn't know I was allowed to have...[F]emslash is written by those whose identities and personal narratives are reflected in the stories themselves...One of the great frustrations of LGBTQ media is the fact that so little of our representations end up coming from LGBTQ-identified creators, and thus we see inaccurate portrayals with limited diversity. Femslash exists because we were sick of being told we didn't exist, so we wrote ourselves into their stories." —Kate (http://autostraddle.com/femslash-can-save-the-world-if-we-let-it-246684/)

[2.8] Since the early days of online femslash, as Maris (2016) observed within Xena fandom, the themes of fans' transformative works of fiction and art have been tied to an activist engagement with entertainment media. It is important not to erase the very real
presence of men and straight women in femslash communities, not to mention people with trans* and nonbinary gender identities. Nonetheless, while there are many barriers to producing good data on a large scale, qualitative scholarship (Hanmer 2014; Ng 2008), informal surveys, community self-definition, and our informal observations suggest that it is accurate to say that an overwhelming majority of active participants in femslash fandom identify as lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer women. This collective sensibility has been determining for the ways a reflexive awareness of femslash in relation to fan culture and media culture has translated into public modes of address and assembly.

[2.9] [International Day of Femslash, beginning July 2008] "The on-line femslash community is set to celebrate the...annual International Day of Femslash; an opportunity to raise its head high and proclaim to the world its delight in all things femslash...For too many years, femslash has been treated as the distant cousin to the het and slash king and queen of fandom, so this is our opportunity to demonstrate to ourselves, as much as anyone else, that we are a force to be reckoned with" (http://femslashday.com/?page_id=24). This organization has run corresponding virtual fan conventions using chat rooms.

[2.10] [TGIFemslash, beginning February 2016] "TGIF/F is a multi-fandom, femslash convention designed to build connections, encourage discussion, and celebrate the media and characters we love...We celebrate many different kinds of relationships between women, whether officially established onscreen or celebrated by fans through subtext. Together, our voices demonstrate a true demand for femslash representation in media. And best of all, the community we build creates lifelong relationships and a true sense of belonging" (http://tgifemslash.com).

[2.11] [ClexaCon, beginning March 2017] "ClexaCon provides a platform to build community, bringing together a diverse group of LGBTQ fans and content creators from around the world....ClexaCon aims to empower media creators to produce and distribute more positive LGBTQ content, providing educational resources for the community to aid in the push for better representation. ClexaCon will strive to lay the foundation for improved visibility within the media while encouraging more LGBTQ women to participate in creating the stories they desire" (http://clexacon.com/vision).

[2.12] Following fandom’s language, the "queer" of this issue is closely allied with the identitarian formation LGBTQ*, and it carries with it the idea that gender and sexuality are crucial categories of being, that they can be transparently visible as essential categories in the media, and that identity and visibility are profoundly linked for individuals and for society. Queer theory has a stake in troubling these assumptions because of the hierarchies and ideologies they leave undisturbed—the unified subject, the monogamous couple, binary gender, whiteness, and capitalist aspirations, to name a few. We need the oppositional mode of queerness, but if we're interested in resistance and what it means to fans, the politics of visibility is a popular phenomenon that we should not discount. By contrast, though, if we infer that femslash equates only to an identity-based call for and investment in portrayals of
queer women, then we might overlook an important dimension of these transformative communities that is not reducible to a politics of visibility. Even if queer female fandom has repeatedly talked back to mass media in these terms, demanding explicitly lesbian characters and relationships on screen from Xena to the present day, they are still also engaged in slashing—a creative intervention in these characters and relationships before and beyond their explicit visibility. This special issue surveys and straddles the tensions percolating through femslash in the current moment, when its online fan communities can claim a historical consciousness and are poised to impact our larger mediascape in unprecedented ways.

3. Previously on: Existing literature

[3.1] In an era of complex interchanges across rapidly changing digital platforms, media aesthetics, labor systems, and individual and collective viewing practices, it is more difficult than ever to say definitively how and where positive LGBTQ* images appear. The same could be said of queer female fan communities, which are becoming interwoven with the increasingly diffuse proliferation of online fan activities. Popular femslash followings of couples on programs like Grey’s Anatomy (ABC, 2005–), Lost Girl (Showcase, 2010–15), Once Upon a Time (ABC, 2011–), and Person of Interest have significant intersections with groups favoring male slash, het fan fiction, or other fan works based on those shows, occupying many of the same online platforms. In some instances an explicit lesbian couple coexisted with subtextual favorites (as in the aforementioned Brittana and Faberry ‘ships on Glee), just as on-screen heterosexual couples have always jockeyed with fans’ queer pairings for attention. Thus, even delineating queer female fandom as an object of study—whether a particular mode of visibility or a particular online community—is increasingly (and excitingly) complicated.

[3.2] The particular inflection of women’s engagement with televised women, the underrepresentation of female characters in the mass media, and the unique interpretive strategies involved in investing in femslash pairings point to specificities of queer female fandom that warrant sustained analysis within the field of fan studies. A few scholars have considered femslash directly (not merely as an aside in articles on male slash), particularly in relation to Xena: Warrior Princess (Jones 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Hanmer 2003, 2014; Hamming 2001) and other major fandoms (Isaksson 2009, 2010 on Buffy; Jones 2013 on The X-Files [Ten Thirteen Productions/20th Television/20th Century Fox Television, 1993–2002]; Kapurch 2015 on Disney). This body of work tends to foreground fan fiction as an axis that connects us with fans’ community structures, or fans’ engagement with media texts, or both. Today, research on femslash is gaining momentum and has included analysis of the discourses fans use to define and circumscribe the boundaries of their activities and communities (Stanfill 2013; Gonzales 2015). The contested relationship between fans and commercial television creators is a newer avenue of inquiry. The multiplication and fragmentation of film and television audiences mean that the industry is courting queer fans in ways that it previously had not, and queer fans have a corresponding capacity to impact and referee the industry via social media.
Meanwhile, with the flowering of explicitly queer characters and narratives in popular culture, much of the film and media research has turned to analyzing the terms of these portrayals and their reception by fans looking for affirmation and visibility. Rebecca Beirne ([2007] 2012) opens her introduction to the anthology *Televising Queer Women* by reiterating calls "over the years [by] the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities...[for] fairer and more accurate representation of LGBT people on television" (1), and the included essays bear out this emphasis (with a particular focus on *The L Word* [Showtime, 2004–9]). There has been some scholarship on fan communities surrounding lesbian media, such as Candace Moore's (2009) ethnography of *The L Word* viewing parties and Maria San Filippo's (2015) framing of AfterEllen (http://www.afterellen.com/) as a site of vernacular media criticism. Femslash fans occupy a particularly delicate corner of this nexus of issues because of their partial overlap with traditions drawn simultaneously from creative fandom, LGBTQ fandom, gay civil rights, and independent media.

**Figure 3.** Lesbian pulp novel cover featuring Janeway and Seven of Nine from *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN, 1995–2001). No. 6, "I Prefer Girls," by Tenderware (2000). The artist altered an existing cover painting by Robert Maguire (1963). [View larger image.]

Perspectives on lesbian fan formations are further developed in the film and media studies literature, which centers on screen texts and spectatorship. Alexander Doty authored some of the foundational theory on subtext and queer reading strategies, including chapters on Dorothy and the Wicked Witch (2000) and Laverne and Shirley (1993) as lesbian-inflected
relationships. In *Uninvited*, Patricia White (1999) explores the imbrication of Hays Code–era Hollywood cinema with queer female eroticism, writing that visual systems and "stars, costuming, reception, source material, and authorship can all introduce traces of a lesbian historical presence that the narratives of the films exclude" (xvii). Lynne Joyrich (2001) offers a similar perspective on television in "Epistemology of the Console," which maps the medium's various tactics for simultaneously showing and hiding queerness (a precursor to debates about queerbaiting), culminating with the coming out of both Ellen DeGeneres and her sitcom character, Ellen Morgan, in 1997 (*Ellen*, ABC, 1994–98). Such scholars have analyzed with great nuance the irreducibly queer language of mass media, but they rarely examine practices or texts produced by queer or slash fans, and consequently they have figured little in fan studies approaches to the topic (though Mel Stanfill’s essay in this issue builds upon Doty).

[3.5] There is a substantive body of research about queer online communities that could also intersect an understanding of femslash, and scholars of mass media have chronicled the history of LGBT representation and the emergence of a gay and lesbian market as a target demographic. Overall, we can see that academic work on phenomena contiguous to femslash has been on a divergent path from typical studies of male slash. As the next section outlines, this queer female fandom issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* enters this lacuna from a fan studies perspective, offering an unprecedented collection of scholarship centered on femslash communities and practices. Nonetheless, its focus moves fluidly between slash traditions and these other lenses and sites for understanding queer female representation and spectatorship. Collectively, the essays invite consideration of how to frame femslash fandoms, scrutinize the contours of their emergence and evolution, and demonstrate a range of media texts and analytical tools that highlight the theoretical and political stakes of demarginalizing this research. 2017 is perhaps the ideal historical conjunctur for taking on this task.

4. Up next 1: Femslash histories

[4.1] Several of the essays in this issue provide historical accounts of queer female fandoms, a valuable endeavor both because these histories may be little known outside of relatively small circles and because collectively they point to how shifts in fan cultures are embedded in broader contexts of media production and representation.

[4.2] Ng historically contextualizes queerbaiting discourses, discussing how femslash fans responded to textual and paratextual suggestions about the possibility of a canonical F/F romance on *Xena: Warrior Princess* as compared to recent shows such as *Rizzoli & Isles* (TNT, 2010–16) and *The 100*. Whereas 15 to 20 years ago Xena/Gabrielle was mostly understood as subtext because fans did not generally expect that a canonical same-sex romance could be depicted on the show, contemporary conditions of LGBTQ representation have contributed to higher expectations of canonical queer depictions.
In femslash fandom, *Grey's Anatomy* has become best known for the Callie/Arizona relationship, but Zuk discusses how the major F/F relationship that preceded that, between Callie Torres and Erica Hahn, came about through collaboration between the show's writers and GLAAD after Isaiah Washinton's use of homophobic language on set and its ensuing fallout. Zuk's account also provides a reminder of how fans have moved through different online spaces: before Tumblr, it was LiveJournal that hosted the bulk of fan interactions, which was where many Callie/Erica fans interacted.

Cameron discusses the genesis and evolution of the Web site Autostraddle (https://www.autostraddle.com/), tracing the trajectories of two key founding members, Riese and Laneia, and how their fan practices, beginning around *The L Word*, built up the online community of site writers and visitors that became Autostraddle. More than simply the history of a single Web site, Cameron's analysis demonstrates how fandom around a single media text can productively proliferate in ways that eventually depart significantly from their origins.

Finally, Friedman discusses multiple lines of cultural and political development in Japan that led to the genre now known as *yuri*, involving commercial manga publishers, the mid-20th-century women-centric "S" movement, smaller manga presses and self-published *doujinshi* works, and the increase of female and in some cases lesbian manga artists in the 1970s.

5. Up next 2: Framing queer female fandoms and the F/F continuum

The authors within also provide several perspectives on how to approach the study of queer female fandoms. What, if any, lines are to be drawn between close female friendships and queer female relationships, and what are the implications for subtext versus canon?

Stanfill argues for extending Doty's (1993) queer readings of women-centered sitcoms such as *Laverne & Shirley* (ABC, 1976–83) or *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970–77) to all genres, proposing that those programs "that center on or are driven by a relationship between women are structurally lesbian media, and that to locate structurally lesbian media after the Internet is to locate femslash fandoms" (¶2). Stanfill is careful to clarify that the claim is not that "the characters in these shows really are lesbians...nor that their interactions really are intended to be perceived as sexual, nor that these relationships really are queer representation" (¶3), but that a range of F/F intimacy comprises the category of structurally lesbian media.

In this vein, Narai's essay examines the genre of fan fiction that the author labels homoaffection fic, which explores relationship dynamics between women that are not primarily sexual. In a way, this genre moves in a reverse direction to most femslash fic, which seeks to make romantic and sexual connections between female characters explicit where they are not on the canonical program. In contrast, homoaffection fic highlights emotional and physical intimacy that falls on the "lesbian continuum" that was first proposed by Adrienne Rich and that Stanfill applies to media.
[5.4] There are interesting resonances between Stanfill's and Narai's essays and Friedman's on the Japanese manga *yuri* genre, which currently encompasses texts differentially aimed at male readers, lesbians, and a more general female audience, and which features narratives ranging from romantic girls' love to explicitly lesbian. As Friedman notes, the *yuri* fandom has taken the term to mean "any narrative of love (romantic, sexual, intimate or not) between women" (¶5.1), but the different kinds of *yuri* stories can be partly traced back to different historical origins.

[5.5] Ng also addresses the scope of femslash fandoms in considering how queerbaiting discourses have evolved in the last few years. Whereas queerbaiting previously applied only to depictions of same-sex intimacy that did not become canonically romantic or sexual, the term has become increasingly understood to refer to any instances where what is delivered on screen fails to match viewer expectations of queer story lines if those expectations have been intentionally fueled by those on the creative or marketing teams. As such, the "slash" part of "femslash" no longer implies noncanonicity.

[5.6] In another discussion about canonical queer depictions, Serafini highlights the problematic erasures of bisexuality in science fiction shows—*Orphan Black* (Space/BBC America, 2013–), *The 100*, *Wynonna Earp* (CHCH-DT/Syfy, 2016–)—which are partially attributable to writers imagining their worlds as label-free utopias, even though the "lesbian" label or identity is more clearly claimed on those same shows.

6. Up next 3: The scope of queer female fandoms

[6.1] This issue also provides insight into further definitional questions. Who are femslash fans, what are they fans of, and how can we describe and theorize their practices? Baker's essay explores the usually unrecognized diversity of gender identities among fans by surveying readers of "gender-creative" works (¶1) (including in this category fiction that swaps the gender of characters or features a variety of bodily transformations). A sizable minority of respondents self-identified in a range of ways that were genderqueer, gender neutral, or "woman-adjacent" (¶6) rather than simply as women, and Baker urges researchers to attend to the "shattered surface" (¶5) of standardized terms.

[6.2] As for the fandoms discussed in the essays, the majority center on shows that air or aired on North American television networks: *Once Upon a Time*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Orphan Black*, *Rizzoli & Isles*, *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN, 1995–2001), *Wynonna Earp*, *The L Word*, *The 100*, and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. However, Zhao's essay about the fandoms around performers on the Chinese music idol show *Super Girl* (Hunan Satellite TV, 2004–6) and Lin's on those around K-pop and J-pop musicians offer an important non-Western perspective. In addition, Day and Christian's discussion of independent Web series featuring queer black female characters addresses fandoms associated with smaller-scale productions.

[6.3] Beyond the sexual continuum, queer female fandoms manifest a range of approaches to female-female relationships. In an essay on fan vidding that includes 11 examples of such works, Russo notes that the collection goes "beyond conventional romance to explore
unrequited love, power dynamics, antagonism, casual sex, and other ambiguities" (¶1.8). In this vein, Pande and Moitra in this issue point out that many "fans invested in queer female relationships" are drawn to pairings with "antagonist/collaborator dynamics" "that do not necessarily express affectionate intimacy," such as Buffy and Faith on Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Emma and Regina on Once Upon a Time (¶2.8). Similarly, Strauch discusses how Once Upon a Time fics build on Regina's canonical personal history and tensions in Emma and Regina's canonical relationship to explore issues of consent, power play, and BDSM dynamics.

[6.4] Yet fandom has always consisted of spaces where normative discourses are not challenged, and this holds true of queer female fandoms as well. Thus, Pande and Moitra also argue that problematic treatments of race and ethnicity on Once Upon a Time have often been ignored or downplayed by fans, even as a small number of Swan Queen fics do address the topic of Regina's Latina identity in complex ways.

[6.5] This significant critique leads us toward essays that highlight less commonly discussed fan formations and propose new ways of theorizing them. Russo offers us an innovative metaphor for conceptualizing the practices and effects of femslash vidding, suggesting that we think of these as akin to augmented reality (AR) headsets, which "augment their source with a layer of interpretation that wouldn’t be visible to the naked eye" (¶1.3). And while alternative universe scenarios are well known in the fan fictional world, Zhao links their deployment in fics featuring contemporary Chinese characters to the writers' aspirations for bypassing current strictures on lesbian life in China. In another account of fandoms negotiating real-life inequities, Day and Christian propose that black queer fans' practices of "quaring" and shared recognition "undergird the reading practices that viewers bring to performances of black queer and femme identities in indie TV" when these representations are wrought through "the paradoxical invisibility and hypervisibility of blackness and queerness" (¶2.3).

[6.6] The issue's three book reviews further extend the possible dialogues around queer female fandom. Although the reviewed volumes do not center on femslash or lesbian fan activity, each considers phenomena that might inform our understanding of some of its facets: shojo (girls’) manga (Lamerichs), feminist blogging by teens (Marwick), and youth activism online (McCracken).

7. Continuing questions and future directions

[7.1] Despite the descriptive and theoretical range of these essays, more research in these areas would be valuable and timely. Queer female fan communities oriented around sources other than major North American television programs—including the full range of television, Web series, film, music, and other forms of media and performers—especially call for further examination. On a broader level, a key goal of this special issue is to continue to interrogate how we define and approach fan studies. We have argued that the distinctiveness of femslash deserves its own focus, but it is important to consider how research terms, including this one, bring their own histories, assumptions, and exclusions. In particular, work on the Global
North remains quantitatively dominant in studies of queer female fandom, but it should not therefore overdetermine future topics and debates in the field.

Figure 4. Fan artist Yu Yong's rendition of China's Super Girl super couple, titled "Happy New Year." Posted on Tieba Baidu (http://tieba.baidu.com), February 17, 2007. [View larger image.]

[7.2] Queer female fandoms are especially striking in the ways they continue to negotiate shifting production/consumption landscapes, both within and beyond national borders, and could be featured more prominently in convergence and industry studies. Besides being a space for fan communities, how will social media impact other elements of fandom, particularly interactions between viewers and producers—for example, in the aftermath of commitments to the Lexa Pledge (Stanhope 2016)? The rise of streaming programming and other online content also affects queer female media, and crowdfunding has become significant for independent projects that wouldn't otherwise find financing. In addition to the Web series discussed by Day and Christian, Carmilla (VerveGirl/KindaTV, 2014–16) has been a great success among femslashers. How will queer female fandoms shape and be shaped by these ongoing changes?

[7.3] We have commented above on how femslash fandoms manifest forms of political agency. Even as we are wary, as scholars, about claiming fan practices as subversive, the relationship of fan cultures to dominant systems of power remains a key question. For example, one currently contentious issue within feminist spheres that also has resonances throughout queer female fandoms is TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminism) versus trans-inclusive feminism debates. How do discourses within femslash spaces about such topics in relation to media texts and beyond reflect and reinforce as well as challenge and transform broader cultural politics?

[7.4] Many of the questions that occupy us in this issue are taken up in sophisticated ways within fan communities themselves. As scholar-fans (Doty's preferred term), we are invited to negotiate our multiple positions as critical scholars of both the media texts we love and the fandoms in which we participate. In Eve's experience of the inaugural ClexaCon and Julie's experience of the first and second annual TGIFemslash cons, these sites of both critique and
appreciation—where identities of academic and fan, content creator and viewer variously intersect—are, at their best, generative of intellectual and creative engagement that continues to energize our inquiries. We hope that some of the same synergies will emerge through this issue's traverse of queer female fandoms.

8. Acknowledgments

[8.1] It has been our great pleasure and privilege to work on this special issue of TWC, and it is not possible to properly acknowledge the depth of appreciation we feel toward the many people who have helped make it 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. We would especially like to express our gratitude to journal editors Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson, with whom we had numerous fruitful exchanges about the details of the issue.

[8.2] The following people worked on TWC No. 24 in an editorial capacity: Julie Levin Russo and Eve Ng (guest editors); Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (editors); Cameron Salisbury and Francesca Coppa (Symposium); and Louisa Stein and Katie Morrissey (Review).

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9. Bibliography

[9.1] In addition to the references from this introduction, we have included further literature on femslash and queer female fan communities below. As a bibliography, this section compiles commonly cited scholarship, drawing on citations from the authors in this special issue.


Lothian, Alexis, Kristina Busse, and Robin Anne Reid. 2007. "'Yearning Void and Infinite Potential': Online Slash Fandom as Queer Female Space." English Language Notes 45 (2): 103–11.


Theory

Between text, paratext, and context: Queerbaiting and the contemporary media landscape

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[0.1] **Abstract**—I discuss the concept of queerbaiting as emergent from viewer readings of both textual and paratextual content at a particular juncture of LGBT media representation. While fan works as paratexts have attracted attention for their queered readings and narratives, there has been little scholarly consideration of how official paratexts that suggest or address queer readings, particularly promotional material and public commentary from producers, inform viewer engagement with media texts, and how they interact with contemporary conditions of media production and LGBT content. Examining F/F pairings from two television shows, *Rizzoli & Isles* (TNT, 2010–16) and *The 100* (CW, 2014–), I propose a model that incorporates text, paratext, and the context of LGBT representation to account for how both noncanonical and canonically queer narratives can exemplify queerbaiting discourses, as well as where queer subtextual readings are positioned in this interpretative space. In addition, I highlight the historical contingency of queerbaiting in terms of shifts in producer/viewer interactions and the character of LGBT narratives in reshaping the contestation of media meaning making.

[0.2] **Keywords**—Fan activism; Intertextuality; Paratext; Queer representation

1. Introduction

[1.1] In the last few years, the pairings of Jane and Maura on *Rizzoli & Isles* (TNT, 2010–16) and Clarke and Lexa on *The 100* (CW, 2014–) have contended for favorite F/F couple or favorite television couple on sites such as AfterEllen and Zimbio (note 1). Yet they have also been commonly cited as examples of queerbaiting, a charge that has grown louder against various shows and has been addressed on both mainstream and LGBT-oriented sites (Bridges 2016; Gennis 2014; K. 2013; Langfelder 2016; Rose 2013).

[1.2] I use the term *queerbaiting* to refer to situations where those officially associated with a media text court viewers interested in LGBT narratives—or become
aware of such viewers—and encourage their interest in the media text without the text ever definitively confirming the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters. However, I approach its application to Clarke/Lexa, a pairing of two canonically queer women, not as an incorrect or overly broad use of an already defined term, but as evidence of a conceptual motility that invites further consideration.

[1.3] While there has been much discussion about the significance of producer/viewer engagement to fan cultures (Shefrin 2004; Jenkins 2006; Stein 2015), as well as fan-queered readings and writings of mainstream media (Bacon-Smith 1992; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Jenkins 1992), I identify queerbaiting as a phenomenon emerging from the increased significance of media paratexts (Gray 2010), especially promotional content and producer commentary, and what I call queer contextuality, referring to how both the current and previous landscapes of LGBT media narratives inform evaluations of particular texts. The analytical model I propose is applicable not just to both Rizzoli & Isles (R&I) and The 100; it outlines a more general space of textual and paratextual interpretation that can account for the historical contingencies productive of both queer subtext and queerbaiting (note 2).

[1.4] In what they both do and do not challenge as queer enough, queerbaiting discourses can be read for broader tensions between more and less progressive energies in fan cultures. Still, as viewer critique, they represent a politically significant moment in a longer tradition of fan activism for LGBT story lines as early as Star Trek (NBC, 1966–67) (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995) and in media content worlds more generally (Brough and Shresthova 2012). Furthermore, queerbaiting discourses address the character of producer/viewer interactions, and for queer female narratives in particular, serve as a touchstone for greater mainstream recognition of the subordinate status of sexual minorities and women in both representational and real-life contexts.

2. Reading intertextually: Paratextuality and queer contextuality

[2.1] The complexity of reading texts has been a cornerstone of both fan studies and queer media studies: despite authorial intentions, multiple readings are available, and the character of televisual texts makes them particularly open to interpretation. Following Stuart Hall's (1973) Encoding/Decoding, Fiske's (1987) influential model distinguished between preferred readings, which are intended by the producer, and alternative or resistant readings, where audiences read against the grain.

[2.2] While queer readings have not traditionally been the preferred readings of mainstream media, the subordinate status of such noncanonical interpretations has been challenged from two angles. First, in his analysis of popular media, Doty (1993)
rejected a hierarchical ordering of readings, arguing against considering queer interpretations as simply "sub-textual, sub-cultural, alternative readings, or pathetic and delusional attempts to see something that isn't there" (xii). Instead, he maintained, they should be seen as always present elements of putatively "straight" narratives of popular culture. Because of this, Doty's work is part of queer studies approaches pointing to how the queer is constitutive of, rather than simply marginal to, the heteronormative (Butler 1990, 1993). Second, despite the availability of queer interpretative challenges, scholars have argued for the importance of viewers having canonically LGBT representations rather than being confined to excavating queerly resistant readings (Jenkins 1995; Gross 2001). As I will demonstrate, both of these threads entwine in discourses on queerbaiting.

[2.3] In terms of the mechanics of reading texts, Fiske (1987) identified three codes that structure meaning—reality, representation, and ideology. "Reality" is constructed through shared sociocultural understandings of what is signified by physical appearance and by verbal and nonverbal communication; visual and auditory aspects conveyed by technical elements (e.g., camera work, lighting, sound, and music) compose the representational level; and a third, more complex level of ideological coding (for concepts such as "individualism," "capitalism," and "patriarchy") is organized from the other two types of code. Textual polysemy often involves interpretative contradictions, where one reading implies narrative facts that are incompatible with those of another reading. However, contradictory readings emerge not simply through properties of a text itself, but through additional content that viewers bring to their readings; this is the phenomenon of intertextuality.

[2.4] In media studies, intertextuality often refers to viewers drawing on other texts of the same kind; reading the rebooted Battlestar Galactica (SyFy, 2004–9), for example, by referencing the original series, other sci-fi shows (such as Star Trek), and so on. However, as Gray (2010) discussed, media texts are also associated with various paratexts both from official sources, including prequel and sequel films, studio promotional materials, tie-in toys and games, and deleted scenes and producer commentary on DVD and Blu-ray releases, and from fan-produced texts.

[2.5] Gray did not consider in any detail producers' commentary about their texts, a genre that I call producer paratext. Its impact has increased with the growth of social media and the move of entertainment conventions such as Comic-Con into mainstream culture. However, Gray noted that official paratexts do not always communicate a uniform message, in part because promotional content is the purview of marketers rather than producers. Another kind of official paratext (not mentioned by Gray) is the gag reels commonly included on DVD sets, which constitute a hybrid product of the marketing and creative teams; although the reels are put together by
the studio, actors are aware that what they are filmed doing on set may end up on those reels, and this content is therefore also a channel through which producers communicate with viewers. Such a range of sources for official paratexts makes them—like texts—polysemous.

[2.6] Media paratexts make up a transmedia environment in which both producer and consumer participate (Jenkins 2006), examples of which have been identified for various shows, such as *Heroes* (NBC, 2006–10) (Mann 2009), *Lost* (ABC, 2004–10) (Mann 2010), and *Glee* (Fox, 2009–15) (Marwick, Gray, and Ananny 2014; Stork 2014). Producer involvement with viewers derives in part from the greater precariousness of television production in a postnetwork era of audience fragmentation (Lotz 2007), and the proliferation of "quality" scripted programming (Carr 2014; Leopold 2013) is also an impetus for producers to heighten the appeal and profile of their shows through paratextual engagement.

[2.7] Queerbaiting discourses highlight the fact that such engagement around queer content or readings has implications specific to viewer experiences of LGBT media narratives more generally, which make up what I have labeled queer contextuality. There are two elements in counterpoint. On the one hand, there are now unprecedented numbers of LGBT characters across network, cable, and streaming sites (GLAAD 2015), reflecting the pursuit of niche audiences. In the 1990s, gay and lesbian narrative elements were initially targeted at affluent, predominantly white, and progressive straight viewers attracted to programming that they saw as hip and edgy (Becker 2006), but the industry also began explicitly courting LGBT viewers. For example, Sender (2007) discussed how the cable channel Bravo began "dualcasting" in the early 2000s, seeking to attract a mix of straight women and gay men, and Himberg (2014) argued that the use of lesbian content reflects current network strategies of "multicasting" to appeal to an even broader mix of audiences. On the other hand, there are still few shows with queer female characters as leads, and there remains a cumulative representational deficit across the time period that many viewers have been consuming media. In addition, a disproportionate number of queer characters continue to meet untimely ends (Riese 2016), a residue of the Hays Code's stipulation that homosexuality could be depicted only in an unappealing or negative fashion (Russo 1987). Queer contextuality, then, informs how viewers assess (1) the validity of reading queerness in a text, (2) the political and economic feasibility (particularly in regard to studio and network financial considerations) of having a canonical LGBT narrative, and (3) the quality of the canonical LGBT narratives that are produced.

[2.8] Queerbaiting is the outcome of increased paratextual discourse about LGBT content at a specific moment of queer contextuality. We might be tempted to reserve
the term, in the sense that I use it, for media texts that fail to have canonically queer characters despite textual and paratextual content that suggests the possibility. However, doing so would not explain why *The 100*, with a canonical F/F couple, has also been widely cited as an example of queerbaiting. The crucial element is not a lack of canonicity, but how satisfactorily queerness plays out in the canonical text relative to viewer expectations that emerge from the reading of multiple texts and paratexts and that take account of queer contextuality. That is, queerbaiting’s referents expand because the text–paratext–queer contextuality matrix changes over time, although its structure remains the same.

[2.9] I represent these elements in figures 1 through 4, which provide a diagrammatic way to map out different media texts relative to each other, and to situate queerbaiting in relation to other interpretative possibilities. The figures do not imply that a text can be definitively classified as queerbaiting or not; indeed, what counts as queerbaiting is often contested (note 3). What the model presents is a schema for how a particular text comes to be seen as queerbaiting by at least some viewers. The vertical axis represents viewer expectations of canonical queer content, while the horizontal axis represents textual content on a spectrum from subtextual to canonical (figure 1).

**Figure 1. Text–paratext–queer contextuality matrix, basic elements A.** [View larger image.]

[2.10] Intertextual readings of textual content and paratextual content inform viewer expectations of canonical queer content (figure 2). In turn, intertextual readings are informed by queer contextuality, and queer contextuality also informs viewer expectations of canonical queer content independent of any one media text, as well as assessments of the quality of canonical queer content (figure 3).
[2.11] Figure 4 additionally labels three different spaces: the realm of queerbaiting (shaded red), where viewers have high expectations for quality canonical queer content, but consider the quality of the actual queer content to be low; desired queer representation (shaded green), where the quality of canonical queer content matches viewers' high expectations; and queer subtext (shaded blue), where queer content is only suggested, not canon, but viewer expectations of having canonical queer content are low. I return to these diagrams after examining the examples from R&I and The 100, but first, provide a snapshot of the shift in viewer practices from reading subtextually to identifying queerbaiting that underscores the historicity of queerbaiting's emergence.
3. From subtextuality to queerbaiting

[3.1] While media producers have never prevented viewers from reading against the grain, the norm used to be not to acknowledge, let alone encourage, queer interpretations of canonically heterosexual characters and narratives. Breaking from this, *Xena: Warrior Princess* (USA Networks and syndication, 1995–2001) was one of the earliest mainstream programs where content strongly suggestive of same-sex romantic or sexual interest, between Xena and her companion Gabrielle, was both intentionally included and publicly acknowledged by producers (Maris 2016). Although it aired well before the concept of queerbaiting that I use here emerged, *Xena* was also read intertextually, which included taking account of the canonical text, official paratexts, and queer contextuality.

[3.2] In a 1996 interview, executive producer Liz Friedman noted, "We opened up [a season 2 episode] with the two of them fishing naked, and we're about to have a Halloween episode that will certainly have some nice moments for our queer fans, a little lesbian vampire show" (Friedman 1996). Lucy Lawless (Xena) also commented suggestively in another interview that Xena's fantasy vacation would be "a biennial sailing trip to Lesbos" (B. 2003). Such comments occurred in the context of both Xena and Gabrielle having occasional male love interests, and a sizable audience segment who preferred Xena to be romantically paired with the god Ares. While the protagonist of Ellen DeGeneres's sitcom *Ellen* (ABC, 1994–98) had come out in a fourth-season episode, the show ended the next season, and there were no other US shows with queer female leads. Despite dissatisfaction about the continuous "will they/won't they" tease, then, a large proportion of Xena/Gabrielle fans accepted that subtext was as far as *Xena* the show could go, and fanfiction would be the domain for explicitly romantic narratives (Hanmer 2014).

[3.3] A decade or two later, a number of shows are being referenced as examples of queerbaiting, although the concept has only begun to attract in-depth academic analyses, primarily of male/male pairings. As Collier (2015) and Fathallah (2015) discuss, the canonical text of *Sherlock* (BBC and PBS, 2010–), which has a large "Johnlock" (John Watson/Sherlock Holmes) fandom, has included various nods to Watson and Holmes as a couple, including other characters assuming that they are together romantically and interactions between the two suggestive of attraction or flirtation. One episode shows Holmes about to kiss another male character, Moriarty, before revealing that the moment was being imagined by a female fan. Collier (2015) identifies the show as an example of queerbaiting primarily because of such textual elements, even as show producers have sought to shut down Johnlock readings. In contrast, while Fathallah (2015) recognizes that various scenes could be seen as queerbaiting, she argues that the text still provides "queer disruption" by offering
comments by Watson or Holmes that "can be read as ruptures in the performance of heterosexual masculinity" (491), as well as through the campy villainry of Moriarty, whose initial reading by Sherlock as gay and later narrative establishment as straight provide "a 'hauntology' of queerness" (492).

[3.4] Collier (2015) also discusses Supernatural (WB and CW, 2005–), many fans of which favor the M/M pairing of Dean and Castiel (Destiel), as an example of queerbaiting. As in Sherlock, there are many textual elements that invite viewers to read the characters' relationship as romantic, including each one's importance to the other, scenes of emotional intensity and physical intimacy, and the failure of both to deny that they are a couple when other characters assume it. Furthermore, the Supernatural creative team has supported fans' queer readings in producer paratexts on social media, in interviews, and at fan conventions, albeit only to a degree. Collier describes how producers of both shows seek to assert ultimate control of the narrative, whether through episode content or through public interactions with fans.

[3.5] Collier's work aside, there has been little discussion of producer paratexts and queerbaiting; in fact, besides Gray (2010), most discussions about the significance of media paratexts concern those that are fan-produced, although not all explicitly theorize them as paratextual (those that do include Fathallah 2016; Leavenworth 2015). Nordin (2015) notes, without exploring further, that fan discourses of queerbaiting sometimes reference official paratexts such as trailers and promos, which are read as a promise of what the text could deliver.

[3.6] Cavalcante's (2013) analysis of TransAmerica (2005) does not address queerbaiting, but is pertinent in discussing how paratexts do "double work." He examines how the film's reviews, posters, and DVD commentary sought to corral readings about LGBT subjectivity, a phenomenon that has also been noted for other films, such as Fight Club (1999) (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002) and Brokeback Mountain (2005) (Cooper and Pease 2008). However, Cavalcante argues that despite an intent for "paratextual domestication" to "subordinate transgender themes and advance certain reductive tropes and stereotypes," the paratexts also "invite wider cultural conversations about sexuality and gender, and include transgender individuals within the national family" (88).

[3.7] Neither textual nor paratextual content alone can determine the meanings of media texts, but these accounts illustrate the significance of paratexts for reading texts. That is, the queerly polysemous is not simply a matter of textual character—the queerness that Doty (1993) and others have argued inheres in popular texts—or of reception—the ability of viewers (including scholars) to read queerly. Rather, text, paratext, and queer contextuality are all at play, and it is their specific configurations
that determine how queerbaiting discourses arise for any particular show, as I illustrate in analyses of R&I and *The 100*.

### 4. Methodology

[4.1] I discuss textual and paratextual material in R&I and *The 100* that has been particularly important for romantic readings of Jane/Maura and Clarke/Lexa. For the textual content of R&I, Fiske (1987) provides a useful model for outlining relevant codings of the characters' appearance and communication, technical filmic conventions, and ideological codings of family and intimacy. Televisual semiotic conventions are also relevant to Clarke and Lexa's scenes on *The 100*, but since their relationship was canonical and viewers therefore did not need to read a romantic bond through the usual "subtextual" methods, I primarily outline the key narrative developments.

[4.2] With both shows having a large amount of paratextual content, I focus on material that is most pertinent to queerbaiting discourses. These include producer paratexts from show runners, writers, and actors that are representative of their comments about the relationships in question (note 4). For R&I, I also discuss promotional paratexts for upcoming seasons and segments from the DVD blooper reels.

### 5. Textual content: *Rizzoli & Isles*

[5.1] *Rizzoli & Isles*, coproduced by Warner Horizon Studios, Hurdler Productions, and Ostar Entertainment, premiered on Time Warner's TNT network in 2010, and wrapped its final, seventh season in 2016. Jane Rizzoli, a homicide detective, and Maura Isles, chief medical examiner for Massachusetts, work together in a Boston police department. Jane's mother and brothers are often present, while Maura is not usually shown to have her own familial unit independent of Jane and her family. Already friends when the show begins, both women have had several male love interests since season 1, but there is a variety of textual content supporting a romantic reading of their relationship.

[5.2] The contrast between the two characters' appearance and demeanor evokes a butch/femme dynamic, especially combined with Jane's repeatedly protecting Maura from danger. Jane, a tomboy from childhood, favors pants, T-shirt, and blazer, while Maura is typically clad in conventionally feminine fashion. Furthermore, the show has acknowledged both that Jane might be seen as a lesbian (in 1.02, an angry interviewee calls her a "a skinny greaseball dyke detective") and that people may assume or believe Jane and Maura to be a couple (1.06, 2.03, 5.04). The two have
discussed the possibility of being attracted to women (1.06), and Jane has asked Maura, somewhat jokingly, to confirm that she is not attracted to her (2.03). They have frequently expressed physical and verbal affection and had emotionally revealing conversations, on two occasions while lying on a bed together (1.01, 3.08).

[5.3] As for technical elements, multiple scenes have been framed, lit, and scored to code emotional and physical intimacy between Jane and Maura. For example, in 1.09, as the two sit inclined toward each other on a park bench having an emotionally intense conversation, there are close-ups of their faces, as well as of Jane's hand caressing Maura's knee, and the score marks the interaction as emotional and intimate.

[5.4] In terms of ideological codings for family and intimacy, Jane's mother, who lives in Maura's guesthouse, interacts with Maura like she is another daughter. Jane is also often over at Maura's, although Jane's family members are often present as well. These scenes of domesticity therefore have some similarity to depictions of married couples, although the family dynamic also undercuts a romantic connection that is more readily available in scenes with just Jane and Maura. A significant narrative parallel occurs in a plotline involving serial killer Charles Hoyt, whose modus operandi is to restrain the man of a heterosexual couple and force him to watch Hoyt assault and murder the woman before also being killed. Hoyt's treatment of Jane and Maura significantly mirrors this; he threatens to rape Maura when she interviews him in 1.08, while his main goal regarding Jane is to kill her, and after he escapes in 2.10 and captures the two women, he attempts to kill Maura while forcing Jane, who is restrained, to watch.

6. Textual content: The 100

[6.1] The 100, coproduced by CBS Television Studios, Warner Bros. Television, and Alloy Entertainment, premiered on the CW network in 2014, with season 3 airing in 2016. In a postnuclear apocalyptic world, Clarke Griffin, the lead character, heads a group, the "Arkers," who establish a settlement called Arkadia, while Lexa is the commander of the "Grounders," with whom the Arkers find themselves in conflict at the beginning of the show. The narrative suggests that Clarke would be categorized as bisexual and Lexa as a lesbian in modern identity parlance, although these terms are not used onscreen.

[6.2] Clarke and Lexa meet in the middle of season 2 while negotiating a truce between their two forces. The two grow closer after agreeing to fight a common enemy, during which Lexa tells Clarke about her last lover, a woman who is now dead. Over several episodes, Clarke and Lexa share scenes of emotional intensity and
physical proximity. Ultimately Lexa initiates a kiss, which Clarke reciprocates briefly before apologizing that she is not yet ready to be with anyone. They part ways at the end of season 2 after Lexa makes a tactical decision to abandon Clarke and their military alliance. As season 3 opens, Lexa has Clarke brought to the city of Polis, from which Lexa now rules, for Clarke's protection. Initially furious at Lexa, Clarke rebuilds her personal and professional bonds with her over the next episodes as they work together again.

[6.3] In 3.07, Lexa invites Clarke to stay in Polis as her guest despite a new injunction that no Arkers be permitted within Grounder territory, but Clarke reluctantly decides that she must return to Arkadia to deal with problems there. When she goes to say goodbye to Lexa, they kiss and make love for the first time. After Clarke returns to her room, one of Lexa's advisers, opposed to her closeness to Clarke, shoots at Clarke, but when Lexa rushes into the room, his bullet strikes her instead, and Lexa dies with Clarke trying in vain to save her.

7. Paratextual content: *Rizzoli & Isles*

[7.1] As I noted earlier, paratexts are subject to multiple interpretations since they come from more than one source; additionally, the same person may say different things at different times or be intentionally ambiguous. Therefore, I cite the content below not as evidence of the "true" intentions of producers, but as key paratexts that have been read alongside textual content in discussions about queerbaiting.

[7.2] R&I producers have commented that they did not intend to depict sexual tension between Jane and Maura, and stated or strongly implied that the pairing would never become romantic, but they have also revealed an intent to encourage the hopes of Jane/Maura (or "Rizzles") fans. Janet Tamaro, show runner for seasons 1 through 4, noted that "the lesbian theory endlessly amuses me, and it amuses the cast," but "Rizzoli and Isles have been heterosexual from the first episode" (Hochman 2011). Executive producer Jan Nash stated that the two are no more than "each other's best friends" (Bendix 2014), and was quoted in *TV Guide* as saying that Jane/Maura was "not something that will be in the cards," in a paragraph-long quotation captioned "No Rizzles...ever." However, that part of his comment was soon deleted, and the subheading changed to "No Rizzles this season?" (Eng 2015) (note 5). Although neither the change to the text nor the reasons for it were acknowledged, a likely reason is that the original article too categorically shot down any chance of a Jane/Maura relationship, so the text was edited to make it more ambiguous.

[7.3] Angie Harmon (Jane) and Sasha Alexander (Maura) have also stated that they see the relationship between their characters as only friendship, although they
recognize their onscreen chemistry and understand why viewers imagine them as a couple (Snarker 2012). Still, Alexander has suggested that Maura might be open to same-sex encounters, commenting that "if Jane were open to it, I think Maura would absolutely experiment because she's just a little bit more open-minded" (Anderson-Minshall 2012). Furthermore, Harmon acknowledged that the show has intentionally included lesbian innuendo: "Sometimes we'll do a take for that demo...I'll brush by [Maura's] blouse or maybe linger for a moment" (Hochman 2013).

[7.4] The awareness of "that demo" (i.e., the lesbian demographic) is also evident in gag reels, which show Harmon and Alexander playing with explicitly romantic tropes. An outtake of the park bench scene I described earlier zooms in on Harmon and Alexander caressing each other's thighs, and then shows Harmon leaning in as if Jane is about to kiss Maura, before she is stopped by a giggling Alexander. The season 1 gag reel also includes an outtake of another emotionally charged scene, in which Harmon ad libs, "Kiss me," and Alexander leans toward her, eyes closed and lips puckered, responding, "Just kiss me." Outtakes like these offer almost-textual possibilities for the episodes, since they are so close to what is seen on the show. Thus, while being dissonant with actual episodes, these paratexts are nods to fan wishes in teasing what canon could in theory look like. In addition, in the season 3 gag reel, Harmon fakes a kiss with Alexander, and then, striking a couple of suggestive poses with her, turns to the camera and asks sultrily, "Like that? Like this?," again pointing to the actors' awareness of viewer desire to see Jane and Maura together.

[7.5] Paratexts from TNT's marketing have also been suggestive, hinting repeatedly—though not exclusively—at a romantic interest between Jane and Maura. In a season 2 promotion (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNfU0wez4mY), Harmon comments that "[Maura]'s funny, and annoying, and they [Jane and Maura] fight," and the clip then cuts to Maura saying, "That's a sign of sexual frustration!" Another season 2 promo (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czKCM3GSsHw) shows Jane and Maura at a speed-dating event, having no luck connecting with a string of men and finally ending up at a table together. Jane remarks, "We should do this again sometime," Maura agrees, and the two toast to that as the voice-over says, "Rizzoli and Isles—a perfect match." In a season 3 promo (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZweX1vZNo4), a tight shot of Jane and Maura huddled together is followed by a voice-over comment by Jane that "opposites attract" during a slow-motion shot of the two staring at each other while walking, and then more clips of Jane and Maura interacting affectionately. A season 4 poster shows the two handcuffed together with the tagline "Bound for Life." And for season 5, one promo (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIXfDHIltRE) intercuts the text "Behind every great woman is another great woman" with footage extracted from 1.06, when Maura tells Jane that various women thought that Jane was hot in her (fake lesbian) dating
profile, and Jane responds, "I might flip for that!"; from 2.03, when Jane asks Maura, "You don't want to sleep with me...do you?"; from 5.04, when Maura tells some men that Jane is a lesbian to stop them from hitting on her; and from 2.13, when Jane and Maura snuggle as Jane discourages a man from pursuing Maura by saying, "Yes, we are still...together."

8. Paratextual content: The 100

[8.1] Whereas the paratexts for R&I pertinent to queerbaiting discourses suggested a romantic relationship that remained noncanonical, those for The 100 involved producers courting viewers invested in seeing a F/F relationship, and Clarke/Lexa fans in particular, through several strategies (Ryan 2016b; http://wedeservedbetter.com/).

[8.2] From late season 2 onward, producers and writers highlighted the distinctiveness of The 100's treatment of same-sex relationships. After Clarke and Lexa first kissed in season 2, The 100 was written up by several outlets for its "brave," "progressive," and "groundbreaking" approach to sexuality (Murphy 2015; Peitzman 2016; MacDonald 2016), and in retweeting the links, show runner Jason Rothenberg also reiterated these descriptors. Javier Grillo-Marxuach, one of the show's writers (credited with the episode in which Lexa was killed), also tweeted before season 3 began that viewers looking for a "truly progressive approach to LGBT relationships" should try watching The 100.

[8.3] Producers were also encouraging when responding to fan questions about Lexa and her relationship with Clarke. Since Alicia Debnam-Carey (Lexa) was not a series regular, there were fears that Lexa might be killed off even in season 2, and many fans who tweeted the creative team about this noted that death was a common fate for television lesbians. One early reassurance came in March 2015, after Lexa's betrayal of her alliance with Clarke had aired; Layne Morgan, a personal assistant on the show, tweeted that while "half the Internet" was crying that "Clexa [Clarke/Lexa] is dead," she was thinking, "Clexa has begun," and Kim Shumway, a show writer, replied "Yes" to this tweet. Another example came in December 2015, when a fan asked whether there was "hope for Clexa," and Rothenberg tweeted back, "Always."

[8.4] Twitter communication from the creative team also strongly suggested that Lexa would live through season 3. In January 2016, Rothenberg tweeted that they were shooting the season 3 finale in downtown Vancouver; "Come say hi!" Answering the invitation, fans took and circulated photographs of Eliza Taylor (Clarke) and Debnam-Carey filming together. Another cast member, Henry Ian Cusick, also tweeted that he was with both Taylor and Debnam-Carey on set during the finale's filming. In addition, Rothenberg did advance promotion for episode 3.07 on the lesbian
entertainment site AfterEllen, which was granted an advance screener and an exclusive interview (Valerie Anne 2016); the coverage was clearly intended to generate excitement rather than apprehension.

[8.5] More generally, the producers have expressed support for LGBT issues and viewers. For instance, Rothenberg tweeted a behind-the-scenes photo of Taylor and Debnam-Carey with rainbow-colored candy (with his comment being "and yes, they chose RAINBOWS"), and writers retweeted a ClexaForMe Twitter tag that trended in December 2015, which was used to share positive comments about the Clarke/Lexa story line, as well as the importance of media representations showing that LGBT characters could be normal, strong, and happy, and of LGBT issues more broadly.

9. Discussion

[9.1] Intertextuality is central to the interpretation of media texts, which, as Gray (2010) commented, involves a "complex hall of paratextual and intertextual mirrors through which meaning and reception must pass" (119). The particular development of queerbaiting is due to changes in the (para)texts that are read intertextually, and the queer contextuality of when they are read.

[9.2] Figure 5 maps out R&I and The 100, as well as Xena: Warrior Princess, in the representation of interpretative space I presented in section 2, showing how it accommodates both current differences between shows and changes over time. R&I is similar in various respects to previously discussed examples of queerbaiting, such as Sherlock and Supernatural: heightened expectations for a Jane/Maura pairing developed from intertextual reading of texts and paratexts, but the consistent lack of definitive canonicity located the show for many viewers in the realm of queerbaiting. For The 100 prior to Lexa's death in 3.07, viewer expectations for canonical queer content were also high, because of both textual and paratextual content, and since viewers considered its content high quality, the show fell in the realm of desired queer representation. After Lexa's death, viewers assessed the show's content poorly, shifting the show into the domain of queerbaiting. For Xena, viewer expectations of Xena/Gabrielle becoming canon were relatively low, partly because there were fewer official paratexts suggesting this possibility, and partly because industry constraints of the time pointed to the low likelihood of such an outcome. The Xena/Gabrielle relationship therefore fell, like same-sex pairings for many shows, into a realm of queerly subtextual readings, although, were this incarnation of Xena to air today, it would likely be accused of queerbaiting (note 6).
The complexity of reading meaning in texts has long been acknowledged; it is complex also in paratexts. As I noted earlier, Cavalcante (2013) argues that official paratexts could not fully circumscribe *TransAmerica*’s capacity to trouble normative discourses of gender and sexuality. In the case of queerbaiting, it is not so much that paratexts do double work, but that paratextual claims to authoritative textual meaning cannot escape becoming part of the matrix of interpretation, being read intertextually with the text (and other paratexts) rather than superseding them. Therefore, once a show is seen as queerbaiting for not making a queer narrative canon, producer denials that such a narrative will ever occur cannot extract the text from the queerbaiting discourse. In any case, the many sources and widely varying contents of paratexts make it impossible to pin down any single "official" message. This is especially true of R&I.

For R&I, the most relevant official paratexts were promotional content and interviews about the Jane/Maura relationship, while *The 100* exemplifies paratextual engagement through social media. However, both these sets of paratexts are indicative and constitutive of the normalization of LGBT visibility in mainstream media. In 2009, it was noteworthy that actor Stephanie March coyly declined to shoot down the possibility that her *Law and Order: SVU* (NBC, 1999–) character was in love with another woman (Warn 2009), although neither did the creative team explicitly court this pairing’s fandom through extensive paratextual commentary. In comparison, multiple R&I promotional paratexts suggested a romantic connection between Jane and Maura, and producers and actors were asked repeatedly about it, while *The 100*, like various other shows now airing, has explicitly sought LGBT viewers by highlighting the Clarke/Lexa relationship and the show’s approach to sexuality more generally.

R&I and *The 100* also underscore two crucial sides of queer contextuality: what recent and current LGBT narratives suggest is now viable on mainstream media, and how past and existing deficiencies constitute a context of representational deficits that
viewers see as requiring improvement. R&I aired on TNT, a basic cable network, and although it is no longer unheard of for cable shows to have queer lead characters, TNT has had no such programming. Since R&I was consistently among TNT's highest-rated scripted programming (Futon Critic 2010), many viewers recognized that neither the show runners nor the network had any financial incentive to change the depiction of Jane and Maura's relationship. In any case, R&I was susceptible to queerbaiting charges whether a canonical Jane/Maura relationship was economically feasible or not. If it was not feasible, then the suggestions were fully misleading; if it was, then the producers were guilty of teasing a narrative they failed to deliver.

[9.6] For The 100, queer contextuality is multilayered. At one level, the show exemplifies recent improvements in queer female representation on US television, particularly with its female lead having a multiseason female love interest. However, as many have noted, Lexa's fate was strikingly similar to that of another lesbian character, Tara, on a 2002 Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB and UPN, 1997–2003) episode: both were killed right after reuniting romantically with another woman and having their first onscreen love scenes, and each died of a bullet meant for another character rather than for a meaningful or heroic reason. It is true that, within the story world of The 100, Lexa's killer did not object to her love for Clarke because of Clarke's gender, but nonetheless the narrative link between lesbian sex and happiness on the one hand and death on the other reproduced a longstanding trope of LGBT representation. An unprecedented level of viewer discussion produced many accounts situating Lexa's death in the longer history of "Bury Your Gays," including a collaborative cataloguing of lesbian character deaths that began with 65 and now stands at 181 (as of June 12, 2017) (Riese 2016).

[9.7] Developments in official paratexts and queer contextuality are deeply intertwined: the official encouragement of queer fandoms demonstrated by R&I and The 100 has occurred in current contexts of LGBT media representation, while paratextual content is interpreted in the light of queer contextuality. However, viewer response to Lexa's death on The 100 may constitute something of a watershed for producer engagement with viewers about LGBT story lines or readings, with calls by viewers and critics not just for improvements in the treatment of LGBT narratives, but also for new discussions on the ethics of how producers appeal to fans, particularly those who are sexual or racial minorities (Roth 2016; Ryan 2016b). Queer contextuality, then, reflects and constitutes not only changes in media representation, but also recent increases in attention to sociopolitical inequality. The queerbaiting discourse has also broadened into commentary linking a recent string of deaths of female and minority characters to the underrepresentation of these groups among content producers (Ryan 2016a), while a viewer initiative to raise money for the Trevor Project, which serves LGBT youth in crisis, in honor of Lexa connects those...
criticizing *The 100* for queerbaiting with other fan endeavors for social justice beyond the media domain (Hinck 2012; Jenkins 2012; Lopez 2011).

[9.8] Such phenomena do not mean that queerbaiting critiques are informed only by progressive energies; the fact that in such critiques a text is deemed queer enough only when two characters are in a canonically romantic relationship tends to obscure other nonnormative modes of being and relating. For all the male love interests on R&I, Jane and Maura's emotional primacy to each other constitutes a homosocial intimacy that the dominant binaries of heterosexual/homosexual and romantic/platonic evacuate from the actual diversity of human relations (Sedgwick 1990). Their relationship and those of many other same-sex pairs who are not romantically involved in their canon texts can be read as instantiating intimacy outside of the normatively kinned family unit or couple, in forms such as romantic friendships (Faderman 1981), chosen family among lesbians and gays (Weston 1991), and other queered familial configurations (Halberstam 2011). Conversely, canonical LGBT characters and relationships can be problematically normative, as on shows including *Ellen* (ABC, 1994–98) (Dow 2001), *Will and Grace* (NBC, 1998–2006) (Battles and Hilton-Morrow 2002), and *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004–9) (Chambers 2006), and fans are often invested in LGBT narratives that reinforce mainstream discourses about gender and relationships (Ng 2008; Russo 2013; Scodari 2003).

[9.9] However, the purpose of my analysis has not been to evaluate the legitimacy of queerbaiting claims either on the basis of the availability of queer readings of the texts as they stand or on the basis of textual and paratextual "evidence." Rather, the examples I discussed highlight the necessity of considering multiple phenomena to account for the development of queerbaiting discourses, which in turn highlight changes in producer/viewer interactions around queer readings that both reflect and constitute conditions of LGBT representation and industry production more broadly.

10. Conclusion

[10.1] While initial accusations of queerbaiting were aimed only at texts that failed to deliver unequivocally canonical LGBT narratives, changes in queer contextuality and the increased prominence of official paratexts that comment on or allude to queer readings have expanded queerbaiting's scope. These developments highlight the historical contingency of queerbaiting as emergent from intertextual readings of textual content and producer/viewer interactions during a particular period of LGBT media representation—queer contextuality—that inform viewer expectations, which now extend to canonical LGBT narratives.
R&I epitomizes how many shows become embroiled in discussions of queerbaiting; despite denials of the possibility by a show runner and some actors, multiple official paratexts teased a Jane/Maura romance that was reinforced by some textual content, even as such a reading was also textually contradicted. For The 100, with Clarke and Lexa a canonical pairing, the key articulations between text and paratext are the creative team's courtship and encouragement of LGBT viewers and Clarke/Lexa fans, counterposed to the narrative characteristics of Lexa's death. Although the specific textual and paratextual elements are different, the same general matrix of text–paratext–queer contextuality that I presented is active in both shows.

Viewer demands for particular kinds of canonical narratives reflect a shift away from satisfaction with solely subtextual readings, long a creative mainstay for queer fandoms. However, alternative readings are not simply supplanted by canon, particularly since the scope of fan works always exceeds the quantity and variety of stories and possibilities that a canonical text can depict. As Figure 3 above diagrams, productive interpretative space outside of queerbaiting discourses remains for queer subtext that "hold[s] value and pleasure outside the mass media's limited repertoire" (Russo 2013, 458), even though that may not be the domain in which fans would prefer to see the forms of canonical representation they are pushing for.

Another alternative for viewers dissatisfied with mainstream LGBT narratives is independent productions, including Web-based series that depict a greater range of gender, sexual, and racial diversity (Christian 2012, 2014). Still, even in an era of declining linear television audiences, viewership for US network and cable programming indicates the enduring economic and representational significance of popular media, for which they can be expected to attract continued fan attention and critique.

Queerbaiting discourse constitutes increased viewer vocalness about both representation and how producers engage with viewers over it, exposing one of the front lines in conflicts over media texts and their meanings, as well as highlighting how current conditions of LGBT representation—which are significantly broader, along several dimensions, than they were a decade or two ago—remain shadowed by deficits both historical and contemporary.

11. Notes

1. In AfterEllen's femslash poll, Jane and Maura were runners-up in 2012 and won in 2013. In Zimbio's Best TV Couple poll, Jane and Maura were in the quarter-final round in 2013 and the main draw in 2014–15, and Clarke and Lexa were runners-up in 2015 and winners in 2016.
2. The model is not intended to be gender-specific, but because my focus here is on queer female representation, I do not discuss it in relation to the distinctive character of M/M relationships and their fandoms (Busse and Lothian, forthcoming). The model could in theory also be applied to transgender representations, but I have not seen examples of these discussed within queerbaiting discourses.

3. See, for example, fan disagreements over whether Once Upon a Time (ABC, 2011–) is queerbaiting in its depiction of the relationship between Emma and Regina (ouatqueer-antisq 2014).

4. I reviewed the Twitter accounts of key producers and drew from multiple other sources, including producer Tumblr posts, press interviews, and public commentary at fan conventions reliably recorded or reported.

5. The original article was entitled "5 Things to Expect on Rizzoli & Isles Season 6 (and 1 Thing That Won't Happen)," and the relevant paragraph began, "Yes, Nash is aware of the rabid Jane-and-Maura-'shipping. No, it's not gonna happen" and quoted Nash as saying, "The people who see the show a certain way and want it to be that, we're grateful that they love the show as much as they do, but that's not something that will be in the cards, and that's really all I'm gonna say about it." The edited article was retitled "5 Things to Expect on Rizzoli & Isles Season 6 (and 1 Thing That Probably Won't Happen)," "No, it's not gonna happen" was deleted from the first quotation, and "but that's not something that will be in the cards" was deleted from the second.

6. NBC announced in August 2015 that it is exploring a Xena reboot, and Javier Grillo-Maruach, who at the time was tapped to be executive producer, acknowledged contemporary differences in LGBT representation in commenting that "there is no reason to bring back Xena if it is not there for the purpose of fully exploring a relationship that could only be shown subtextually...in the 1990s" (Grillo-Maruach 2016).

12. Works cited


Theory

"Yes, the Evil Queen is Latina!": Racial dynamics of online femslash fandoms

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Abstract—Online media or participatory fandom has long been theorized as a unique creative and communicative space for women. Further, scholarly work has highlighted the possibility of it functioning as a space that is conducive to the articulation of queerness—both through transformative work and participant identity. However, this theorization has failed to account for the differential operations of these spaces when they are forced to deal with issues of race and racism. This essay argues that this is a significant blind spot as fannish spaces cannot but negotiate with the multiple loci of privilege and intersectional concerns that underpin their functioning. It therefore proposes a significant intervention in the study of the same, drawing our attention to the historically queer and oft-sidelined fannish spaces of femslash fandoms. This analysis seeks to locate the ways in which such queer spaces grapple with critiques of misogyny and homophobia in popular cultural texts and online spaces, as well as the problematics of race and racial identity within such spaces, focusing on the queer fan community built around the relationship of Regina Mills and Emma Swan, eponymously known as Swan Queen, in the television show Once Upon a Time (2011–).

Keywords—Fan community; Fan fiction; Intersectionality; Queerness; Race; TV

1. Introduction

Fans of popular cultural media texts in 2017 occupy a somewhat unique position. On one hand, studios now battle for eyeballs in an ever-expanding globalized marketplace, and their efforts at currying fan favor now encapsulate activities once considered weird or derided for their links to fannish subcultures. Glitzy fan conventions encourage cosplay and cosplayers; fan fic is solicited and fan art contests are a matter of routine. There has been, over the last 10 years, a significant
mainstreaming of certain aspects of fan culture. As numerous academic studies have pointed out (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Booth 2015), a key role in this process has been played by the proliferation of fannish activity on the Internet, particularly the rise of social media platforms like LiveJournal, Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter. As content creators and marketers have been able to listen in to fans like never before, fans have also been granted unprecedented access to talk back to the creators, leading to a fourth wall that is more porous than ever. This newly acquired cultural capital and leverage is not, however, distributed equitably, and access to it remains highly determined by other aspects of individual fan identity—most crucially, race, gender, and sexuality.

[1.2] Fan studies in 2017 is also at a crossroads of sorts. Exciting new possibilities of research have opened up in numerous directions, encompassing everything from fandom tourism to the evolving mechanics of transmedia storytelling. It is, nonetheless, crucial to draw attention to some of its recurring blind spots, particularly in relation to race. Stanfill (2011) examines racial dynamics in media fandom communities, but does so with a focus on the power relations between white male fans and the mainstream that sees them as an aberration and as possibly misdoing whiteness. While interesting, this discussion does not engage with nonwhite fans and their positions within fandom vis-à-vis white fans who might misdo whiteness but nonetheless retain considerable privilege. Rebecca Wanzo’s (2015) crucial intervention has underlined the whiteness of the very genealogy of the field, with studies of African American fandom in particular having been overlooked in theorizations about US-based fan cultures. This is a very significant critique, which we would like to extend to engage with nonwhite fans who participate in media fandom communities as conceived of within mainstream fan studies. Warner's (2015) work on the black female audiences of *Scandal* and Johnson’s (2015) examination of misogynoir and antiblackness in *The Walking Dead* fandom are also recent notable interventions in the field.

[1.3] While theorists (Busse 2013; Stanfill 2013) have pointed to the role that gender and, to an extent, sexuality, play in the fashioning of the ideal fan for the marketers of popular cultural texts, little attention has been paid to the ways in which this paradigm is also heavily racialized. For instance, the oft-criticized fanboy/girl binary, with the fangirl characterized as irrational, hysterical, and ultimately unprofitable (Flegel 2015), is certainly a valid analysis, but it remains a partial one, bypassing completely, for example, the differential treatment that nonwhite fanboys and fangirls receive in fannish spaces. Similarly, when it comes to sexuality, there has been a consistent focus on the ways in which queerness has been expressed, both within fan texts and fan communities; extant studies have focused on male slash communities for the most part (Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2003). However, these examinations ignore or erase the role that race plays in these fan communities and
their production. Because they do not speak to or of nonwhite fans, their analyses of subversion, resistance, and co-option do not have the weight they might have with a less parochial, more intersectional approach.

[1.4] This absence of attention to race in fan studies is ironic, because these debates have never been more hotly discussed and contested in fandom spaces than they have been in recent years, particularly after the controversial series of events and discussions that constituted RaceFail '09 (note 1). This is particularly true of the social media platform Tumblr (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014). Although scholars have noted that social media platforms have changed the way online spaces and interactions function, there is as yet little work on Tumblr, which is a major site of fan online activity in the present day (Nosko, Wood, and Molema 2010; Carstensen 2011). Tumblr offers us evidence of just how interconnected and fluid media fandom spaces have become, disrupting the accepted sectioning off that fan studies has itself partially enabled in its divisions of, for example, studies along genres of male slash, het, and femslash. Likewise, because it is a particularly friendly site for women, queer people, people of color, and progressives, it has become a space in which social justice politics and fan activity intersect. This is not to argue that there is nothing to be gained by focusing our attention on specific aspects of fan production—this essay is very much in that tradition—but to fully address the current social media scenario, we must also look at fan sites as complex continuums, rather than as completely different watertight compartments. We must bring intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Bobo 1995; hooks 2009; Rodríguez 2003) into the heart of our analyses of fandom spaces—not just as part of a list at the beginning of papers and presentations to show an awareness of these aspects of identity, but with the same weight as gender and sexuality.

[1.5] Thus, this essay offers an intersectional intervention in fan studies by focusing attention on the historically queer and oft-sidelined spaces of femslash fandoms. We seek to locate the ways in which such queer fans grapple with critiques of misogyny and homophobia in popular cultural texts and online spaces, both in relation to and in conjunction with the problematics of race and racial identity, and thereby address this existing lacuna in contemporary fan studies. We will locate this discussion within a consideration of existing scholarship on femslash and its relationship to other genres of media fandom activity. Following that, we will also consider the ways in which race has been engaged within certain key femslash fandoms in order to historicize our understanding of the same. Our particular case study is the queer fan community built around the racialized relationship of the characters Regina Mills and Emma Swan, eponymously known as Swan Queen, in the television show Once Upon a Time (2011–). We will focus on the vociferous fannish debates centering around the claiming of Regina Mills (or the Evil Queen) as Latina, and the complex negotiations in
Swan Queen fan works that seek to foreground the Evil Queen's Latina identity in opposition to the purported color-blindness of the source text.

2. Examining the ghettoization of femslash

[2.1] Fan studies over the years has seen a remarkable degree of multidisciplinarity—almost too much of it, some have claimed (Hellekson 2009)—in terms of the methodological approaches to the analysis of fan activity, drawing from fields as diverse as anthropology, communications studies, music studies, Internet studies, and so on. However, much of this work tends to approach Western media fandom in particular with an implicit understanding that its dividing lines fall quite neatly along the generic divisions of het, male slash, and femslash. These divisions are broadly ordered in terms of gender and sexuality. Significant academic focus has been devoted to the study of those fan communities wherein there is a perceived shocking disruption of accepted correlations between what fans are and what they ship. This has resulted in an inordinate focus on male slash fandoms as initially they were seen to be constituted of straight female fans. The foundational texts of the field (Russ 1985; Penley 1991; Lamb and Veith 1986) saw these fans as subversive because they were disrupting patriarchal discourses regarding what they were meant to find desirable in their fannish practices. While this almost all-pervasive formulation of male slash fandoms has been questioned significantly in recent times—multiple surveys (Melannen 2010; Centrumlumina 2013) now attest to the fact that male slash fandoms also have a high representation of queer women along a broad spectrum of identity articulations—the inherent subversiveness of these fandoms remains a dominant strand in theorization about them (Driscoll 1996; Busse 2005).

[2.2] Conversely, femslash fandoms and texts are often somehow seen as inherently less disruptive to patriarchal strictures, as lesbian sexual performance in particular is argued to be produced almost overwhelmingly for the straight male porn viewer (Smyth 1990). This particular charge is mirrored by the oft-heard accusations that many women in the realm of popular culture pretend to be queer in order to titillate male viewers. Recent academic analyses, such as that of Russo's (2013), examines the problematics of negotiating a mode of queer female intimacy that resists this co-optation as something that femslash communities have to deal with, particularly when the texts they focus on are popular ones that engage a wide audience. These concerns have also informed other existing studies on femslash fandoms, such as those that focused on the relationship between the characters of Samantha Fraser and Janet Carter in the prolific Stargate SG-1 (1997–2007) fandom (Millward and Dodd 2016).

[2.3] One effect of the almost ghettoization of genres has been that femslash has largely remained a footnote to most studies on fan culture. For one, femslash fandoms
are continually held as less popular than those accruing around het and male slash pairings, though this assumption is increasingly disputed (note 2). More pertinent to this essay, however, is the fact that this erasure has also been animated by the aforementioned focus with tracing those aspects of fan activity that have crossed conventionally accepted gender and sexuality correlations. Since femslash fandoms have been assumed to be dominated by queer women from their inception, there has been very little impetus to examine the motives for their engagement in such activities. However, with the convergence of fan activity on shared platforms like Twitter and Tumblr, fans now have noticeably different entry points into a particular fannish universe. In actual fannish practice, particularly with the convergence of fannish activity on shared platforms like Twitter and Tumblr, there has been a noticeable engagement of fans with differing entry points into the common fannish universe. This has led to a significant disruption of long-accepted narratives about what has constituted visible or significant fan activity. For example, a lengthy feature on fan fic by the online magazine *Vulture* included a section captioned, "A Fanfiction Syllabus: Ten Classics That Cover the History, Breadth, and Depth of the Form, with Original Custom-Designed Covers." The section did indeed list some excellent examples of fan fic; however, the texts chosen remained dominated by cisgender white men, and no femslash text made an appearance on the list at all. This erasure was hotly contested by both femslashers and nonwhite fans, who underlined how this selective mythmaking and historiography about what is considered noteworthy about fan texts perpetuates and reinscribes erasures and biases within fan communities (allofthefeelings 2015).

[2.4] Shades of these arguments are also reflected in some other recent meditations on the place of femslash within fandom communities. These arise from the diversification of knowledge about the makeup of male slash communities, and seek to interrogate why queer women choose not to write about queer female relationships. Most of these arguments revolve around the freedom that female writers find in writing queer male bodies. Writing queer male bodies, it is argued, allows female writers to distance themselves from the effects of misogyny and rape culture that writing about female characters forces them to face head on. Additionally, in terms of more pornographic writing, it is more conducive to erotic fantasy to imagine a body that is wholly other, thus freeing the imagined experience and allowing for heightened physical responses that are unmoored from actual experience (Rachel A 2015). While these arguments all have some validity, they continue to remain stable only when a singular axis of difference is considered—that of gender. The almost total domination of white male bodies forming the focus of well over 60 years of documented male slash writing (drawing primarily from English-language media texts) points to the fact that some male bodies are clearly too much the other to form the object of fantasy or escape.
These are highly problematic positions, especially when they seem to lead to a conclusion that the most subversive thing queer women can do in fandom spaces is write about white male homosexual relationships. Our understanding of what makes up subversion, resistance, and co-option in fan practices therefore needs further interrogation, especially from an intersectional standpoint. In this essay, we refer to intersectionality in the light of Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) powerful formulation of the complex layering of discrimination that black women in particular have historically faced. This formulation has been adopted across disciplines to underline the need for multifaceted approaches to analyses of various issues that take into account race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, among other aspects of identity. In the particular case of fandom, a failure to adopt such a position leads to the unquestioning elevation of white queer relationships over those which include nonwhite characters, even in the contemporary reality of US-based popular cultural texts wherein interracial relationships are still a rarity. One example of this was the backlash against the canon relationship of the characters of Spock and Nyota Uhura in the Star Trek reboot movie released in 2009. As a text hailed to be the originator of male slash fandom activity, the new Star Trek movie was eagerly awaited by many fans, and the chemistry between the characters of Kirk and Spock made them rapidly into the fandom juggernaut. However, this also led to considerable amount of racism and misogyny directed at Uhura within fan fiction and meta, especially from the fans of the Kirk and Spock pairing. As many black fans argued, for the canon to pair Uhura with one of the film's heroes was in fact a very unusual and subversive act, as black women are seldom depicted as romantic leads (Scodari 2012). For fannish spaces to try and erase that, often in extremely toxic ways, and then try to argue that this had been done in the name of pushing for greater queer representation is obviously a highly dubious and effectively racist position (peri-peteia 2009). While this particular example has been drawn from a male slash versus het formulation, femslash fandoms have often been guilty of these blind spots as well, as will be discussed in more detail the next section of this essay. To reiterate, this is a problem that affects all fandom spaces and should be examined as such.

The notion of what constitutes subversiveness, therefore, needs to be further interrogated from multiple perspectives, including the variegation of dynamics found in femslash fandoms. For instance, Russo (2013) argues that,

male slash implies a particular mode of reading that interfaces with the mass media's codes for representing masculinity: because affectionate gestures between men are taboo, onscreen instances of intimate male–male relationships appear charged with romance and eroticism. In the rarer cases where two female characters have a close relationship, their attachment may be expressed more freely but thus read less clearly as homoerotic. (458)
This lens is certainly accurate in terms of some male slash pairings that have garnered fan attention, but it is equally true that there are other dynamics (such as that of sworn enemies) that do not necessarily express affectionate intimacy and have also garnered massive followings. Similarly, fans invested in queer female relationships are drawn to a wide range of relationship dynamics. Isaksson's (2009) analysis of the BDSM-heavy fan fic written for the pairing of the characters of Buffy Summers and Faith in the cult television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) offers one such example. Both women were vampire slayers and were portrayed as frequently shifting between being collaborators and antagonists. Their clashes were read by many fans as explicitly erotic, and related violent power dynamics were frequently explored in fan fic about them. Isaksson notes, "The sexual pleasures of violence and pain are frequently thematized in femslash featuring the two Slayers, which challenges the gender coding of violent sexuality in the canon as well as in Buffyverse kink-fic" (22). Swan Queen, which forms our case study in this essay, had similar antagonist/collaborator dynamics in the first season of *Once Upon a Time*, and was interpreted as similarly erotically charged by femslash fans. It would therefore not be inaccurate to affirm that femslash fandoms do engage with multiple dynamics between female characters and, in doing so, expand the ambit of what could be considered homoerotic and subversive expressions of queer female desire.

3. Negotiating race in femslash juggernauts

Before moving to our specific case study, it is necessary to locate that discussion within a broader consideration of how femslash fandoms other than Swan Queen have engaged (or not) with race. Considering the limited scope of this essay, we will focus on three fandoms that have had a considerable impact on the growth of femslash communities at different points in time—(1) *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001), as *Xena* is the starting point of most discussions of femslash, and it remains central to conceptualizations about what the act of shipping two women together based on textual cues (overt or subtextual) has signified since then; (2) *Glee* (2009–15), since it remains a watershed moment in terms of queer representation on mainstream television, and the pairing of Brittany and Santana is significant for this essay’s analysis for its depiction of an interracial queer relationship and its interpretation by fandom; and (3) *The Legend of Korra* (2012–14), an animated series set in a fictionalized Asian-inspired universe, since it allows us to examine the specific (sometimes problematic) ways in which fandom has depicted both Korra and Asami as nonwhite characters.

While femslash fan works have existed since the time of printed fanzines, the online communities formed around the ship of Xena/Gabrielle (*Xena: Warrior Princess*) were the first ones to attract the attention of fan scholars (Helford 2000, Jones 2000).
Jones characterizes the *Xena* femslashers as lesbian and bisexual women who "identify themselves among history's lost tribes—the colonized, the terrorized, the outcast, the dispossessed" (405). Additionally, Jones claims that with their queer reworkings of the text, fans "rethink history itself and, in particular, its inscriptions of marginalized identities" (406). The language of this analysis is troubling, as it leans heavily toward equating all femslashers with historically oppressed cultures and communities that face the brunt of appropriation and colonization within the text of *Xena* itself. For instance, in the highly problematic India arc in season 4, the show's rethinking of history results in egregious orientalism and exoticization, while also facilitating white saviorism. By ignoring the real, historical intersections of power in the reworking of myth and history in the show and focusing purely on the available queer readings of the text (focusing on two white female characters), both fans and academics allow for only a single axis of identity around which to base ideas of subversion and resistance. This trajectory of research has also been replicated in more recent studies of *Xena*'s queer fandom (Hanmer 2014). As pointed out earlier, this is by no means unique to femslash fandoms, but it does set up a troubling precedent in terms of their framing and, specifically, in their loaded choice of terms.

[3.3] Following on from this, much has been written about the profound effect Ryan Murphy's *Glee* has had on the way queerness, especially teen queerness, is depicted on US television screens. While much of the analysis has focused on the characters of Kurt and Blaine, the pairing of Brittany and Santana (known as Brittana) has also been seen as pivotal (Jacobs 2014; Hobson 2015). Brittana was not originally part of the plan for the show's writers, who decided to turn a throwaway in-joke into a character arc only after fans advocated for it vociferously. As actress Naya Rivera (who played Santana) remarked, "Who knows if the writers would have taken that relationship so seriously if there hadn't been such an outpouring for them to get together" (Ito 2011). This level of response certainly points to the fact that femslashers made up a very significant part of *Glee* fandom and also marked one of the first times in which a television show responded to demands of fans in context of a nonheterosexual relationship (note 3).

[3.4] Given the attention the show and its fans have received, it is surprising that there has not been much in-depth analysis of the fan fic produced around it. Ellison's (2013) examination of the *Glee* kink meme brings up some extremely interesting data on how various kinks were conceptualized in that shared fannish space, showing once again the interconnectedness of these genres. While not the primary focus of this essay, Ellison's detailing of certain femslash-specific kinks, such as the frequency of girl!penis, also points to a much greater variegation in how queer female sexuality is being conceptualized in these spaces than has been explored so far in fan studies. Ellison, however, does not focus on racial dynamics, and neither is this remarked upon
in other fan-centric analyses of the show (Marwick, Gray, and Ananny 2014). While Santana's queer Latina identity has been analyzed within the narrative of the show, these studies do not focus on fan texts (Phelps 2014; Molina-Guzmán 2013).

[3.5] In order to investigate how fan authors in the Brittana fandom negotiated with Santana's racial and ethnic identity (or if they did so at all), we examined a series of interviews that were conducted by Tumblr user oh-thats-wanky of seven high-profile fan fic writers in 2012 (oh-thats-wanky 2012). In each of the interviews, the authors were asked about their preferred writing styles, their favorite aspect of the pairing, and how they research their stories. It is intriguing that while there is mention of researching specific aspects of music, costumes, setting, and so on that are incorporated into various story ideas, there is almost no mention of researching Santana's background or positioning within these narratives. Out of the seven writers, only one, referred to as JJ and who writes as themostrandomfandom, mentions considering the intersections of Santana's identity as part of her isolation within "a group of outcasts." In the specific alternate universe (AU) fan fic referenced in the interview, *The Knife Thrower's Daughter*, Santana's experience of being racially coded is central to her introduction into the narrative, as she is considered a possibly exotic addition to a circus ensemble. After speculating on her possible ethnicities, the circus manager, Mr. Adams, decides that it would be best for her to have a "favorable nationality" and asks if she can "feign an accent."

[3.6] "Pardon?" Santana asks, confused as to whether Mr. Adams would prefer her to have an accent or not. Her whole body flutters with nerves. She feels her pulse pick up in neck and bites her lip. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

[3.7] "Nobody wants an American-born fortuneteller," Mr. Adams says bluntly. He scrutinizes Santana a second longer and then repeats, very calmly, "Can you or can you not feign an accent?"

[3.8] Santana searches inside herself, wondering if she can. She's never pretended such a thing before. She thinks of her grandmother, of her rounded t-sounds and wide vowels and nods gingerly. "Yes, I believe I can," she says, mimicking her grandmother's accent, putting lifts and flares into her words that she's never used before while speaking English.

[3.9] In her own ears, it's a poor imitation to the beautiful cursive of her grandmother's speech, but the attempt seems to satisfy Mr. Adams nonetheless.
"Very good," he says staunchly. "The country folk won't know the difference between Spanish and Italian anyhow. You sound exotic. You can pass."

Pass. (themostrandomfandom 2012)

Clearly then, while not an overt concern in much of the fan writing and analysis around the pairing, some writers were well aware of the nuanced nature of Santana's experience of queerness and isolation. It is also interesting to note that Glee debuted in 2009, the same year as RaceFail '09. In many ways, this event, though not engaged with at the same level in all fandom spaces, marked a watershed in the ways in which debates around these issues were framed. While fans who point out the overwhelming whiteness and US-centrism of fan spaces and texts still face backlash, there has been a definite shift in the ways these categories are approached.

This aspect can be further interrogated through a brief analysis of the fan activity around the critically acclaimed animated series The Legend of Korra. Korra is a unique text in a number of ways, but most significantly for this essay, it is set in a completely nonwhite world (note 4). The character of Korra initially seems to be interested primarily in Mako, even dating him, but by the end of the show is quite clearly romantically involved with Asami (amusingly also Mako's ex-girlfriend). While not made absolutely explicit in the main text of the show, its cocreator Bryan Konietzko confirmed the pairing on his blog immediately after the finale aired (Konietzko 2014). Korrasami occupies a unique space as one of the only popular nonwhite couples occupying a primary position in an English-language fandom (het, male slash, or femslash) and thus their interpretation in fan texts becomes key in this analysis. As a largely Tumblr-based fandom, the pairing has produced a large amount of fan art, wherein there is a troubling trend of colorism in the depiction of the canonically darker-skinned Korra and the fairer Asami. In many cases, Korra's skin is lightened by fan artists, either consciously or unconsciously. In other cases, especially those that imagine the pairing in AUs, Asami is often whitewashed with her cultural specificity erased.

This can be a problem both of art-style and of setting. Fan artists often remix narrative worlds from different source texts to produce images set in AU's. This can have troubling effects if there is an erasure of specific racial-cultural/ethnic contexts. In our survey of artwork for the pairing, we came across numerous examples that placed Korra and Asami into the universe of the Disney version of Tarzan. This is a problematic choice because apart from the fact that the Tarzan story itself is deeply racist, the darker-skinned Korra was consistently cast in the role of the uncivilized brute who must be tamed by Asami—who was inevitably cast in the role of Jane. While such positioning may well be unintentional on the part of fan artists, it nonetheless
reinforces, implicitly and explicitly, racist stereotypes and narratives. We have chosen not to use specific examples of fan art here so as not to single out individual fans, but it is important to note this trend—along with documented racism in practices like cosplay—in order to see this as an issue that affects all aspects of fan activity (Eddy 2013; Gooden 2016). Fan art has so far mainly been studied as important in terms of youth educational activities, and as such would also benefit from an intersectional lens (Manifold 2009; Zaremba 2015).

[3.15] It is in these contexts of erasure, awareness, and misrepresentation that we locate our case study of Swan Queen fandom. Along with Glee and The Legend of Korra, it stands among the most popular present-day femslash fandoms that feature at least one character of color (Curious 2015). Swan Queen, as another post–RaceFail '09 fandom, has had to negotiate with the source text's problematic handling of both its queer subtext and its racial dynamics, as well as engage with the fandom's often virulent ship wars and address its own blind spots when it comes to race and ethnicity. Our analysis will trace how some fans, often identifying as fans of color, have attempted to reinscribe race as a constitutive element in their meta-readings of the source text and in fan works. Given the source text's marked instances of egregious racefail, these moments of intervention within popular fan works that assert the need to claim Regina Mills as a Latina and represent her as such become charged with meaning on the dual axes of race and queerness.

4. Once upon a problematic show

[4.1] Once Upon a Time, produced by Adam Horowitz and Eddie Kitsis, is a fantasy drama that aspires to be a modern take on fairytales familiarized by the Grimm Brothers and, more importantly, Disney, which owns the rights to most of the show's characters. The show's premise has, at its very heart, a nonheteronormative familial configuration. The Evil Queen of Snow White fame (Regina Mills, played by Lana Parrilla) casts a curse to destroy all happy endings, one that transports the majority of the residents of the Enchanted Forest to the fictional Storybrooke, Maine, in "our" world, the Land Without Magic. Snow White and Prince Charming (Ginnifer Goodwin and Josh Dallas), in a final effort to defeat the Queen, send their infant daughter, who is the prophesied savior, through a portal to the Land Without Magic. This daughter, Emma Swan (Jennifer Morrison), grows up an orphan, and in a dark period in her life, gives birth in prison to a boy whom she puts up for adoption. Ten years later, that boy (Henry Mills, played by Jared Gilmore) shows up at her doorstep, with the words, "My name's Henry. I'm your son," and recruits her—albeit reluctantly—to the cause of taking him home to his adoptive mother, Regina Mills, whom he claims is the Evil Queen, and whose curse Emma must break to save them all. This premise—"Henry has two mommies," as it is often referred to—and the protagonist/antagonist
relationship between Regina and Emma that drove the show's plot in the first season, found its resonance with femslashers who flocked to the fandom.

[4.2] In the course of its five seasons, *Once Upon a Time* has accrued numerous charges of racefail and queerfail from its viewers. The show's main cast continues to feature only one POC, Lana Parrilla, who is of Puerto Rican/Italian heritage and identifies as a Latina. Until the fifth (current) season of the show, there were no explicitly queer characters, despite its heavily subtextual teasing of Mulan's bisexuality—first, with her gender ambiguous expression of love for Princess Aurora, and later, with the characters Ruby and Merida in the fifth season of the show. The show's producers announced the inclusion of an LGBT storyline in the fifth season as a show of support for its queer audience, saying that, "We know that community have been big supporters of the show and we would love to be able to tell a love story that reflects that" (O'Sullivan 2016). The eventual love story, featuring two white characters (Ruby and Dorothy) played by guest stars with no larger role in the narrative, left many viewers disappointed, even as others observed that it "sent a strong signal of support to LGBT fans and openly defied the homophobes in *Once Upon a Time's* viewership base for the first time in series history" (Sparks 2016). The fandom, despite these fails, continues to be a thriving one.

[4.3] The particular problem with articulating queer spaces and texts as the only or primary axis of identity within fan communities, and the extension of that to academic theorizations of subversion and resistance in fan spaces, becomes apparent when one considers the fault lines within the Swan Queen fandom's celebration of the nonheteronormative family unit of Regina, Henry, and Emma, or the Swan–Mills family. The show's problematic storyline in the early seasons that constituted the undermining of Regina as Henry's evil adoptive mother in favor of Emma as the good biological mother, the white savior, was hotly contested by most fans of Regina's character and Swan Queen. The canon storyline was perceived as antiadoption and, furthermore, as one that presents a disturbing mirror to the systemic racism in real-world practices that leads to a disproportionate number of women of color in the USA being deemed unfit to raise their children (Roberts 2002; Garcia, Aisenberg, and Harachi 2012). In the words of a fan, stanley-tuccis, responding to a storyline in the second half of the show's third season, wherein a memory-wiped Henry remembers being raised by Emma, as opposed to Regina, "Regina is being robbed of her identity again. which shouldn't be surprising. but it's sad...we are in season 3 and Regina is still being denied as a mother. as Henry's mother. and that is so fucked up" (stanley-tuccis 2014).

[4.4] Regina's Latinidad has been a subject of relentless scrutiny within the fandom, even though the actress, Lana Parrilla, playing the said character identifies as Latina
and once famously claimed, in what would become a rallying cry for many fans, "Yes, the Evil Queen is a Latina!" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jzxi2S9rjkk). Once Upon a Time's mythology, especially in its homogenous vaguely European, Disneyesque fairytale land, does not make an effort to elaborate on the racial or ethnic identities of characters of color. In response to an anonymous question posted at the sqfanawards Tumblr (a Swan Queen fan fic awards blog)—"Are there any fics that acknowledge Regina being Latina (and not just through epithets or a few lines) in the nominated/winning fics [at the sqfanawards]?"—the moderator wrote, "Now is where I feel completely confused and don't understand where this specific canon [head or otherwise] came from. Explicitly within the show nowhere did it even hint as to what nationality or race she's portraying" (sqfanawards 2014). The position taken by the sqfanawards moderator, demanding explicit articulations of ethnic/racial identity for characters of color in fannish source texts, is not uncommon in fan spaces, cutting across het/male slash/femslash spectrums. The default whiteness of mass media productions—of which Once Upon a Time is a prime example—allows for color­blind interpretations of the source text, even within queer fan spaces that celebrate diversity and the subversive pleasure of queering a heteronormative space. Tumblr user wherethewhiled, identifying herself as a Chinese American fan, drives the point across when she writes,

[4.5] sqfanawards, your post asks for fact, proof and explicit statements re: Regina's heritage and race. Here is a fact that I can provide: race and ethnic identities are not conditional, it is not an optional character trait, it is relevant 100% of the time. It isn't ever "superfluous" in life, it is an inextricable part of who a person is, it impacts how a person lives. Therefore, if a story is to portray a human being well, how can those identities be "superfluous"? How does it not impact that character's story? The answer is: when we homogenize, then default characters to "colour-blind" white or a generalized white culture. The kicker is: people of colour in real life do not have that privilege of being treated as "without colour," and so, when that outright erasure happens in fiction, it isn't an extra detail that could or could not be included, it is a life of triumphs and hardships and pain that is being stripped and thoughtlessly dismissed as unimportant. (wherethewhiled 2014)

[4.6] It becomes evident from the aforementioned debates that for sections of the Swan Queen fandom—one that fights regular, often-virulent battles with canon shippers of heterosexual ships on its reading of queer subtext in Emma Swan and Regina Mills's relationship—emphasizing of Regina Mills's Latinidad holds enormous value, one that is no less significant than their queering of the heteronormative maintext of Once Upon a Time. In some readings of this reclamation of their favorite
character's Latinidad, fans flesh out elements of her backstory as a sympathetic villain to read the story of the Evil Queen's rise as a narrative seeped in white privilege and racial oppression. *Once Upon a Time* represents the fabled enmity between Snow White and her Evil Stepmother as one wherein the cruel machinations of Regina's mother and the master manipulator Rumpelstiltskin (played by Robert Carlyle), led to her marriage to Snow White's much-older father, King Leopold, against her will. Tumblr user deemnfic, another fan identifying herself as a fan of color, addresses this backstory, arguing, "Regina's forced marriage to Leopold can be likened to the position of a house slave or Mammy," and further, that it was a clear instance of "buying" an "older girl of color—to raise the lily-white child" (deemn 2013).

Although Swan Queen fan fic engages with these readings of Regina's story in multiple ways, we will limit our discussion to two stories, both well-received in the fandom: *Cops&Robbers* by deemn (deemn 2014), which is an unfinished canon divergence story that sends the Swan–Mills family to New York and uses the fake marriage trope to advance Emma and Regina's relationship, and *Send Up a Signal (that everything's fine)* by coalitiongirl (coalitiongirl 2015), an AU that has Regina and Emma star in a television fantasy drama called *Happily Ever After*, which is in fact a reimagining of *Once Upon a Time*. Our choice of these two stories, apart from their reception within fandom, is to underline this complex wrangling of Regina's queer Latinidad as a constitutive element of fannish subversive practices.

*deemn's* story, in a clever sleight of hand, places Regina and her family in New York in a bid to escape persecution for her past crimes as the Evil Queen and, in the process, squarely forces her—and the readers along with her—to confront a world wherein color-blindness is not an option afforded to people of color. The fan fic weaves in canonical references to dubious paperwork produced by Rumpelstiltskin (Gold) for Henry's adoption, and thus Regina finds herself in a position wherein she is a Latina without paperwork in the real world:

> She lays it out quickly, quietly. On paper, Regina doesn't exist. All the paperwork Gold forged for Henry's adoption describes a now forty-seven year old woman, but there's no paper trail for the last fourteen years, and modifying the original adoption records—it's going to be a mess. (deemn 2014)

Emma and Regina find themselves thwarted, among others things, by attempts on the part of an enthusiastic realtor who attempts to find them a neighborhood in the city they'll fit in:

> Air whistles over the bottle top as Emma sucks in a breath. "Yeah, it was the white trash plus Spanish plus lesbians part."
Regina lets the misnomer slide, just this once, chews at the inside of her lower lip until she thinks she has words in the right order. (deemn 2014)

In one delicate moment, the narrative manages to address the complex intersections of multiple loci of privilege and oppression—sexuality, race, and class. Elsewhere in the story, Regina's lack of Spanish-speaking ability becomes a part of the fan fic's commentary on Latinx identity in present day America, with its constant negotiation with language and belonging. In deemn's version of events, there is no scope for ambiguity on the Evil Queen's queer Latinidad—the circumstances of the narrative do not allow its readers to forget that Regina is Latina, that regardless of the fantastic setting of *Once Upon a Time*, it is, at the end of the day, a product of our world and is enmeshed in its dynamics of power and oppression. In the process, it forces us to reconsider assumptions about the superfluity of racial/ethnic identities of characters of color in everyday fannish practices.

coalitiongirl's *Send Up a Signal (that everything's fine)*, reimagines *Once Upon a Time* as *Happily Ever After*, a modern fantasy drama. It stars the debutante Emma Swan and veteran actress Regina Mills, and in a conscious act of racebending, casts an Afro-Latino original character (Jamaal) as their son in the fictional show's narrative. The show is produced by none other than Cora Mills (Regina's mother) and Leopold Blanchard (King Leopold), who serve as convenient stand-ins for the showrunners and writers. A love letter to the Swan Queen fandom, the fan fic is a story of triumph against all odds—Emma and Regina's television counterparts, Rose and Victoria, overcome the demands of heteronormative storytelling and queerbaiting to eventually emerge as a canon couple, even as the two women who play the said characters navigate their own love story and the perils of being queer in a homophobic media industry. There are inside jokes and tongue-in-cheek references to various incidents over the years that are instantly recognizable to Swan Queen fans, but amidst it all, the story never loses sight of the fact that "the Evil Queen is a Latina." The author, who identifies as white, locates her in a world wherein racism is an everyday reality, often in delicate touches such as her typecasting in Hollywood.

The story's most scathing commentary on race and representation in the white-dominated culture industry, however, is reserved for the character of Cora, whose blasé appropriation of the language of social justice leads to proclamations such as, "If we can't write diversity into our fantasy, what's the purpose of fantasy at all?" even as she defends her choice to cast white actors for the role of Jamaal's biological parents and calls herself a progressive showrunner. The stinging hypocrisy, in tune with Cora's canon characterization, is of course a commentary on the white-dominated media industry as a whole, but on *Once Upon a Time* in particular—weighed down by
echoes of years of fannish outrage over multiple instances of racefail and Twitter trends like #OnceUponARacefail.

[4.16] coalitiongirl's story then turns its gaze upon the fandom itself. Happily Ever After's Victory Rose fandom (fans of Emma and Regina's television counterparts, Rose and Victoria), mirrors the Swan Queen fandom and its own complexities in the real world. In one instance, the fannish response to an offhand comment by Jamaal on Victory Rose—"gross," said laughingly, before a serious, positive response on the same—leads to furious allegations of homophobia from a fandom that thinks nothing of branding a 16-year-old an angry black man:

[4.17] He's 16. If he doesn't understand why he can't reply to a question about queer women by calling them GROSS, he shouldn't be at cons.

[4.18] Idk, he seemed really angry in that video. Like he didn't want to be asked about it at all. (coalitiongirl 2015)

[4.19] Within the narrative, Jamaal manages to escape the incident without career-damaging repercussions after interventions by both the protagonists on his behalf, but the story nonetheless seems to ask if queer fan spaces that are quick to raise charges of homophobia, at times at the expense of considerations of their own lack of awareness of racial dynamics and oppression, are necessarily as progressive as they aspire to be. Indeed, this is a key question for both fan spaces and fan studies going forward.

[4.20] The racial dynamics within Swan Queen fandom and the fault lines therein, as a case study, serve to highlight this contradiction between inclusion and everyday racial erasure that is part and parcel of fannish spaces. Certain fan practices, as we have underlined in our analysis, can constitute negotiations with such erasure—sometimes by reclaiming a favorite character as emphatically not white, through the creative reworking of canon in meta and fan works that engage explicitly with racial identity. Indeed, as the case of the Swan Queen fandom suggests, such negotiation and engagement makes for an integral part of fannish practice.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] Throughout this essay, we have traced the differential intersecting and interlocking aspects of identity that, while always being present in both popular cultural texts and the communities that form around them, need to be given further weight in academic theorizations of resistance, subversion, and co-option. As we have argued, racial and ethnic identity must be considered as important to our conceptualizations about fandom spaces as we have always considered gender and
sexuality. To do otherwise will be to repeat the mistakes of fields such as feminist and queer studies that have at times unwittingly reinscribed the idea that race is somehow an additional aspect of cultural experience, something that can be disregarded at will (Ford 2011; Thomlinson 2012). Fan studies continues to have a strong thread of reading fan culture (especially female-dominated aspects of it) as enabling spaces that allow for greater freedom in (re)crafting the cultural narratives that seek to order our world. While these spaces definitely work to disrupt hegemonic constructions of what kinds of stories are allowable in fan communities, their recurrent biases and erasures are equally present. As elsodex, a Swan Queen fan, puts it when talking about the difficulties of writing Regina as Latina:

[5.2]  This discussion we are having right now. This, right here, is an example of how, in order for our identities to be validated, we almost have to turn ourselves into utter caricatures just to be seen. Not only is that bullshit, but it's fucking harmful as all fuck. For everyone.

[5.3]  What I'm trying to get at here is, it takes finesse and frankly, experience to write this sort of thing well. But that's difficult, when the examples we end up learning from are so messed up to begin with that we just end up perpetuating these things.

[5.4]  So I understand sociopsychologically why some authors would feel the need to write with little epitaphs with no thought or consideration for the actual reality of the character.

[5.5]  But here's the thing—none of that is an excuse. You want fanfic to be redemptive? You want fandom to be a "Take that!" to the corporations who own the stories—to be the capital "T" capital "V" True Voice of the people?

[5.6]  Then you've got to fucking earn it, folks. (elsodex 2014)

6. Notes

1. To summarize, RaceFail '09 refers to a series of blog posts written by fans engaged in the science fiction and fantasy (SF/F) community, initially written in response to SF/F author Elizabeth Bear's (2009) advice about writing the other in fiction. These posts pointed out both Bear's apparent hypocrisy, critiquing her record of portraying people of color, and encompassed the failings of the SF/F genre as a whole when dealing with the issue of race. While it is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss the specific series of events that made up RaceFail, the discussions that took place, which involved fans, writers, and editors, have impacted the ways nonwhite fans
engage with such issues across media fandom. For more, see Fanlore entry http://fanlore.org/wiki/RaceFail_%2709.

2. For instance, in the case of the television show The 100 (2014–), the overwhelming negative reaction to the killing off of one half of the femslash ship of Clarke and Lexa (known as Clexa) is certainly proof by any estimation that femslash fandoms in the present day more than make up the numbers in terms of fan activity (Roth 2016).

3. This has also been dubbed the Brittana Effect, whereby fans of other shows have taken inspiration to advocate for their favorite queer ships to become canon, couching their arguments in terms of increasing diversity on television. This kind of advocacy, while welcome in certain contexts, also must remain contextualized within other aspects of representation in the concerned texts.

4. The problematics of creating an Asian-inspired fantasy world have been commented on by both fans and critics, but the show's treatment of individual cultural practices that make up its universe has in the main been well received by nonwhite fans.

7. Works cited


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1. Introduction

A queer fan subculture that focuses on homosocial/homoerotic relationships between female characters and/or celebrities, femslash has been prevalent in Chinese cyberspace for over a decade (note 1). Existing scholarship attributes the rise of online Chinese femslash fandom to its potential to utter queer voices and generate alternative affective belongings (Yang and Bao 2012). Yet despite its growing popularity, there has been little effort given to unveil the internal complexity and contradiction of Chinese femslash culture, especially Chinese femslash fans'
sophisticated reimaginings of lesbianism, which are often conditioned by mainstream understandings of female gender and sexuality in the nonfictional world.

[1.2] To fill this gap, this article presents a case study of the femslash writings of gender-defying female participants of a prominent Chinese reality TV show, Super Girl (SG; Hunan Satellite TV, 2004–2006). This globally formatted, Idol-style singing contest once highly profiled a large number of female participants who looked either "boyish" or "androgynous" (Yardley 2005). These female contestants had never explicitly revealed their sexual orientations in public. However, the ambiguous intimate relationships between them had been articulated and celebrated in SG’s online femslash fandoms. My analysis looks at the femslash fan fictions created and circulated on feise chaonü (FSCN), one of the most popular and large-scale femslash fan forums for 2006 SG (note 2). FSCN was built in May 2006 and is fraught with queer gossip and femslash vidding and writing. By the end of 2015, FSCN contained more than 460,000 entries and over 3,000 threads. According to earlier scholarly observations on FSCN, to this day hundreds of original femslash fan fiction works have been circulated on the site, a few of which are more than 200,000 words in length (Yang 2010; Yang and Bao 2012, 851).

[1.3] My study pays particular attention to FSCN femslash fan fiction with culturally distant settings, such as Western, futuristic, or historical backdrops. Methodologically, drawing from John Fiske's (1996) and Michel Foucault's (1990) explications of discourse in modern societies and public cultures, in concert with scholarly understandings of gender and sexuality as discursive formations in Western scholarship (Rich 1986; Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1993), I mainly employ textual and discourse analyses of some representative FSCN narratives featuring this kind of writing strategy. During my online ethnographic observation of FSCN between 2006 and 2013, I have read hundreds of FSCN femslash stories and tens of thousands of fan entries responding to the stories. In fan studies, both online narratives and communication are deemed as "representations of experiences, constructed first by the [fan] participants themselves and then by the researcher in the analysis of the data and the presentation of the findings as a coherent text" (Bury 2005, 29). Echoing this view, my interpretation of the data obtained during my long-term observation unpacks "the meanings which underlie and are enacted through these textual practices" (Hine 2000, 50) on FSCN. In doing so, I detail the contradictory yet critical ways in which Chinese lesbian identities, desires, characters, and relationships are posited and narrated in these queer fantasy contexts as a subjective fannish cultural discourse.

[1.4] It is worth noting that this textual maneuver of repositioning nonheterosexual characters into certain "already queered" sociocultural contexts is not FSCN-specific; it
widely exists in both Western and East Asian popular cultures, especially fannish cultural productions (see Doty 1993, 15; Benshoff 1998, 215; Jones 2002; Jung 2004; Woledge 2005; Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007; Martin 2008; Martin 2012; Ng 2008, 104; Wei 2008; Li 2009; Suter 2012; Feng 2013). In earlier fan scholarship, a comparable genre of Western slash/femslash fan fiction, which typically narrates queer romance against futuristic, historical, or fantasy backdrops that remove the sociocultural pressures faced by both LGBTQ communities and queer fan writers in reality, has been termed as "alternate world" (AW), "alternate reality" (AR), or "alternate universe" (AU) literature (Penley 1991; Jenkins 1992; Jenkins 2006; Woledge 2005) ([note 3]). However, existing studies tend to understand this writing strategy as a liberatory, escapist tactic for homosexual-themed cultural productions or an intentional disinterest, demonization, and/or othering of same-sex relationships.

[1.5] For example, in his study of male homoerotic romance in Japanese boys' love (BL) works, James Welker notes that the Western cultural elements commonly borrowed in BL "help to liberate [Japanese] writers and readers to work within and against the local heteronormative paradigm in the exploration of [gender and sexual] alternatives" (2006, 841; also see Suter 2012, 230). Some other scholars also remark on the "anti-realist" or "homoindifferent" tendency rooted in this kind of queer fan productions because it "is simply not about modern homosexual identities, and thus, although it often depicts homosexual acts, it retains a distance from homosexual politics" (Woledge 2006, 103; also see Allison 1996; Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins 1998; Kinsella 1998; McLelland 2000; Wei 2008; Li 2009). Similarly, in her groundbreaking study of FSCN fan productions, Ling Yang reads some of the relocated narrative settings that are not closely associated with the real lives of the SG participants as a means for the fans to express their own lived experiences, emotion, and desires (2010). She attributes this prevailing style of FSCN writing in part to the growing estrangement between the show's contestants in real life after the show had ended.

[1.6] Dissimilar to these previous findings, Fran Martin observes a subjective, powerful "worlding" practice in the Taiwanese fandom of Japanese BL that is shaped by both local realities and cross-cultural fantasization (2008; 2012). As she elaborates, worlding is

[1.7] the way in which Taiwanese readers use the BL texts to imagine a geo-cultural world and reflect on their relation to it—that is, to create an imaginative geography of a "Japan" that is characterized by sex-gender ambiguity/fluidity/non-conformity, where beautiful boys enact romance narratives and enjoy passionate sex with each other. (Martin 2012, 378) ([note 4])
In so doing, as Martin incisively argues, the Taiwanese BL fans imaginatively create a "BL Japan" that "is notably distinct from readers' own everyday life-worlds in Taiwan [but] facilitates the formation of a reflexive zone of articulation where the fans work through a range of responses to local regimes of gender and sexual regulation" (2012, 366). In this article, I go beyond Martin's viewpoint to look at the alternate worlds as reconfigured in FSCN femslash fan fiction. I see the worlding practice embodied by the culturally distant settings in FSCN femslash as a discursive strategy to address the depressing queer reality in contemporary Chinese society. Through this tactic, FSCN fans show an intense unease and insecurity, as well as deep concern about the existence and survival of lesbianism in the heterocentric Chinese world. This femslash genre can thus be seen as a sophisticated, self-reflexive means for the fans to voice their queer fantasies and legitimize lesbian romance. It offers an indirect critique of mainstream Chinese society's erasure, denigration, and ostracization of real-world lesbian practices (Sang 2003; Martin 2010; Kam 2013). Meanwhile, I also unveil the ambivalent aspect of this fannish worlding strategy on FSCN fandom in revising, appropriating, and sometimes even conforming to mainstream media's queer connotations, unpleasant queer realities, and sociocultural stereotyping of lesbianism in local regimes.

2. SG as a queer female spectacle and FSCN as its femslash fandom

The femslash mania surrounding SG was certainly not accidental. As a new media platform opened to a grassroots public, it lent voice to underrepresented Chinese females in various ways. As noted by Nick Couldry, it is "the fantasy of being included in some way in major cultural forums" that propels the audience to participate in the auditions and/or voting of reality TV shows (2000, 55). Indeed, SG's preliminary annual audition had no restrictions on the participants' age, outward appearance, singing style, or any other backgrounds. A wide range of Chinese-speaking females from all over the world were motivated to participate (Yardley 2005; Warn 2006). In its second season, in 2005, SG attracted about 120,000 participants to audition (Meng 2009, 260) and 400,000,000 viewers during the broadcasting of its final national competition (Yue and Yu 2008, 118). Although its selection criteria and processes were updated frequently and became more and more complicated, the general rule was for the participants to be judged by the following three groups of people before the finalists could proceed to the next round: several professional judges, a small team of randomly selected public judges, and the nationwide audience. While the professional and public judges were invited to vote for the participants in the live studio after the contestants' performances, the audience were allowed to vote for their favorite singers through SMS messages. The ranking of the three finalists in the
national competition was solely decided by the audience's SMS votes (Meng 2009, 260).

[2.2] The unrestricted preliminary audition and the audience's voting rights on SG further encouraged the participation of those with nonnormative gender personas. A large number of females who were conspicuously gender-defying participated in the 2005 and 2006 national-wide auditions. Later, a great many regional and national finalists presented varied forms of queer performance in the show that "obviously challenged traditional [Chinese female] gender norms" (Warn 2006, 2). As argued by Frances Bonner, reality TV typically looks for people who can "project a personality on television" and who "are more usefully ordinary than others" (2003, 53). SG participants' nonconformist gender (and perhaps potentially sexual) deviance became, in this sense, a marketable draw for TV producers to explore. By dramatizing and sometimes even homeroticizing the friendships between female contestants (Zhao 2016), SG carefully manufactured some of its gender-defying participants as "on-screen" queer hybrids that imply "the way that gender bending and non-normative sexualities can denaturalize and transgress" normative gender and sexuality divisions (Friedman 1998, 77). Meanwhile, it has been noted that fans tend to employ slash to expand and explore the underlying world hinted at by mainstream media (Bacon-Smith 1992, 45; Jenkins 1992, 176). This intriguing feature of SG eventually rendered itself a queer female spectacle, which not only helped to promote, dramatize, and sensationalize the show but also emboldened the reinterpretations of these queer female images by the show's staggeringly large numbers of online fan communities' (Yue and Yu 2008; Yang 2010; Xiao 2012; Yang and Bao 2012; Huang 2013; Kam 2014; Zhao 2014; Zhao 2016).

[2.3] Numerous femslash communities and spaces devoted to SG have been built since 2005 (Yang 2010; Yang and Bao 2012, 846–47). In 2006, femslash writings about SG flooded Chinese cyberspace. Because of its wide-ranging focus on multiple queer pairings in the 2006 season of SG, FSCN became one of the most prominent SG femslash forums. The majority of the fans actively participating in the forum were young, educated, Mandarin-speaking, Mainland China-based female fans with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations (Yue and Yu 2008; Yang 2010; Yang and Bao 2012; Zhao 2014) (note 5). FSCN femslash activities were extremely active from 2006 to 2010. After 2010, partially due to the state-forced transitioning of the entertainment contents and production formats of SG and similar kinds of reality TV shows (Yang 2014, 521–22), as well as some disruptions and inner struggles within FSCN community caused by several SG participants' lesbian scandals (Zhao 2014), FSCN's vitality as a femslash fandom gradually faded.
Most stories in FSCN femslash transform the 2006 SG queer hybrids into characters with more explicit lesbian romances; however, they typically do so without situating such lesbianism within the contexts of SG. This repositioning helps to distinguish the characters from SG, a media world very close to reality, and reassigns these reality TV stars to fictional occupations and identities. It allows FSCN writers to draw heavily on a variety of genre elements, such as crime, fantasy, historical, or science fiction. In this way, the writers break the constraints of the canon and reclaim the homoerotic connotations of the pairings in distinctive settings. Nevertheless, a more meticulous examination of the underlying reasons for this deliberate disentanglement of lesbian romance from contemporary Chinese sociocultural contexts reveals the cultural implications of this femslash genre. In the following sections of this article I offer a close reading of several commonly used, culturally distant settings of FSCN fan fiction—Western, futuristic, and historical backdrops. My analysis illustrates how the prevalence of this femslash genre in FSCN showcases its fans' awareness of and anxiety over mainstream Chinese society's patriarchal manipulations of female gender and sexuality, as well as their implicit and sometimes subjective challenge of this (hetero)normative regime.

3. The Western worlds

3.1 Western contexts are commonly narrated in FSCN fan fiction to complete the development of lesbian romance, especially in the stories devoted to a popular pairing of two 2006 SG national finalists, Liu Liyang and Shang Wenjie. Interestingly, the appearance of Western storylines in FSCN femslash is often paralleled with some turning points for their lesbian identities, desires, and romantic/sexual relationships. Such is the case in the sensational FSCN fan fiction titled fei se shi (FSS; fatiaocheng521 2006), which pairs up Liu and Shang, and is known for its explicit portrayals of their highly eroticized, incestuous, and sadomasochistic lesbian relationship. FSS was originally published on FSCN by the author in November 2006 and had gained more than 10,000 fan responses by 2011. Even now, nearly ten years later, the fiction still draws recognizable fan discussions online.

3.2 In FSS, Liu and Shang are depicted as paternal half-sisters who, unaware of this fact for most of the story, are brought up together as stepsisters and have strong but convoluted feelings for each other beginning at 12 years old. After Liu's tomboy lesbian identity dramatically surfaces in her final year in high school, her lesbianism immediately lines up with her other socially questionable behaviors and qualities, such as being a troublemaker and school dropout. All her "misdeeds" greatly disappoint and eventually enrage her father. He felt that it is impossible for Liu to stay in school and at his home anymore, and therefore decide to exile her to England with the excuse of "continuing her education." Yet, as the plot quickly unfolds, this decision of Liu's father
to send her away actually aims to cast off the shadow caused by Liu's lesbian scandal in high school and let the rest of the family start over with a normal life. Ironically, during the course of her lesbian encounters in England, Liu becomes an independent, sensitive, responsible, and hardworking person and also learns how to deal with her anger, despair, and complicated feelings toward her stepsister Shang. In this part of the plotline, England interestingly is staged as both an exotic wasteland for heteropatriarchal families to expatriate their "misbehaved" children and a queer nurturing place for young lesbians to explore and make sense of those same-sex desires constantly rejected and stigmatized in the mainstream Chinese environment. Moreover, soon after Liu's exile in England, she accidentally comes across Shang in France, where they had their first kiss in a dreamy, surreal scene of nighttime escape together. France, often imagined as a romantic, sexually open place in mainstream Chinese culture, here serves as the fictional locus where the two are allowed to bond emotionally and develop intense lesbian romance.

[3.3] Sometimes, the location of the West is also used in FSCN fan fiction for Chinese lesbian characters to run away as queer diaspora from the social pressures resulting from their same-sex desires. In the plots of many FSCN stories, the romantic relationship of Liu and Shang starts in China but is doomed to fail eventually because of external pressures. Then, one or both of them goes to a Western country, such as England, France, Greece, Italy, Canada, or Australia, to recover from the psychological trauma. The plot then finds them either reuniting overseas and resuming their love affair after they return to China, or meeting by chance in the West, where they settle as a happy lesbian couple. Even in the stories without a happy ending between the two characters, Western settings still function in a therapeutic way. Take, for example, the fan fiction Plane Tree (chouchangliaowuyi 2009). In this story, realizing there is no future for her secret lesbian love for Liu, Shang runs away and eventually settles down in Australia, a place with a scenery similar to the one where she meets Liu for the first time. This Australian plot offers Shang a space that not only separates her from the current, disappointing reality in China but also allows her to reminisce about her lesbian past. Even in some stories where the development of the lesbian romance is not relocated abroad, it is often the case that at least one of the partners is imagined as having lived in a Western country earlier in her life. In these stories, the experience of living in the West often serves as a prelude to their lesbian romances in China.

[3.4] These storylines with a western setting may have been inspired by the cosmopolitan personal backgrounds of Liu and Shang as promoted in the reality show (Zhao 2016, 165). They both studied in European countries and can speak multiple Western languages fluently. Shang studied as a French major in college, while Liu finished her undergraduate study in England. Western locations with predominant French- and English-speaking populations are frequently employed as the settings of
FSCN fan fiction. However, the fact that the alternate Western world positively perpetuates the development of Chinese lesbianism, nourishes lesbian sentiments, and serves as the destinations of choice for nonheterosexual people in queer diaspora, is hardly a direct borrowing from the real-life narrative. Notably, a great number of FSCN femslash stories position other SG participants in Western settings, such as Zhang Liangying in *Love Wrong, Wrong Love!* (nabi forever 2007), Li Na in *Shadow Gloom* (fenglaifengquyuwuhen 2007), and Wei Jiaqing in *Every Lonely Flower* (feiyangyixia 2007). Most of these participants have never been abroad and/or cannot speak foreign languages at all in real life. In the following entries of one FSCN story devoted to queerly coupling Liu and Shang, *Love Likes the Tides* (malilian.xiongyong 2009a), some fan readers questioned why the story is set in Quebec, a place relatively unfamiliar to most Chinese people, to which the author responded:

[3.5] Quebec is the largest, French-speaking province in Canada. It is chosen [to be used in the story] because same-sex couples can legally get married there. As a YSER (femslash fan of Liu and Shang), we believe it represents hope. (malilian.xiongyong 2009b)

[3.6] As can be seen from the author's reply, the queer-supportive, promising West in these FSCN writings, as reimagined and aspired to by some fans, is an ideal fantasy universe, which, by nature of the frequently mass-mediated celebratory queer images, is utilized for the imaginary creation of Chinese lesbian romance. The use of these Western backdrops helps the fans validate in concrete, sociocultural terms the existence and future possibility of Chinese lesbianism, which in real-world China is less legitimate and recognizable. In this sense, these alternate Western worlds in the fans' fantasy scenarios are culturally, politically, and socially valorized as the opposite of mainstream Chinese society in order to express, develop, and reminisce about same-sex desires.

[3.7] This essentialization and romanticization of the West as a queer wonderland in FSCN femslash can be seen as a result of complex negotiations between the fans' queer fantasy desires and the stereotyping of Western practices of lesbianism (or nonheterosexuality and other kinds of gender and sexual deviances) in China. It implies a Chinese fantasy trope that same-sex desires are more prevalent and easily developed in Western countries and are more acceptable to people with Western cultural upbringings and lived experiences. This deployment might be explained by an Occidentalist perspective in current Chinese society that "the plentiful and prosperous Western materials civilization and its culture are considered superior to Oriental culture [by some Chinese people]; ...the Western world is a heaven [to them]" (Ning 1997, 64). The erasure of queer, especially lesbian, history, existence, and representations in local Chinese media and the influx of Western queer-related
information into Mainland China have helped the Chinese consumers form this positive conceptual linkage between nonheterosexuality and the West. For instance, a valorization of a Western queer world, "which is perceived as non-homophobic, care-free, and liberating" has been found to be prevalent in China (Chou 2001, 31). Especially in recent years, the blooming of media piracy in Mainland China has familiarized Chinese people with a diversity of Western media, including queer-themed American TV shows such as Queer as Folk (Showtime, 2000–2005) and The L Word (Showtime, 2004–2009) (Tan 2011; Yang and Bao 2012). These shows in Western media further promote among Chinese audiences the fantacization of queer images that may be removed from off-screen, Western physical worlds.

Moreover, this queer exploration of the West as an alternate world suggests a tendency to use Western locations to "naturalize" lesbian romances between Chinese characters. The contextual naturalization of lesbianism discloses some FSCN fans' compliance with one Chinese heterocentric assumption of lesbianism as derived from and shaped by cultural influences from the West (Engebretsen 2008). In a recent study of Chinese fans' interpretation of the American TV show Friends (NBC, 1994–2004), See Kam Tan (2011, 221) recognizes that a "'we-us-Chinese-self' versus 'they-them-Westerners-other!'" dichotomy is created in Chinese audiences' cross-cultural interpretations of sex- and homosexuality-related themes. Tan's (2011, 222) study demonstrates that some Chinese fans possess distorted, homophobic views of homosexuality as a "contagious disease," a "'learned' behavior," and a prevalent occurrence in the West. According to Tan (2011, 219), the mixed influences of Chinese people's self-consciousness as a unique "cultural group that had particular traditions, norms, and values...the recourse to cultural difference based on ignorance and denial," and the unfamiliar life portrayed on American TV lead to "gross generalizations of the culture of the other" among the Chinese audience (2011, 221). These views of nonheterosexuality in mainstream Chinese society as derivative and deviant are possibly also internalized and incorporated into FSCN femslash writings and reflected by the fans' queer use of the West in femslash narratives.

Nonetheless, underlying this promotion of the valorized queer atmosphere of the West in FSCN fan fictions is also the "backward" intolerance of mainstream Chinese society toward nonheterosexuality (Engebretsen 2008, 99). The fans' utopian, queer imagining of the West, though problematic, ultimately reflects their acute awareness of mainstream Chinese society as an exclusionary, heterocentric place. Thus, in their fictional narratives, the fans tend to emancipate lesbian characters by creating what might be called the space of queer utopia freed from the constraints of heterosexual hegemony in contemporary China. This point can be better demonstrated by FSCN fans' crafting of futuristic and historical Chinese contexts in the fan fiction.
4. Futuristic and historical settings

[4.1] Futuristic and historical China are two other common settings in FSCN femslash. Since "the temporal settings have a strong influence on plotlines and the type of fantasy that is found in [romance stories]" (Linz 1992, 11), these backdrops, to a certain degree, help the writers to complete utopian, bolder lesbian romances. They are frequently appropriated by the fan writers to create greater homoerotic possibilities and promises between the characters. Yet, similar to the Western worlds deployed in FSCN femslash, such narrative settings often reflect both a subversion of normative female gender and sexual ideals in the fictional world and the fan writers' frustration with the harsh real-life conditions of survival for lesbianism in contemporary China.

[4.2] One case in point is the futuristic fan fiction, *One Thousand Years Later* (niaoshanmingdeYS 2007). In this story, the lesbian romance between Liu and Shang takes place in the year 3032, in which there are ongoing intergalactic wars between humans, robots, and aliens. The author starts the story by stating that "Now is AD 3032 on the earth...Human civilization is on the verge of being destroyed by the rapid development of technology... Human obtains unprecedented freedom... The so-called ethics has long been stamped out" (niaoshanmingdeYS 2007). In such a chaotic future, love and sexual intimacy not only transcends traditional boundaries of gender, sexuality, and species but also is no longer sacred. Within this futuristic, permissive environment, the plot continues to describe a lesbian love tragedy that failed 1,000 years ago because of social pressure. This strategy of using combined futuristic and fantasy generic tropes to reimagine Chinese lesbianism makes wobbly the centrality of heterosexuality in today's Chinese society. However, the story simultaneously places lesbianism in opposition to contemporary social order and morality. The continuation of a lesbian romance in a chaotic, alien world suggests that lesbian relationships are only achievable when released from the constraints of the present heterocentric social and ethical systems.

[4.3] Similarly, the stories set in ancient China are usually set in a time when feudalism was the social and cosmological norm. The construction of lesbian romances in the relatively more closed-in and conservative sociocultural environment of the past can be read as an ironic commentary on the marginalization of and discrimination against lesbianism in the still-homophobic, highly civilized, postmodern human society of today. However, these historical plotlines are always infused with elements of social and political turbulence, a strategy that also possibly divulges a contradictory, pessimistic undertone of this fan fiction subgenre to parallel the existence and continuation of lesbian relationships with the ongoing social malaise and disorder.
For instance, in one FSCN fan fiction work, *Shanghai 1943* (bulaimeidefuqiao 2007), the lesbian love between Liu and Shang is set in the context of the Chinese civil war period during which Chinese women were severely subordinated and had no control of their own destiny (note 6). The romance occurs between two characters working in a Moulin Rouge–style Chinese brothel where most of the girls are escorts. In another instance of historical FSCN fan fiction, *Peking Opera Blues* (sanshaonainaideshanzhi 2007), the lesbian story is set in a female-only traditional Chinese opera troupe during China's anti-Japan war era (note 7). Intriguingly, almost all the females in this troupe are portrayed to be nonheterosexual. Of course, this plot design is largely based on the cross-dressing tradition and transgenderism in this type of Chinese female troupe. Yet these intentional cultural positionings of lesbianism in the historical genre can also be viewed as clear manifestations of the fans' intertwined queer derision of contemporary Chinese heteropatriarchal society and their conformity to mainstream societal definitions of lesbianism.

These historical repositionings of lesbianism serve as an interesting detour to imagining homorelationships between females that are unsettling to current, heteropatriarchal hegemony. It has been argued that, in romance fiction, historical settings are more often employed to "depict poverty, violence, and rape than are romances set in the present... [Because they] mak[e] the dramatization of such perils more remote and therefore less threatening" (Seidel 1992, 166). Indeed, most of these FSCN historical romances are accompanied with plots of rape, jealousy, revenge, sexual licentiousness, suicide, and sexual violence and abuse toward and between female characters. These dramatic, intense storylines and the permissive, chaotic, distant settings often generate homosocial and homoerotic bonding between the subordinated females in the stories. As Maureen Quilligan (2005, 12–13) has pointed out, lesbianism is a way for women to retain their agency, actively express their desires, and refuse to be traded out in a patriarchal society. While a direct subversion of heterocentrism in mainstream Chinese culture seems unrealistic and less possible, these historical lesbian fantasies function as a distant and relatively safe strategy of queer resistance against real-world cultural forces that deny and silence same-sex desires of women.

Furthermore, although historical settings "have an advantage in creating fantasy worlds because our view of the past is selective" (Putney 1992, 99), selective historical Chinese contexts in these stories are certainly not utopian queer fantasy worlds. The imaginary lesbianism in these stories is also not exempt from being defined and even ostracized by the present Chinese heteronormative society. Similar to the Western plotlines, the historical settings often present relatively "naturalized" lesbian romances developed through women's cross-gender identifications, cross-dressing careers, or emotional bonds in an authoritarian, misogynistic surrounding. In
such cases, the fan writers attribute Chinese lesbianism to the attachment of female friends within unconventional, difficult, or unsettled sociocultural and political environments. This way of "explaining" lesbianism, to some extent, reproduces the heteropatriarchal understandings of nonheterosexual female desires and identities as "derivative" and "situational" (see Sang 2003; Martin 2010) that the fans strive to challenge through femslash writings.

5. Conclusion: A self-contradictory worlding practice

[5.1] Some scholarship believes that slash fans have a tendency to ignore real-world, queer-related, social and political issues and that they tend to focus only on the pleasure generated through their play with same-sex desires. As Rhiannon Bury claims, "the function of romance fiction, even if it is queer, is to provide an escape from unpleasant realities; simply put, issues detract from the fantastical pleasures of such texts" (2005, 93–94). Nevertheless, some scholars (McLelland 2005; Wood 2006; McLelland and Yoo 2007) also argue that certain queer fan communities dedicated to Japanese media can be understood as a "counterpublic" (Warner 2002) because they actively and critically challenge "hegemonic (that is, patriarchal, masculinist, heterosexist) codes governing the public expression of gender and sexuality" (McLelland and Yoo 2007, 100).

[5.2] Neither view in itself can fully explicate the intricacy of FSCN femslash writings. Indeed, as previous research illustrates, many SG fans, including the FSCN femslash writers who had situated their stories within contemporary, SG-related contexts (note 8), fully realized the specific "capitalist mode" of the show's deliberate exploitation of female homosociality, yet were still able to enjoy the subjectivity and "pleasure of fan practices" during this discourse (Yang 2009; Yang and Bao 2012, 850; Yang 2014). Nevertheless, due to the increasingly tightening and evolving online media censorship and communication control in Mainland China, cyber public spheres, especially the ones explicitly advocating equality and democracy, hardly exist in such an environment (Zhou 2006). For instance, most FSCN femslash fans constantly made efforts to differentiate the fantasy of lesbianism in the fan fiction works from the real-world lesbian-related topics; in some cases, the administrators of the fan sites would silence explicit fan discussions on LGBTQ cultures to avoid potential backlash against both the SG celebrities and the fandom itself (Zhao 2014).

[5.3] Furthermore, online Chinese queer fan literature might "articulate [fan writers'] desire for democratic changes in both the intimate sphere and the public sphere" (Xu and Yang 2013, 39), but it has also been found fraught with "repression of female sexuality...uncertainties about [females'] gender identities and frustrations with heterosexual relationships as constituted in contemporary [Chinese] society" (Feng
As I reveal in this article, the worlding strategy allows fans to elaborate their complex queer fantasies and their struggle with mainstream, heteronormative cultures, as well as to negotiate with prevalent sociocultural regulations on female genders and sexualities. The creation of alternate worlds in fan fiction allows FSCN fans to voice their awareness of the undesirable real-world situations faced by Chinese lesbians. Meanwhile, the alternate settings and plotlines of FSCN femslash fan fiction imply that contemporary, mainstream Chinese society offers very limited supportive space for queer females. Seen in this light, this writing technique suggests that those who want to have a lesbian relationship need to run away from the judgment of their peers, cut off their social ties with family members and friends, and live in a culturally distant place or time in order to relieve themselves from the pressures that could hinder the development of their lesbian love. With this narrative strategy, FSCN fans simultaneously exercised their queer play with mainstream media, posed discursive challenge to Chinese lesbian reality, and expressed deep concern and discomfort with the heteropatriarchal and heteronormative paradigms ingrained in contemporary Chinese society.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] I thank my MA thesis advisor, Elana Levine, without whom the completion of this research would have not been possible. I extend my gratitude to Celina Hung and Fran Martin for their generous support, patience, and careful persuasion, which have made my researching and writing on this topic a rewarding journey into the past, the future, and the soul.

7. Notes

1. The terms "girl slash" and "girls' love" (GL) have also been used in certain studies of Chinese queer girl culture (Yang 2010; Yang and Bao 2012). GL is often closely linked to Japanese media and popular cultures. A large portion of GL culture also exclusively centers on the platonic, homoromantic relationships between underage, feminine girls. Furthermore, the definition of GL varies in different cultural contexts. Thus, I use the term "femslash" in this article to denote all kinds of FSCN fans' female same-sex fantasies.

2. This site is available at http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kw=%E7%B3%C9%B3%C5%AE.

3. Certain genres, such as gothic and horror, have also been frequently appropriated in Western AW (or AR/AU) fan narratives.
4. In her research, Martin also uses the term "worlding" to describe how Taiwanese BL fans socially connect with each other in a local affective community. Because of the limited scope of this article, my analysis focuses on the imaginative level of worlding in FSCN femslash.

5. Some fan scholarship has showed that it is very difficult to unveil the real, off-line identities and backgrounds of online fans because virtual identities themselves are often performative, fluid, and fictional (Busse 2006; Hanmer 2010). Based on my long-term observation, this point is also applicable to FSCN fandom. In the previous study focusing on FSCN, the researchers believe that its fans, especially fan writers, were well-educated, and romantically (or even sexually) experienced and knowledgeable (Yang and Bao 2012, 851). Their findings were largely based on the sexually revealing content and well-designed, sophisticated plotlines of FSCN femslash. Yet I also found a few active FSCN fans who claimed to be romantically innocent, underage girls. Take, for example, xinxinxiaoxue, who claimed during online FSCN conversation with other fans, to be only 12 years old in 2007 and to never have had a romantic relationship (see http://tieba.baidu.com/p/166973394?pn=74). Thus, my research does not attempt to specify any precise data of the demographics of the participants of FSCN femslash.

6. The backdrop of the story is a time period before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, during which Mainland Chinese society was still at war.

7. This time period is from 1931 to 1937. This kind of female troupe is frequently referred to as kunban.

8. The FSCN femslash fan fiction works that set lesbian romance within a SG context, though they existed and were popular among the fan readers, often divulged the fan writers' cynical or gloomy view of the show's manipulation of queer female images and the real-life lesbianism in mainstream Chinese society. Such an example is one of the most sensational fan fiction works in FSCN, A Play for the World to See (axiuluozhishuhai 2006).

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Praxis

Female-centered fan fiction as homoaffection in fan communities

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[0.1] Abstract—In the scholarship of fan studies, a lot has been said about why female fan communities enjoy writing about male characters and relationships in fan fiction. In contrast, there has been a dearth of research into female fan communities that are centered around female characters and their relationships with each other. Here I examine the heretofore unnamed female-centered fan fiction genre of homoaffection fic through a close reading of examples chosen from the Star Trek fandom. I show how this fan fictional genre reworks the masculine narratives of the television series and movies in order to define female experience and demonstrate the way in which this in turn creates female communities in both the world of the fic and our own world.

[0.2] Keywords—Community; Female fandom; Femslash; Gift economy


[0.3] White picket fences have no place on space stations.

—Hellekson and Busse (2014)

[0.4] With Jadzia and Keiko both gone, Nerys became painfully aware of just how much she'd come to rely on the two of them for support, advice and, yes, gossip.

—AceofWands, "Casting On" (2014)

1. Introduction

[1.1] This special issue of TWC sets out to "collect and put in dialogue emerging research and criticism on the subject" of femslash, and my paper contributes to this goal by attending to a particular fan fiction genre that incorporates femslash but also refuses to draw a strong distinction between sexual and nonsexual relationships between women. As an academic fan, I believe, like Jenkins, that fan fiction is a resistive form of creative expression practiced by women (note 1) who seek to
"colonize" the texts they are fans of by "reworking [them]...to become open to feminine pleasures" (Jenkins 1992, 114–15). This focus on fandom as a community of women has intrigued scholars, particularly in regards to slash. However, comparatively little has been said about the women who talk, read, and write about women in fan fiction, which is particularly lamentable given the extensive work about women reading and writing in other female-centric genres such as romance fiction (e.g., Radway 1984). There are even some similarities between the genres—for example, Radway's notion of romance fiction as compensatory literature that "enables [women] to relieve tension...diffuse resentment, and...indulge in a fantasy that provide[s] them with good feelings" (1984, 95) could easily be applied to fan fiction as well. But the scholarship on women in fan fiction in general, and on femslash specifically, is incredibly sparse—as Reid points out, "the existence of women writing about women in fandom is generally ignored" (2009).

[1.2] In this paper I seek to rectify this lack, sketching out the characteristics of a fan fiction genre that fans recognize but have not named, homoaffection fic, and showing how it reworks masculine narratives and in doing so centers and revalues female experiences, bringing into being female communities both in the world of the fic and—through its circulation in female fan communities—in our own world. The examples of homoaffection fic that I have selected come from the Archive of Our Own (AO3; https://archiveofourown.org/) and are based on the various Star Trek television series and movies. They were chosen through consultation with the community of Star Trek fans on Tumblr, and I have obtained permission from all the creators of the fan fiction included in this paper.

[1.3] In order to analyze these examples of homoaffection fic, I am drawing upon a number of theoretical frameworks including the notion of the lesbian continuum, theorized by Eve Sedgwick and expanded by Adrienne Rich, which "[includes] the sharing of a rich inner life...bonding...[and] the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (2003, 27); Elayne Rapping's use of the private sphere in analyzing soap operas, particularly the "things women do in [the private] sphere [that] are seen as central to the maintenance and proper functioning of human life" (2002, 52); and the existing fan studies scholarship on the gift economy in fandom.

[1.4] I must also clarify that in this paper I use the potentially problematic terms "masculine narratives" and "feminine narratives/pleasures" in reference to the public sphere and private sphere, respectively, which treads uncomfortably close to gender essentialism. That is, of course, not my intention at all. I use these terms not because men and women have innate properties that align them to these different spheres but because these terms are socially produced in many domains (including fiction and fan fiction) and are therefore useful to my argument.
2. Defining homoaffection fic

[2.1] Homoaffection fic is not a named genre in fandom. It was while reading Star Trek fic in other named genres, such as fluff, curtainfic, fem gen, and femslash that I began to identify similarities and recognize the conventions of a new genre. The fic was female-centered—not just because the main characters were women or because it was focalized through a female character but because it was centered on the relationship between two or more female characters. Also, if a male character or a relationship with a male character was included or discussed, then it was secondary to the main focus on female characters and relationships. However, it was not just that this fic centered on women but what women did in the fic itself that I identified as a generic convention. In terms of conventional narrative structure, nothing happens in the fic. The traditional plot—of set up, conflict, resolution—is not present. Instead, there is an emphasis on the female characters offering each other emotional support, with their relationships being profoundly positive.

[2.2] Although it is not a named genre, fans other than myself were able to recognize it when asked. As an author of homoaffection fic, I reached out to my community for fic that fit within the genre. I selected examples for this paper by sharing a post with the Star Trek fan community on Tumblr, describing the type of fic I was looking for and asking for recommendations. Within a week I had been sent over 30 examples.

[2.3] It should be noted that although homoaffection fic is an unnamed genre, it is similar in some ways to another fic genre that existed prior to and in the early days of the Internet, known as smarm ("Smarm" 2016). This genre was similar to the hurt/comfort genre, with an emphasis on the comfort: like homoaffection fic, it emphasized characters caring for and supporting each other through everyday experiences that were not part of the original narrative. Unlike homoaffection fic, smarm—like most fan fiction genres—was primarily associated with male-male friendships; however, it did include stories written about women. Another dissimilarity was that smarm was seen as the antithesis of slash, with characters not having a sexual relationship of any kind ("Smarm" 2016). The existence of smarm demonstrates that this type of storytelling, and the accompanying caring community of female readers and writers, is not a new phenomenon in fandom. And it also serves as a reminder that there are similar genres to homoaffection fic which focus on male-centered stories, in contrast to homoaffection fic's unique focus on women.

[2.4] In naming this genre, I have borrowed the term homoaffection from Caroline Gonda, who in turn adopted it from Susan Lanser to describe same-sex relationships in a way that emphasized the importance of affection as opposed to being constricted to
a sexual/platonic binary with terms such as homoerotic or homosocial (2007, 92). This seemed appropriate to my classification, as the fic encompasses a wide range of relationships: sexual, romantic, platonic, and familial. This diversity of relationships between women can be understood in terms of what Rich and Sedgwick call the lesbian continuum. Rich suggests that "we consider the possibility that all women... exist on a lesbian continuum" (2003, 136), with Sedgwick explaining that "the diacritical opposition between the homosocial and the homosexual seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men" (1985, 2).

[2.5] In other words, because men in our society are confined to such a strict heterosexual/homosexual binary, any expression of homosocial behavior or affection between men must not be classified as anything other than a normal aspect of heterosexuality and defended, sometimes violently, as such. However, women are not restricted to the same binary, and the line between heterosexuality and homosexuality is blurred, particularly by homosocial behavior and affection. Sedgwick goes on to explain, "At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter...the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship" (1985, 2).

[2.6] It is these forms of women's attention to women depicted by homoaffection fic. This is best illustrated through a close textual reading of a short example of homoaffection fic. The example I am analyzing, "Ice Cream, Coffee and Strawberry Tart" (2013) by cosmic_lillin, is the third fic in a series about the romantic and sexual relationship between Seven of Nine from Star Trek: Voyager (1995–2001) and Sarina Douglas, a minor character from Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (1993–99). Voyager and Deep Space Nine are two separate spin-off Star Trek television series, which ran almost concurrently and are set at roughly the same time in-universe. Deep Space Nine depicted the adventures of the crew of the titular space station in what is known as the Alpha Quadrant—the region of space that the Federation is situated in. Voyager is set on the titular starship, which is flung to the far-off Delta Quadrant on the other side of the galaxy. The series depicts their voyage home and culminates in their arrival at Earth in the final episode.

[2.7] The character Seven of Nine joins the crew of Voyager halfway through the series, having been rescued from the Borg Collective—a hive-mind of cyborgs, assimilated from humanoid races across the galaxy—by whom she was assimilated as a 7-year-old. The character of Sarina Douglas, meanwhile, appeared in only two episodes of Deep Space Nine; in "Statistical Probabilities" she is introduced as a genetically engineered human who processes information so quickly that it cannot get to her visual or auditory systems, rendering her unable to interact with her
surroundings. In her subsequent appearance in "Chrysalis" an operation is performed which corrects the problem, allowing her to properly interact with the world for the first time since she was a child. Seven and Sarina never meet or know of each other in their respective series, but they have a great deal in common. They are both geniuses and work as scientists, and both have difficulty with social interaction because of their upbringings. Furthermore, they share a love of singing, which is established in their respective series and is part of the first fic in the series "Jasmine and Rose" (2012), in which Seven and Sarina meet at a scientific conference and develop romantic feelings for each other. By the time of "Ice Cream, Coffee and Strawberry Tart" (2013) their relationship has been established. As the title suggests, the fic consists of three sections—one for each conversation Seven has about her relationship with Sarina.

[2.8] Seven shares ice cream with Naomi Wildman, the first child born on Voyager. Their relationship is a curious mixture of maternal and sisterly, as a result of their age difference. Their conversation begins with Seven commenting on Naomi looking older:

[2.9] "Naomi Wildman," said Seven. "Your appearance has altered. You have gained approximately six centimeters in height since our last encounter, and you have modified your hairstyle." She paused, and smiled. "It is very...grown-up."

"Really?" Naomi beamed back, sliding into the booth opposite Seven. (cosmic_llin 2013)

[2.10] Following this, they order the ice cream, and Naomi tries to tease information out of Seven about Sarina. There is a childlike innocence to Naomi’s questioning: "'A gift? Who from?' [Naomi] 'A friend.' [Seven] 'A girl friend?' [Naomi]." Even her observation that Seven looks different because she is "smilier" contributes to the overall tone of their friendship. This is reinforced by the ending of this section, with Naomi entreating Seven to "'tell me about Sarina!'"

[2.11] The second section, the coffee, is shared with Admiral Kathryn Janeway, Voyager's former captain—which fans would anticipate, because of her well-established love of the beverage. Seven and Janeway share a professional relationship, as implied by the coffee, and yet there is also a maternal aspect to it in the television series. This is reflected in their dialogue:

[2.12] "Status report," said Admiral Janeway, taking two mugs from the replicator and bringing them over to the couch, where Seven was sitting.

"Everything is fine," Seven said, taking her mug.

"...and?" (cosmic_llin 2013)
[2.13] This continues, with the Admiral's repetition of "... and?" prompting brief, practical answers, until Janeway finally asks Seven to "tell me everything." This request is followed by the longest paragraph in the entire fic:

[2.14] So Seven told her how Sarina's shuttle had been twenty-three minutes late, how they had tried almost every restaurant on Earth that Sarina had ever happened to read about in a book, how they had gotten lost in Kaluga, seen an old-fashioned movie, walked the entire length of Federation Row in Paris, bought confectionary from street stands, and talked for hours about the new warp engine developments that had been in the news lately. (cosmic_lillin 2013)

[2.15] The use of short sentences and repetition in the first half of this section builds up the suspense, which is satisfied by the condensed description of all the details Seven shares with the Admiral. This paragraph in particular reflects a common female experience, of giving an in-depth retelling of a date to a female friend.

[2.16] The third and final section is Seven's conversation with her only living relative, her aunt Irene Hansen, who appears briefly in a single episode, having reached out to contact Seven in the Delta Quadrant, along with all the other families whose loved ones are on Voyager. This section of the fic begins with a discussion of the strawberry tart:

[2.17] "How's the strawberry tart?" Irene asked.

Seven swallowed her current mouthful and smiled. "Excellent, as always," she said. "Aunt Irene, you do not have to make it every time I visit. I know from experience that preparing food by hand is time-consuming."

"Nonsense, it's your favourite," said Irene. (cosmic_lillin 2013)

[2.18] The caring relationship between them is established through the homemade strawberry tart and the effort that Seven's aunt goes to in making it. This initial discussion is followed by Irene asking whether Sarina also likes strawberry tarts and suggesting that Seven bring her to meet her, prompting a discussion about their relationship.

[2.19] "So...it's getting serious between the two of you?"

Seven paused for a moment to consider the various meanings of the word serious.

"Perhaps?" she ventured. "I am unsure. I don't know yet what I want to happen next, or how I foresee our relationship progressing...I like how things
"Well, as long as you're both having a good time, that's the important thing," Irene said. "It does my heart good to see you happy, Annika." (cosmic_llin 2013)

Irene's use of Seven's birth name, Annika, is a reminder of the familial relationship between them, different to the one she has with Naomi or Kathryn.

From this analysis, it is clear to see the four kinds of relationships that cosmic_llin has plotted in this fic. Seven and Sarina's romantic and sexual relationship is at the center of the three conversations, yet it is not the focus—the platonic friendships she has with Naomi and Janeway, her chosen family, and her familial relationship with her aunt—are the main features of the text. And each relationship is different yet similar, a perfect example of the many different relationships that are part of the lesbian continuum and the way that they all "[include] the sharing of a rich inner life...bonding...[and] the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (Rich 2003, 27). It is this, the women supporting Seven and her relationship with Sarina, that is what happens in the fic. Their dialogue and their actions—particularly the expression of emotions and eating and drinking—is what makes up the majority of the fic. In order to see what is at stake here, I draw on Rapping's work on the importance of the private sphere to soap opera fans. She states that there is

[2.22] a sharp delineation between the male driven public sphere, in which work, business, and public affairs are handled, and the female driven domestic sphere...in which [takes] place the work of caring for and maintaining family relations, the socializing of children, and the negotiation of emotional and spiritual matters...This realm was seen to promote values such as caring, emotional openness, mutual support, and concern for the welfare of the group. (2002, 52–53)

[2.23] In the private sphere, Rapping argues, "the things women do"—in particular, "the work of caring for and maintaining family relations" and the expression of "caring, emotional openness, [and] mutual support"—"are seen as central to the maintenance and proper functioning of human life" (2002, 52–53). This centralizing of "the things women do" characterizes homoaffection fic as well as soap opera, and it is part of the way in which this genre of fic defines, constructs, and revalues female experience. A connection between soap opera and fan fic along just these lines—their construction and representation of female lives—has been drawn by Camille Bacon-Smith, who states that "fan writers, like soap opera fans, want to see characters change and evolve, have families, and rise to the challenge of internal and external crises in a nonlinear, dense tapestry of experience" (1992, 64). She claims this is so as "whether
because of innate qualities or socialization, women perceive their lives in this way, and they like to see that structure reproduced in their literature" (1992, 64). Whether this is true of all fan fiction or not, it applies to homoaffection fic.

3. Defining, constructing, and revaluing female experience

[3.1] To establish fan fiction as a form of literature that seeks to rework existing texts to "become open to feminine pleasures" (Jenkins 1992, 114–15) raises the question of what, exactly, is meant by feminine pleasures. Fic focusing on traumatic events such as character death, humorous romantic comedy plots, epic tales more complicated than their original source text—fan fiction encompasses all of these and more, and as it is written primarily by women, it follows that it must all then be fulfilling feminine pleasures. But homoaffection fic seems to focus on a specific form of feminine pleasure, the one hinted at by Bacon-Smith, of seeing characters exist in a "nonlinear, dense tapestry of experience" (1992, 64) encompassing the everyday, reflecting women's experience of their own lives. In Bacon-Smith's view of what fan writers want in their fic, "it is living day to day that matters, not the single events that make up individual plots" (1992, 64).

[3.2] This is reflected in homoaffection fic, which focuses on the mundane and trivial and revalues them as important. The fic I was recommended features a variety of domestic activities from eating, drinking, sleeping, and bathing to knitting, gardening, visiting the holodeck, or going on shore leave, as well as the other, most common aspect of homoaffection fic: emotional support, with female characters confiding in each other and receiving support and understanding, as well as physical comfort and nurturing, in return. Often, as in "Ice Cream, Coffee and Strawberry Tart," the two are linked together, with the domestic activities being used to nurture a character physically while they are being supported emotionally.

[3.3] For example, "Pomegranate" (2010) by Raven follows on from the events of the Star Trek (2009) movie, with the character of Nyota Uhura returning to her home on Earth to heal from the ordeal. Tea serves an important function in the story. It is established that making tea was how her mother nurtured her when she was studying to join Starfleet—"Nyota studied late into the night, every night, and her mother made tea after dark and poured out mute, loving cups"—and that this is how she continues to nurture and comfort her when she returns home: "'I'm so sorry,' her mother says, softly. 'I'm so, so sorry. I know I can't understand.' She lets go and stands up. 'Let me make you some tea, baby, okay?"' The mundane, domestic act of drinking tea is given a sense of importance in this example of homoaffection fic—and it is not an isolated example.
3.4 My own fic, "Casting On" (2014), depicts the formation of a knitting circle among the women of Deep Space Nine. Knitting serves to bring the women together as they support and comfort each other. They also drink tea while knitting and talking and, as in "Pomegranate," it is not treated as just a descriptive detail but as an essential part of the story. In one scene, Keiko O'Brien—the wife of main character Miles O'Brien—joins the knitting circle after a harrowing few weeks when Miles's life was put in danger numerous times. When she arrives, she is emotionally distressed. The other women there settle her on the couch then get her some tea to drink: "Keiko brought the mug to her face and inhaled deeply. Dax was pleased to see some of the tension ease from her shoulders" (AceofWands 2014). This then allows Keiko to open up to the other women emotionally. Something as simple as providing and drinking tea is constructed as an important aspect of female experience—and homoaffection fic revalues this experience as itself important. This is a political act of resistance to traditional (masculine) narrative values.

3.5 Hennegan laments that, in traditional literature, "the bulk of women's lives go ignored, unknown, unrecorded. Women's lives are too 'trivial,' 'boring,' 'narrowly domestic' to matter and the novels which depict them are equally expendable" (1998, 184). And her examination of so-called women's books written in the 18th and 19th centuries reveals "meticulously detailed accounts of a women's world" with less visible male characters, and whose "real content lay in the women's interactions with each other: in the advice they gave, care they took, support they offered, sacrifices they made" (1998, 174). This description clearly fits homoaffection fic as well, suggesting that it is not a new phenomenon but a continuation of an existing form of literature—one that constructs everyday domestic activities and emotional support as a defining part of female experience and that revalues this as something important and worthy of being written about. This raises the question, however, of what pleasure is to be gained from reworking the masculine narratives of an action-adventure science fiction television series to focus on the female experience of the everyday and the domestic. That is, why write homoaffection fic in the Star Trek universe when women's fiction already exists?

4. Reworking masculine narratives

4.1 Henry Jenkins notes that "most traditionally feminine stories do not require such constant reworking in order to become open to feminine pleasures" (1992, 114), suggesting that part of the pleasure is, precisely, in the reworking itself. Pugh states that a fic writer of her acquaintance once remarked that "people wrote fanfic because they wanted either 'more of' their source material or 'more from' it" (2005, 19). In other words, either they love the text so much that they want to continue spending time with those characters in that world, or their desires are not being fulfilled by it.
and they want more. I believe both to be true in the case of homoaffection fic. The writers love the world of Star Trek and its female characters, and yet Star Trek episodes are traditional masculine narratives—as are most television dramas.

[4.2] Fiske defines masculine narratives as those "structured to produce greater narrative and ideological closure" (1987, 200) and contrasts them to soap operas, noting that masculine narratives "have a single plot, or a clearly defined hierarchy of main and subplots" in contrast to the multiple characters, plots, and perspectives of soap operas (1987, 219). Furthermore, masculine narratives tend to focus on the public sphere, as outlined by Rapping (2002), and to center on the work that the characters do. Because of their desire to explore more feminine pleasures, the writers of homoaffection fic focus on a different aspect of the characters' lives than what we see in the masculine narratives of the series. This is illustrated in different ways in the examples I have selected.

[4.3] In some cases, the fic explores events that would never happen in the series, such as "Coffee in Bed" (2010) by Opal Matilla—a series of fics about the romantic, sexual relationship between Admiral Kathryn Janeway from Voyager and Doctor Beverly Crusher from The Next Generation (1987–94), two characters who never meet in the series. The fic series is set after Voyager returns to Earth, and follows on from The Next Generation movies, when Janeway is an admiral at Starfleet Headquarters and Crusher is the head of Starfleet Medical. The series follows their relationship as it progresses from dates to moving in together—then continues to marriage and pregnancy in a subsequent series—and much of it is entirely domestic, without any of the markers of traditional masculine narrative. For example, "Ours" (2011), a fic halfway through the series, consists of the two women adjusting to moving in together, particularly Kathryn getting used to the idea of them sharing a cat. Much of the fic is devoted to erotica and dialogue between them about the aforementioned cat.

[4.4] This is one of the ways in which homoaffection fic can completely rework the characters and events from Star Trek to fit feminine pleasures. However, it is not the only way in which homoaffection fic reworks masculine narratives. Other examples center around the events of particular episodes, specifically the emotional impact that they have. "Kindred Spirits" (2014) by allamaraine follows the Next Generation episode "Lower Decks," where a young Starfleet officer, Sito Jaxa, dies on a dangerous mission. Although we do see some of the characters grieving, including Captain Picard, who sent her on the mission, there is not much space given to that grief in the episode. By contrast, allamaraine's 2,000-word fic focuses entirely on Doctor Crusher comforting her grieving friend and nurse, Alyssa Ogawa. The fic culminates in Beverly physically comforting Alyssa as she cries:
Beverly felt her chest tighten at the sound of Alyssa's grief. "Come here," she said, gathering Alyssa into her arms. "I miss her so much," Alyssa sobbed, before burying her face into Beverly's shoulder. "Shhhhh," Beverly stroked Alyssa's hair and gently rocked her back and forth. "I know, I know." (allamaraine 2014)

A similar scene occurs at the end of my fic "Casting On" (2014), set during the second and third seasons of Deep Space Nine and filling in the gaps between episodes, in terms of the emotional impact that these events have on the female characters. The final scene follows on from the events of the episode "Life Support," in which Kira Nerys's lover has died. In my fic, Jadzia Dax arrives at her quarters to comfort her while she is grieving:

Jadzia lead her, gently, across the room. She pressed firmly on her shoulder, silently urging her to wait there, and went and heaved Nerys's couch around until it faced the window. Then she took Nerys's hand and pulled her down onto the couch beside her. They looked out at the bright stars, undulled by a planet's atmosphere, and the low hum of the station's environmental control system was the only sound to be heard.

And when Nerys started to cry again, soundlessly, her whole body wracked with sobs, Jadzia said nothing, but wrapped her arms around Nerys and gently rocked her from side to side. (AceofWands 2014)

These examples are two among many in homoaffection fic, and they demonstrate the way that this fic revalues female experience and constructs it as something valuable. It is not simply that fans are adding female experiences to the traditionally masculine plots of Star Trek episodes, but that by focusing on them they are fleshing out aspects of the Star Trek universe that are considered trivial and thus creating a much richer narrative world, encompassing a wider range of human experience. And in doing so, they are reconceptualizing the television series not only for themselves, as individual fans, but for others. In her paper "Slash as Queer Utopia," Willis states that "to say that Blake and Avon are in love is not only to make a claim about the content of Blake's 7; it is also to make the claim that queer desire exists and can be recognized" (2007, 4); analogously, homoaffection fic does not just make a claim about the Star Trek universe but insists that in our world, the things women do exist, and that these things are not only valuable and worthy of being written about but are crucial to maintaining a livable world. With this emphasis on reworking masculine narratives to open them up to female experience, homoaffection
fic attracts fans who are also interested in exploring those possibilities. The women writing about these characters want to explore the relationships between them that might only have been hinted at, or given less emphasis, in the original text. Or, as with many of the examples, they might bring together characters who never even met.

[4.9] But in writing fic about women coming together to form female communities, the fic itself also acts to bring the fan writers and readers together to form their own female community. As Stanfill and Condis note, "fan work creates fan community—fandom itself—through the production and maintenance of affective ties" (2014, 3.4). In other words, by interacting with each other—whether in comments on fan fiction or talking in a community space like Tumblr—these fans form a community. Indeed, as Scott notes, "it is the reciprocity and free circulation of fan works within female fan communities that identifies them as communities" (2009, 2.10). So the creation and circulation of homoaffection fic, whose focus is on female communities and relationships, in turn develops reciprocal female communities and relationships among the fans who write, read, and share it.

5. The role of the gift economy

[5.1] It is not simply the circulation of fan fiction in fandom that forms a community. The Star Trek fandom is vast and stretches across real world and online spaces, and the subset of the fandom who write and read homoaffection fic is small and centered around Tumblr and AO3. Their community is formed through their interactions in these online spaces. The social aspects of this community take place on Tumblr, where pictures, fic, and vids are shared and where discussion about the female characters, their relationships, and particular events and episodes is common. Wilson states that the "affective discourse of fandom (that is, excited conversations and expressions of love) is inextricable from the production of fan fiction" (2016, 3.6) and this is true of the community that I am examining. Many of the fans who interact on Tumblr also write fan fiction, and because of their affective ties, they often write fic specifically for each other. But as Turk notes, "While some gifts are made for and presented to specific fans, whether in the context of a preexisting friendship, a prompt or request, or a fest or challenge, they are typically made available not only to that individual but to the community as a whole" (2014, 3.1).

[5.2] Even when fic is written for someone, it is still shared on the AO3 to be enjoyed by the entire community. In the selection of homoaffection fic chosen for this paper, a number of examples were gifts. "When The Working Day Is Done" (2015) was written by glitteratiglue for cosmic_llin, with the note "because she got excited about the idea and didn't tell me I was insane for wanting to do it," suggesting a friendship between the two writers that extends beyond reading and writing fic. However, friendship is not
a prerequisite for gifting fic. Since 2014, cosmic_llin has run an annual Star Trek Friendshipfest on the AO3, described as "a fanfiction exchange for friendship stories set in the Star Trek universe" ("Star Trek Friendshipfest" 2014). Fic exchanges are a common practice in many fandoms (and across fandoms). Writers sign up for them, request pairings they would like to read, and offer the pairings they are willing to write. Then they get matched, anonymously, and have a limited time to write fic of a certain length, which is then shared on the AO3.

[5.3] This particular fic exchange is often a source of homoaffection fic, with participants requesting female friendships. I myself have been the recipient of fic in these exchanges, including "Everything Will Be All Right (If You Keep Me Next To You)" (2014) by silly_cleo, written for my request for more fic about the women of Deep Space Nine being friends. And "Kindred Spirits" by allamaraine was another gift of that same exchange, written for glitteratiglue. I mention these examples in particular to demonstrate not only the way in which the fic exchange is part of the existing community—as it is made up of many fans who already know and interact with each other on Tumblr—but also that it is part of the making of that community. Although fans may not have interacted prior to writing fic for each other, the act of writing that fic can serve to form the first bonds of friendship and establish a sense of community. Fans discover that they share similar interests in terms of what they want to write and read about, which naturally encourages them to seek out and interact with each other on Tumblr in the hopes of being able to discuss those shared interests. Thus the gift economy creates social bonds and constructs fan community.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] In the chapter of The Fan Fiction Studies Reader about slash, Hellekson and Busse suggest that the only relationships that make sense in the universes of cult television are homosexual ones, as heterosexual relationships are "bound to short-circuit the adventures and fantastic explorations" at the center of these series (2014, 80). They suggest that "domesticity cannot be allowed in these universes, and within a heteronormative ideology, heterosexual relations will eventually lead to domesticity... White picket fences have no place on space stations" (Hellekson and Busse 2014, 80). Obviously, I do not agree with this assertion. Homoaffection fic, the fan fiction genre I have defined and illuminated in this paper, embraces domesticity and incorporates it into Star Trek—a cult television universe it is supposedly antithetical to.

[6.2] Furthermore, with its central focus on female characters and their relationships with each other, homoaffection fic embraces domesticity while simultaneously resisting heteronormative ideology. It defines domestic activities and emotional support as essential aspects of female experience, and it constructs and revalues this as
something worth being written about. And it counters the notion of domesticity having no place in the action-oriented, masculine narratives of *Star Trek* by reworking those narratives to make them open to feminine pleasure. By creating this sense of female community within the fic itself, it also creates the same supportive community among the fans who create and circulate this fic—of which the giving and receiving of gift fics is an integral part.

[6.3] Although this paper has focused solely on *Star Trek* and on a specific section of its fan community, Hennegan's commentary on women's fiction in the 18th and 19th centuries makes it clear that homoaffection is part of a long tradition of feminine resistance to masculine narratives. The link between this form of literature, in which female experience is valued as something important and worth writing and reading about, and fan fiction has previously been unacknowledged by scholarship—in much the same way that femslash and other female-centered forms of fan fiction have been ignored. And yet, as this paper demonstrates, these forms of fan fiction serve an important need for female fans. They create a richer narrative world that encompasses a wider range of human experience—specifically, female experience—and revalue this experience as important.

[6.4] As with femslash and queer female fandom in general, there is plenty of scope for further research into homoaffection fic as a genre of female-centered fan fiction and the role it plays in creating and serving female communities. So too is there scope to explore the similarities and differences between homoaffection fic and other similar fic genres such as smarm. But in terms of its role in the *Star Trek* fan community, this paper has demonstrated that through reworking the traditional masculine narratives of *Star Trek*, homoaffection fic has continued the tradition of illuminating the lives of women and thereby unequivocally states that white picket fences do indeed have a place on space stations and starships.

7. Acknowledgments

[7.1] I thank both my supervisor Ika Willis and fellow homoaffection fic author Llinos Cathryn Wynn-Jones for their help, guidance, enthusiasm, and encouragement.

8. Note

1. Although here I refer to female experience and female community, I must clarify that I am not referring to an innate characteristic attached to biological sex, but a socialized way of being not limited to heterosexual, cisgendered women—as there are a diversity of genders and sexualities present in fan communities.
9. Works cited


Theory

Locating black queer TV: Fans, producers, and networked publics on YouTube

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[0.1] **Abstract**—For black creators, television remains an elusive yet illustrious art form. Corporate television networks have restricted access to black writers, limiting black representations. However, through a more open distribution system on the Internet, black writers have expanded the art of television, producing stories in a wider range of genres through a variety of intersectional identities and intersecting art forms. Here we interrogate indie black cultural production to first locate how writers queer traditional television production. We then examine how audiences form counterpublics to read and respond to these works in comments and on blogs. We engage a broad array of popular indie series whose creators span identities and whose narratives span genres, including the black queer and lesbian dramas *Between Women* (2011–present) and *No Shade* (2013–2015) as well as the comedic black gay pilots *Twenties* (2013) and *Words with Girls* (2012–2014). We explore how and why producers conceived of these series alongside how viewing publics interpreted and consumed them. To varying degrees, these series queer not only the norms of television production and form but also of viewership and audience response.

[0.2] **Keywords**—Audience; Digital media; Fandom; Intersectionality; Television


1. Introduction

[1.1] Visibility and invisibility shape why black producers create, and how their fans respond to, queer representations on YouTube. We theorize this unique fan-producer relationship as "quare-shared recognition," combining intersectional performance theory and fan studies. Examining popular black queer Web series *No Shade* and *If I Was Your Girl* as well as pilots *Twenties* and *Words with Girls*, we find a heightened visibility of queer women of color, as producers serialize performances for and by black
queer women. Indie producers and fans collectively create new performances of blackness and queerness via open networks online, in response to legacy broadcast and cable television networks that ignore and normalize intersectional black identities through closed development processes. The work of producers and fans reveals how networked (digital, peer-to-peer) distribution reconfigures the (in)visibility of black production, performance, and fan reception in legacy network (linear, one-to-many) development.

[1.2] Black queer indie series are largely unrecognized by legacy networks so circulate in the decentralized networks of those in the community who recommend series to friends and family. Fans of queer black Web series include both individuals who explicitly identify as queer and those who do not. Aware of the diversity among fans, producers explicitly work toward visibility for black queer people and must negotiate with fans the networked visibility of black queer performance without legacy network intermediaries on open-access platforms. We argue this unique producer-fan relationship quares scholarly understandings of television development by fostering a more complex, interdependent vision of series distribution, particularly of indie, community-focused series.

[1.3] Our essay locates black queer TV production and reception through analysis of comments from fans and interviews with producers in Hollywood and outside in Chicago and New York. We analyze how producers respond to their communities, locally and nationally, and how fans reconstruct and negotiate communities online. As Rebecca Wanzo (2015) writes, our position as black acafans, an underexplored area in media studies scholarship, compels us to center intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in our study as a form of both scholarly and industrial critique. Like fans of legacy TV series, fans of indie series are network-savvy and understand the mechanisms by which the mainstream channels under- and misrepresent them. Therefore, they envision queer black indie productions as one of the only ways through which they can gain visibility in the public media sphere.

[1.4] At the same time, fan affective connections with black queer performance create a representational burden that producers must carry. Black indie TV writers are constantly held accountable for the representations that they utilize, and they face pressure to meet the expectations of the queer black community. In interviews, producers of *No Shade, If I Was Your Girl, Twenties,* and *Words with Girls* directly engage with and struggle over the invisibility and visibility of black queer persons, before and after production. They cite a range of impetuses for releasing series online, including representing community expressions and concerns, personal struggles, interpersonal or social dynamics, artistic allegiances in film and TV, and economic or market incentives. In analyzing these series, we can see production impetuses falling
into two categories that are specific to location and series type. Many producers of indie series outside of Hollywood express their primary motivation as socially and community-driven. These producers tend to welcome more feedback and engagement from fans and take more pleasure in or issue with the visibility of the performances represented. In slight contrast, producers working within or near Hollywood stress market incentives to a greater degree than those producing in cities outside of Hollywood. These producers work to use pilot series as a means for breaking into the television industry and/or producing their own identity-based artistic vision. Yet, in both cases, these productions quare legacy forms of television production by exhibiting both transparency and the importance of audience reception in their creation, as well as a commitment to producing more complex and diverse portrayals of black queer performance by black queer producers.

2. Black queer indie series: Quare-shared recognition among fans and producers

[2.1] Web series represent a form of independent television or indie TV: television production independent of legacy (traditional broadcast and cable) television distribution (Christian 2014). Legacy television distribution develops series by culling from thousands of pitches and producing one or two dozen pilots, presented to advertisers who buy the audience's time up front, before viewers ever see the narrative. Stories and performances produced by those black and brown producers are marginalized in this process for a variety of reasons, including closed professional networks and discrimination in writers' rooms (Bielby and Bielby 2002; Henderson 2011). In this sense, television productions within legacy networks exist in a black box where fans tend to have little knowledge of or involvement in the production process but instead are positioned as passive consumers whose main role is to garner ratings, views, and therefore profit for the network.

[2.2] Yet Web distribution allows producers to connect with viewers directly, without network distributors who shape and select narratives to appeal to broader audiences, conform to established formulas, and satisfy advertisers (Gitlin 1983; Lotz 2007). Most black Web series are about straight people, but the specificity of intersectional Web series by queer and femme people of color has made them popular online (Christian 2016). View count on If I Was Your Girl rivals that of Issa Rae's The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl, by all accounts the most successful black series online. Anacostia, a DC-based series starring and created by gay producer Anthony Anderson, amassed enough of an audience to run for at least four seasons, giving it time to garner a Daytime Emmy for guest star Martha Byrne. Dramas and dramedies about queer people of color are popular on YouTube, beginning with Chump ChangeS, the first black drama on the site, and continuing with The Lovers and Friends Show, Between

[2.3] Black queer and intersectional Web series advance innovation in series development and set the stage for creating queer community online through identification with content creators, the characters, and issues in the series. Corporate networks address communities as market niches and employ post identity (postracial, postgay) politics, erasing differences within communities and promoting disidentification between racialized subjects and the text even on niche channels like LOGO (Dávila 2012; Muñoz 1999; Ng 2013; Sender 2004; Smith-Shomade 2008; Warner 2015). In response, we find that queer of color Web series promote quare-shared recognition. This theory integrates queer and black theory into the breadth of scholarship on how fans, particularly women, appropriate, shape, and challenge media texts within affective communities (Bury 2005; Christian 2011; Jenkins 2006; Morimoto 2013; Ng 2008; Russo 2009). By combining E. Patrick Johnson's conception of Quaring and Patricia Hill Collins's use of shared recognition, we see black queer series development as constructed in relation to shared recognition of performances of intersectional identity. For Johnson (2005), Quaring (taken from black vernacular) references the ways in which sexual and gendered identities "always already intersect with racial subjectivity" while also showing how these identities resist oppression and containment (125). Collins (2000) defines "shared recognition" as the process by which black women form a community in order to recognize "the need to value Black womanhood" (97). While Collins references black women's identity, the indie productions that we analyze expose how we must value queer identity within the black community and the ways in which Web producers value the identities and opinions of their viewers/fans. As Kara Keeling (2007) shows in cinema, the visibility and invisibility of black queer femme representations perform an essential function in how audiences assess cinematic reality; meanwhile C. Riley Snorton (2014) theorizes black sexuality as marked by hypervisibility and invisibility in the public sphere, forming what he calls a "glass closet" around black subjectivity. Quaring and shared recognition undergird the reading practices that viewers bring to performances of black queer and femme identities in indie TV, framing the discourse through which they negotiate the paradoxical invisibility and hypervisibility of blackness and queerness—the glass closet frames the reality of black queer productions and publics. In their use of quare-shared recognition, black queer Web producers quare legacy
television production by demonstrating the value of black queer identity. This is accomplished through producing series and pilots that expand the diversity of black queer performances, as well as bringing viewers into the production process by encouraging recognition and interaction with the media text.

[2.4] As Nancy Baym states, "most good qualitative work uses multiple strategies to get at the phenomena that interest them. Researchers may look at multiple forms of online discourse, they may conduct interviews, and they may complement online data collection with offline encounters" (2006, 84). Therefore, in order to understand how recognition shapes reception, we performed a content analysis of the YouTube comments for both the series and pilots in conjunction with the collection of interview data from series creators. In order to gain the most variability in responses to the series, we only examined the comments for the first episode of every series. While No Shade and Words with Girls have only one video as the first episode, If I Was Your Girl is available on YouTube as a compilation of three episodes, and Twenties is presented as an episode in four parts, so the number of comments and videos analyzed varies across the group: No Shade: 418 comments; Words with Girls: 128; If I Was Your Girl: 1,768; and Twenties: 787. We conducted open coding to categorize comments from the start of the series to the most current postings. The analysis foregrounds similarities between the comments across content as well as what is unique to each series and pilot. Drawing on the work of Norman Fairclough (2013) and critical discourse analysis, we also analyzed the discourse between viewers of the show. This discourse unites meanings both inside and outside of pilots, as viewers draw on their own experiences in life, with the show, and with other media texts to formulate responses to the representation of a queer black identity. Given the small sample size of interviews (three), interview transcripts were not coded; instead, the researcher focused interviews on how and why producers develop their stories and compared what discourses—for example, community versus market value, explicit versus implicit citation of black queer identities—were emphasized by each producer in their responses.

[2.5] The rest of this paper focuses on an analysis of the community-driven queer Web series produced outside of Hollywood (No Shade and If I was Your Girl) and the market-driven pilots produced in Hollywood (Twenties and Words with Girls), in order to examine how the direct and discursive comments on these series reflect the construction of a queer black audience unique in their interest and investment in the production of black Web series and nuanced representations of a queer black identity. Each case study integrates interviews with series producers in which producers express similar investments in the production and representation of black queer performances. Our analysis suggests location as a key variable in how producers negotiate their investments. Hollywood-based producers are more attuned to creating
marketable representations while those outside the TV industry's center express in
greater depth and detail how their personal investments connect to community and
social concerns in their respective cities. Both of our analyses suggest how networked
distribution privileges community-based modes of production and engagement focused
on creating publics, shifting television development online from niche/market-driven to
social/community-driven.

3. No Shade and If I Was Your Girl: Speaking to black queer communities

centers on the life of Noel Baptiste, a Haitian-American artist struggling in New York
living with his religious and homophobic mother. Creator Sean Anthony portrays Noel
as naïve and in search of his place within the LGBTQ community. His three best friends
—bar manager Eric D. Stone, choreographer Kori Jacobs, and transgender makeup
artist Danielle Williams—assist him in this journey while also grappling with their
identities as artists and queer and transgender people. In focusing the narrative
around Noel, Anthony attracts an audience who does not just identify as queer but
also as Haitian or Haitian-American, raising issues around being gay in Haiti or within
the Haitian community. Comments such as "Haitian? Wow. Never knew someone
Haitian and gay. I'm Haitian and other Haitians can't even imagine homosexuality in
Haiti" reflect the lack of visibility within mainstream media and society for this
particular identity. For viewers who relate to Noel, there is a shared recognition around
the unique oppression that he deals with because of the intersecting identities of a
Haitian Gay man. Yet in the first episode, Noel is not explicitly described as Haitian.
Many viewers see Noel's black diasporic identity signaled through other factors, such
as the last name Baptiste and his mother's use of Haitian Creole (not translated in the
series).

[3.2] We see the use of language and naming to signal communal affiliation in
viewers' comments, defining No Shade as a queer space. Stating their appreciation for
the series and its message, viewers of No Shade continuously reiterate slang terms
requiring prior knowledge or familiarity with the queer community to be understood,
for example: "The life I was given within the first 30 seconds is what made me stay.
Killin' it!" Much of this language comes out of the ballroom culture in New York City,
with which some characters in the series, such as Kori and Danielle, are heavily
affiliated. Ballroom culture is especially depicted through the intertextuality of the
series, which blends genres from various film and television texts. Paris is Burning, the
1990 documentary film by Jennie Livingston on the ballroom culture in New York, is
satirized in the first episode of the series through the character House Mother Patty
Alchemy, to mostly positive (but some negative) comments from viewers. As Marlon
Bailey (2013) states in his ethnography of ballroom culture, *Paris is Burning* is one of the most prominent films depicting the lived realities and unique forms of self-fashioning, familial support, and identity construction within queer of color communities (4–5).

[3.3] Following S. Craig Watkins's work in music and Aymar Jean Christian's work in TV, we see the work of community-driven indie series as producing not only visibility but also innovation. From reconfiguring corporate practices designed to exclude to producing series on new technologies, community-driven Web producers quare legacy forms of television production by facilitating new networks of association for black queer viewers. Viewers actively acknowledge this innovation and the connections that black queer productions foster. Discussions most often refer to other Web series, such as *Between Women*, when discussing representations of black queer community (for example: "I stumbled across this after looking at Between women and I fell in love with the show...please keep them coming"). At the same time, viewers also reference series such as *Noah's Arc* (2005–2006), which appeared on the LOGO channel and also represented a black gay man who deals with many of the same struggles as *No Shade*'s protagonist Noel.

[3.4] The breadth and depth of the performances of black queer identity that Anthony crafts also suggest why viewers engage with and debate the representations in a variety of ways. With no marketing or plan and only a small crew, and performing many of the roles himself, Anthony nonetheless creates a series that promotes shared recognition for a diverse black queer community. The pilot has been played almost 90,000 times as of this writing (Anthony 2013). To be sure, Anthony was also motivated by personal and social concerns; the characters were modeled after friends in New York along with his own experiences: "I implement a lot of things with me and my friends...I've been every one of those characters." (Anthony, pers. comm.) Danielle, a transwoman in the ball scene, reflects transwomen he knew in the ball scene, even as he acknowledges "there's different types of transgender women...there's some that don't associate with that world," Anthony said in the interview; Anthony combined personal motivations with a sincere desire to address his community's invisibility in the mainstream media, or "put comedic humor behind a filter that reflects the community." Anthony and *No Shade* reveal the complex politics of recognition in the production and reception of black queer indie TV. They show how community-driven productions provide fruitful platforms for engaging viewers around cultural and place-based differences within and between black queer identities and performances.

[3.5] Charting the rocky relationships and ups and downs of four queer women (Toi, Stacia, Lynn, and Rhonda) in Chicago, *If I Was Your Girl* (2012–2013) is a thriller that
goes back and forward in time to construct a narrative about serious issues in the queer of color community including incarceration, domestic violence, and suicide. As the second series invested in the black queer community, *If I Was Your Girl* shares its fan base with another Web series about queer women of color in an urban space, *Between Women*, set in Atlanta. As seen in the comments for *No Shade*, which reference *Between Women* as the series that led them to the show, for many viewers of *If I Was Your Girl*, *Between Women* is their first lesbian series. Many viewers see *Between Women* as a starting point for their investment in queer Web series and take sides proclaiming whether or not *Between Women* is better or worse than *If I Was Your Girl* using standards that include the quality of the acting, characterization, entertainment value, and representation of queer women.

[3.6] *If I Was Your Girl* is different from *Between Women* and *No Shade* in content and comments because of its sexually explicit portrayal of black queer women, which has resulted in an inordinate number of comments from nonqueer, religious, and/or homophobic viewers. This pushback seems to be indicative of the fact that *If I Was Your Girl* veers away from the safe and sanitized portrayals of lesbian couples that viewers are used to seeing in other Web series and network TV in order to visibly represent the fullness of lesbian sexuality. Embracing these representations, there are also many viewers of the series who truly enjoy the series because of the overt representation of lesbian sexuality. In the comments section, there are multiple examples of the parasocial relationships that fans developed with the queer characters and couples as a result of this attraction (note 1). As one commenter states, "You never see lesbian shows on the tv so thats y theres youtube:)...smh [shaking my head] u people are mad because [you] disapprove of homosexuals lol [laugh out loud] o wel." Hypersexualized queer individuals do not operate within respectability politics, but viewers see Web series as a unique space where producers should push the boundaries of what is acceptable in the mainstream. If viewers do not approve of these representations, then the content is probably not for them.

[3.7] In keeping with the goals of community-driven productions, creator Coquie Hughes (2013) explicitly cites her motivation—particularly domestic and state violence — to create works for the urban black lesbian community as inspired by her personal and social experiences. During our interview she states, "I wanted to use the film to let people to know that I was a lesbian...It kind of gave me that bravery I needed" (Hughes, pers. comm.). While Hughes's personal work is rooted in propagating representations of urban queer women of color, her roots are in community theater for city publics, and conversations around *If I Was Your Girl* started locally in Chicago at the Portage Theater in Portage Park, an ethnically diverse community with a growing black population. Hughes premiered the series in April 2012 to an almost sold-out audience of 1,100 people, not all of them queer, and premiered it again to a sold-out
audience later that year. "The local people they liked it...The bootleg man really played a role in getting the word out," Hughes said in the interview. When she sold the version online after the premiere, she grossed $12,000.

Hughes's impressions of local reception mirror online dynamics, revealing how the performances she captured—she cites the attractiveness of actors as key—produced complex sexual response from queer and nonqueer viewers alike: "I get more so straight people who relate to my projects...A lot of straight people come to my premieres. They say 'I'm not gay but...' so and so is gorgeous...People get all kinds of emotions" (Hughes, pers. comm.). Hughes cites the complex politics of recognition in black production and reception. The black community's invisibility creates excitement, drawing diverse crowds for queer content; yet media's hypervisibility and the independent-mindedness of creators intensifies conversations around representations of blackness. Series by producers like Hughes clarify and challenge the boundaries of black community. Black production and performance online is an innovation in television development with social but also economic value. As Hughes stated in the interview: "I didn't plan on making films for the urban lesbian community. I'm just taking advantage. Ain't nobody making content for this community because they don't care...They will pay to see themselves." For Hughes, modest financial gain is an unpredictable side effect of providing places online and off-line for a public eager to engage with the queerness of black social dynamics.

4. *Twenties* and *Words with Girls*: Marketing black queer publics

In contrast to community-driven series productions, market-driven pilot productions are primarily focused on moving from the Web to television networks. The existence of underserved audiences encourages producers to make pilot episodes to show legacy networks that there's a market for their work. Yet, while Christian describes how all indie series are possible pilots to be picked up by major networks, producers working close to Hollywood are increasingly constructing more limited stories (pilots instead of full series) to introduce new characters and inspire fans to pressure legacy networks to invest in developing black queer series (2014). Commenters initially expressed confusion around the purpose of a pilot and whether or not it will actually become a series, either online or on cable. Yet, after producers allay these concerns, some viewers support the productions on the basis of queare identification. Openly distributing pilots online to black queer fans quares legacy network traditions of testing pilots with randomly filled (race- and sexuality-neutral) focus groups and public screenings in Los Angeles and elsewhere, where the results of these tests are hidden from the public and used only by (mostly white) network executives who decide whether or not the series get the green light (Gitlin 1983).
[4.2] Exploring the lives of six twentysomethings, *Twenties* (2013) is a pilot presentation in four parts centering on the protagonist, Hattie, who is seeking Internet fame through vlogging on YouTube. Produced by Queen Latifah's production company, Flavor Unit, *Twenties* received a pilot script deal with BET before the departure of Loretha Jones, head of original programming, after which the project stalled (Rafus 2014). While the show starts off as a heteronormative coming-of-age tale, as the series unfolds, the fiancée of one of Hattie's best friends is discovered having a gay affair, and Hattie comes out as a queer woman in love with a straight girl. Its installments explore the performance of blackness, interracial dating, the nature of queer sexuality, and financial hardship. Many audience members expressed how they related to these issues, particularly on the trials of falling in love with a straight girl, as Hattie expresses in the end of Part 4. Although Hattie does not explicitly come out in this video, with one viewer stating "so is Hattie gay? someone please answer," most viewers recognize Hattie's declaration of love for a straight girl as indicative of her queer sexuality. Similar to the comments on *If I Was Your Girl*, while some comments express disdain at what they call a "homosexual agenda," there are even more comments expressing joy at seeing queer women of color represented in the media (Waithe 2013).

[4.3] Yet, audiences heavily critique the show for being elitist or bougie, promoting consumeristic, narcissistic, self-indulgent, or strange characters. As one comment says:

[4.4] I love to see beautiful young black people on television but I wish that there was more substantive dialogue. Our twenties are marked by more than black-brand consumerism. We have more depth than this. How do you break tropes about black people (she prefers the original wiz of oz—really cool) but then reinforce them (black women have never had sex ed/don't know how to use tampons—read, we don't know our bodies and need a white woman to show us the way) The subsequent scene is problematic.

[4.5] *Twenties* seems to operate in the liminal space between stereotype and realism, making it difficult to find an audience who can relate to the show as it works to produce the knowing laughter endemic of the sartorial tone of 21st-century quality television. While this results in a very smart take on the black twentysomethings, the pilot splits the audience and opens itself up to critique on both sides from viewers concerned about the threat of stereotypes and the misrepresentation of black women as well as from those who are tired of the sarcastic tone of series such as *Girls*, a series created and partially written by Lena Dunham for HBO in 2012, which focuses on the lives and relationship(s) of four young white women living in New York City during their early twenties. The issues around stereotypes hinge on the particular
scene, mentioned in the comment above, in which the pilot's only white character explains to the three black female characters how to use a tampon. While some viewers also relay their experiences of first learning how to apply a tampon that occurred through the help of friends in college or in their early twenties, many other viewers state that the series is reinforcing the idea that black women are ignorant about their own bodies and are sexually misinformed.

[4.6] Even with these viewer concerns, the pilot has garnered over 300,000 views for the four parts of *Twenties*, yet the series still has fewer than 1,000 comments. Mixed reviews could have limited audience response, but it could also be a result of confusion among viewers around what a pilot is and why the four videos did not constitute a Web series. The description of the show explicitly states "This is NOT a web series... This is a Flavor Unit Production." But the description did not explain that the four installments are one pilot made to generate an audience and to push back against legacy networks' pitch-to-pilot model of series development. Limiting the narrative scope allows the producers to utilize resources that increase production value—the industry's standard focuses on the quality of production, typically technical elements like lighting, sound, and design but also acting, directing, and writing. *Twenties* is shot by Justin Simien, director of *Dear White People*, winner of the Sundance and Independent Spirit Awards, which was eventually set up in development at Netflix. His presence lends a patina of credibility inaccessible to other indie Web series working for recognition by Hollywood. *Twenties* stands out in the Web series market and attracts viewers who want to see black queer people in shows of broadcast quality but find it more challenging to keep viewers.

[4.7] In *Twenties*, Waithe and Flavor Unit use decentralized networks to support their bid for legacy network recognition (a series development deal). In this they had some success. They encouraged viewers to share *Twenties* with twenty people if they liked it, underscoring how queer black Web series rarely gain visibility on YouTube, even with high production value, unless disseminated through social networks. Some commenters express excitement about the prospects of the pilot becoming a television show. Even more viewers express knowledge of the constraints of broadcast television, rooting for the show to get picked up by cable networks such as HBO or Showtime or by online subscription services such as Netflix or Hulu. Still, many viewers want the pilot to become a Web series, with some explaining a lack of access to cable television networks (premium channels requiring monthly payments) and others proposing that Web series keep the power of production in the hands of black content creators. In this sense, *Twenties* rallies more fans interested in developing niche markets for black content than those invested in community-building and authenticity.
In interviews with the press, Lena Waithe cites both the representational inequality on television and her own life as inspirations for *Twenties*. To her, the show reflects a black experience not defined by stereotypical blackness, but one which is both specific and universal:

I didn't write this pilot just because I wasn't seeing myself on television. I wrote it because it was a story I needed to tell...TWENTIES is the most personal script I've ever written and I don't think it's a surprise that it's also gotten me the most attention. People like it when you tell the truth. And this is mine. But I also think it's universal. Because who can't relate to being in your twenties and sucking at life? (quoted in Dowell 2013)

Waithe's complex, at times contradictory, impulses manifest in the story and viewer response. She embraces the burden of representation in mainstream film and television, for instance naming Hattie after Hattie McDaniel, the first black woman to win an Academy Award, a message not lost on commenters. But crafting a unique but also relatable story about a black lesbian proved a difficult tension to resolve. Commenters' confusion over some of Waithe's storylines derive from experiences so personal—"these are pages from my diary," she told *After Ellen*—they appear to disrupt expectations of shared recognition (Rafus 2014). The tampon storyline comes from her childhood; her mother would not let her wear them whereas she noticed white girls did—Waithe compares this cultural difference to makeup and pierced ears. She notes how blackness can be expressed outside of dialogue, in clothes and music, a lesson she no doubt took from Shonda Rhimes (consider *Scandal*'s soundtrack), Bill Cosby (*note 2*), and *A Different World*, all of which she cites in interviews for their ability to broaden or ignore race: "I'd love to tackle it (performing blackness), possibly, but I'm more interested in discovering what it's like for a Black person of her age, and in her group, living in Los Angeles" (quoted in Rafus 2014). We can see in *Twenties* the ways in which market-driven productions, while similarly invested in black queer audience opinion, are also inspired by the creator's singular conceptualization of black queer identity, hailing the auteuresque impulses of film and quality television. At the same time, market-driven productions also quare legacy television development with fans' involvement in the pilot process. Unlike corporate Web networks like Amazon that also pilot openly but rely on mostly white, credentialed Hollywood producers, these indie productions focus on keeping the means of production and reception in the hands of black queer producers and fans.

Avoiding prospective audience confusion over format, *Words with Girls* (2014), originally an eight-episode series produced independently by creator Brittani Nichols, explicitly signals itself as a pilot. Premiering in September 2014 along with two other comedy pilots, Nichols's pilot centers around Pacey, a lesbian and financially
challenged slacker, who right at the moment she plans to propose to her longtime girlfriend is dumped and left with her friends to pick up the pieces of the emotional breakup. Nichols also stars in the series as a friend to Pacey, also involved in a complicated relationship with her girlfriend. The series is one of three pilots produced by Issa Rae through her Color Creative network, a kind of studio developing online pilots for networks or studio to pick up or develop.

[4.12] With this setup, viewers of *Words with Girls* are much more informed about the pilot process and discuss which of the other Color Creative pilots they watch, like, and/or dislike. Similar to the response to *Twenties*, viewers are excited to see faces they know from other series such as *Awkward Black Girl* as well as representations of queer women of color. However, the pilot did not seem to be as popular as the other pilots from Color Creative and, as of the most recent episode of the series/pilot analyzed, *Words with Girls* has the least comments and views of all of the series with a little over 30,000 views and slightly over 100 comments. Many of these comments critique the writing on the show, describing the pilot as boring and the characters and acting as inauthentic. These critiques also seem to correspond to the fact that unlike most Web series and the pilot for *Twenties*, *Words with Girls* is standard television episode length at almost 30 minutes long. While the video for *If I Was Your Girl* is approximately three times that length, we suggest that the racy subject matter and drama of the plot was able to hold viewers' attention in a way that the more mundane ups and downs in the lives of a group of friends does not. At the same time, many commenters disagreed with the negative critiques. One such comment states, "I think people are being a little too critical. I feel like I've got a great ideal of the girls' individual personalities. I love the ideal of the plane and the underlining message of each woman being in some form of transition. Always great to have an awkward character, a wild card, and a moody one! Great effort."

[4.13] From this comment and others like it, we see a divergence in how audiences read the series. Some were less critical and more generous, seeing potential in where the characters could go in the narrative. Yet for other audience members, the ready-made presentation of a pilot invites greater critique because it is supposed to hook them and make them want to watch more. As in the other pilots in this study, *Words with Girls* tends to receive more criticism and negative comments from viewers who were not a part of its ideal target audience.

[4.14] Despite noticeably lower production value, the original *Words with Girls* series, shot when Nichols was new to Hollywood, was just as popular. Similar to *No Shade*, *Words with Girls* draws on queer cultural expression and language, as every episode of the series is centered around a word presumed to be part of black lesbian vernacular: "The language that we use in different communities is always so different...There's not
always the way the word is actually supposed to be used" (Nichols, pers. comm.).

Trying to capitalize on the success of Broad City, Nichols read all of the comments and tried to become a YouTuber, by posting one-off shows—like vlogs—that were cheaper and more immediate. Nichols’s original series focused on cultivating a community of black queer women. When Nichols was pitching Issa Rae on the pilot, however, she was working in the industry as a writer for the Web series Billy on the Street and as an associate producer on a pilot for a cable network. Writing, starring, and editing her own pilot was a new and affirming experience for her: "It's something I can take to going out to other jobs," she said in the interview; Words with Girls allows her to "trust my voice and whatever comes out of that is going to be different" from Hollywood’s male-centered series.

[4.15] This raises the question of whether the Color Creative pilot is more auteur—and market-focused compared to its predecessor. Comparing the opening of the episodes and the words that telegraph its meaning and purpose suggests that it is. Each episode title of the original Words with Girls presents and defines a word that the characters grapple with in the episode, such as "Homophobic" and "Beard." For the Color Creative episode, the word is simply "Pilot," defined as "a person who operates the flying controls of an aircraft" and "a television program made to test audience reaction." In the episode, Nichols’s character Aspen is writing a pilot and her friend Ari (comically named an "assistant to watch" by Hollywood trade magazine Variety) wants to see it and give feedback. The pilot engages directly with the writers' struggle in Los Angeles and explicitly places the audience in the role of a consumer whose reactions are being tested for market performance, as opposed to a community whose views are valuable as a social good. The longer pilot thus reframes the series from community vernacular to niche product, shaping how viewers perceive representations of blackness in the narrative and each other as a public (Nichols 2014). Nevertheless, by publishing Words with Girls on YouTube and explicitly asking Rae’s predominantly black fan base for recognition, the pilot circumvents legacy TV’s closed processes for testing pilots, quarantining this process by centering a conversation between black queer producers and fans.

5. Conclusions

[5.1] As Herman Gray (1995) writes in Watching Race, during the 1980s "blackness emerged as a site of contested struggle over the very question of identity and difference within America in general and Black America in particular" (42). Broadcast television networks developed dozens of black series as white viewers started watching cable channels, using black audiences' affective desires to see themselves to smooth business operations in a moment of new media change (note 3). Yet broadcasters rarely acknowledged the queerness of blackness. Mostly confined to
family sitcoms, black characters had little narrative space for nonnormative sexual expression, even though America's policing and regulation of black sexuality can be articulated in concert with blackness and queerness. The struggle for blackness rages on in both the linear sphere of television and the networked sphere of Web production. For black queer viewers in particular, the symbolic annihilation experienced through limited representations in not only mainstream broadcast networks but also more niche-driven cable networks has led them to alternate models of media representation. These alternate models are exemplified through the multitude of Web series and pilots released on YouTube, which, in seeking community, create representations more recognizable or sincere.

[5.2] From our study of a subsection of quare YouTube productions, Web series and pilots tend to fall into one of two location-based categories that both challenge conventional forms of television production. Community-driven productions are defined as the indie series created primarily with the black queer community in mind as seen with the analysis of No Shade and If I Was Your Girl. The creators of these series are invested in responding to what their audience would like to see instead of working to create a show that would be well received by a legacy network. In addition, these indie series tend to be lower in production value or less finished/complete than are other television series. By contrast, market-driven productions are defined as the pilots that are created with the purpose of gaining a production deal with a legacy network, for example, Twenties and Words with Girls. In contrast to the indie series, these pilots are not fully created series but are rather one complete episode or a pilot in parts created to garner market interest. They also tend to be higher in production value than are the community-driven productions in order to make it easier for the pilots to be accepted by legacy network executives.

[5.3] While some may view the market-driven pilots as simply replicating the traditional forms of television production that we are used to seeing, black queer pilot productions also quare television production by being created and financed by individuals who are working to see their communities represented, instead of a network supplying funds to create a pilot geared toward a particular niche market. In addition, both community-driven and market-driven productions utilize language and themes that reference a canon of queer production both within and outside of legacy networks. Therefore, referencing black queer language and culture demonstrates how all of the Web content producers profiled are invested in fostering a shared recognition between their content and black queer viewers. By representing black queer communities with performances and images that viewers recognize in themselves and/or their kin, black queer Web productions, producers, and viewers utilize a quare-shared recognition in order to fill in the blanks left by legacy productions.
Although none of the series analyzed have amassed audience sizes attractive enough for series orders by potential legacy TV distributors, from the perspective of viewers, black queer indie TV is just as valuable as mainstream productions, if not moreso. Producers want to challenge the network system from the inside out, but many viewers are encouraging them to challenge the system from the outside in. As Kara Keeling (2014) writes in her essay "Queer OS," to queer an operating system is to be "at odds with the logics embedded in the operating systems" by seeking to change that system through "scholarly inquiry and social activism" (154). Creating quare Web series and choosing to watch them over solely consuming legacy network productions queers the operating system of the television industry—pilot and series development and financing. By not simply accepting what is given to them from the YouTube algorithm, legacy corporate networks, or even indie producers, online publics queer the norms of viewership by inciting representational change for their communities.

6. Notes

1. There is an extensive literature in media sociology and communication studies on how media texts—particularly dramas or soap operas—facilitate parasocial interaction. See Baym (1999), Horton and Wohl (1956), Liebes and Katz (1992), and Morley (2003).

2. See Christine Acham's (2013) short essay on representing race on Cosby where she notes the presence of black art in the home of the postracial sitcom.

3. We view this as akin to Keeling's discussion of the role of blaxploitation in the film industry during the 1970s before the rise of the blockbuster and after the breakup of the studio system; see Keeling (2007).

7. Works cited


Praxis

Constructing queer female cyberspace: The L Word fandom and Autostraddle.com

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[0.1] Abstract—Autostraddle.com is the most popular independently owned Web site for queer women and a central, organizing force in queer female cyberspace. It also grew out of The L Word fandom, though its appearance now occludes the history of fan recapping that laid its groundwork. In this article, I reconnect Autostraddle to The L Word fandom, tracing the gradual accumulation of online fan activity into a stable Web site and queer female social space. In doing so, I revise dominant conceptions of fan productivity as individual-centered and temporally bound, arguing for a more expansive consideration of the large-scale creations fans can build over time. My intervention is twofold: a plea for history where the Web can seem to be an eternally present medium, and an assertion of fandom's inseparability from the larger landscape of queer female life online.

[0.2] Keywords—Blog; Fan community; Fan productivity; Queer women; Recap culture; Web history


1. Introduction

[1.1] In this article, I analyze The L Word (TLW) fandom's role in establishing online spaces for queer women. TLW premiered in January 2004, when queer presence online was restricted to mailing lists, chat rooms like Gay.com, and certain sections of MySpace. Though there were some spaces designed explicitly for queer women (see Bryson 2004; Correll 1995; Rak 2005), most targeted gay men, catering to lesbians incidentally or as an afterthought. Queer female cyberspace as it exists today emerged alongside and often through TLW, as women gathered together online to discuss and critique it and then stayed together even after its run. Digital spaces for queer women did not spring spontaneously into existence; they had to be made, and I argue here that TLW fandom was essential to their making.

[1.2] In making this claim, I use Autostraddle (http://www.autostraddle.com) as a case study. Arguably the most-visited Web site for queer women worldwide (note 1), Autostraddle gets over a million unique views per month and over 3 million total; to put
that in perspective, the United States' best-selling lesbian magazine (*Curve*) lists its readership at less than a fifth of the site's monthly total. Independently owned where all other major queer Web portals are run by established media conglomerates, Autostraddle describes itself as "an intelligent, hilarious & provocative voice and a progressively feminist online community for a new generation of kickass lesbian, bisexual & otherwise inclined ladies (and their friends)."

[1.3] What Autostraddle's "About" page occludes is the debt it owes to TLW fandom. The site grew out of TLW's online community, and its major players honed their skills at content production and community management through roles they played in fan spaces. That this history of development disappears behind an apparently atemporal surface is characteristic of the Internet in general and queer online space in particular: as Ben Aslinger points out, "the ephemerality of the web as a medium and the historical silences that render writing queer political, social, and cultural histories so difficult" can make it seem like the queer Web has no history (2010, 114). Part of my project here is to make visible that past, for it shapes queer online sociality's present even when it goes unnoticed. With reference to Autostraddle, that means tracing out TLW's shift from gravitational center of community to infrastructure invisibly undergirding online lesbian spaces. Using the site as a case study, I demonstrate how TLW served as an initial node for the organization of digital lesbian community and then dropped off the radar even as the spaces it made possible continued to thrive. My intervention is thus twofold: a plea for history where the Web can seem to be an eternally present medium, and an assertion of fandom's inseparability from the larger landscape of queer female life online.

[1.4] A number of other online lesbian spaces owe their existence to TLW, and other histories could be written around them. The best known is AfterEllen.com, where TLW drew together a community before it aired. In September 2002, AfterEllen creator Sarah Warn began writing about *Showtime*'s upcoming lesbian ensemble drama (then titled *Earthlings*) on her Web site. AfterEllen was at the time a weekend project Warn ran alone, with a tagline reading "Reviews and Commentary on the Representation of Lesbians and Bisexual Women in Entertainment and the Media." Response to the first TLW article ("Will 'Earthlings' be the Lesbian 'Queer as Folk'?") was overwhelming, and as AfterEllen continued reporting on it the site's readership exploded. Warn brought on other contributors, and the site's success eventually drew attention from major media conglomerates: Viacom acquired it in 2006, and then Evolve Media took the reins in 2014. Thus AfterEllen is, in Warn's words, a business "built on the lesbian community's interest in *The L Word*" (2006, 2).

[1.5] I focus on Autostraddle rather than AfterEllen for two reasons. The first is that AfterEllen's link to TLW has already received substantive scholarly attention: in discussing AfterEllen's practices of film criticism, Maria San Filippo notes the "symbiotic" relationship between show and site (2015, 131–32). The second, more substantive reason is that centering Autostraddle allows for a different view of queer female fandom's economies.
AfterEllen's 2006 acquisition tends to be read as a moment of corporate takeover, when capitalist logics of monetization intrude upon fan and community spaces. Such an account is not wrong, but it is also not the only story: centering Autostraddle allows me to attend to the entrepreneurial desires of fans themselves, nuancing the opposition between fans' authentic, community-oriented activities and corporations' exploitative, money-driven ones.

[1.6] My project draws on fan studies' insights and vocabulary, though I am conscious of its tendency to overlook LGBT women and their cultures. Henry Jenkins's work was essential to establishing fan culture as a legitimate object of scholarly inquiry, and most studies of online fandom owe a debt to *Convergence Culture*, which pioneered considering digital spaces in tandem with the televisual objects they are often organized around. As Jenkins himself acknowledges, however, the people he studies are "disproportionately white, male, middle class, and college educated" (2006, 23); the prevalent models of fandom—as a low-stakes form of association, as separate from identity work, as anchored in a single TV show—grow out of this demographic's particular way of engaging with media objects. They do not necessarily translate to queer women, who lack both identity reinforcement from mainstream culture, which Jenkins's subjects constantly receive, and the embodied sexual spaces that many position as key to the cultural lives of gay men (Dean 2009; Delaney 2003; Warner 1999). There is abundant reason to think that queer women's investment in media is the opposite of low stakes. Part of my project is thus to work through the tensions inherent in uniting queer women and fandom, and to explore whether "fan" is the right name for the people who came together around TLW.

[1.7] This article moves through three sections and a brief conclusion. The first is a consideration of previous scholarly work about TLW and fandom, through which I articulate the context and contribution of my project. The second and third trace two of Autostraddle's key players (Laneia and Riese) on their respective trajectories through TLW fan spaces, drawing on their own published accounts of this time and on archived fan sites (note 2). My analysis is centered in three Web spaces: Autostraddle itself, its predecessor blog *The Road Best Straddled* (where Riese wrote TLW recaps), and the *Planet Podcast* blog and forum (where Laneia was a moderator). In concluding, I examine Autostraddle's design to argue for a recalibration of how we talk about fan productivity.

[1.8] As sources, I use only publicly accessible materials with significant online circulation. Riese and Laneia are both public figures, and have discussed their lives and fan activities extensively on Autostraddle and their own blogs; their disclosures—which I analyze throughout this paper—are already subject to wider reading than academic discussion will expose them to (note 3). I refer to them by the names they write under, which are abbreviations but not pseudonyms, and provide links to all digital sources I reference. Thus, although my project shares certain values with ethnographic work—an investment in thick description and the lived reality of a particular social group (Geertz 1973)—I am not here doing ethnography as traditionally understood (note 4). Rather, my
interest lies in documenting the architecture of an emerging lesbian space through collecting and analyzing publicly accessible digital traces.

[1.9] The archival materials I work with are neither complete nor impartial: Riese's and Laneia's writings are bound up in the work of self-promotion, of attracting a readership to Autostraddle and putting forward a particular account of its emergence. Others who participated in The L Word fan spaces might dispute their accounts, and in fact some do: in response to a post by Riese about Autostraddle's history, user ar1ana comments, "This blog post is entirely too inaccurate (and too self-congratulatory) to call itself 'an oral history' of anything" (Riese 2014, comment posted January 29 at 8:23 am). That a record is disputable does not compromise its value, however. I do not take Riese's and Laneia's writings as unvarnished truth, but they still provide an important window into the emergence and transformation of lesbian cyberspace.

2. Online with The L Word

[2.1] Before turning to my case study, I want to frame my project in relation to existing work on TLW and online lesbian sociality. Scholars tend to focus on OurChart.com, a lesbian social network Showtime both incorporated into TLW's storyline and attempted to launch in the real world. Kelly Kessler articulates the reasons for its prominence as follows:

[2.2] Sites with overt links to Showtime were not the only or likely even the most frequently visited lesbian-targeted sites on the web...however, the textual, mechanical, and aesthetic choices and interactions on Showtime's sites speak more directly to the possible economic and ideological underpinnings at the heart of media corporations' drive to capitalize on convergence. (Kessler 2011, 126)

[2.3] What OurChart uniquely reveals, in other words, is the intertwining of fan activity and capitalist imperative: the site stands as testament to Showtime's desire to profit off of fan labor, and analyzing it brings to light the means by which media corporations exploit and channel fan productivity toward commercially valuable ends. As Kessler argues, then, corporate design of fan spaces reveals the narrative of fandom as free play (Bryson 2004; Jenkins 2006) to be a myth: rather than enabling democratic, user-driven activity, OurChart produces "an utterly predictable and restrictive vision of the lesbian target market, while simultaneously usurping the supposed freedom associated with the increase in online fan activity" (Kessler 2011, 128).

[2.4] Kessler's is in many ways a valuable perspective—it is important to consider the costs of increasing lesbian visibility in mainstream media (Villarejo 2003) as well as who nonetheless remains invisible. However, such an approach obscures what TLW viewers actually build through fan activities, how they interact with and move between OurChart.com and other TLW-based online spaces. Kessler acknowledges that her study focuses on Showtime's "privileged discourse" (2011, 127); it cannot answer the question
of how consequential that discourse is or whether it has meaningful impact on lesbian cyberspace as a whole. That a corporation wants to channel fan activity does not mean that it succeeds in doing so, for agency lies in both production and consumption. Writing of TLW viewing parties, Candace Moore notes that "the fan public both links themselves to the fiction (by their very presence) and surprisingly resists it (by exhibiting critically distanced or even disinterested forms of attention) (2009, 130)." Such resistance does not negate Showtime's structuring influence, but rather suggests that "the outcome of mediations between capital and fan laborers is far from a foregone conclusion" (Russo 2014, 109). In other words, we need to take into account what fans actually do in the context of corporate media structures rather than assuming blanket resistance or blanket assimilation.

[2.5] My goal, then, is to shift attention from corporations to people, from centralized structures to marginal fan activities. With TLW, that means contextualizing OurChart.com in a broader landscape of online queer sociality. OurChart's particular functions and failures as lesbian social space are well documented (Kessler 2011; Moore 2009; Russo 2014). Instead of retreading that ground, I want to point to what both Showtime's presentation of OurChart and scholarly treatment of it obscure: it was only part of a larger online constellation of lesbian sociality around TLW that began developing before the site's launch (at the end of 2006) and continued after Showtime abruptly shut it down (at the end of 2008). While Showtime's press materials cast OurChart as the "first lesbian social network" and academic work tends to accept this positioning, there was already at its inception a vibrant—if dispersed—community of queer women talking about TLW and themselves online. OurChart was unique in its legitimated, branded connection to the series (TLW's showrunner and stars were among its founders), but even at its most popular it was never the entirety of digital lesbian social space. I argue that you cannot separate OurChart from its context, for emergent, fan-based networks of digital lesbian sociality are prerequisite to OurChart's existence: such spaces had to be already proven viable for Showtime to invest in creating one. That OurChart drew both contributors and users from other TLW sites supports such a claim, as does the fact that these same people went on to participate in related ventures (like Autostraddle) after its demise. Thus, a narrow focus on Showtime's site—as unique, as isolated, as singularity—fails to account for the traffic between commercial and independent digital lesbian spaces, and grants corporate Web platforms a primacy they did not in fact hold.

[2.6] In placing OurChart in context, I hope to give a richer sense of TLW's role in the wider topography of queer female cyberspace—the way fans coalesced around it in a variety of online venues, many of which they themselves built. I do not have room here to detail all such spaces, and so I focus on the trajectories of two individuals: Laneia and Riese, driving forces behind Autostraddle. Both contributed content to OurChart, but both also entered TLW fandom through other, unofficial Web sites where they continued to play roles even as they participated in Showtime ventures. My hope is that analyzing their
paths will clarify Autostraddle's particular history, as well as point toward the more general forces at play in the formation of queer online space.

3. Laneia and the *Planet Podcast*

[3.1] Laneia first encounters TLW in 2005; at the time, she is married to a man, raising a son, and a new subscriber to Showtime. Hence she has the channel on as she is doing work around the house, where she happens upon a marathon of TLW season 2 without immediately realizing what she is watching:

[3.2] And then it was Shane and Cherie [having sex] and I did that thing where you look around the room to make sure no one's seeing you, even though no one else is in the room, and I shut the door even though there was no reason to and sat on the edge of the bed and changed the channel, like I was never ever going to watch that seriously, I was not. And then I changed it back. And the next day I realized Google's full potential. (Riese 2014)

[3.3] The breathless, rushed feel to this narration ("And…and…and") suggests that this is a moment of importance, but also one that Laneia cannot immediately process in its entirety. Thus Google comes into play the next day, when she uses her computer for private research and viewing, taking advantage of the way search engines organize and make accessible online information. Engaging with TLW is here as much about going online as it is about watching TV; it is a combination of mediated experiences, linked to a technological milieu rather than any one medium. And the multiplicity of mediation becomes more pronounced when Laneia enters the fan community: her initial foray is through the *Planet Podcast*, the highest-rated *L Word* podcast, which she finds because she has just gotten an iPod and become "obsessed with podcasts, because you could listen to them while you cleaned the house" (Riese 2014). As she listens and grows more invested, she also becomes a commenter on the *Planet Podcast*’s blog, developing relationships with the podcasters and other listeners enabled by the Blogger platform's investment in sociality.

[3.4] I want to focus now on the *Planet Podcast* and Laneia's relationship to it, for it provides a useful contrast to OurChart's corporate orientation. The podcast is produced by KC and Elka, two TLW viewers from Albuquerque, New Mexico, who describe their motivation for making it as follows in their first episode:

[3.5] All over the country today, people are going to *L Word* premiere parties. People who live in real cities, like Phoenix, Los Angeles, New York. There's probably somewhere in Oklahoma that's doing it but no, podunk Albuquerque has no premiere parties. We put up a post on Craigslist: come to our *L Word* premiere watching party, it'll be fun. But nobody—one straight girl, but you can't have an *L Word* party with one straight girl. So we decided to make an *L Word*
fan podcast. Maybe somebody else out there is missing all the premiere night parties as well. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjAiBsCPPjg)

[3.6] Podcasting is here a gesture toward lesbian community in an environment without a local one: KC and Elka take the steps that enable social viewing in "real cities"—opening their home to others for a premiere party—but get no response in Albuquerque. Thus the podcast is initially figured as a response to lack, an attempt at conjuring mediated community where there is no readily available embodied one. Significant here is how spur-of-the-moment their decision to start podcasting feels: this is not a project KC and Elka labored over for months before it got off the ground, but rather an event roughly on the same scale of investment as throwing a party in one's home. That KC and Elka can transition with relative ease from viewers of TLW to makers of their own fan media brings to mind the eroding distinction between media consumption and production so often considered characteristic of digital technology (Benkler 2006; Manovich 2009; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010).

[3.7] The podcast inspires further cycles of consumption-into-production in its listeners. At each episode's end, KC and Elka invite responses, listing a phone number, blog address, and email account for anyone who wants to "be part of the chart where we make a connection with our listeners"; note the attempt to foster an online version of TLW's diegetic chart years before OurChart.com would launch. Listeners do respond, Laneia among them, commenting on the blog to interact with KC and Elka and also, importantly, with each other. Laneia suggests that this many-to-many (or at least several-to-several) interaction was key to the growth of a community around the podcast:

[3.8] The thing was that we—the commenters on the blog—weren't getting enough of each other via the comments, and the majority of the comments started to be us talking to each other and playing off each other and FLIRTING, god whatever. So we started blogs of our own so we could, I don't know, be more? Like more of ourselves in this space. And a few of us would record ourselves doing whatever—telling a story usually—and upload it to our blogs. (Riese 2014)

[3.9] Again we see a progression from consumption to production: commenters want to be together with an intensity that exceeds the Planet blog’s established spaces of reception, and so they begin to build their own venues for interacting. Note Laneia's repetition of "more"—"be more," "more of ourselves," which suggests a desire to forge greater contact with other commenters over a shorter period of time. Laneia, for example, starts blogging under the name "Green" and eventually makes a personal podcast with a fellow commenter; through it she becomes visible in the fan community in her own right. Important here is that the conversations developing out of the Planet Podcast are not necessarily about either TLW or the podcast: the Planet Podcast (like TLW itself) serves as a nodal point bringing together many queer women, who use the community spaces it
enables to express their own interests and desires—sometimes their interests in and desires for each other.

[3.10] It is hard to say exactly how large the Planet Podcast community comes to be. The episodes and blog are no longer accessible, and translating number of comments or page views into number of community members is an inexact science at the best of times. (To give ballpark numbers: podcast episodes have hundreds of comments and at least one Planet forum thread has 30,000 views.) We can say, at least, that the community outgrows a Blogger comment section: KC and Elka create a members' forum as a space that—as they describe in a blog post titled "Where you at?" on April 8, 2006—"focuses more on Kelkians" (as their commenters were called) and "less on Kelka" (KC and Elka themselves) (https://web.archive.org/web/20060427212020/http://theplanetcast.blogspot.com/). This is an explicit shift in emphasis, from the podcast itself as media object to a user-driven lesbian social space. They ask Laneia to be a forum moderator because of her visible presence in the community; as we will see in the following section, here her story intersects with Riese's.

[3.11] Before I move on to that section, however, I want to address the relationship between online community and its embodied counterpart. The two are often opposed, and it can be tempting to see the former as a weaker form of connection, as less meaningful because it originates in mediation. I want to push back against this line of thought, which depends on two faulty assumptions: first, that each act of mediation represents a loss in the vitality of experience, a dampening or cheapening of sensation, and second, that we can separate mediated life from an originary state of unmediated connection. As Mary Gray argues, the possibilities media make available for LGBT people "are always interlocking with the material conditions of their lives" (2009, 164). The Planet podcast community is for its members less escape from the world than an extension of it, part of the fabric of everyday life. And, though it begins in a TV show and coalesces through a podcast, that community materializes in real-world gatherings; the first, "Kelka Pride," attracts 92 women from all over the country to KC and Elka's hometown for Pride. This is not so different from KC and Elka's original plan to have people over to their house, though at a scale and intensity far greater than a viewing party could achieve.

4. Riese, recapping, and the entrepreneurial impulse

[4.1] Riese's trajectory through lesbian cyberspace begins similarly, with a televised TLW encounter and subsequent Internet research:

[4.2] Before The L Word, I'd never seen lesbians who looked and talked like me and my friends...As a slut who'd been told all her life that lesbians were girls who "couldn't get a man," I found the character of Shane so revolutionary and empowering. She had this ego and strength that came from not wanting men,
and really wanting women. I fell in love and googled her to death, which eventually brought me to *The L Word Online*, because they were big into Shane. (Riese 2014)

[4.3] Again, we see an initial affective connection that Google routes into fan space. *The L Word Online* ([http://thelwordonline.com](http://thelwordonline.com)) is an unofficial but popular TLW fan site that, as Riese suggests, developed out of love for Shane and Kate Moennig, the actress behind her; its two founders, Slicezy and Oz, began tracking TLW as soon as Moennig was cast, at first feeding information to established magazines and sites and eventually creating TLW Online as their own platform for information dissemination. As a site rather than a blog, TLW Online places less emphasis on commenting and reciprocal sociality; it provides links to social spaces, including the *Planet Podcast* blog, OurChart, and MySpace, but itself operates on a several-to-many, content-provider model.

[4.4] Through TLW Online, Riese finds KC and Elka and related TLW-derived media. Unlike Laneia, she has offline friends to enjoy the show with, but they do not satisfy the depth of her interest in the show: "I talked to a lot of people about it, and still my own inner life with it was so much bigger than theirs." Mediated community thus offers something "real life" doesn't: a deeper and more intense relationship to TLW, and the ability to form lesbian worlds around it. Where Laneia was happy to participate in someone else's community, Riese becomes active in fandom to build her own: "I saw the internet as a place for advancing my career as a writer...and so it was never about casual conversations about things I liked, it was always deliberate and 'on-brand'' (Riese 2014). Thus, where Laneia is a pseudonymous and largely behind-the-scenes presence, Riese works to establish her online self visibly and as a brand, a node around which people would gather rather than one of many gathered into some other community. In service of this goal and inspired by KC and Elka, among others, she herself begins to recap TLW as an offshoot of her established personal blog.

[4.5] Hearing "recap," it is easy to imagine "summary": a rote recitation of events that recalls to mind what happened during a show but offers little additional value. As Mark Andrejevic has noted, however, the practice of recapping television involves criticism and interpretation, often with the addition of humor: "Within this context, the show is no longer the final product but rather the raw material to which value is added by the labor—some paid, some free—of recappers" (2008, 32). This is the tradition of recapping Riese enters into, and from her first recap she foregrounds the value she adds: her own stories, pictures, and reactions, which arise in response to TLW but are not reducible to it. It is worth reproducing that first recap's opening at length to demonstrate its functioning:

[4.6] KC and Elka of the "Planet Cast" do such an amazing weekly L Word round-up recap podcast that I can't even begin to compete (AfterEllen has its own fantastic recap as well) so I'm gonna do something a little different with mine. Oh also—I have learned a lot about making fun of television from the
Americas Next Top Model recapper, four-four. So I must also thank him. Also I'd like to thank God and my mother.

[4.7] So, because I know I will never be KC and Elka, or FourFour, or ScribeGirl or whatever, I'm just going to post all the photos of breasts and tell you how good their breasts are. I'm going to track my bisexuality over the course of the program. (http://theroadbeststraddled.blogspot.com/2006/11/where-do-i-begin-l-word-season-three.html)

[4.8] First, Riese works through a lineage of established recappers—KC and Elka, AfterEllen’s ScribeGrrl (whose name she misspells), and Television Without Pity’s FourFour—and then she asserts her difference from them. They already do such a good job analyzing TLW and working through its significance that she is not trying to compete; instead, she makes herself into a character to be tracked alongside those from TLW. Recappers are always to a certain extent present in their writings—their accounts of the show are filtered through their own particular interests and experiences—but Riese takes this a step further: she presents herself as a mediated object, whom readers might attach to in the same way viewers do the women of TLW. Thus she narrates not just on-screen events but herself as event, which manifests as a playful tracking of her own position on the Kinsey scale via an infographic (figure 1). Later in this episode, for example, Shane’s new haircut so offends Riese that her Kinsey position drops to an "exclusively heterosexual" 0; the head in the infographic slides from a central 3 all the way to the left.

Figure 1. A movable head on the Kinsey scale, which appears in Riese's recaps. [View larger image.]

[4.9] And other people from Riese's life get drawn into the recap as well. An in-show argument between Bette and Tina provokes the following free-associative ramble: "Haviland won't even say that word ("cunt") out loud, and I say it all the time, but her and I are still great friends. See? Friends. And we're not in therapy. At least not together. I kinda like Tina's look this episode though. Hmm..." As the episodes progress, Riese begins incorporating pictures of herself and the people she watches TLW with and reporting their reactions as well; she ends up producing a whole cast of characters that her readers "watch" watching the show. She also makes clear her growing disappointment with the series, which spurs her to deal less and less with its actual content. Consider the opening to her recap of 4.11, "Literary License to Kill": "Okay. I'd like a literary license to kill the writer of this show. Arguably, that's sort of what I do here anyway, right? To make it through this week, I must imagine that I'm not, in fact, re-capping a tv show episode. Rather, I'm using the characters and 'storylines' of a teevee show as a starting point for my hot comedy" (http://theroadbeststraddled.blogspot.com/2007/03/l-word-season-4-
Though it is framed as a counterfactual imagination, it seems to me that this is exactly what is happening here: TLW is a starting point, something Riese uses but ultimately wants to move beyond. Such movement is already present in these recaps, as the comments on them make clear: readers spend more time talking about Riese and her humor than they do the show, and a number declare that they read for her stories and comments though they no longer watch TLW at all. This trend away from TLW and toward viewer-generated content becomes even more entrenched with time, as we will see in the following section.

[4.10] In December 2006, Riese emails KC and Elka asking if they want to trade links (a common practice of reciprocal sociality at the time, wherein each party gains exposure to the other's audience). They agree, and also give Riese permission to post a link to her recaps on the Planet boards: Laneia's domain. When Laneia sees Riese's post, her instinct as moderator is to delete it, as it speaks in the language of self-promotion rather than accepted fannish lexicons. This interaction dramatizes the tension between fan productivity and economic productivity: Riese comes across as too entrepreneurial, too interested in profit rather than the enjoyment of mediated objects. The economic dimensions of fan activities tend to be read as imposed from the outside by the media industry—as companies like Showtime exploiting fans' free play—a narrative to which Riese's desire to both be a fan enjoying TLW and parlay her fan activity into an actual paying job someday stands as an important corrective. My goal in tracing both Laneia's and Riese's fan activities is not to set up a morally inflected binary between them—Laneia as the good, community-oriented fan and Riese as the bad, money-driven imposter—but rather to make clear the range of orientations fandom encompasses. I would argue, in fact, that the combination of entrepreneurial investment and community orientation is key to establishing and sustaining Autostraddle.

[4.11] After Riese and Laneia's initial encounter, they continue to interact in online spaces. Laneia begins reading Riese's TLW recaps, and when Riese posts a link to her personal blog in one of those recaps Laneia starts reading and commenting there, too. They become friends, and through 2007 and 2008 their online worlds are visited by many of the people who will later be involved in Autostraddle. A number of them, writes Riese, are "blog commenters who lived in the area and so gradually one by one we kept making plans to meet in real life." Note again the difficulty of separating fandom from "real life," online friends from the offline world. During this time, Riese is also imagining ways to bring together the various online pursuits she is engaged in. An initial idea is "All Our Powers Combined," a "landing page for our favorite queer bloggers" that would centralize and formalize the online community that had been formed through TLW but was moving beyond it (Riese 2014). By 2008, her imagining shifts to an online magazine, and she recruits Laneia and others to help her build it.

[4.12] In the midst of all this OurChart comes into play. Given that it has received the lion's share of critical attention about TLW and online lesbian sociality, I will not spend
much time on its particular features here. Suffice it to say that when Ilene Chaiken and her team went looking for content providers outside the TLW cast, they found their way to Laneia and Riese through people they had gotten to know in the fan community: Riese was one of OurChart's first "guestbian" columnists (figure 2), and soon after Laneia became a paid member of the site's writing team. Thus, while TLW viewers did inhabit OurChart during its two years of functionality, their community was never contained within or reducible to it. As the next section will make clear, the queer female sociality that coalesced around TLW would outlive and outgrow the show itself.

Figure 2. OurChart.com's design, prominently featuring the "guestbian" column where Riese would sometimes appear (http://albertsondesign.com/projects/ourchart-website). This image comes from Albertson Design, the company that designed the OurChart brand for Showtime. OurChart.com itself resists archiving, so this is one of the only remaining accessible images of it. [View larger image.]

5. Autostraddle: Fandom and beyond

[5.1] Autostraddle.com launched in 2009, as TLW's sixth and final season was airing. One of its earliest posts, "What Is Autostraddle 1.0," gives the following self-description: "Something new. Girlier than Queerty and gayer than Jezebel, Autostraddle aims to address all things terrible/AWESOME with a quick, queer and intellectual attitude. We're particularly passionate about independent movies and music, books, theater, visual art, cyberculture and sex as well as queer theory, social justice, feminism and GLBT rights." While Autostraddle articulates itself in relation to entertainment media, TLW is nowhere to be seen: television in general does not even make it onto the list of things Autostraddle is passionate about. Further down the page, under the subheading "Why Now?," the series does get a mention:

[5.2] I [Riese] have been wanting to do this for a long time—and though I've made serious steps towards very similar ideas with other ambitious visionaries over the past two years, this is when it's finally come together. For one, I don't want to lose the strong online community we've built around The L Word. It was a bad show anyhow. We're all here, let's do something good.
[5.3] TLW, in other words, provided an opportunity: an initial rallying point that helped queer women find each other and jump-started conversation among them. The things these women build as a result—relationships, communities, Web spaces such as Autostraddle—are not, however, primarily about the show.

[5.4] Today, Autostraddle betrays no link at all to TLW. Though its original layout gave a prominent place to "The L Word Archives" (figure 3), the current menu offers no means of specifically accessing TLW content. There is a submenu dedicated to television (figure 4), but the shows it lists are ongoing or more recent: Pretty Little Liars, Orange Is the New Black, Faking It, Transparent, Glee, Orphan Black, The Fosters, American Horror Story, Bomb Girls, and The Real L Word. That final entry—a reality TV offshoot of TLW—is the sole implicit reference to the show so important to Autostraddle's founding. The site's blog-style design also contributes to TLW's forgetting: the most recent posts go at the top of the page, relegating past content to archives accessible only through a targeted search. Autostraddle is thus clearly not a TLW fan site, for you could spend hours clicking through it before encountering any reference to the show.

Figure 3. Autostraddle's original menu as of March 2009, which offers a shortcut to "The L Word Vaults."

Figure 4. Autostraddle's current menu as of March 2016, which has no shortcut for accessing TLW content. [View larger image.]

[5.5] So, to return to the question of naming: does Autostraddle count as fandom? In his seminal Fan Cultures, Matt Hills cautions against the impulse to search for fandom's "rigorous definition," which flattens the contextual nature of fan activity in the service of producing manageable objects of study. He does give the following, however, as something of a working definition: "What different 'performances' of fandom share...is a sense of contesting cultural norms. To claim the identity of a 'fan' remains, in some sense,
to claim an 'improper' identity, a cultural identity based on one's commitment to something as seemingly unimportant and 'trivial' as a film or TV series" (1992, xx–xxi).

One way of approaching my question, then, would be to ask whether the viewers of TLW who built Autostraddle claim an identity based in TLW. The only response possible here is the eternally unsatisfying "yes and no": yes in that TLW initiates viewers into particular mediated identity formations, and no in that those identity formations find their anchor in lesbianism, bisexuality, and queerness as much as in the show.

[5.6] Fandom is of course never only or exclusively about a show. Study after study highlights the importance of sociality to fan experience, the pleasures people derive from discussing, critiquing, and interpreting their favorite objects together. In one of the first studies of online fandom, Nancy Baym emphasizes the tendency of fan groups to stray beyond their initial topic as they develop into communities. Analyzing the rec.arts.tv.soaps Usenet newsgroup for soap opera fans, she notes how members chat about major and minor events from their own lives alongside analyses of soaps, signaling messages that are social digressions by putting "TAN" (for "tangent") in the subject line. As Baym argues, "The fact that tangents are marked explicitly in the subject lines indicates that some people do not want to partake in r.a.t.s. when it goes beyond the soap. Although the establishment of the TAN genre sanctions a space for purely social chat, its marking also marginalizes it as outside the group's primary arena" (2000, 140).

[5.7] With TLW fandom, social tangents are not marginalized in this way. When Laneia and Riese put more and more of themselves into their fan presences, no one chastises them for straying too far from the primary arena of TLW. In describing the relationship she and queer women had to TLW, Riese writes, "We'd built whole worlds around this show!" (Riese 2014). Those worlds—the communities and connections forged with other queer women—are the point, and so the show itself becomes tangential. The formation of queer female community was a main thrust of TLW fandom, and that community remains its lasting legacy. And while Autostraddle may be an exceptional case—an unusually wide-ranging product of fan activity, which has cultural impact on the scale of TLW itself—the increasingly wide circulation of fan culture makes it necessary for us to rethink its boundaries and definitions. Exceptional cases are proliferating as the Internet makes fan works easier to access and circulate: consider Twilight-fan-fiction-turned-bestseller *Fifty Shades of Grey*, or the success of Harry Potter parody *A Very Potter Musical*, which launched Darren Criss into a mainstream television career.

[5.8] Thus, we need to add nuance to models that view fan activity exclusively through the lens of a central text and imagine fandom as something that should be separate from corporate economies. The recent turn to questions of fan labor (De Kosnik 2013; Stanfill and Condis 2014) is an important one, but it tends to focus on the small scale: fan videos, fan fiction, or other objects that one or several people make over a relatively short period of time. Fandom's productivity is visible here, but as Autostraddle makes clear, it also happens at other scales and over longer durations. Scholars are good at talking about how
fans inhabit and expand the world of a show, the individual and communal creativity involved in remaking stories to one's own ends. We have less vocabulary for worlds built around a show that then outgrow it. I am not arguing here that Autostraddle is somehow better or more valuable than more commonly considered fan works, but it is a different beast, and its difference pushes us to think about where we draw fandom's limits. More specifically, it asks us to consider fan productivity as it intersects with structure: not just the individual projects undertaken by specific artists or writers, but also the way they build up and take on life of their own.

6. Notes

1. I say "arguably" because it is difficult to get exact information about page views and relative popularity. Autostraddle claims to be the most-visited lesbian Web site, and it is at least among the top three (alongside AfterEllen and SheWired.com).

2. Archive.org's Wayback Machine is an important tool here, for it archives the appearance of Web sites at particular dates, allowing users to see expired Web domains and earlier iterations of existing sites.

3. This is one reason I focus on the two of them, though many people were involved in Autostraddle's formation.

4. My project is closer to Internet-inflected versions of ethnographic practice like "trace ethnography" (Geiger and Ribes 2011). That I am a periodic reader of Autostraddle and have participated in lesbian fan spaces (though not those of TLW) provides motivation for and insight into this project, but nothing prevents others from finding the materials I work with here.

7. Works Cited


Multimedia

Femslash goggles: Fan vids with commentary by creators

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[0.1] Abstract—This gallery opens with a curatorial essay offering a metaphorical theory of vidding as an AR technology and contextualizing femslash fan vids. The selection of works with artist notes includes "Come On" by here's luck (2002); "These Two Arms" by Killa (2006); "Vitalum Vitalis" by hollywoodgrrl and ohvienna (2014); "Past the Feeling" by Anoel (2013); "Lightning Field" by bradcpu (2012); "Gimme Sympathy" by beerbad (2014); "I Do Adore" by kiki_miserychic (2014); "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" by Mithborien (2015); "Hurricane" by Laura Shapiro (2010); "Hands Away" by chaila and beccatoria (2011); "The Coming Out of Quinn Fabray" by jarrow (2011).

[0.2] Keywords—Audiovisuality; Augmented reality; Lesbian subtext; Queer spectatorship; Queer technologies; Vidding


1. Introduction

[1.1] Consider, if you'll indulge me, the mobile game Pokémon GO, a worldwide phenomenon that has players walking, running, biking, and driving around their environment with smartphones out to catch, collect, train, and battle cute critters. (This reference is perhaps not as tangential as it seems if you factor in the popularity of 'shipping Candela and Blanche, the female NPC leaders of teams Valor and Mystic.) Pokémon GO is arguably the first killer app in the medium of augmented reality (AR), which was already breaking as a consumer trend in 2009, when Wired defined it as "an intersection between virtual and physical reality, where digital visuals are blended in to the real world to enhance our perceptions" (Chen 2009). Mobility in the guise of handheld or head-mounted devices has been key to AR's alluring capacity to "reveal" an imagined world that's coextensive with our real one. That world might be pragmatic (an informative data overlay) or fantastical (an ecosystem of cartoon creatures), but tying navigation in the app to movement through material space has been a common characteristic. Engaging technology with our bodies is a baseline level of interactivity, but beyond this, there may be varying degrees of control over the virtual layer:
accessing information with a few taps, capturing pokémon and building a personal inventory, manipulating holographs with the hand tracking functions on the prototype Meta 2 headset. And crucially, AR is usually configured as a visual mediation, augmenting what we see. The oblong window of a phone screen, with the camera pointed out, has been the most widely accessible optical interface for AR, doing an end run around the cyborgian fantasy of wearable computers. But goggles are hotter than ever in tech companies, and in 2016 it doesn’t seem far-fetched that a more affordable version of Google Glass might catch on as quickly as the Apple Watch. Like attaching the digital to your hand, seeing the virtual through your eyes is an old dream of the future, but in the immortal worlds of 30 Rock’s (NBC, 2006–13) Dennis Duffy, Beeper King, "Technology is cyclical."

![Figure 1. Dyna Girl (left; Electra Woman and Dyna Girl, ABC, 1976–77) and Dana Scully (right; The X-Files, Fox, 1993–2002) using technology.](View larger image)

[1.2] Fandom has its own technoutopias, bricolaged from consumer devices and science fiction's imaginary. In Fanlore's (http://fanlore.org/) entry on "slash goggles," the earliest reference to the term is from 2007, but I suspect the phrase was in circulation years before (the author of the cited LiveJournal post uses it without explanation). I wrote previously that "this witticism evoking the image of specialized eyewear (my literal pair are always big, round, and pink) is a metaphor for a queer mode of viewing that interfaces with television's contradictions, excesses, gaps, and fragments" (Russo 2015, 458) to unveil its homoerotic subtext. Today's debates over the wearing of slash goggles seem to take them as corrective lenses: to their proponents, they're a fix for the myopic heteronormativity of mainstream representation; to their detractors, they're blinders that excuse a lack of LGBT visibility (see Fanlore). But I like to think that the original inspiration for these goggles was not spectacles or protective sports gear but rather the geeky trope of the AR headset. Beyond adjusting our view of the screen, with our goggles, we can access phantasmagoric strata of the text, and what's more, we can interact with them. We can see the given image but simultaneously the navigable fannish reality that adheres to it. AR turns reality into a remix.
AR is a generative framework for elaborating on my proposition that vidding in general—and slash vidding in particular—"is a technology of seeing...a literalization of fans' ocular prosthetics, rendering as montage the strategies of active viewing that are animated by love" (Russo 2015, 458). Existing somewhere between the reality of simply watching (even with corrective lenses in place) and the virtual reality of an original universe, vidders augment their source with a layer of interpretation that wouldn't be visible to the naked eye. Unlike AR goggles, though, slash goggles in this guise operate through sequential editing rather than through superimposition in real time. Sergei Eisenstein, pioneer of the theory and practice of montage, understood moving images as juxtapositions up from their most basic unit: a succession of still pictures intelligible as motion only to the human optical and cognitive apparatus. At every level, conflict between elements produces dynamic effects for the viewer—graphical, emotional, intellectual. Eisenstein's dialectical concept of montage, and indeed of any creative medium, resonates with today's interfacing of the material and the virtual: "The logic of organic form vs. the logic of rational form yields, in collision, the dialectic of the art-form" (1949, 46).

Eisenstein edited his own films, but as Francesca Coppa has pointed out (2011, 124), the industrial history of film editing is yoked to women's labor—women whose names (like Yelizaveta Svilova, wife and collaborator of another famous Soviet director) are too often forgotten. Svilova appears at the editing bench in the iconic metalfilm Man with a Movie Camera (dir. Vertov, 1929) and her image is reappropriated in Counteragent's metavid "She Blinded Me with Science" (2009). This piece is a tribute to another editing virtuosa and frequent femslash vider, Charmax, and Counteragent's supercut foregrounds motifs in her work that show women asserting agency over representation, from Morgana's visions and augury on Merlin (BBC One, 2008–12) to the vider's signature in the credits. Coppa writes that film and video "technology has enabled the female gaze by giving women...control over visual media" (2009, 112). Today, with digital hardware, software, and source material at their disposal, female vidders have new tools to "see parts—tropes, movements, frames—within larger narratives that are presented to them as unified and complete, and they reassemble them into coherent wholes of their own devising" (110). The sequential juxtaposition of analog photographs has given way to a different series of fragments: the algorithmic sampling and data compression of digital video. Like film editing, computer programming was initially a female-dominated field, so we shouldn't be surprised to find that women have fashioned an AR hack like slash goggles.
[1.5] For Coppa, the liberatory principle of editing's cut and suture is not merely formal: fragmentation is deployed fetishistically as a means to enjoy the erotics of bodies and narratives through a "female gaze" (2009, 112). This private gaze has been collectivized as "vidders have taught each other to see...by showing us exactly what and how she sees" (Coppa, 2011, 124). Tisha Turk has built on similar ideas to explain why fans may connect to vids not only on the basis of an investment in the canon but on the basis of an investment in vidding itself as a technology of vision: "Shared understandings and mutual interests transcend specific source material: vidders and vidwatchers are fans of particular ways of seeing, ways of reclaiming or talking back to mass media" (2010, 90). Although vids are often framed by scholars as a species of audiovisual essay, Turk and Johnson caution us not to forget that creative fans are writers as well as readers, and while vidders "are audiences, they also have audiences" (2012, ¶1.3). An emphasis on the reception of vids points to their foundation in what Turk has identified as a community or ecology that relies on "advanced interpretive practices of vidwatching" (2010, 94). Through a set of conventions developed collaboratively over several decades, "vids require audiences to process many different kinds of information, including the visual content of clips (what's happening in the frame), the context of clips (what's going on in the original source), and the juxtaposition of clips within the vid (why one clip precedes or follows another)" (Turk and Johnson 2012, ¶3.3). This interpretive intensity can pose challenges when it comes to circulating or presenting vids to an uninitiated audience. Below, you will have the opportunity to peruse a series of commentaries by vidders about how they approached their work that reveals some of the sophisticated labor of the gaze as simultaneously reading and writing, looking and cutting.

[1.6] Obviously, in keeping with the theme of this special issue, the collection below takes femslash as an organizing characteristic: these are vids which might help to define the specificities of femslash goggles as a transformative apparatus. (I am forgoing my attachment to the more alliterative "girlslash goggles" in favor of the dominant term.) Moreover, the pieces have some additional commonalities. All are structured around an F/F pairing, which is not the only typical format of femslash vids —there are examples that focus on threesomes or moresomes ("Take Me to Church [Root/Shaw/The Machine] by LithiumDoll, 2015), on queer kinship networks beyond...
the couple ("Hera Has Six Mommies" by Tallulah71, 2008), and on multifandom media
tropes ("I'm Your Man" by Charmax, 2008). On YouTube, many popular vids parallel
multiple 'ships to celebrate ("Yours" by 10fireflym) or critique ("LGBT Fans Deserve
Better" by fearlesssummer) the state of LGBT representation in mass media. In
contrast to the archival and archetypal function of such multifandom tributes, each vid
in this compilation presents a narrative arc particular to a specific relationship, serving
as a story at least as much as an argument. Also, none of the pairings here is strictly
canonical, so the vids are less directly celebratory or critical of mainstream portrayals
of queer female characters than many femslash fandom hits—although the vidders' work
does encourage us to interrogate how we define canonical sexuality in the first
place.

[1.7] Like vidding overall, femslash vidding is inextricable from the participatory
dynamics of distinct communities, relying on and contributing to shared emotions and
interpretations around media texts. And, like vidding, people are often fans of
defemslash in general as a collaboratively defined genre that reaches beyond any single
fandom. Coppa and Tushnet observe that, in the era preceding YouTube, it was typical
for female vidders to distribute their work individually on password-protected Web
sites, but they mention in a footnote that "some Xena and Buffy vidders founded
centralized public vid listings" (2011, 132n4). These early online fandoms were
formative for femslash as a collective project, and videos developed as an anchor of
that project as the technical infrastructure progressed. Eve Ng researched vids made
in 2003–4 by fans of Bianca and Lena (Lianca) on *All My Children* (ABC, 1970–2011)
that were announced and discussed on message boards (primarily by queer female
fans). Ng proposes that "fan cultural forms such as the Lianca music videos constitute
re-articulations that are what fans want in queer narratives" (2008, 105). In this case,
they serve as a protest against and reconfiguration of problematic developments in the
couple's on-screen relationship. At the same time, these works have a tendency to
reproduce the more normative tropes of romance, including "romantic love as
redemptive power" (114), long-term monogamous commitment, and the idea that true
love is necessary for happiness. When watching femslash vids, then, it is important to
contextualize them as part of a conversation about the ways lesbian romance is visible
(or invisible) in the media, one which offers critical analysis of representation but still
looks for our culture's dominant language of love.

[1.8] This is to say that, from Xena/Gabrielle or Bianca/Lena to the present day,
femslash's political dimension relies not only on narrative and visual interpretation of
our media reality but also on the capacity of technologies like vidding to deploy
augmented realities that reflect desired images of queer women. The creators featured
here all participate in vidding fandom and participate to differing degrees in femslash
fandom. Their works have a general appeal insofar as they present recognizable stand-
alone stories, and some premiered at vid convention VividCon or slash convention Escapade, where femslash is in the minority. (An annual femslash con, TGIF/F, launched in 2016.) Nonetheless, you will read about how these vidders are speaking to particular fan communities and making explicit interventions in heteronormative texts. One of the most exciting aspects of this collection is the range and complexity of female-female relationships represented, extending beyond conventional romance to explore unrequited love, power dynamics, antagonism, casual sex, and other ambiguities. These pieces also exemplify a continuum of different relationships to canon—highlighting, "fixing," or fully constructing certain aspects—and the vidders explain specific editing strategies that they used to transform the story that we see. Given the figure of goggles as an emblem for slash, it is appropriate that women looking at women is a primary motif in evidence here—the paradigmatic "eyesex" that has been pivotal to subtextual queer reading since the dawn of cinema. Most vids excise dialogue and emphasize close-up shots of the face, foregrounding and heightening this interplay of gazes. Coppa has observed that there are "vids that feature, and even eroticize, women, often from a lesbian perspective," but more often "fans tend to be critical of the eroticized female image" and use vidding to "experience the pleasure and power of not being seen" (2011, 125–26). At the same time, it's plausible that "lesbian, bisexual, and queer women make up a large, possibly majority, percentage of vidders," complicating the dominance of "vids featuring men as the object of the gaze" (129n5). It is my hope that this collection will further displace the focus on male characters as a privileged fascination, demonstrating in part the scope of fan creativity directed at women. In femslash vids, we can see vividly the cultivation of what we might call a lesbian gaze, embodied both in the visual intensity of the relationships on screen and in the looking operations implied by the vidding activity itself.

Figure 3. Section of editing timeline for "The Coming Out of Quinn Fabray" (2011) by jarrow. (This video is included in the collection below.) [View larger image.]

[1.9] As the scholars cited have also stressed, however, vidding is not merely visual but also audiovisual, and music is an inextricable component of the form. The music video has been remarkably persistent as a schema for fan works, but in contrast to the commercial format, the song illuminates the images rather than the images illuminating the song. Turk, especially, describes the varied and fundamental roles music plays in vid making and vid watching, writing that "the song and its lyrics provide narrative and emotional information that the audience must decode...by adding
music, vidders re-narrate source texts: the new music functions not merely as a soundtrack for the images but as an 'interpretive lens' [Coppa] through which to view the re-cut and re-sequenced clips" (2010, 95–96). Beyond offering interpretive cues, "music is the throughline of a vid...[and] thus a crucial factor in whether the audience experiences a vid as a coherent whole" (2015, 167). Song choice also carries, in large part, the affective tone and impact of the vid (in Internet vernacular, the "feels"). Ng found that Lianca videos were usually set to pop ballads where "both the lyrics and the melody tend to conform to cultural understandings of emotionality," which was a crucial tool to "facilitate a unique intensity of media engagement" (2008, 110). Turk expands on this concept by explaining that "pop songs work on a logic of emotional identification...encourag[ing] us to insert ourselves into them as the 'I' or the 'you,'" so they can function "to give shape and voice to the emotions of fictional characters" (2015, 171). Perhaps most importantly, "choosing a song is, for most vidders, generative—of the vid itself and of the vidder's process for making that vid. Vidder creativity is produced through interaction with music" (Turk 2015, 165). Indeed, in many of the commentaries below, creators describe the importance of a song to the development of their ideas and approach, and it's apparent that vidding as a mode of fannish engagement is often intertwined with music fandom. Turk cites Michel Chion, who terms the audiovisual principle *synchresis*: the idea that we will necessarily perceive sound and image as interrelated. Vid editors and vid watchers collaborate to realize the dialectical potential of this "audio-visual counterpoint" (Eisenstein 1949, 55), a particularly innovative multisensory rendition of AR.

[1.10] Please enjoy the following videos with an awareness of how their various juxtapositions—source and interpretation, representation and desire, watching and transforming, characters and editors, images and music, and sutures across cuts—contribute to the seamless yet lush textures of vidding as a distinctive and interactive mode of seeing. In the tech community, there is a tradition of presenting teardowns: stripping consumer devices down to parts to better comprehend their technological and economic constituents. Scott Torborg and Star Simpson, who did the first teardown of Google Glass in 2013 (http://catwig.com/google-glass-teardown/), wrote that disassembly is important "in an age when more and more of our technology is made inaccessible to the people who use it, to either understand, repair, or reuse" (see also the EFF's "right to repair" topic: https://eff.org/issues/right-to-repair). Speculative technologies are also embedded in systems their users don't fully own or control, and so, as a corrective to this opacity, you could consider this project a collaborative teardown of Femslash Goggles as an AR apparatus.

2. Acknowledgment
[2.1] Thanks to kiki_miserychic for invaluable assistance with the conception and organization of this project.

3. Works cited


Turk, Tisha. 2010. "'Your Own Imagination': Vidding and Vidwatching as Collaborative Interpretation." Film and Film Culture 5:88–111.


[4.1] When I started this vid, I'd been vidding for about 6 months. Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB/UPN, 1997–2003) was the only show I'd vidded, and the only one I had any interest in vidding. I wasn't planning to make a Faith/Buffy vid, but this song grabbed me and wouldn't let go. Tegan & Sara's This Business of Art is full of songs that could be about Faith; in fact, the vid I made right after this one was a Faith vid set to "Superstar" from the same album. But the lyrics of "Come On" gave me a hook: the first line, "you've got your lights turned so they can see you," immediately suggested the scene from 4.15 "This Year's Girl" in which Faith stands outside Giles's window looking in at Buffy. That lyric/image combination ultimately gave me the flashback structure of the vid.

[4.2] I don't ship Faith/Buffy in the sense of believing that they will (or should) end up together or thinking that the characters were sexually involved offscreen, but I do find their relationship fascinating. As I see the show, Buffy quickly becomes the most important person in Faith's life—the one person Faith thinks might understand her—and in turn Faith wants to be the most important person in Buffy's life. But she's not. Buffy likes Faith (and is also a little envious of her), likes being important to Faith, likes Faith's attention; but she has other friends too, other things in her life besides being a Slayer (as well she should!). It's not hard to read that dynamic as a queer woman in love with a straight friend who is never going to reciprocate those feelings but really likes the attention.
One of the things the vid highlights is the moments of connection between Faith and Buffy that Faith interprets as promises of friendship, companionship, devotion—the parallel between Buffy kissing Riley and Buffy kissing Faith is especially important there. It also highlights the ambiguity in their relationship, which the ambiguity of the song's chorus really helps with. "Come on, come on, come on"—come on and do what, exactly? I staked the vid on its meaning two different but inseparable things: Faith’s goading Buffy to fight with her and daring Buffy to connect with her erotically. That moment where she’s got Buffy against the wall and for a second you’re not sure if she’s going to hit her or kiss her? And then later she does kiss her, and then she runs away? That’s it, that’s the vid. Well, that and the fight scenes, which are the most technically impressive thing in the vid (and took a long time to get right—seriously, I was so cranky).

5. "These Two Arms" by Killa (2006, Escapade premiere)

These Two Arms from Killa Beez on Vimeo.


I heard this song played live on our community radio station, and knew instantly that it had to be a Xena: Warrior Princess (Renaissance Pictures, 1995–2001) vid. Though I’d never participated much in Xena fandom beyond reading some fic and making one other vid, I’d deeply loved Xena’s sixth season when it aired, with its lush visuals and the overwhelming love story between Xena and Gabrielle unabashedly
front and center. Hearing this song 5 years after the show ended, it evoked those images and feelings so powerfully, I couldn't resist.

[5.2] The ending of the show, though—what a betrayal. Not just Xena's death, but the way they killed her, the undermining of everything the character represented, and the trick they played, making us think Gabrielle would be able to save her. Of all the shows to go there, we never thought it would be this one. So, given the chance to rewrite the ending with the vid, I had to take it. Gabrielle kisses Xena, saving her life, and the story ends there—your basic fan fix-it.

[5.3] I've always been a fan of the surprise POV-shift vid structure, where one character's POV is represented for the first two verses, then the POV switches for the last verse. Not only does it help create build within a song that might not have its own, but it's also useful for showing how a relationship affects growth in one or both characters. Since that's exactly the way the Xena/Gabrielle dynamic evolved, with Gabrielle losing her innocence and eventually taking up bladed weapons and fighting alongside Xena (and embracing that choice), the refrain of this song and its themes were a perfect fit.

[5.4] Side note: At the time, my particular fannish vidding community was still debating the aesthetics of when and how often to use dissolves in vids. This might have been considered excessive. And it might be interesting to note that I made this for a long-running M/M slash con vid show, at which femslash was a fairly unusual occurrence. I'm not positive, but I think only one femslash vid had aired there previously, some years before.

[5.5] And finally, to my knowledge, this vid represents the only time a song's creator has ever found one of my vids. As it turned out, the band members were huge Xena fans, and they loved it. Lucky for me!

6. "Vitalum Vitalis" by hollywoodgrrrl and ohvienna (2014, VividCon premiere)
The third season of *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011–) dealt with a coven of sassy young witches with a variety of powers all vying to be the Supreme (new leader) by performing the Seven Wonders (witchy trials). Two such witches emerged as the primary femslash pairing within the fandom: Misty Day and Cordelia Foxx (played by Lily Rabe and Sarah Paulson, respectively). During one of the tests, Misty Day was lost (in her own personal hell where she was stuck resurrecting frogs forever) and Cordelia, who previously thought herself the weakest of the witches, turned out to be the Supreme. This is how the story concluded, and fans of Misty/Cordelia were *livid*. Going by the show's own rules, Misty's demise didn't make any logical sense. She possessed the power of resurgence and had previously brought herself back from death. Meanwhile, the Supreme has to command all Seven Wonders, one of which is Vitalum Vitalis (the power to balance the scales between one life force and another). Misty Day had to literally go *poof* so that there was no body to be resurrected! And instead of making them a canon pairing, Ryan Murphy & Co. gave us another Big Gay Tragedy. Well, we weren't having it. Hence "Vitalum Vitalis" became what is known as a fix-it vid.

Since an obsession with Stevie Nicks was such an integral part of Misty's character, we pulled from ohvienna's Misty/Cordelia fan mix the perfect song: a mashup of Fleetwood Mac's "Rhiannon" + Sia's "Breathe Me." For the structure of the vid, we wanted to show how Misty and Cordelia's individual paths cross. Once together, their combined energies were like a breath of life, which was visualized by the time-lapse imagery of the blooming flowers. We pulled from outside sources to add some oomph to the one existing scene from the show. Layered underneath was, of course, the subtext that Misty and Cordelia's love was also blooming.

After Misty does the ritual that sends her to her frog hell, it was important for us to show Cordelia actively trying to save her but ultimately proving helpless in the matter. As Misty's body turned to ash in Cordelia's arms, we cut to the previously established imagery of Misty burning at the stake. In the show, this scene was used to visualize Misty's power as she brought herself back from a combusted state. But in the vid we reversed it, showing instead what really happened to poor, sweet Misty in that fire. For us, this was the fix-it. While her soul was trapped in hell, her physical powers of resurgence were rendered ineffective, and thus her body would naturally revert to the state it was in had she never been able to resurrect herself in the first place: she would burn and turn to ash, just like she did in Cordelia's arms. And that is why poor Cordelia cannot bring sweet Misty back even with Vitalum Vitalis. This is still heartbreaking, but at least it makes sense!

7. "Past the Feeling" by Anoel (2013, VividCon premiere)
[7.1] When I first heard the song, it instantly pinged me as a Regina vid, specifically focused on Swan Queen [from *Once Upon a Time* (ABC, 2011–)]. The main chorus repeats the line "I'm moving past the feeling" and this well represents a big part of Regina's story line: how she moves past her hurt feelings over her mother's killing of her first love and the part that Snow White played in that. When Emma shows up as the biological mother of Regina's adopted son, Henry, she becomes the catalyst for Regina to have to overcome her resentment of Emma and again move past her old destructive patterns through the bond Regina and Emma share over their love of Henry. This is an example of a character vid that also functions as a femslash vid by giving the Swan Queen relationship more emotional layers, showing why Regina starts out resenting Emma but grows to form a partnership with her, and why this is so meaningful on both a relationship level and a story level. This arc has led many Swan Queen fans like myself to feel they are a destined, true love pairing on par with the other "true love" heterosexual pairings on the show (like Prince Charming/Snow White) and inspired us to create fan works and interact with the creators to demonstrate this, as I tried to do in this vid.

[7.2] Regina and Emma's dynamic is a great example of the enemies-to-lovers romantic trope, with their initial interactions antagonistic but full of flirting looks, rough touching, and growing obsession with each other that comes across as strongly femslashy—I tried to highlight this aspect particularly in the beginning of the vid. On top of that, their interaction takes on a destined quality, not only because of how both of them came to have Henry in their lives but also because of their magical powers, which help them protect Henry together. I emphasize this in the vid through the choruses, which provide a contrast to Regina and Emma's antagonism by showing them combining their magical powers to work together to save Henry. Ultimately they discover their magical bond as they pool their powers at the very end, taking their relationship to another level. In this vid, I specifically tried to add more cross-dissolves than I usually do in order to highlight this symbolism and to make the emotions and
reactions of the characters clearer, as well as to enhance the aesthetics and fit the tone of the song.

8. "Lightning Field" by bradcpu (2012)


[8.1] For me, vid projects always start with a need to communicate specific feelings or emotions. In this case, it was the deep sense of yearning that defined Cara and her relationship with Kahlan in Legend of the Seeker (ABC, 2008–10). Cara was kidnapped as a child, tortured, and brainwashed. She reluctantly joined the heroes of the show in season 2, and we watched as those walls slowly fell. The irony is that much of that happened because of the nurturing relationship she built throughout the season with her sworn enemy, a woman whose touch is deadly to her. As their relationship evolves, Cara goes from begrudging (and unwanted) hero, to friend, to guardian, to self-sacrificial third wheel, to regretful and borderline suicidal. It was a complex relationship and one that was uniquely compelling, in a painfully beautiful way. The point here was just to express that.

[8.2] I tried to do that by grounding the viewer in Cara's point of view. In many cases, that meant framing scenes with storm clouds or flashbacks to her past to show how a look or a touch made her feel, since one of (adult) Cara's defining qualities is that her face betrays very little emotion. In other cases, it meant using metaphors like flowers or a rising sun to show how she sees Kahlan. That extended to the sex scenes between Kahlan and her canon lover, Richard, which I positioned around shots of Cara having sex with another member of their group before sacrificing him and finally herself in order to protect Kahlan. That segment includes an episode in which Cara is secretly dying while trying to conceal her body's decay from Kahlan.

[8.3] I see the vid less as an alternate universe narrative and more about emphasizing what's hinted at in canon. Honestly, I didn't have to do a lot. Everything in the vid happened on screen, often in the same chronological order as the vid. It was
just a matter of positioning the most relevant shots next to each other and adding some visual representation of each emotion.


[9.1] While not having any canonical F/F relationships, Bunheads (ABC Family, 2012–13) was a show begging to be reinterpreted by femslashers. Literally 100 percent of the main cast were female characters, and the show's focus was always on the growing relationships between girls and women of different generations, coming together and helping each other and finding their own strength. The relationship between dance teacher Michelle and her student Sasha was the highlight of the show for me, as relationships between female characters of different ages who are not related are very rarely given such attention in media. The canonical Michelle/Sasha relationship inspired me and filled me with so much emotion that I knew I wanted to vid them, and in the process take things one step further by presenting them as a femslash pairing.

[9.2] Michelle and Sasha's connection is so evident on screen, and they were given plenty of scenes together in the canon of the show, so it wasn't difficult to imagine an added romantic/sexual element in the relationship. Since it's so easy to see their chemistry visually, I knew I would have a lot of material to work with and subtext to exploit when I made my vid. In vidding Michelle/Sasha, it was not a big stretch to take all the wonderful platonic scenes between them and put them in the context of femslash. I did also edit together several scenes to make them Michelle/Sasha scenes, such as when they're on the phone with each other, which is something I have a lot of fun with when I'm vidding subtextual relationships.

[9.3] Bunheads was a show with a very small fandom, and Michelle/Sasha was never a hugely popular femslash ship, so vidding was the perfect form of artistic expression for me to both process my own emotions about the show and the ship while also creating something fun and accessible for folks who aren't familiar with it. The lack of
Creating something fun and accessible for folks who aren’t familiar with it. The lack of Bunheads fan works in general, coupled with the lack of a vocal fandom to interact with, really fueled my vidding as an outlet for my love! I hope my vid will inspire lovers of F/F relationships—especially of the teacher/student or mentor/protege variety—to give Bunheads a try!

10. "I Do Adore" by kiki_miserychic (2014, VividCon premiere)


[10.1] I watch a lot of cartoons and was pleasantly surprised to find a subtextual femslash relationship on Adventure Time (Cartoon Network, 2010–). While not outright confirmed in canon, Princess Bubblegum and Marceline have been confirmed as a ship in interviews and such. I curated a femslash vid show for VividCon, a convention devoted to the practice and appreciation of vidding, and wanted to create something that would add more diverse sources to the playlist. I have a collection of music I want to eventually vid that I listened to, and when I heard this song, I thought of Princess Bubblegum and Marceline.

[10.2] It's interesting to vid a cartoon as opposed to the live-action source that I typically use in that different illustrators draw the characters with their own individual style. A lot of cartoons tend to have set character looks. The structure of Adventure Time makes vidding minor characters easier than most television shows because they tend to focus on a couple of characters in each episode. I pulled from the Princess Bubblegum and Marceline–focused episodes and additional episodes where they were in the background as part of the ensemble. Toward the end of the vid, I manipulated the clips with the inclusion of a book page titled "How to Kiss a Princess" taken out of context, to give the impression of a more textual romantic relationship without a lot of special effects on the source.

[10.3] I think representation in cartoons is extremely important and making this vid was important to me. Had young me seen this vid and cartoons like Adventure Time and Steven Universe (Cartoon Network, 2013–), I am certain I wouldn’t have had as many identity issues growing up.


[11.1] While I really enjoyed Guardians of the Galaxy (Marvel Studios, 2014) movie, I was disappointed we never got more backstory about Gamora and Nebula—Gamora especially, being one of the core protagonists, but we were only introduced to her after she had already made the decision to go against her family and steal the orb. I also really liked Nebula's line "of all our siblings, I hated you the least," which implied a particularly interesting relationship between them.

[11.2] I actually like them so much that I walked out of the movie theater already planning a fan vid in my head. Sadly, it took me a while to find a song and actually finish the vid, but I was certainly inspired by their relationship from the beginning. Luckily, my delay in making the vid ensured I was able to include a deleted scene between Nebula and Gamora that went into their backstory a little further as well as including an awesome shot of them getting up in each other's faces. It was actually this shot that tipped their relationship from being platonic into somewhat incestuous in my mind.

[11.3] The main issue I faced with making this vid was that I ran out of footage to use. Gamora and Nebula were in few scenes together to begin with, but there was also a lack of scenes of them separately that proved useful for the vid I was trying to make. I ended up having to crop and resize a number of clips so I could exclude the men in them and just focus on Gamora and Nebula.

12. "Hurricane" by Laura Shapiro (2010, Escapade premiere)

[12.1] This vid was born of a deep, unfulfilled need to read Starbuck/Aeryn fan fiction [Battlestar Galactica (SyFy, 2004–9), and Farscape (Nine [Australia], 1999–2003)]. Two hot pilots with serious mommy issues and frustrating boyfriends, both with strong tendencies toward independence and unhealthy ways of expressing their emotions, meet in a Space Bar® for a zipless fuck. Both characters operate in universes that are largely free from the sexist constraints of our world. Both come from military cultures where women are assumed to be as capable as men, and both are in heterosexual relationships where they get shit done and the men are the emotional ones. And they love to fly. I latched onto that to set up the vid's plot, but also to say something about flight, escape, freedom.

[12.2] At first I was only thinking of the eyebrow-melting hotness of the pairing, but once I began plotting out the vid, I realized that I needed to use parallel structure to introduce each character, partly because the verse lyrics didn't immediately lend themselves to the sex part of the plot, but also because most viewers would not be familiar with both characters.

[12.3] The clipping and overall editing process were relatively smooth and painless. But it was my first constructed reality vid, and the technical challenges were considerable: the shows' color palettes are nothing alike, and I knew I would need to bring in outside footage (The L Word [Showtime, 2004–9]) for the sex scenes. The hardest thing was erasing the men. My favorite moment of the vid was the most technically challenging to produce: when Aeryn rolls off Starbuck at the end of the sex sequence, she's originally rolling off of a dude. I had to mask him out, frame by frame. I'm really glad I did, though; that clip is so satisfying to me now.
It was important to me to build the vid without faked kisses or the like. I wanted to use pure editing to tell the story. The only time you see two bodies in the frame together, it's *L Word* footage. Aeryn and Starbuck are never in the frame together. What you think you see is from the juxtaposition of clips alone.

13. "Hands Away" by chaila and beccatoria (2011, WisCon premiere)


"Hands Away" is a vid for a show that doesn't exist, sparked by the incredible potential of two world-saving female leads not just in the same narrative space but also in a romantic relationship with each other. The vid was born when two Internet besties, wielding editing software, accidentally came up with the idea of two of their favorite fictional women connecting, despite boundaries of time, space, and television networks. Sarah Connor (*Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* [Fox, 2008–9]) and Olivia Dunham (*Fringe* [Fox, 2008–13]) were rare female leads on science fiction television shows. They were each the center of their shows' stories and mythology, each responsible for saving their respective worlds, sublimating personal happiness to duty. Telling a sincere but impossible love story between Sarah and Olivia, combining their narrative power together into a shared story where they might be in love, was exciting and powerful and downright sexy.

The visual and thematic parallels between the two characters and their stories helped inspire the idea of Sarah/Olivia as a relationship. The parallels and mirroring both paint the epic backdrop of a shared universe and create intimacy by showing how alike the characters and their stories are, and how much they would understand each other. Flashes of manipulated footage put them in the same scenes, repurposing footage from the shows or the actors' other work to create moments of solace, attraction, or affection between Sarah and Olivia. Their stories are meant to tangle
attracted, set to an impressionistic song whose few lyrics don't matter that much, beyond creating a mood as the two women search, find, and lose each other, separated by their missions but linked by the way they feel about each other. For us as the vidders, the plot didn't matter as much as the endless possibility that results from Sarah and Olivia connecting, crashing their complex and powerful stories and worlds into each other, anchored always by how desperately they reach for each other. The show never actually existed, but for the space of the vid’s three minutes, it does.


[https://vimeo.com/32143485]


**Password:** faberry.

[14.1] This project is different from any other vid I've made. At the outset, I was creating what I called a "scene reconstruction." However, upon its completion, I realized I'd gone beyond that and created, effectively, a video fan fic that told an actual story. As I had new ideas for scenes to manipulate—either by working around preexisting conversations or creating brand-new ones with dialogue pieces—I built a new chapter, so to speak. When it reached 10 minutes long, I realized it didn't have to just be random scenes strung together—I could create a narrative by arranging them intentionally. That was when the project really came alive and started toward what it is today: Quinn's coming-out story through a romance with Rachel, told over 18 minutes.

[14.2] The original objective was simple: Use material from *Glee* (Fox, 2009–15) to "prove" that Quinn was gay using a combination of canon and convincing manipulations. As a Faberry (Quinn Fabray/Rachel Berry) 'shipper, Quinn's potential lesbianism is the premise of their hypothetical relationship. I was able to use the canonical evidence of Quinn's queerness as a foundation for the vid (because she looks longingly at Rachel a lot) and then create new conversations to show what could be if only the show would go one step further. This project was successful because so much fodder already existed in canon, but the excitement (and challenge) lay in the fact that Faberry is ultimately a fanon relationship. Much to my delight, this became an instant hit on Tumblr—by far my most popular vid ever—and is still treasured by the fandom as a unique and special contribution. I hope, by watching this video, other viewers will better understand what Faberry shippers saw in Quinn and Rachel's interactions. This is the *Glee* story we wanted; this is *Glee* as we saw it.
Symposium

Where the femslashers are: Media on the lesbian continuum

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Abstract—Some texts are femslashier than others. Drawing on Alexander Doty's argument that television shows with primary relationships between women are "lesbian sitcoms," I argue that media driven by relationships between women are "structurally lesbian media" that generate femslash fandoms.

Keywords—Homosociality; Lesbian potential energy; Structurally lesbian media


[1] It is widely acknowledged that femslash is a minoritarian form of shipping, outnumbered in fandom at large by heterosexual pairings and m/m slash, though there are some fandoms where femslash holds its own with these other forms of shipping or even dominates (note 1). Some scholars have gestured toward the early lack of compelling women characters as driving m/m slash (Jenkins 1992), and others have identified the subsequent increase of well-rounded women in media as enabling femslash (Russo 2010). At this end of history, there are many complex women characters (though fewer after the rash of women characters killed off in spring 2016), but despite some change, the overall pattern, in which only certain, specific fandoms are femslash-dominant, remains.

[2] Here, I argue that there is something about these texts that, as Rosalind Hanmer (2003, 86) argues about Xena: Warrior Princess (1995–2001), "hails" queer women: something about these texts makes them femslashier than others. This is not the variety of defense of slash that might be shorthanded as "one, two, three, four, it's really there; we're keeping score"—the argument made by slash shippers that they are simply uncovering actual homoerotic subtext really in the text (note 2). Neither is my point here an instantiation of its counterpart, the very worthy argument that might be summarized as, "five, six, seven, eight, don't assume the text is straight" that inveighs against default heterosexuality (note 3). Instead, drawing on Alexander Doty's (1993) argument that Laverne and Shirley (1976–1983), The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970–
Designing Women (1986–1993), and The Golden Girls (1985–1992) should be understood as "lesbian sitcoms" because the primary relationships in them are between women, and men as love interests are generally transient and not central to the ongoing development of the story or characters, I argue that all media (not just sitcoms) that center on or are driven by a relationship between women are structurally lesbian media, and that to locate structurally lesbian media after the Internet is to locate femslash fandoms.

[3] The concept of structurally lesbian media, as Doty's "lesbian sitcom" before it, relies on Adrienne Rich's (1993, 239) concept of the "lesbian continuum": "a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman." In her 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Rich (1993, 239) proposed that we use lesbian continuum "to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support," and other woman-to-woman relationships (note 4). This is not the same as saying the characters in these shows really are lesbians (or any other identity), nor that their interactions really are intended to be perceived as sexual, nor that these relationships really are queer representation—any of that would move into the sexual lesbianism Rich termed "lesbian existence." It is, rather, a description of the mechanics of these texts and the ways they are centered on relationships between and among women. Thus, Doty (1993, 42) argues, "in mass culture reception, at least, the idea of a lesbian continuum might be adapted and expanded to include those situations in which anyone identifies with or takes pleasure in the 'many...forms of primary intensity between and among women.'" Doty describes the shows he discusses as "lesbian sitcoms" because they are structured around, and audiences "identify with" or "take pleasure in," the centrality of women to each other's lives, and I argue that the texts that generate large femslash fandoms are those that produce this identification and pleasure.

[4] Structurally lesbian media has three main, interrelated characteristics: primary homosocial intensity, transient heterosexuality, and homosocial-homosexual slippage. Henry Jenkins (1992, 187) explains that "slash originated as a genre of fan writing within Star Trek fandom in the early 1970s as writers began to suggest, however timidly, that Kirk and Spock cared more deeply for each other than for any of the many female secondary characters who brush past them in the original episodes." This idea that the ostensibly homosocial bond is the most important in characters' lives, and more so than explicitly heterosexual ones, is also shown in more contemporary texts such as Supernatural (2005–), but it hasn't been taken seriously that there is a reason that "'classic male-male buddy series'...have often produced slash fandoms
(Tosenberger 2008, 1.2). Where the most important relationship in the text is same-sex, I argue, there shall you find slash in volume, and in the very few media objects where the primary intensity is between women, this is femslash.

[5] Homosocial primary intensity takes various forms. In Xena, for example, the Xena-Gabrielle dyad was the core of the show. Other characters came and went, but the two ladies were what it was about, and I argue that this is why Xena-Gabrielle shipping vastly drowned out any other pairing: Xena was a structurally lesbian show in its focus on relationships between women as primary. Similarly, Rizzoli and Isles (2010–2016) was a structurally lesbian text because it centered on the titular characters and their relationship. To take perhaps unexpected examples, recent Disney films Frozen (2013) and Maleficent (2014) have central relationships between women, and there is substantial femslash about those relationships; this is despite the respectively literally and figuratively incestuous nature of those woman–woman pairs that might otherwise be expected to dampen interest, which may speak to a shortage of structurally lesbian media to choose from. Despite its otherwise conservative gender and sexual politics, ABC fairytale drama Once Upon a Time (2011–) has, for most of its run, been a structurally lesbian television show, driven by the developing relationships between and among its three lead women, Emma Swan, Snow White, and Regina Mills, from strangers to enemies to allies to family—and indeed "Swan Queen," the relationship between Emma Swan and Regina, the Evil Queen, has, at various points in the last six years, been the largest femslash fan base on the Internet.

[6] In accordance with the primary intensity in these texts being same-sex, heterosexual relationships may exist in structurally lesbian media, but they are not the most important ones. As Christine Scodari (2012, 343) argues, "if canonical homosociality between men is a catalyst for traditional slash, it is not threatened merely by male/female romance but by a female character's centrality in the narrative." Because love interests are peripheral to the narrative in these homosocial-bond frameworks, they're also produced as peripheral to the characters, and so such heterosexuality does not threaten the centrality of homosociality. This was certainly true of Xena—men came and went in both of the women's lives. As much as Anna of Frozen is marriage-crazy at the outset, she immediately tosses aside her new fiancé when she needs to go in search of her sister. Similarly, Emma and Regina have had men as love interests during substantial portions of Once Upon a Time, but the big plot and emotional beats have often been with each other (though this has changed in the fifth and sixth seasons), and so it is unsurprising that at AO3, Swan Queen stories outnumber those for any of the show's heterosexual pairings, and nearly both of the women's canonical heterosexual pairings put together (note 5).
This core homosocial bond and merely perfunctory heterosexuality mean there's always a potential for homosexual-homosocial slippage that must be managed. As Jenkins (1992, 203) describes it in the case of m/m slash he examines, texts "must also repress the specifically sexual dimension of these relationships." Julie Levin Russo (2010, 46) contends that "tropes like sudden onscreen boyfriends may function as overdetermined markers of the places where lesbian desire most threatens to erupt." Indeed, it's quite possible to be both a structurally lesbian text and a homophobic, gay-panicked one. The need to push lesbian existence back into the lesbian continuum—to desexualize and deemphasize the relationships between women—can drive an almost hysterical insistence that such women are merely close friends. This is so common as to be a meme: just gals being pals (note 6). The impulse also manifests in what Doty (1993, 42, n. 9) identifies in an endnote as "straight culture's careful maintenance of the line between homosociality and homosexuality." There is much extolling of the value of platonic love between women, and routine demands of "Why do you have to sexualize things?" The existence of a continuum—that these two forms of woman-to-woman relationship exist in relation to one another, and can slide into one another—is terrifying for homophobes but vital to femslashers.

By contrast, queerbaiting arises when show production personnel recognize the homosocial-homosexual slippage and give it a helping nudge rather than suppressing it. This is a situation in which they have no interest in actually letting the relationship in question between women reach lesbian existence—sexual lesbianism—rather than staying on the lesbian continuum—women's primary relations to women—but they will write and direct and act and edit in such a way as to push toward lesbian desire in order to attempt capture of fan attention, affective attachment, and labor. Rizzoli and Isles was notorious for this, from scripting to blocking to promotion, and open about the intent behind having the two actors touch and express care for each other. Queerbaiting, then, attempts to edge closer to lesbian existence while remaining plausibly deniable, exploitatively mining the lesbian continuum's affective resources.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985, 2) famously theorized "male homosocial desire," "using 'desire' in a way analogous to the psychoanalytic use of 'libido'—not for a particular, affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that has shaped an important relationship." The structural lesbianism of the media I describe here is the libidinal glue that holds them together, and as in Sedgwick's (1985, 2) case, "how far this force is properly sexual...will be an active question." How sexual these relationships are indeed varies from text to text, but they mostly stay on the nonsexual side of the lesbian continuum rather than passing into lesbian existence. There is, however, the potential at every moment for affect to break through into desire, for subtext to become text, to go from implicit to explicit, becoming lesbian
existence and actuality. The text carries that lesbian potential energy like a compressed spring. It may or may not ever become kinetic in the media object itself, but fans can run their communities on it either way.

Notes

1. See destinationtoast (2016) and Tumblr staff (2015) for quantification of the most shipped and fic-ed couples of 2015, as an example.

2. For descriptions of this argument, see Jenkins (1992) and Allington (2007).

3. See, for example, Åström (2010), Jones (2002), and Tosenberger (2008).

4. In saying that all "primary intensity" between women should be framed as lesbian, Rich (1993, 240) was making a political move, calling on ostensibly heterosexual women to recognize their kinship to lesbians on the basis of their deep emotional ties to other women, asking them to "consider the possibility that all women...exist on a lesbian continuum," because this would let women "see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not," in order to band together more effectively toward feminist causes rather than being divided by the specter of lesbianism.

5. As of March 26, 2017.

6. Rundowns of the meme can be found at Meme Documentation (2015) and Buzzfeed (Karlan 2015).

Works cited


Symposium

The surface of women

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[0.1] Abstract—This essay examines the range of gender designations, particularly those referring to women (as a class), within the research I conducted on genderswap fan work. The survey I did as part of that research had 295 participants, who were provided a short-answer field to explain their gender identity. The vast majority can be considered as being in the class of "women," but the ways in which they define themselves offer a significant expansion to the surface that "women" can be conceived to cover.

[0.2] Keywords—Feminism; Gender; Transgender


[1] My research focuses on fan work that shifts and changes gender between adaptations of existing works (regendering and gender-creative fanwork), and as part of that research, I surveyed and interviewed fans. The prevalence of women within fandom is well known and researched, from Bacon-Smith to Jamison; however, the tendency of earlier studies to describe primarily heterosexual, white, and cis respondents is mired in expectations about gender and sexuality. The assumption that (transformative) fandom is populated mostly by straight white women is part of why I chose to allow an open response for gender in my survey. That assumption has proven somewhat false about sexuality; would it prove similarly fallible in the case of gender?

[2] Discussing the David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade mailing list in 2005, Rhiannon Bury reasoned, "It is unlikely that female fans who identified as lesbian would join a list whose name, however playfully or ironically, foregrounded heterosexual desire" (2005, 22). This reasoning ignores sexuality's long history as a variable and codified performance that does not tidily line up with our current labeling system. However, sexuality is increasingly respected as an identifier in fan studies, as can be seen particularly in work like "Cunning Linguists: The Bisexual Erotics of Words/Silence/Flesh" (Lackner, Lucas, and Reid 2006) and the collections Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays and The Fan Fiction Studies Reader (Hellekson and Busse 2006, 2014), which reflect society's increasing awareness that the usual labels for sexuality do not clearly illustrate the varieties of sexual interest. We are seeing the beginning of a shift: where examination of sexuality was once thought unnecessary, because the motivations for sexual actions seemed clear, now such examination is a clearly valuable facet of quantitative research. Although academic research has both contradicted and supported those earlier findings of hetero dominance,
Fan research has repeatedly revealed a clear proportion of nonheterosexual women; the blogs Destination: Toast! (http://destinationtoast.tumblr.com/) and The Slow Dance of the Infinite Stars (http://centrumlumina.tumblr.com/) particularly have taken broad samples of fandom and archives. Out of interest in the gender breakdown, and in order to determine if a similar shift was occurring with gender, I offered survey participants the opportunity to explain their gender to me. Their responses, and the associated data, form the basis of this essay.

[3] Gender-creative works—encompassing regendering, omegaverse, mpreg, and other variations—do not form a large part of fannish work, although they are seen by many people as evidence both of creativity and of puerile sexual interest (which is why fans interested in such works are sometimes described as "rotten" in China, and "trash" and "garbage" on Tumblr). The disproportionate psychological space occupied by these works in the minds of fans and antifans alike is testament to the transgressiveness they engage in both within and outside fannish cultures. As Busse says, "These stories are not only hot and allow our beloved sex objects to get and stay together in bonded bliss but they also interrogate some of the issues and prejudices of our day" (2013, 571–72). It seems logical that these works would primarily be created by and for similarly gender-creative fans, but my survey shows that those who used standard gender identifiers and those who did not were equally likely to consume them, with creators slightly more likely to use nonstandard gender identifiers. What piqued my interest most was the way gender was constructed by my respondents.

[4] What all respondents had in common, of course, was their willingness to participate in my survey about gender-creative fan works. Most belonged to a class that could broadly be described as female; either they outright identified their gender this way, or they located it within a broader spectrum, using phrases like "mostly female" and "afab" ("assigned female at birth") to describe their gender identity. Approximately one-fifth of all women and women-adjacent respondents described their gender in a way that separated them from the category "female" or particularized it in some fashion. I am sympathetic to the desire to do so; my own discomfort with gender asserts itself periodically, in behaviors ranging from teenaged chest-binding to my current b/Butch appearance, and there is no way to explain this gender performance and identity construction within the highly codified structures of the gender binary. Even claiming a gender identity of "other" does not tell the story sufficiently. It certainly does not help explain why I read what I read, or write what I write, given the expectations laid upon gender.

[5] My survey was only available online, publicized via Twitter, email, Tumblr, and other social networks. The respondents came from a variety of educational, economic, language, and racial backgrounds, although they tended to be from the English-speaking West, the US particularly, and to be highly educated. It is tempting to standardize the gender data; after all, the responses "woman," "demigirl," "female," "cisfemale," "lesbian," "queer femme," "lady i guess," "primarily female," and "genderfluid mostly female" could all be considered under the class of "woman," or at least "female," in order to offer a quantitatively "clean" delineation of gender in the analysis. However, these nonstandard responses (all of which
are listed in Table 1) offer a way of looking at the shattered surface of womanhood (note 1), a disparate class nonetheless considered "lesser" by mainstream communities and corporate entities, affecting treatment in the work, reading patterns, responses to works, and so on. However, it is difficult to identify an experience common to all those classed as "women," except being seen as "other." The intersectionality of the class "women" is revealed by the term's use with modifiers describing race, trans status, and sexuality.

Table 1. Answers to "What Gender Do You Identify As?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agender</th>
<th>Androgynous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bigender (female and nb/masculine)</td>
<td>Cis female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cis woman</td>
<td>cis gender female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cis lady</td>
<td>Denimnonbinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Demigirl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (demigirl/genderqueer)</td>
<td>Female (with a strong streak of genderqueer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, more or less</td>
<td>Female/genderless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female/Genderqueer</td>
<td>Fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid</td>
<td>Genderfluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderfluid</td>
<td>Genderfluid (biologically female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderfluid; mostly female right now</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Genderqueer afab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girl/penguin/??</td>
<td>I am anti-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reject gender as a concept, but society deems me female.</td>
<td>lady, i guess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male/Agender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male/Agender</td>
<td>Masculine Genderqueer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutrois</td>
<td>Nonbinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbinary</td>
<td>Non-binary—demigirl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbinary (agender)</td>
<td>Nonbinary/Androgynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary/butch</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>None (agender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[6] This shattering of the categories presents categorization difficulties to researchers, particularly within an online environment. That is not to say the gender(s) chosen are false, but to highlight the multiplicity of identities people find themselves inhabiting online as expressions of themselves and their truths, particularly within the overlapping subcultural elements that make up what Morimoto terms the "contact zones of fandom," where a singular interest binds people together from an "infinite diversity" (Morimoto 2015). I also want to highlight the way this makes data analysis fraught with a kind of bowdlerized gender binarism—removing the subcategories of "woman" in order to present a more cohesive dataset makes a kind of sense, even as it replaces that deep and broad category selected by the respondents with the putative "whole" of a gender binary, or even a trinary, no matter how flexibly that third status lets us shift between categories and identities. The one-fifth of women-adjacent respondents who identified themselves with nonstandard gender terms would be lost, their gender identification swallowed by those larger categories.

[7] The assumption of a static gender-class, in and of itself, is the genesis of gender policing that gender-creative fan work can interact with. A gender binary sees women as a class identified by femininity (with allowed deviations) and men as a class identified by masculinity (again with allowed deviations). Within fandom, it is divorced from sexual behaviors in multiple ways, but is reinscribed in others. Respondents often derided this binary. In their survey responses, they often described fan work that strengthens the wall between those two genders, or that reifies a kind of gendered performance of sexuality (by, for instance, featuring feminine bishies or sexually receptive and passive males, "bottoms"), as "less interesting" than work that creatively intersects with gender as a concept. They also often consider such work to be fetishizing the gender binary, having more in common with sexual roleplaying and dress-up than with actual gender identity. This use of gender as a means for fetishized sexual performance, without either an honest claiming of the fetish or a coherent examination of gendered sex and performance, garners fans' disdain; they see it as appropriating gender politics without giving due consideration to the sociopolitical importance of the act of regendering the existing characters.

[8] Gender expression as integrity forms a part of this disparate surface—the shattered pieces reflect better expressions of "woman" than the whole, ones with more meaning to the respondents than the word "woman" can offer, even as they become part of the class of women by virtue of not being men. This absorption into the class of women intersects with the management and "cleaning" of data by overriding respondents' attempts at integrity in
favor of a meaning that may or may not be their intent. While this shift may make analysis easier, it also ignores the facets of gender highlighted by the terms "cis," "demi," and "femme." The urge to standardize data in order to fit it into the shape expected has historically not served minorities or subaltern groups well, particularly in research. The nuances afforded by these categories of womanhood offer a way to look at the surface of womanhood in contemporary culture.

[9] The new wave of gender criticism, with facets of trans* activism, feminism, racial studies, and sociology, invites us to explore the intent of those who police, reify, produce, and reproduce these binaries in media and in culture. Gender forms the foundational element of society in a way that is not yet fully understood; investigations into brain structure, hormones, and physiology are providing new and provocative complications of what was once considered to be a discrete binary. Fandom, rather than simply being a reflection of the media it focuses on, is a site where the questions those complications raise can find creative praxis alongside personal recovery and reimagining. Gender-creative adaptations, though contentious, can rework an original property alongside its archontic versions, can meditate on gender, and can critique media, gender, and fandom itself. Junot Diaz notes that "if you want to make a human being a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves" (Stetler, 2009), and thus his work seeks to provide mirrors for those unreflected and made monstrous populations of minorities and the subaltern. A personal revelatory experience offers a necessary reflection to soothe that monster, albeit in a fractured surface.

Note

1. Djuna Barnes, in a letter to Emily Coleman, says, "There is more surface to the shattered object than the whole," and this conceptualization has guided my investigation of gender identity within the data I have collected (Barnes 2003, xi).

Works cited


1. Introduction

[1.1] Yuri, a genre of Japanese comics, animation, and related media focusing on lesbian themes and content, is unlike the four main demographically focused genres of Japanese media. Without a single, discrete source, yuri is the product of disparate creators and audiences with conflicting needs, tropes, and conventions of storytelling. With such incompatible demands, the different audiences (i.e., female, male, straight, gay) who read, watch, and create derivative material in yuri fandom often lose sight of the roots of yuri, while publishers promote properties that are marketable to a minority male audience rather than to the majority female audience (note 1).

[1.2] To understand how yuri reached this point, it's useful to understand that its sources have a point of commonality (lesbian themes) but lack a shared purpose.

2. Herstory: Japanese social politics and media

[2.1] In the early 20th century, a sociopolitical movement called the S movement was formed by Japanese women. The letter "S" stood for shoujo, sister, schoene, and even sex, but among some members, S also stood for Sappho (Robertson 1992, 427). Their desire to effect change took artistic form as they established a uniquely Japanese girls' culture, even as they looked to the West for cues on fashion and lifestyle (Dollase 2008, 339). Like the Lavender Menace of the women's liberation movement in the
1970s in the United States, the separatist and/or homosexual members left or were driven away from the larger S movement throughout the 1920s.

[2.2] Japanese girls' magazine publishers modulated this new girls' culture through an externally imposed community, one that idealized the new consumer culture of the early 20th century (Thorn 2008). As the popularity of manga as entertainment and lifestyle grew, these girl's magazines retained a consumer culture profile but also featured comics designed to highlight desired qualities for Japanese girls—smiling through hardship and self-sacrifice and effort on behalf of the group (Sievers 1983, 22).

[2.3] Women radically altered the world of manga as artists in the late 1960s, pioneered by the group known in English as the Magnificent 49ers. They became the first women to draw comics specifically by and for women and included sexual and gender minority themes in their work (Thorn 2008). Hagio Moto drew *Toma no Shinzo* (*Heart of Thomas* [1974]) with gay elements, and Riyoko Ikeda (note 2) created several key manga which deal with lesbian love and included transgender characters in her work. Her stories, *Oniisama E* (*Dear Brother* [1975]) and *Claudine* (1978) both feature crossdressing women, and Claudine can be interpreted as either gay or trans. 49ers Igarashi Yumiko and Yamagishi Ryouko both explored same-sex love between women in, respectively, *Paros no Ken* (1986) and *Shiroi Heya no Futari* (1971). The latter work can be considered the first yuri manga, as it drew from many of the conventions of girls' literature and same-sex romance used or established by influential S writer Yoshiya Nobuko and thereby cemented these as tropes for future yuri manga (Yoshiya 2003).

[2.4] The first known formal lesbian community was founded in Japan in 1971, Wakakusa no Kai (Fresh Green Club) was named to literally represent the fact that it was a grassroots organization (Sawabe 2007). Wakakusa no Kai did not disband completely until the mid-1980s. A separate group, Studio Regumi, was founded in Wakakusa's ashes in 1985 (Subramanian 2007) to be, according to their Web site, "Japan's first Lesbian assembly." (http://regumi.sakura.ne.jp/retsushin/ayumi-3/ayumi-1).

[2.5] The year 1971 also saw the creation of Japan's first commercial gay magazine, *Barazoku*. The editor, Ito Bungaku, included a page for lesbians, which gave information on how to get in touch with lesbian organizations. In an editorial, he named gay men *barazoku* (rose tribe) and lesbians *yurizoku* (lily tribe). *Yuri* is the Japanese word for "lily," and so the lily flower became the de facto symbol for lesbian-themed media (note 3).
[2.6] Japanese manga, well established by the 1970s, is at the forefront of political and artistic discourse in alternative manga magazines such as Garo magazine (Holmberg 2010). Just as their S forebears had found their voices through letter writing, poetry, short stories, and novels centered around community in girls' magazines, manga was engaged by the lesbian community in Japan.

[2.7] After the massive comic event known as Comiket had formed in 1975 (Comic Market Committee 2008), Itou's word Yurizoku was shortened to yuri and appropriated by comic artists to describe not lesbians but lesbian sex. The imagery of the lily had attached to lesbians permanently but not in a way that was comfortable for lesbians.

[2.8] The creation of Comiket and the spread of small presses and self-published comics, known as doujinshi, opened up a new door to expression for sexual and gender minorities to create stories for themselves. Early doujinshi and minicomics gave Japanese lesbians a chance to tell their stories outside the confines of editorial constraint. Artists like Amamiya Sae, Takashima Rica, Ang, and Morishima Akiko created comics to express their own personal narratives, explicitly lesbian for lesbians, completely separate from popular pornographic comics featuring lesbian sex for male consumers. Lesbian stories for lesbians had finally found a home.

3. What girls want, what boys want, what publishers want

[3.1] As the Magnificent 49ers had inspired early lesbian doujinshi artists, those artists inspired a new generation. By the 1990s, commercial publishers had reentered the manga market with stories of sexual and gender minorities. When the wave of political and social activism dissipated in the postwar bursting of the Japanese economic bubble, the bulk of stories were cautionary. Lesbianism was associated with pathology, with depression, suicide, and madness. Commercial publishers were willing to show lesbian stories—but not for a lesbian audience.

[3.2] Following the success of any popular manga series with implicit or explicit lesbianism, publishers pushed out a wave of similar stories that cashed in on now-established tropes but without any explicit lesbian identity. The popular light novel series Maria-sama ga Miteru (1998–2012) was a game-changing franchise with strong explicit roots in the S novels of the early 20th century, the midcentury S manga, and stories of sexual and gender minorities of the 1970s, tied together with well-developed characters and a fantasy setting of an old-fashioned Catholic school. The series was published in a magazine for young women, hearkening back to the 1930s girls' magazines. Marimite also became the springboard upon which dozens, if not hundreds, of similar series, both implicitly (Kannazuki no Miko) (note 4) and explicitly (Strawberry Panic!) yuri, were launched—for a straight, male audience (note 5). By
the time publishers considered the idea of an audience for purely yuri content in 2003, there were enough artists in the field to sustain a magazine (note 6).

[3.3] In 2007, Ichijinsha, publisher of the second yuri-focused magazine to be published in Japan, Yuri Hime, split the magazine into two—Yuri Hime, which was meant to cater to a female audience, and Yuri Hime S, designed to appeal to a male audience, with more explicitly sexualized views of female bodies and dress, a practice referred to in the Anime News Network’s encyclopedia as fan service. ("Readership Data Analysis" 2008) Ichijinsha incorporated a simplified art style called moe (Galbraith 2014) which rehashed popular, safe themes of young schoolgirl romance and avoided adult or realistic narrative.

[3.4] The focus on the male audience continued in Comic Yuri Hime with Kurata Uso's Yuri Danshi series, which follows the adventures and fantasies of a yuri fanboy. James Welker (2014) has written about this series as a metareview of yuri fanboy types and tropes of being a male fan; however, until the inclusion of recent side stories, Yuri Danshi focused on male fans and their needs and desires around yuri but left women out of the narrative that portrays them. In recent chapters, Kurata has created a yuri story, but one that highlights readers' imagination of what modern relationships based on tropes of S relationships of the 20th century might look like.

[3.5] From 2011 to 2014, yuri-focused magazines increased from one to three (note 7). In all three, yuri relationships showed lesbian content (girls in love) without lesbian identity. However, lesbian identity in yuri manga increased as manga artists came out. Out lesbian manga creators, such as Nakamura Ching (in an interview by Erica Friedman published on Okazu on August 8, 2009) and Takemiya Jin (in an interview with Erica Friedman published on Okazu on June 2, 2013) included lesbian culture, slang, and life in their yuri, outside the idealized commercial yuri romance. However, despite resistance from publishers and researchers, creators and fans inextricably mesh yuri and lesbian identity.

4. What is yuri?

[4.1] Corporate sales, creator identity, and audience heterogeneity lead yuri to an awkward place in terms of genre identity. Is yuri the schoolgirl romance created by men for a male audience who consider love between girls pure, or is it the girl's romance that has roots in S literature for a female audience who fondly remember their days admiring upperclassmen at all-girls schools? Or is it for lesbians, whose stories are nominally acknowledged in narratives of self-awareness of love for a member of the same sex or feelings of being different, without any use of the word
lesbian? The heterogeneity of creator and audience causes difficulty in both definition and scholarship. Who gets to define *yuri*?

[4.2] Fans, almost inevitably, have their own terms (*note 8*). Fan organization Yuricon has taken the broadest possible look at *yuri*, which both includes lesbianism and acknowledges nonlesbian sources, that is, admiration (*akogare*), platonic romance, or intense emotional connection. Fan language is free to shift and change with fashion and need, so that it often runs ahead of both commercial and research terminology, hand in hand with creators.

[4.3] Shamoon (2012), in *her Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girl's Culture in Japan*, warned readers to avoid reading real-life lesbian Yoshiya Nobuko's work as lesbian even when it reflects an intimate relationship between two women. Frederick (2013) has noted the irony of not acknowledging a lesbian's lesbian work as lesbian.

[4.4] Maser (2013) created a whole new term for *yuri* romance, so that lesbian identity need not apply. Despite the plethora of terms already in existence—girls' love, *yuri*, *shoujoai*, *onna no ko-doushi*—Maser stated that existing terms do not create the distance from lesbianism that researchers need in order to objectively understand *yuri*.

[4.5] Again, the heterogeneity of *yuri* is the single overarching characteristic of the genre. As researchers seek to limit and define *yuri*, fans seek to broaden the definition and push it forward.

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5. *Yuri* overseas

[5.1] Once *yuri* leaves Japan, the term stops needing definition at all. Audiences that compose *yuri* fandom have adopted *yuri* as a term that means any narrative of love (romantic, sexual, intimate or not) between women. European anthologies of comics about lesbian romance have tagged themselves as *yuri* without need for further explanation (see, for instance, the Kickstarter Web site at Indiegogo for "Freya Sequential Love Stories" 2015).

[5.2] The concept of *yuri* has spread from Japan to overseas and from overseas fandom to non-Japanese creators who want to express their own lesbian narratives. While commercial publishers have stuck with more broadly appealing nonidentity narrative, there are leaks driven by internal pressure. Morishima Akiko's work in *Comic Yuri Hime*, Takashima Hiromi's work in *Pure Yuri Anthology Hirari*, Takemiya Jin's work for Hakusensha, and Nakamura Kiyo's autobiographical manga, all have forgotten to shy away from explicitly lesbian discussion.
Yuri in 2016 is a genre created from mutually exclusive desires and different needs. Manga creators tell stories based in manga culture tropes rooted in 20th century lesbian community and life; commercial publishers sell to nonlesbian audiences; researchers seek to codify from a distance; and fans want stories of their own fantasies and realities. New waves of lesbian identity, with new storytellers, shape and reshape the genre as culture shifts. Yuri is constantly in flux.

6. Notes

1. Citing poll results from Yuri Hime, ComiPress reported on a 2006 poll on readership of Ichijinsha Publications ("Readership Data" 2008). This news was greeted by Yuri Hime magazine editor-in-chief Nakamura with dismay. "Don't forget male fans," he said in an editorial when the survey was released in the March 2007 issue.

2. Japanese names appear in Japanese format—family name followed by given name—with this one exception. Riyoko Ikeda's name, when written in Western text, is always presented in Western format.

3. LOVE MAGAZINE, October 2014. Fbooks. A page titled "Yurizoku no Heya" (the lily tribe's room) solicited letters from lesbians and gave lesbians a way to connect that was reminiscent of the letters pages from Girls' magazines of the 1930s.

4. Kannazuki no Miko (2004–2005), a series by the artist Kaishaku, was serialized in Shounen Ace by Kadokawa Shoten in 2004–2005 as a seinen (for men) title; it includes rape along with all the earlier girls' literature tropes.

5. Kimino Sakurako's Strawberry Panic! (2003–2007) was published by Media Factory in 2004 originally as a series of short stories; it was later expanded to an anime, manga, and novel franchise, all with an intended audience of adult men. Like the series Kannazuki no Miko, it includes nonconsensual and coercive relationships (and incorrect explanations for lesbianism, such as a neglectful father) sprinkled in among the idealized romantic schoolgirl romance.


7. The two new magazines were Pure Yuri Anthology Hirari from Futabasha 2010–2014 and Tsubomi from Houbunsha Publishing 2009–2012.

8. Bangin's blog Japanese Words of Anime Fans was a fascinating glossary and history of such words from 2007 to 2015 https://bangin.wordpress.com/.
7. Works cited


http://archive.is/PXMH.


Symposium

Unseen international music idol femslash

Elaine Han Lin

[0.1] Abstract—One sector of femslash appears to have developed in relative isolation from the rest. This sector is international music idol femslash.

[0.2] Keywords—Fan community; Music; Real person fiction; RPF


[1] A post on Tumblr says simply, "The lesbians of tumblr just travel like a flock from fandom to fandom." As of mid-2016, it had over 7,000 notes. Another continues the bird metaphor, saying, "lesbians just migrate from fandom to fandom depending on the time of the year. like gay birds." It had over 60,000 notes. A popular addendum is a GIF depicting a flock of flamingos moving from a space marked The 100 to one marked Fear the Walking Dead, referring to how fans followed actor Alycia Debnam-Carey to the latter show (where she does not play a queer character) after her character on the former show was killed off. AfterEllen has an article titled "Lesbian Loyalty: Why We'll Follow Some Actors and Writers Anywhere" (Hogan 2011), speaking of how queer women go beyond just hunting down every whiff of media representation to keep tabs on the careers of actors and creators long after their first queer role or production.

[2] Both online conventions like FemSlashCon and more traditional ones like Thank Goodness It's Femslash (TGIF/F) offer panels devoted to singing the praises of diversity and representation in fiction. Congoers testify about how fictional ships and characters were instrumental in their own identity formation, how they learned of their own queerness.

[3] But some areas remain relatively segregated. Real-person shipping remains as controversial as ever, with both TGIF/F and FemSlashCon declining to discuss the topic. International non-English-language media is dependent on the production of subtitles or the release of an English translation to get some attention in English-speaking fandom. Only a few animated ships seem to penetrate the greater femslash consciousness. Only one of those, Haruka/Michiru, is from a source that is not in
English, and its show, *Sailor Moon* (1992–97) was broadcast as a Saturday-morning cartoon all over the world, dubbed into local languages. Put all of that together, and the most niche femslash category would have to be real-person fandom in languages other than English.

[4] Such a fandom exists, and it is quite robust. It's just not connected to the anglophone sphere that the term "femslash" usually refers to.

[5] Music idols aren't a foreign concept to America ([note 1]). My generation grew up in the mid-1990s, with the Spice Girls, Britney Spears, NSYNC, the Backstreet Boys. Our adolescence also saw the next wave, with the likes of Miley Cyrus, Ariana Grande, and Taylor Swift. Shipping music idols isn't a new thing either. Fanlore ([http://fanlore.org/](http://fanlore.org/)) maintains 19 subcategories and 38 pages under the "Music RPF" category.


[7] Shipping idols together is a common pastime in Asian idol fandom. The first episode of *SNL Korea* featured a skit recreating the events of a famous boy band fan fiction story. There's international academic scholarship on idol femslash ([Yang and Bao 2012](https://doi.org/10.1386/jlss.11.1.188.8213)). Idol shipping is fairly popular even outside of Asia. On the highest ranked international K-pop fan site, Allkpop ([http://www.allkpop.com/](http://www.allkpop.com/)), articles have titles such as "10 of the Most Popular K-Pop Fan-Fictions Out There," "11 Ships You Wish Were Real," and "7 Times Hani Proved to Be Totally Shippable." On the J-pop fan forum site JPHIP ([http://forum.jphip.com/](http://forum.jphip.com/)), there are two forums dedicated to idol pairings and about half a dozen forums and archives dedicated to idol fan fiction. The lesbiansubtextinkpop Tumblr posted over 2,300 posts from 2011 to 2013. On the Archive of Our Own (AO3; [https://archiveofourown.org/](https://archiveofourown.org/)), there are over 6,000 fan stories tagged J-pop, over 60,000 tagged K-pop, and several dozen tagged C-pop.

[8] The idols themselves are aware of and deliberately play up to fans' shipping interests, sometimes directed to do so by their management and marketing departments and sometimes not. The most popular male and female members of the mixed-gender J-pop group AAA sang a series of love song duets across multiple albums. Music videos and concert skits had them playing a couple ([note 2]). Notably, however, the kiss that actually occurred in a concert was between two male members. The K-pop boy band TVXQ released two DVD box sets that each included a disc devoted to a segment titled "Couple Talk," in which each combination of members discussed why fans had paired them together and promoted their supposed closeness to each other. Popular J-pop girl group AKB48 has had at least 14 different pairs of
members perform the song "Oshibe to Meshibe to Yoru no Chouchou," which describes a lesbian affair. Performances include a kiss at the end, with some girls going for a visible lip-lock instead of hiding the act behind suggestive head tilts.

[9] One Tumblr poster mused on the motivations behind such shipping, especially considering that most femslash shippers appeared to be straight fans: "For me, it's obvious why people might spend their time looking for homoerotic subtext to K-pop: there is an implied intimacy within K-pop (between idols and fans but also between the idols themselves) that is not so much present in Western pop. Intimacy being one of the main qualities I look for in art, this is probably one big reason I gravitate towards it" (occupiedterritories, Tumblr, June 21, 2012). The poster also touched on the usual interest in the love lives of celebrities that drives tabloid sales.

[10] For me, shipping Asian pop idols was mostly just the application of standard geek passion to my particular fandom. The vast wells of available source material enabled me to relate intensely to, and project my imagination onto, the subjects of my interest. There weren't just music videos and concert performances, but also TV variety show appearances, specialty events like sports tournaments, and behind-the-scenes footage, which really meant that a camera had been set up backstage at concerts and at photo shoots for the idols to perform shenanigans in front of while waiting to be called up. These were real people pursuing their dreams and playing out real relationships right in front of my eyes. These were group members spending the majority of their days in each other's company, and their synergy was far more critical to their success than it was in typical coworker settings. I got to see more of these peoples' lives and relationships than most normal people ever get to see of their actual friends'.

[11] Furthermore, everyone involved in idol fandom—idols and fans alike—were very much aware of how important physical attractiveness was to an idol's popularity. There was no taboo against fans of any gender publicly crushing on or just lusting after an idol online. In Asia, men are the primary fans of female idols, but in the transnational English-language fandom, idol fans were seen as feminized, and those insecure in their masculinity thus avoided the fandom. As a result, the English-language idol fandom contained a sizable female presence. This meant that there were many female fans saying, of various female idols, "I'd go gay for her." So within certain idol fan communities, femslash was a means through which female fans could explore queer expressions of identity without being scrutinized for it (snsd_ffa, LiveJournal, July 19, 2011).

[12] Asian idol femslash was not so different from traditional fictional media femslash except that the canon was real, and perhaps more relevantly, there was a steady supply of in-depth source material, more than a fictional production could have ever
provided. In an informal anonymous survey, idol fan fiction authors tended to see little difference between idol fan fiction and regular fan fiction, except that adherence to characterization was stricter in the former (snsd_ffa, LiveJournal, November 10, 2010). They also considered the benefits of representation in idol fan fiction to be similar to those of representation in traditional fan fiction. Some fans have been inspired by the apparent queerness displayed by idols to be more open about their own sexuality (pink-wota, LiveJournal, March 14, 2008).

But idol shipping remained firmly in the fantasy realm. Fans did not have to fear that a writer would screw up the characters' characterization, but industry executives might meddle behind the scenes. Fans might have oodles of canon, but it would never be confirmed. Most female idols go on to marry a man after they retire from idoling. Even as Korea's and Japan's paparazzi leap at the chance to break celebrity scandals, just like in the West, outing someone as homosexual remains a taboo (Pann 2016). Gal pals forever.

Despite its popularity, idol shipping is as controversial as any RPF. When I searched the K-pop fan site Seoulbeats for the term "shipping," five of the first 10 results were editorials critical of the practice, specifically same-sex shipping. Another relegated fan fiction to the realm of guilty pleasures.

So, as stated before, Asian idol shipping is a niche within a niche fandom, all but ignored within traditional anglophone femslash. AfterEllen contains two posts under its K-pop tag, only one of which might be tangentially relevant to shipping. The site has no J-pop tag. Autostraddle's sole K-pop post does not mention shipping, and J-pop has a single mention, in an interview with an American band. Searches on geek-media Web sites return even sparser results since those sites are focused on narrative storytelling. One fan noted that of the top 100 femslash pairings on AO3, the only characters from nonnarrative media came from women's soccer RPF (centrumlumina, Tumblr, July 8, 2015). In the archive for 2015's Femslash Exchange, there's one entry for the anime Love Live! School Idol Project (2013–) and one entry for American actor RPF.

Meanwhile, the AsianFanfics archive contains over 800,000 entries. The primary fan site for the K-pop girl group Girls Generation contains over 200 topics and 290,000 comments in its Soshi Pairings forum, and includes over 7,000 topics and 870,000 comments in its fan fiction forum. Unsearchable and uncountable accounts across all sorts of social media platforms (forums, individual fan sites, Wattpad, Tumblr, LiveJournal) tweet and blog and post and reblog their favorite ships, out of sight of the rest of fandom. And the weekend after attending TGIF/F in 2016, I was flying right back to Houston to see J-pop girl group Morning Musume, with a completely different social circle.
Notes

1. One might think of Beatlemania, and before that, Frank Sinatra's "Bobby Soxer" fangirls. Before their more famous idol debuts, Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake were members of the Mickey Mouse Club. An earlier iteration of the club had produced teen idol Annette Funicello, who would become known for her beach party films with Frankie Avalon. The connection to Asian idol fandom would be made years later by Crisp (2009).

2. Kimitsu (2009) considers why some fans are so attached to the pairing of the male and female AAA members.

Works cited


Coming out on *Grey's Anatomy*: Industry scandal, constructing a lesbian story line, and fan action

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[0.1] **Abstract**—This analysis focuses on a series of industry scandals that created a need for and the development of a lesbian story line on *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005–), resulting in the creation of a lesbian-focused fan group dedicated to the lesbian pairing, Erica_Callie on LiveJournal. The resulting constructed representation portrays authentic lesbian and bisexual characters on mainstream broadcast television, promising inclusion to those who identify with these characters.

[0.2] **Keywords**—Authenticity; Discourse analysis; Emotional realism; Fan studies; Identification; Knight/Washington scandal; LGBT studies; Online ethnography; Production


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1. Introduction

[1.1] During the 2006–7 television season, the production team and cast for *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–) dealt with a series of unfortunate industry events that significantly affected the writers' room, cast, and ongoing story lines of the show. An actor uttered a homophobic slur, which received wide media coverage, and which ultimately led *Grey’s Anatomy* to create a compelling, true-to-life lesbian story line.

[1.2] This essay examines the discourse surrounding these events, including news reports and audience reaction to the story lines developed in response to the scandal. The LGBT fan community I examine here is Erica_Callie, a LiveJournal (LJ) community, which was highly active during the 2008–9 TV season, with over 1,800 individual posts and tens of thousands of comments.

[1.3] The production response to real-life events relies on underlying production-culture knowledge of media concepts, such as authenticity, audience identification, and emotional realism, as a remedy for the damage inflicted by the scandal on both the show and the affected LGBT audience. The development of the lesbian story line in
Grey's Anatomy was an act of industry public relations; the story line was constructed to develop and resonate with LGBT audiences.

2. Inciting industry incident: The Knight/Washington scandal

[2.1] The introduction of a major lesbian story line on Grey's Anatomy began not in the writers' room but on set with the use of a slur (figure 1). The instigating event occurred on October 9, 2006, when the actors Isaiah Washington (who plays Dr. Preston Burke) and Patrick Dempsey (Dr. Derek Shepherd) had an argument on set. Washington was overheard calling cast mate T. R. Knight (Dr. George O'Malley) a faggot (Wyatt 2007a). News of the incident spread quickly as entertainment magazines, news programs, and major newspapers reported the exchange. Washington publicly apologized to Knight in a press release the next week. On October 19, 2006, Knight for the first time made a public statement regarding his sexual orientation, confirming that he was gay. There were no additional press releases from any of the parties involved in the incident.

![Figure 1](http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/667278/Coming-Out-on-Greys-Anatomy/)

**Figure 1.** Detailed timeline of industry events, story points, and fan response. An interactive version is available [here](http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/667278/Coming-Out-on-Greys-Anatomy/). [View larger image.]

[2.2] On January 15, 2007, Grey's Anatomy won a Golden Globe award for best television drama. Washington broke from the cast lineup, approached the press microphone, and denied ever calling Knight a faggot while using the offensive word yet again ("Sound Bites" 2007). Washington's outburst tainted the win by reinvigorating the original scandal. The resulting media frenzy marginalized not only Knight but also the efforts of the cast and crew. After the second incident, Washington fired his press agent, made yet another public apology, met with the president of GLAAD, Neil G. Giuliano, and entered counseling for his behavior (Wyatt 2007b). Washington was not fired outright, but his contract was up for negotiation, and his placement on the program was not assured.

[2.3] In late May, Washington released a public service announcement (PSA) created in conjunction with GLAAD and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), which aired on ABC, to further address his behavior (video 1).
[2.4] However, producer Shonda Rhimes deemed Washington's efforts insufficient, and his contract was not renewed. Washington's eventual departure and the events that led up to that decision were directly responsible for the program's collaboration with GLAAD on the development of a new story line for season 4. This lesbian story line was an act of industry public relations, constructed to address LGBT audiences' concerns regarding representation.

[2.5] Nikki Weiss and Trish Doolan, filmmakers and GLAAD representatives, collaborated with the program's producing and writing staff to develop a romantic story line featuring Callie Torres (played by Sara Ramirez) and Erica Hahn (Brooke Smith) for season 4. They also spoke with the actresses about portraying lesbian and bisexual identities. Weiss and Doolan stated that the production team "didn't want to stereotype anything" ("Behind the Lesbian Story Line on Grey's Anatomy," 2008) and asked for personal examples for reference. The season 4 cliffhanger, Callie and Erica's first kiss, began the only lesbian/bisexual relationship with "regular" characters on network television at that time (note 1). The success of these characters and the story line is attributed to the detailed, well-developed, and authentic representations that Grey's Anatomy constructed; the program created a set of characters and experiences designed for a specific audience to identify with.

3. Authenticity and emotional realism

[3.1] Creating quality representations involves the concept of authenticity or verisimilitude. Defining authenticity is subjective; Charles Lindholm describes it as "the
leading member of a set of values that includes sincere, essential, natural, original and real." The function of authenticity is to provide discernible, if ineffable, qualities through which people can create social groups that provide members with "meaning, unity and a surpassing sense of belonging" (2008, 1). The Grey's Anatomy producers, writers, and cast, through their collaboration with GLAAD, actively pursued the ideal of authenticity when developing the new queer story line by leveraging first-person accounts and LGBT advocates at all levels of production. Notably, Ramirez and Smith's connection with GLAAD's Weiss and Doolan enhanced their performances, making these representations emotionally resonant.

[3.2] In their analyses of fandom communities, Ien Ang and Henry Jenkins both focus on the visceral reaction of the individual to the media text. Ang defines the concept of "emotional realism" as truth of feeling (1984, 41). Emotional realism, when found in actors' performances, intends to be read as emotionally authentic. The audience validates this authenticity by establishing an emotional connection. Henry Jenkins (1992) argues that emotional realism is constructed by the audience through identification with the characters. Representations become authentic for the viewer when he or she identifies with the characters and situations on screen. Grey's Anatomy purposefully constructed story lines and characterizations meant to appeal to a specific minority group as authentic.

4. Erica's epiphany and Brookegate

[4.1] The development of the Callie/Erica romantic story line occurred over the course of two seasons, featuring several episodes devoted to pivotal moments in their relationship. The episode 4.13 "Piece of My Heart" features Callie's resistance to her attraction to Erica. In 4.16–17 "Freedom," Callie and Erica begin awkwardly courting. In 5.04 "Brave New World" and 5.05 "There's No 'I' in Team," Callie goes to friends for romantic advice regarding her new relationship. Though Callie is clearly the dominant character, it is Erica's sexual awakening that is the culmination of the story line.

[4.2] In 5.06 "Life during Wartime," Callie and Erica have sex. In the morning-after scene, both Erica and Callie have a sexual revelation—but not the same one. Erica describes it as an epiphany, like "needing glasses" as a child. However, Callie does not share this revelation; instead, she is alienated by Erica's sexual awaking (video 2).
These two diverse experiences of a single shared experience are common for individuals discovering their sexual orientation (Stevens and Wunder 2002). Broadcast television does not typically attempt representations of this sort; instead, characters are introduced as already established in their LGBTQ identity, or the coming-out process is glossed over quickly (note 2). *Grey's Anatomy*, however, depicted awkward moments and struggles in finding a queer identity in a way that was both authentic and distinctive.

The framing of the actors' performance and the melodrama presented in the scene emphasize the importance of the narrative moment. The camera creates distance between the characters and highlights the emotional impact of Erica's epiphany. David Thorburn asserts that "television melodrama is an authentically popular art" that derives its popularity from the simultaneous presentation of ordinary reality and heightened emotions that are rarely presented in everyday life but that specifically allow for a connection between audience and performance (2000, 606). Erica is consistently in close-up, which accentuates the subtleties of the actress's performance and heightens the moment's emotional impact. The camera frames Callie in a wider shot than Erica, creating distance between the characters both physically and emotionally. The scene's filmic language directs viewers to identify with Erica's performance and to experience her feelings of emotional distance and rejection. The scene ends with a filmic punctuation as Erica's close-up abruptly changes to a long shot that includes Callie, thus creating a void between the characters. This
foreshadows the distance growing between the two characters' mental spaces—and ultimately the demise of their romance.

[4.5] In 5.07 "Rise Up," Erica and Callie have a disagreement over a patient scandal from 2 years ago, which Erica has only now become aware of. The conflict quickly dissolves into an argument about their relationship. In this scene, Erica and Callie start the conversation in a series of medium shots and shot/reverse shots. As Erica becomes increasingly angry, her medium shot tracks into a close-up while Callie remains in a medium shot. Erica's argument is based on a simple sense of morality that has created a binary: good versus bad, white versus black. She sees no moral middle ground in the situation and believes that Callie must side with her in the decision to report the hospital's error.

[4.6] This moral binary quickly shifts to a romantic one, when, at the climax of Erica's tirade, she says, "There is no gray area here...You can't kind of be a lesbian." It is only here that Callie's reverse shot tracks into a close-up. Callie's response is simple: "Yes, I can." Erica turns to leave, and the camera cuts to a long shot of her walking into the night. Erica has broken up with Callie; she has left Seattle Grace Hospital only one episode after declaring her orientation as "so gay."

[4.7] Indeed, Grey's Anatomy eliminated Erica the episode after her spectacular coming-out scene and after only 25 on-screen episode appearances; Smith had a main-cast contract for the season, and her final episode was only the seventh of the 24 scheduled. Though her relatively short run on Grey's Anatomy limited her newly realized representation of a lesbian identity on television, her emotionally authentic representation energized fans to create LJ communities devoted to the character and her relationship with Callie. Smith's firing and Callie and Erica's breakup was dubbed Brookegate by fans of the couple in the LJ community Erica_Callie.

[4.8] Moderators of the Erica_Callie community eloquently sum up the shock of the announcement felt by fans in a statement made January 30, 2009:

[4.9] The Erica_Callie community was stunned at the seemingly cavalier attitude towards an important depiction of lesbian and bisexual women on television. Having viewed Erica Hahn's beautiful coming out monologue only the week before, we were even more invested. It felt very personal. (LJ, rhyfeddu)

[4.10] In November 2008, two community moderators, Aly and Alicia, began an online scrapbook where community members could e-mail or post their appreciation of Smith, the character of Erica, and the representation of a lesbian voice on broadcast TV (figure 2). The "Scrapbook for Brooke" posts have the most comments in the 6-
year history of the community, aside from live reaction posts. Aly and Alicia created video blogs of their efforts to create a physical scrapbook to share with the community. They also shared Smith's response to the tribute in a locked members-only post. This call for action, the overwhelming response from the fandom, and the interaction between fans and the show (via Smith) document the strong fan identification.

**Figure 2.** Cover for fan page "A Scrapbook for Brooke," a tribute to the actress, Brooke Smith, who played the character of Erica Hahn. Smith was fired one episode after her character's coming-out scene. [View larger image.]

[4.11] In January 2009, the moderators created a special entry permanently linked in their layout: "Scrapbook for Brooke" (http://erica-callie.livejournal.com/98949.html). This tribute includes graphics and quotes from community members, such as the one shown in figure 3.

**Figure 3.** Example of an entry in the Erica_Callie LiveJournal "Scrapbook for Brooke" by bandwidth_limit, November 4, 2008. [View larger image.]

[4.12] The lesbian representations of Callie and Erica were considered to be authentic by the members of this community. The identification was so strong that the
couples breakup and Smiths firing caused emotional distress and passionate responses from community members. The response critiqued the ideological message that ABC was broadcasting, supported the representation of lesbians on the show, and thanked the actress who helped create a representation on television that they could identify with. Unlike the prevalent "lesbian kiss" sweeps trend, which features a one-off and short-lived lesbian romance to boost ratings (Heffernan 2005), Callie's exploration of her sexual identity does not end with her breakup with Erica but becomes an ongoing aspect of her character.

[4.13] Callie continues pursuing her queerness throughout her time on Grey's Anatomy, including a long-term relationship with Arizona Robbins (played by Jessica Capshaw) that lasts for six seasons before ending in divorce and joint custody of their daughter. Even after the end of her marriage, Callie continues to attempt lesbian relationships. She eventually leaves Grey-Sloan Memorial Hospital (formerly Seattle Grace) to pursue a relationship with Penny Blake (Samantha Sloyan) in New York at the end of season 12 (Ramirez had requested an exit from the show).

5. Conclusion: Fan call for action

[5.1] The existence and quality of minority representations in broadcast television are particularly important for communities that are still fighting for legal and social equality. A variety of lesbian and bisexual primary characters, as well as LGBT recurring characters and LGBT-themed episodes, enhance diversity on Grey's Anatomy. Unlike the majority of televisual history, where representation was cobbled together with subtext and slash fan fiction (such as Xena: Warrior Princess, syndication, 1995–2001), Grey's Anatomy and its direct antecedents, ER (NBC, 1994–2009) and Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB, 1997–2003), kicked off the current rise in canonical LGBT representation on TV. It is therefore fitting that the founding members of the Callie_Arizona LJ community directly call for inclusion:

[5.2] Now we know that its time for lesbians to be portrayed on network television as something other than the token best friend or guest star. It is time for lesbians to be at the forefront of story lines the same way that heterosexuals are. (February 2, 2009)

[5.3] LGBT fans of Grey's Anatomy hold the production, writing team, and network responsible for providing high-quality, complex, and authentic LGBT characters on the show. Likewise, fans call for the expansion of LGBT representation in programming to include characters that are more than stereotypes and sidekicks. Fans continue to highlight the inadequacies of lesbian portrayals on broadcast television: the fan uproar over the death of Lexa (Alycia Debnam Carey) on The 100 (CW, 2014–) serves as an
example of the resurgence of the "bury your gays" trope (note 3). However, programs such as *Grey's Anatomy* provide some hope that equality in representation is possible.

6. Notes

1. There have been a few lesbian relationships previously on prime-time network television: Willow and Tara (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, seasons 4–6); and Kerry Weaver with Kim Legaspi and then Sandy Torres (*ER*, seasons 7–10). Callie’s on-screen relationships are visible longer than their predecessors and do not fall prey to the "bury your gays" trope.


3. Twenty-seven, or 22 percent, of all LGBT characters on broadcast and cable television were killed off in the 2015–16 season, causing fans to rally and to create LGBT Fans Deserve Better ([http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/](http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/)) and the Lexa Pledge ([http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/pledge/](http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/pledge/)), devoted to improving LGBT representation and creating a voluntary production code (Framke, Zarracina, and Frostenson 2016; GLAAD 2015).

7. Works cited


Symposium

Bisexual erasure in queer sci-fi "utopias"

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Abstract—I discuss the paradoxes of queer representation in contemporary science fiction television by analyzing bisexual female protagonists of the CW's The 100 (2014–), BBC America's Orphan Black (2013–), and SyFy's Wynonna Earp (2016–). Queer female fans engage in femslash to make sense of the utopic intentions of executive producers who attempt to create better queer representation through labelless premises that de-emphasize queerness.

Keywords—Science fiction; Television


I will remember how to write your name, Clarke, but do not delude yourself into thinking I would change my way of living for you because you fell from the sky with lust for a utopia that does not exist.

—nightshifted, "(I Wanna Be) Your Left Hand Man"

1. Introduction

1.1 Contemporary science fiction television attempts to create queer utopias in an effort to articulate what a postqueer world may look like. Here I consider science fiction programming as an example of "utopia as a stage" (Muñoz 2009, 99). I am particularly interested in how content creators frame their narratives in worlds/utopias that could be and how this struggle between the real present and the fictional future proves to put queer female fans in a paradoxical position when consuming such programming.

1.2 Bisexual fans additionally have to deal with a larger real-world social phenomenon, bisexual erasure, a process that works to enforce the belief that bisexuality is not a legitimate sexuality or simply does not exist (note 1). The term was coined in 2000 by legal scholar Kenji Yoshino, who notes that "bisexuals are
invisible in modern American society and that this invisibility arises from erasure rather than nonexistence" (388). Unlike Yoshino, however, I assert that the invisibility of bisexual characters on television may be a combination of both erasure and nonexistence because there are so few bisexual characters on television. In fact, bisexual characters, compared to gay and lesbian characters, are very few, and those that do exist are often depicted stereotypically (note 2).

[1.3] An illustrative example is that of the character of Clarke Griffin (Eliza Taylor), the protagonist of CW's sci-fi program *The 100* (2014–). Despite using dystopian tropes, executive producer Jason Rothenberg has insisted that the world of *The 100* leans toward utopia in terms of its representations of sexuality. Rothenberg refuses to use sexuality labels in the program, which some critics have praised as being "progressive" and "groundbreaking" (Peitzman 2016). Despite these claims, Rothenberg's evasion of definitive labels may actually contribute to the erasure of the program's bisexual protagonist.

[1.4] In contrast with the example of Clarke are those of the characters Cosima Niehaus (Tatiana Maslany) and Delphine Cormier (Évelyne Brochu) of BBC America's *Orphan Black* (2013–). Unlike *The 100*, *Orphan Black* is a scientific/technological utopia that embraces sexuality labels, which becomes problematic for Delphine when she is labeled a lesbian by her girlfriend and others. Science fiction programs like *The 100* and *Orphan Black* allow producers to envision better worlds and allow queer female fandoms to question their relationship to their televisual representations by actively engaging in femslash and social media activism. We see bisexual fans "lust for a utopia that does not exist," but what happens when they paradoxically reject the utopias given to them in these sci-fi programs?

2. Dystopic world with utopian ideals

[2.1] In the world of *The 100*, sexuality labels do not exist. Rothenberg admits this is "the way I wish our world was" (Li 2016). But is a labelless world the best way to represent and be inclusive of different sexualities on television? On the one hand, the refusal to use labels can create an egalitarian premise where sexuality is not the defining quality of a character. However, it can also be a way to evade discussions of sexuality and thus promote bisexual erasure by taking away the opportunity for self-identification for bisexual characters. Without labels, and thus verbal cues, audiences must rely solely on visual and narrative cues to decode sexuality on *The 100*.

[2.2] Clarke's sexuality has long been an issue of debate among fans of *The 100*. During the first and second seasons of the show, Clarke has a male love interest, Finn (Thomas McDonell), whom she is shown having sex with. After Finn is sentenced to
death by Commander Lexa (Alycia Debnam-Carey) for massacring one of Lexa's people's villages, Clarke mercy kills him to save him from being tortured to death. Finn's death marks a truce between Clarke and Lexa's people. As they burn his body on a pyre in 2.09 "Remember Me," Lexa reveals that she once lost someone special: "Her name was Costia." Lexa advises Clarke that to get over Finn's death, she must accept that love is weakness.

[2.3] After this canonical expression of Lexa's homosexuality, fans began to ask Rothenberg to confirm Lexa's sexual orientation, even though such labels are not permitted in canon. Why were fans so insistent on a label? With so little representation in the media, queer women constantly search for any possible representation, and they engage in subtextual femslash to make up for this lack of canon representation. Thus, when asked by a fan whether Lexa was a lesbian, Rothenberg tweeted, "That's what we'd call her in the real world. In #the100 we just call her HEDA [Commander]" (Twitter, @JRothenbergTV, July 28, 2015).

[2.4] This example illustrates the struggle between the dystopian world of The 100, the utopian ideals set by the producers, and the struggle for positive queer representation sought by fans of the show. The 100's utopian premise falls short when fans and producers on social media sites cannot avoid the imperative to put labels on supposedly labelless characters.

3. Legitimizing bisexuality through visual cues

[3.1] Now that we have seen how Rothenberg constructs Lexa's homosexuality, let's consider how he frames questions of Clarke's bisexuality. In 2.14 "Bodyguard of Lies," Lexa admits to caring for Clarke, going against her personal mantra: love is weakness. Clarke is shocked and storms away. Clarke later apologizes: "Maybe life should be about more than just surviving. Don't we deserve better than that?" Lexa sighs, "Maybe we do," before kissing Clarke, who kisses Lexa back. This marks an important turning point in Clarke's character development: until now, Clarke has focused only on the survival of herself and her people; within this context, the kiss could be interpreted as a manipulative move by Clarke. Yet seeing Clarke as manipulative is puzzling when we consider that being manipulative is a stereotype of bisexual individuals. However, because Clarke lives in a postqueer world, can we reject the stereotype by separating her bisexuality from her manipulative nature?

[3.2] To fully legitimize Clarke's bisexuality, Rothenberg included a scene in the season 3 premiere in which Clarke has a one-night stand with Niylah, a woman who runs a trading post. In an interview, Rothenberg admitted that he chose a female partner over a male partner because he felt "like it needed to be clear that she
[Clarke] is bisexual" (Ryan 2016a). Bisexuality can thus only be legitimized on television by visually depicting a character having sex with people of two different sexes. Rothenberg noted, "She [Clarke] just wants to escape her pain...she's not feeling bad—she's feeling sexual, and that's a good thing" (Peitzman 2016). One female blogger on a feminist media site wrote, "The portrayal of Clarke...plays away from these shallow stereotypes, while not denying her an active sex life" (Bitch Flicks, September 24, 2015). Again, there is a tension between stereotypes and depictions of queer sexuality in *The 100*, which is made extremely complex by Rothenberg's self-proclaimed egalitarian premise.

[3.3] Even though the program's labelless premise does not allow Clarke to self-identify as bisexual, this does not take away from the fact that Clarke's queerness is canon. One fan, who identifies herself as bisexual in her post, wrote this on Tumblr: "Here was a bisexual character who simply...existed...Her bisexuality wasn't her sole defining characteristic, but it was also an essential and important part of her identity" (whovianfeminism, March 19, 2016). Queer female fans thus simultaneously and paradoxically emphasize queerness and deemphasize queerness. I now turn to how this paradox is also apparent in programs that use sexuality labels.

4. A world full of labels: The better alternative?

[4.1] Unlike *The 100*, *Orphan Black* presents itself as a utopian world that embraces sexuality labels. However, like *The 100*, producers of *Orphan Black* have worked to assure fans that sexuality is not the most interesting thing about a character, nor should it be (note 3).

[4.2] The portrayal of female bisexuality on *Orphan Black* is convoluted. Let's first consider Delphine's girlfriend, Cosima Niehaus, a fellow PhD student studying evolutionary development. According to Tatiana Maslany, executive producers/cocreators John Fawcett and Graeme Manson told her that Cosima is bisexual. In an interview, Maslany said she "could feel it [Cosima's bisexuality] in the writing even when it wasn't explicit," and she felt that "she [Cosima] identifies as bisexual, and very much understands her sexuality as a spectrum from a scientific viewpoint...Cosima just loves people" (Anne 2013). Yet Cosima never self-identifies as a bisexual woman, instead using the labels "gay" or "lesbian" to describe her sexuality. There is a discrepancy between what the producers label a character as and what the character self-identifies as in the program's world, much like Rothenberg and his use of labels on Twitter to describe characters on *The 100*.

[4.3] The word "bisexual" is only used once in *Orphan Black*, when Delphine admits to Cosima, "I have never thought about bisexuality [until you kissed me]. I mean, for
myself...But as a scientist, I know that sexuality is a spectrum. But you know, social biases, they codified attraction. It's contrary to the biological facts" (1.08 "Entangled Bank"). After this, Delphine never references her sexuality; Cosima and her friends label her as lesbian or gay.

[4.4] Even though sexuality on Orphan Black is determined through a combination of visual and verbal cues, wrongly labeling a character's sexuality is problematic and can also work to produce bisexual erasure. Labels do not automatically make for better bisexual representation even though verbally acknowledging bisexuality as a legitimate sexuality is extremely important to many bisexual members of the fandom. Like Clarke, Delphine's character is riddled with bisexual stereotypes (mainly Delphine's use of manipulation). Can we excuse these stereotypes as simple characterization in a queer utopia where sexuality doesn't matter?

5. Conclusion: Queer female representation after the "disposable spring"

[5.1] The dead are gone, Clarke. The living are hungry.

—Lexa, 2.09 "Remember Me," The 100

[5.2] Queer female fans who engage in femslash fandom on sites such as Tumblr and Twitter seek validation from producers and writers who are paradoxically in turn being blamed for invalidating the experiences of said fans through the "bury your gays" (BYG) trope. Maureen Ryan (2016b) dubbed the spring 2016 television season the "disposable spring," noting the high death rate of sexual-minority characters. According to a list compiled by Vox (and later by LGBT Fans Deserve Better) (note 4), queer women (bisexual/gay) constituted 10 percent of the total deaths on television during the 2015–16 season despite accounting for less than 4 percent of the total characters on television (Framke, Zarracina, and Frostenson 2016; LGBT Fans Deserve Better 2016). Many show runners who have killed off queer women have claimed that doing so does not contribute to the BYG trope because their characters were more than their queer identities. To these producers, their utopic views on queerness seem to separate them from being blamed for using stereotypes and tropes because their characters "just happened" to be queer (note 5).

[5.3] Many queer female fans have pointed to SyFy's Wynonna Earp (2016–) as the end of the disposable spring and the start of a promise for positive queer representation on television. Wynonna Earp, a Canadian sci-fi western about a woman who must rid her town of undead demons, features a queer female couple with a happy ending (at least as of season 1). Waverly Earp (Dominique Provost-Chalkley), sister of Wynonna (Melanie Scrofano), breaks up with her boyfriend and starts a
relationship with the town's deputy, Officer Nicole Haught (Katherine Barrell). When Nicole is shot in the season's finale episode (1.13 "I Walk the Line"), she lives because she is wearing a bulletproof vest. Many fans on social media sites called the scene a satirical take on the BYG trope (figure 1). This scene is the antithesis to Lexa's death scene in 3.07 "Thirteen," which aired 3 months before, in which Lexa is killed by a stray bullet to the stomach only minutes after finally consummating her relationship with Clarke.

![Image](http://lenaluthcr.tumblr.com/post/146471221672/nicole-throwing-the-bullet-trope-away)

**Figure 1.** A satirical take on Wynonna Earp's season 1 finale episode, 1.13 "I Walk the Line." In this fan-made GIF, Nicole throws away the bullet caught in her bulletproof vest as her girlfriend, Waverly, cries out in relief. The bullet is changed to "BYG" (bury your gays) to symbolize Nicole's (and executive producer Emily Andras's) challenge to and rejection of the BYG trope ([http://lenaluthcr.tumblr.com/post/146471221672/nicole-throwing-the-bullet-trope-away](http://lenaluthcr.tumblr.com/post/146471221672/nicole-throwing-the-bullet-trope-away)).

[5.4] Emily Andras, executive producer of *Wynonna Earp*, has refused to label Waverly's sexuality (though most fans have agreed that Waverly is bisexual). Yet when asked in an interview about Nicole's sexuality, Andras confidently replied, "She's definitely L [L in LGBT]. She's full L" (Snarker 2016). Even in this fan-acclaimed utopia, *Wynonna Earp* seems to find it easy to accept with certainty Nicole's homosexuality but has a hard time with the ambiguous nature of Waverly's potential bisexuality. Ironically, fans do not seem to be concerned with this. Instead, they are just happy that WayHaught (Waverly/Nicole Haught) is canon and alive. Fans trust Andras in part because she was an executive producer on *Lost Girl* (2010–15), a Canadian sci-fi show with a bisexual lead and one of television's only queer female happy endings.

[5.5] Is Andras's *Wynonna Earp* the utopia queer female fans have been searching for? Is it a space (or perhaps a stage) where queer women live and love without tropes? This depends on how future seasons of the program address Waverly's
sexuality. In the meantime, queer female fandoms engage in a sort of paradoxical femslash, wishing for a world in which queerness is not the defining characteristic of television characters, yet also wanting characters who embrace their queerness. Muñoz reminds us that "utopia is an idealist mode of critique that reminds us that there is something missing, that the present and presence (and its opposite number, absence) is not enough" (2009, 100). Will it ever be enough for queer female fandom, or will these fans always be lusting for this queer utopia, to no avail?

6. Acknowledgment

[6.1] I extend my most sincere gratitude to my mentor, Hunter Hargraves, who encouraged and assisted me throughout the writing process.

7. Notes

1. Though Yoshino (2000) is credited for coining the term "bisexual erasure," he does not give a clear definition of it. Thus, for a definition of bisexual erasure, I instead used that of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD) (http://www.glaad.org/bisexual/bierasure).

2. See GLAAD's "Where We Are on TV Report—2015" (http://www.glaad.org/whereweareontv15), 26, for a full numerical breakdown of bisexual characters on American broadcast, cable, and streaming television in 2015–16.

3. This refers to an exchange between Rachel (Tatiana Maslany) and Cosima in which Rachel interrupts Cosima and Delphine as they kiss and says, "So, you're gay." Cosima replies, "My sexuality's not the most interesting thing about me" (2.02 "Governed by Sound Reason and True Religion").

4. LGBT Fans Deserve Better is a (politically charged) movement/activist group created by fans (after Lexa's death on The 100) in an effort to increase awareness around the BYG trope/queer media representation (http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/). The movement has created a fund-raiser for the Trevor Project (raising more than $137,000) and written the Lexa Pledge (http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/pledge/).

5. To see how producers have processed fans' reactions to the death of queer characters on The 100 and Orphan Black, see Rothenberg's (2016) "apology" to the fandom, written 3 weeks after Lexa's death, and Maslany's (who is also a producer on Orphan Black) and Manson/Fawcett's addressing of Delphine's "death" in the season 3 finale (Patch 2016).
8. Works cited


Symposium

Once Upon a Time in queer fandom

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[0.1] Abstract—I approach the topic of queer female fandom through the television program Once Upon a Time (2011–) and its femslash fan fiction in order to investigate how fans explore queer scenarios and deal with narrative weaknesses of the canon story line.

[0.2] Keywords—Fan fiction; Femslash; SwanQueen; Television

1. Rediscovering the Evil Queen through fan fiction

[1.1] Fandom can mean many things: community, creativity, agency, freedom, sexuality, queerness, and so much more. We are fans, collectively and individually; some of us are even brave or foolish enough to devote not only our free time but also a part of our professional lives to fandom. Here I explore the SwanQueen fandom of Once Upon a Time (2011–) and its potential to bridge the gap between fan and scholar, for me personally and perhaps for other (aca)fans as well. I explore the relationship between SwanQueen femslash fan fiction and its reimaginings of the Evil Queen we know from fairy tales that we may have encountered as children and that still accompany us today. I ask questions of how fannish lesbian or queer versions of Regina Mills, the Evil Queen, and her relationship to Emma Swan, the Savior, can take on issues of sexuality and consent. In this sense I am not introducing entirely new concepts or theories of fandom studies; rather, I am attempting to explain how femslash fan fiction is a way to enter into a complicated, passionate, and ambiguous relationship with the material we are presented with. I also attempt to explain what queer female fandom means to me and where I see transgressive potential that has changed my view on something as traditional and patriarchal as fairy tales.

[1.2] The character of Regina Mills is a fan favorite. This popularity is in part due to the versatile interpretations fans can ascribe to this new incarnation of the Evil Queen. Even in earlier versions of the Evil Queen, I and many other fans were more fascinated
by this character than any of the princesses. As one critic noted of the Disney films *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950), "Both films concentrate with exuberant glee on the towering, taloned, raven-haired wicked stepmother; all Disney's powers failed to save the princes from featureless banality and his heroines from saccharine sentimentality. Authentic power lies with the bad women, and the plump cozy fairy godmother in *Cinderella* seems no match for them" (Warner 1995, 207). The audience of *Once Upon a Time* is presented with a new version of this bad woman, the powerful Evil Queen.

[1.3] This time, however, the TV program also provides a multilayered backstory that has not only turned Regina into a fan favorite but also attempts to explain how she even became the Evil Queen and why her hatred for Snow White runs so deep. For several episodes of the first season, fans waited patiently for the explanation of why Regina went as far as killing her own father in order to enact the Dark Curse, only to be presented with a story of puppy love and yet another evil mother. Young Regina was in love with the stable boy, but her mother, a vindictive woman hell-bent on climbing the social ladder, did not agree with the relationship. Instead she arranged a marriage between Regina and the king, using Princess Snow White as bait in her ploy. Regina had no interest in marrying the king and planned to run away with her stable boy. Snow White caught them in the act, and Regina made the young girl promise to keep her affair with the stable boy a secret. Of course nothing went according to plan. Snow White spilled Regina's secret to her villainous mother, who then killed the stable boy and robbed Regina of her one true love.

[1.4] Fans did not seem satisfied with this explanation, and, as is often the case with disappointing and incomplete narratives, other writers took it upon themselves to expand on these ideas and shift the focus from the spilling of a secret by a young girl toward the abusive relationship between Regina and her mother, as well as the marriage into which she was forced. Elizabeth Wanning Harries's theory of transliteration as a mode to transform old narrative patterns is instructive here. By using transliteration, authors "play, rather, on our memory of salient images, often apparently peripheral details, transforming them into new centers of meaning" (2001, 136). These new centers of meaning are the dark yet intriguing scenarios that *Once Upon a Time* fan fiction and femslash authors use to delve further into untold depths of the story and attempt to explain and underscore Regina's transformation into the Evil Queen. As a result of her own mother's meddling, Regina was forced to marry a man, the king, three times her age to become Snow White's stepmother. The TV program completely ignores the implications of such a medieval marriage between an old king and his young bride. But fan fiction writers do not shy away from exploring this particular family constellation, which has been at the center of many a fairy tale. How much must Regina have suffered finally to plot and orchestrate the king's murder?
What happened to drive her to such extremes? Fan fiction writers logically extrapolate the clues provided in the program through the lens of femslash, uncovering parallels to same-sex desire in that they explore the differences between being forced into a "proper" union versus the desired improper one.

2. Reading between the lines

[2.1] In SgtMac's story "Stop" (2016), this particular phase of Regina's past is discussed when "a night of passion between Regina and Emma ends up turning into an opportunity for the two of them to discuss the traumas of their sexual pasts and to then set boundaries in their still very young romantic relationship with each other." Already in the author's notes the reader is warned of the content of the story and the nonconsensual relationship between Regina and King Leopold. This so-called trigger warning is not only a sign of awareness and willingness to deal with the underlying issues of a television program but also hints toward fans' own experiences and care for fandom and potential readers. Furthermore, Regina's history with the king and her loveless marriage is often used as a backdrop in femslash for explaining her actions, her issues with relinquishing control, and specifically her reservations or dislikes in sexual situations. In "Stop," Regina interrupts her moment of sexual pleasure with Emma because Emma has been restraining Regina bodily, not knowing that this passionate embrace would bring back painful memories:

[2.2] Yesterday, she would have just closed her eyes and told herself to focus on the feel of Emma's warm reassuring hands, and the softness of her lips as they traced their way down, and both of those things would have been easy for Regina to do. Today, though, she sees flashes of something behind her eyes every time she closes them.

[2.3] Tonight, she hears a door closing and hears footsteps approaching, and they're too heavy to be Emma's—Emma doesn't walk softly or gracefully, but she has never walked like that. Tonight, the hands holding her wrists above her head send her back forty-five years and she can't.

[2.4] She just can't.

[2.5] "Stop," Regina whispers. And then says it again. Louder, almost frantic. Pleading, even.

[2.6] Emma ceases her movement and her touches almost immediately, frowning (perhaps no one is as attuned to that word as Emma is, and it makes Regina wonder about all of the things in her lover's background and history that she's never really had the courage to ask her about). (chapter 1)
The topic of consent is of utmost importance here, and "Stop" illustrates how fan fiction can deal with it in a self-aware fashion. In the canonical story line, Regina enters into heterosexual relationships, first with the Huntsman and later with Robin Hood, but her arranged marriage is never a topic that is brought up by either party. Even when her mother returns for one last attempt at regaining her former glory, the fact that she forced her daughter to marry a much older man remains a nonissue. Of course, a television program on ABC dealing with fairy tales—a program that is supposed to attract audiences from a wide range of age groups—will likely never attempt to disentangle all the subtext that has been hinted at in canon; yet the gaps obviously leave fans unsatisfied as they take it upon themselves to explore these silences. Femslash is not only an outcome of this dissatisfaction but also a hopeful glance at how fans deal with veiled topics. SwanQueen creates a space where female concerns, even queer distress, are not merely brushed aside but discussed and dealt with—discussions that I and other fans find pleasurable in many ways.

3. The wicked stepmother

Although Regina's past as King Leopold's young bride is frequently acknowledged and discussed in femslash fan fiction, Regina is also coded as an erotic character, charged with dark sexuality and the potential for more than vanilla sex. One fic that well addresses the loss-of-innocence trope and the imagining of "deviant" sexualities is "The Wicked Stepmother" by seriousish (2012), which is rated mature. It breaks with conventions even as it bends them forward and backward; readers' comments note that it is "strangely appealing," with readers who "simply could not stop reading." The crossing of queerness, fandom, and sexual identities is especially vivid in this story. Teenage Emma is seduced by an older, stepmother-like Regina who wants to spite her cursed nemesis, Snow White. Emma is drawn into a romantic and sexual relationship that cannot be easily defined; it leaves the reader wondering what exactly the nature of their liaison is. Red Riding Hood, or her Storybrooke counterpart, Ruby, is also a part of this threefold affair as she serves as a catalyst for Emma's eventual surrender to Regina's charms. This fan fic plays with many popular tropes, from the age gap between the three women to the BDSM scenes; it does not shy away from reimagining these characters as sexual beings who take and grant pleasure. By staying within canon boundaries and depicting Regina as a strong, villainous woman who acts completely outside of stereotypical and heteronormative ideals, the characters explore deviant sexualities in the form of varying BDSM practices. Additionally, the author's notes provide a few tongue-in-cheek comments and show that the story is a kink fic that doesn't take itself too seriously with its canon-bending reimagination of the Evil Queen.
However, the value of this interpretation lies in the reversal of traditional roles women traditionally occupy in fairy tales. Purity—a virtue in the stories of Snow White or Red Riding Hood—is subverted in favor of an exploration of queer sexualities that defy normative traditions and frameworks. "The Wicked Stepmother" is also an example of how Once Upon a Time has opened up traditional fairy tales for queer readings and transformations, whether to explore deviant sexualities or to reinterpret the wicked stepmother as a queer trope with erotic dimensions. In a few lines, seriousish has wonderfully combined both the queer reinterpretation of Regina’s character and the notion that other Enchanted Forest inhabitants are in some respects no less deviant than the Evil Queen herself:

"I am the Evil Queen," Regina retorted, almost wistfully. Like someone would say they were an amputee. "I always will be. I'm just something else as well."

"What?"

"Yours."

Emma buried her head in her hands for a long moment before standing. "God. I'm so fucking pissed at you. This is like finding out I live in a town full of psychos and no one ever told me. The next-door neighbors have sliced people's heads off and think thirteen-year-olds should be married off to fucking Prince Humperdink, they just don't remember it, do they?"

4. Conclusion

SwanQueen femslash challenges the unspoken assumptions of heteronormative marriage and the innocence or purity of heroines versus the poisonous evil of their wicked counterparts. Stories such as SgtMac's "Stop" or seriousish's "The Wicked Stepmother" provide insight into the diverse positions of a character and explore these versions as queer multiplicities of sexuality and trauma. These literary engagements with the canon text are part of queer world building and challenge notions of identity and sexuality by creating new contexts. Fleshing out characters with meaningful backstories is one aspect that fan fiction excels at. I sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between canon and fan fiction: the fan fiction stories supply important facts that explain situations, behavior, and tropes in such a way that they enrich, even improve, the canonical story line.

SwanQueen fandom provides a space for diverse queer female explorations. Queer female fandom has inspired me and encouraged me to see that thoughtful
discussions and depictions of sexuality and trauma are possible. I wasn't born at the right time to understand the chemistry between Xena and Gabrielle when Xena: Warrior Princess (1995–2001) first aired, but I enjoy going back and looking at how femslash writers before me have opened up these ongoing discussions of queer female love—and, perhaps following in their footsteps, I continue in their vein, writing about women on television who are queer in my eyes and in my stories. I inhabit my fandoms, including SwanQueen, Bering & Wells (from Warehouse 13 [2009–14]), Jessica Jones (from Jessica Jones [2015–]), and Lexa and Clarke (from The 100 [2014–]) and their depictions of strong, multilayered women. I read Tumblr posts talking about queer female fandom and find acceptance. And I hope that the future holds more queer women on screen, with less violence enacted upon them and more kisses, smoldering glances, and everything in between.

[4.3] Looking at SwanQueen femslash is only one way of combining my fannish interests and my academic aspirations. As an academic, I want to encourage and be encouraged to work in this field. As a fan, I want to read stories and share my arguments and thoughts. Once Upon a Time and SwanQueen fic provides me with an access point to start writing new versions of old tales and to show that each new reiteration is another new beginning—a new "once upon a time."

5. Acknowledgments

[5.1] I would like to thank Beth Capper, Lynne Joyrich, and Ramsey McGlazer for their invaluable insights on the first version of this article. I also want to express my appreciation to the Once Upon a Time and SwanQueen fandoms; thank you for all those wonderful fics that have kept me up at night.

6. Works cited


Book review

By any media necessary: The new youth activism, by Henry Jenkins et al.

Allison McCracken

[0.1] Keywords—Civic engagement; Digital media; Fandom; Participatory culture; Politics; Youth media


[1] By Any Media Necessary is a major contribution to media and cultural studies scholarship, both for the significance of its subject matter and for those involved in the project. This foundational, timely volume argues that some kinds of youth participation in the digital media sphere represent a new and significant form of political activism that has been unrecognized or trivialized by the public at large. It is the product of 6 years of research by Henry Jenkins and his team at the MacArthur Foundation's Youth and Participatory Politics (MAPP) research network housed at USC. While there are many such digital projects around the country focused on youth Internet use (it seems that every research university has one), MAPP and the Connected Learning Research Network are the two most prominent of these, and both are well funded by the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning Initiative (DML). By Any Media Necessary is the second offering of the NYU book series "Connected Youth and Digital Learning," also supported by the DML.

[2] Jenkins is famous for his previous field-defining interventions in media studies, particularly Textual Poachers ([1992] 2013) and Convergence Culture (2006). Both of these works focus on the intersection of corporate mass media and fandom, with the latter specifically addressing the proliferation and changing nature of these meeting points in the Internet era. Jenkins was especially interested in the way in which the
increasing accessibility of the Internet made the voices, critiques, and creative production of young fans more visible to each other, providing them with new opportunities for peer-to-peer education, mutual support, and civic engagement. The potential of this participatory culture has remained a central interest for Jenkins and the subject of much of his published work since (note 1). He and his team's mission here is to extend the idea of participatory culture into the political realm, examining how for many youth within the United States political change is being promoted "through social and cultural mechanisms rather than through established political institutions" (2).

[3] The volume is both introductory and foundational on this subject and offers both theory and praxis. In two substantial chapters, Jenkins and MAPP director Sangita Shresthova think through the larger questions posed by the project, such as how to conceive of and map the relationship between cultural and political youth media activities; they offer a variety of frames for analysis, many of which are applied and further developed by the authors of five fascinating, very different case study chapters. Elisabeth Soep, senior producer at Oakland's YouthRadio, provides an equally thoughtful afterword. Although By Any Media Necessary's various chapters are by individual authors, the volume's authors are collaborators, and they all use the term "we" to reflect their collective composition. However, given that the volume highlights media activities by demographically varied, multiply identified US-based youth, it does seem important to point out that Jenkins's collaborators are an equally heterogeneous group that includes people of color and immigrants. The resulting text is unusually cohesive because of rather than despite its collective nature; it is ideologically consistent across chapters, and the collective's attention to the realities of social difference is a structural component of the project. It's baked into the cake.

[4] Indeed, By Any Media Necessary is valuable not because it promotes one particular conclusion about the connection between culture and politics but because it does not. The collective's position—to borrow the title and argument of fellow scholar danah boyd's recent valuable study of youth social media use—is that "it's complicated" (boyd 2014). By Any Media Necessary's tremendous worth is in the depth and richness of the conversation, the establishment of the scholarly playing field, the detailed documentation of often ephemeral youth activity (products of years of research), and the often inspirational quality of much of that activity. Case study authors employ multiple methodologies in their research, combining in-depth interviews, ethnography, and textual and material analysis in a number of ways. They grapple with the social diversity of their youthful subjects (including the widely divergent personal stakes involved in their media use), the variety of their media activities, and the shifts in digital technologies, youth organizational structures, and national politics that constantly impact their studies.
It is impossible to read this book outside of our present dystopian context, which makes the work its authors are doing in drawing attention to youth media practices all the more vital. What this collective's compelling case studies make very clear is that it is through these nontraditional modes of communication and within these new media spaces that a great deal of youth civic participation and politicization is happening. The collective effectively refutes the critiques often leveled at clicktivist youth that paint them as apolitical and shallow. They make the excellent (and chillingly accurate) point that media activities such as shared popular culture material and informal peer-to-peer civic education across media have assumed a greater political weight because other forms of youth civic education (such as traditional educational institutions) have broken down. Participatory culture is what many young people have instead, and they use it to teach, support, and encourage each other in ways that adults dismiss at their peril. The urgency of the book's title, an adaptation of the phrase "by any means necessary" popularized by Malcolm X, seems especially appropriate in our current climate, and it is one of several ways in which the collective draws connections between the activities of today's youth and those of the 1960s. Previous politically active youth were likewise disappointed with consensus politics and were inspired by the counterculture; the two groups informed each other, and these authors suggest that similar kinds of cultural/political amalgamations are at work now but in new forms that must be understood, valued, and utilized by progressives. The collective provides examples of many youth activist organizations today that are successful because they offer young people multiple points of entry, including popular culture and participatory forms that have proved very successful in sparking civic engagement (64).

Henry Jenkins provides the hefty and dense 60-page introduction to the subject in the book's first chapter. To his credit, Jenkins is self-aware of his position as a field-defining scholar and he takes full advantage of it, offering an exhaustive review and analysis of the scholarship and activism that has helped shape the collective's thinking. This is a distinctly interdisciplinary study that draws on the work of (among others) digital culture and media studies scholars, social and communication theorists, historians, and media and youth activists. Among the many ideas on offer, some clearly have had greater impact on this project than have others. In particular, the collective's concept of the civic imagination, introduced by Jenkins, frames a great deal of their work. The term was inspired in part by a 2008 talk given by author J. K. Rowling (2008) in which she called for her public to "imagine better" by linking imagination to empathy for persons "beyond the bounds of [one's] own experience." The phrase "imagine better" has inspired a great deal of fan activist engagement, and the authors here combine this idea with communication studies scholar Peter Dahlgren's concept of the "civic" as "an engagement in public life...for the public good" (37). This definition works well for Jenkins because of its broader application to the motivations as well as the practices of youth who may or may not identify politically
but who participate in cultural and educational activities within their communities. The authors employ the concept of the "civic imagination," then, to describe how youth are utilizing the language and symbols of popular media to envision alternatives to seemingly intractable social realities and therefore also begin to "imagine themselves as active political agents" (29). For example, notes Jenkins (citing Zimmerman's research), undocumented youth frequently adapt superhero images, such as illegal alien Superman, as figures of personal and collective empowerment.

[7] Sangita Shresthova's chapter, "'Watch 30 Minute Video, Become Social Activist’?: Kony 2012, Invisible Children, and the Paradox of Participatory Politics" foregrounds the activity of a single youth-focused organization. Invisible Children was founded by three US college students in 2003 to create awareness of civil unrest in Uganda and, in particular, the plight of child soldiers. Leaders frequently employed the language of popular culture and social media to get their message out, culminating in their phenomenally successful YouTube video Kony 2012, which was seen by more than 100 million people in its first week. However, the attention to this video—both supportive and critical—overwhelmed the group's leadership, and Shresthova examines this crisis to understand the kinds of challenges such youth networks face in "promoting change through participatory politics" (77). Her detailed analysis—the product of years spent working with IC organizers and the youth activists inspired by them—provides a useful model for future researchers. She identifies key points of paradox in the organization, such as the group's struggle to maintain control of its messages and initial goals while supporting a large, diffuse, intensely engaged youth population eager for ways to more fully participate.

[8] Both Neta Kligler-Vilenchik's chapter "'Decreasing World Suck': Harnessing Popular Culture for Fan Activism" and Liana Gamber-Thompson's chapter "Bypassing the Ballot Box: How Libertarian Youth Are Reimagining the Political" focus, like Shresthova, on the participatory activities of largely white, privileged youth. Kligler-Vilenchik's chapter foregrounds the charity and human rights organization The Harry Potter Alliance (about which Jenkins has also written) and the Nerdfighters, a subcultural community advocating charity, education, and positive values that is led by self-described "Vlog brothers" and multimedia producers John and Hank Green (Jenkins 2012). Kligler-Vilenchik's is the only chapter that focuses specifically on the complexities of "fan activism," a term that the collective uses to refer to both fan political participation and civic engagement (such as charity work). She again invokes the concept of civic imagination to describe how fans use fantasy to both envision social change and to feel empowered themselves. She notes that fans are well positioned for politicization because they already have communities built around the kinds of intense affective investments that often drive political action, which has greatly facilitated the organization of HPA and the Nerdfighters. HPA is the most
prominent of these civic-minded fan groups, with chapters in 300 community institutions nationwide and abroad; its members engage in a wide variety of cultural, educational, philanthropic, and more traditional political activities that often overlap and converge. Perhaps surprisingly, Liana Gamber-Thompson's study of libertarian youth (the Student Liberty Movement) demonstrates how their media activism also incorporates fannish affective behaviors (centered around favorite philosophers). Unlike fan activists, however, they reject conventional political practices entirely and focus on making change through informal educational activities, especially online learning. Gamber-Thompson provides a useful discussion of the generational shift represented by this self-named "second-generation" of libertarians, who, paradoxically, do receive the financial support of some traditional libertarian think tanks.

[9] The largely white, middle-class privilege of both the libertarians and the fan activists gives them the advantage of social power and reach, but, as the authors observe, their demographic homogeneity has unintended consequences of exclusivity. In regard to fans, for example, Kligler-Vilenchik observes that the taste cultures uniting Nerdfighters (and HPA) are classed and raced in particular ways that inhibit more diverse membership. She develops this important point by drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) and Daniel Dayan's (2005) work on the formation of "taste publics" and "identity publics" to suggest how common experiences, backgrounds, and references connect these overwhelmingly female, white, and middle-class fans in ways that can make others (especially people of color) feel unwelcome. Surprisingly, however, Kligler-Vilenchik does not discuss the way in which these young fans' often intense feminist and LGBTQ affiliations and commitments—often actualized and developed within these communities—have prompted them to engage in a variety of forms of civic engagement, as scholars of youth media fandom such as Louisa Stein (2015) have detailed. Making feminist politics a larger part of the conversation here would certainly enrich Kligler-Vilenchik's analysis, as shared feminist and LGBTQ identifications often help fans to make connections across class and racial lines.

[10] The next two chapters, Sangita Shresthova's "Between Storytelling and Surveillance: The Precarious Public of American Muslim Youth" and Liana Gamber-Thompson and Arely M. Zimmerman's "DREAMing Citizenship: Undocumented Youth, Coming Out, and Pathways to Participation," shift away from voluntary political engagements by young people to groups of youth whose bodies are always already politicized in the United States: American Muslims and undocumented DREAMers. They represent "precarious publics," youth more in need of empowerment but also more at risk in making their voices public. Shresthova describes how culture and politics are always conflated for American Muslims, a fact that, she argues, has both advantages and disadvantages. Although she makes clear that there are plenty of intracommunity
differences, the fact that youth are already situated within an organized, politicized community means that their cultural work is legitimized (and often supported) by more established, traditional advocacy groups. At the same time, however, young people's desire to express themselves and to correct public misperceptions of Muslims—primarily through sharing their stories and critique via videos—is threatened by their constant surveillance and is always tied to the changing national political climate toward Muslims. Like American Muslims, DREAMers are also balancing the risks and benefits of public participation, and they have also found that video confessional (coming out as undocumented online) have been a powerful way of feeling heard and creating community. The authors argue that this group is "enacting citizenship" in new ways by making "creative use of new media to put a new face on civil rights activism in the 21st century" (187). They demonstrate how this group's moving videos united the community and led directly to the establishment of a national civil rights movement on the ground, making the point that "affective and tactical elements" operated together and were "mutually reinforcing" (187). Under the new administration, however, DREAMer activity is particularly precarious, as DREAMers have become subject to abrupt shifts in legislation, policing, and internment or deportation.

Indeed, these two chapters are especially poignant and troubling after the 2016 presidential election. Our current national emergency makes both what this book does and what it does not do seem even more significant. As is Jenkins's wont, By Any Media Necessary gives short shrift to the limits of youth media activism in corporate-controlled media (the recent death of Vine, an app widely used by youth of color, provides an object lesson in such precarity). The book's most glaring absence, however, is a complete lack of attention to right-wing/alt-right youth media activities. While Jenkins admits in his introduction (following scholar James Hay) that participatory politics can be employed for either progressive or reactionary ends, there are no examples or citations regarding the latter, which promotes the impression that such activity is fairly minimal. Yet the fact that the presidential vote was so clearly divided among American millennials suggests that there is a great deal of political activity by reactionary youth (fueled by young media activists such as those at Breitbart News). Humanities-based, qualitative media scholars (myself included) have long neglected the close study of current right-wing media activity because it is inevitably very difficult, depressing, and increasingly dangerous. Although individual feminist media scholars have done some brave and important work addressing public media attacks on women (such as in gamergate), it is unclear to me whether research into the media use of reactionary youth in particular is being funded institutionally to the degree that this study has been. If it isn't, it should be.
This absence, however, does not make *By Any Media Necessary* any less of a gift for scholars and students across disciplines (and, I hope, beyond the academy). It will be enormously valuable for scholars in media and popular culture studies, cultural studies, critical race/ethnic studies, and American studies. While the introduction seems addressed to graduate students and above, the individual case studies are very accessible for undergraduates, and each stands on its own. I am looking forward to teaching these chapters, and I am particularly appreciative of the fact that the entire book is available for digital access, as are all the books in this series. I am hopeful that this book will do much to ensure our greater attention to and understanding of youth media practices—and sooner rather than later.

**Note**

1. Jenkins coauthored the volume *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era* in 2016, an extended conversation with fellow digital media scholars Mizuko Ito and danah boyd, that functions well as a companion to this book. See also Jenkins et al. (2009).

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**Works cited**


Book review

*Girls' feminist blogging in a postfeminist age*, by Jessalyn Keller

Alice Marwick

*Data & Society, New York, New York, United States*

[0.1] *Keywords*—Activism; Feminism; Gender; Social media; Youth

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[1] Jessalyn Keller's first book, *Girls' Feminist Blogging in a Postfeminist Age*, is a qualitative examination of teenage girls who blog about feminism, based on interviews with bloggers and content analysis of their blogs. Keller, assistant professor in the department of communication, media, and film at the University of Calgary, is situated in the nascent field of girls studies and, alongside scholars like Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose, is doing fascinating work on digital feminist activism. As her research makes clear, many studies of activism focus on communities where male experience is considered normative and women are shunted to the side; even scholarship on feminist activism usually presumes adult experiences. Thus, because of their gender and age, girls are often unheard and invisible in discussions of both activism and feminism. Given this landscape, Keller is interested in how girls produce a political culture that is rooted specifically in their subjectivity as girls, reflecting their experiences as teenagers, students, and burgeoning feminists. Using a cultural studies approach, Keller places blogging within a continuum of girls' media-making practices, from scrapbooking and diaries to zines and fan fiction. She argues that blogging resists neoliberal postfeminist discourse that reduces feminism to an individual series of choices, instead giving girls space to simultaneously acknowledge structural oppression and structural power. The book theorizes a politics of affect that will be familiar to anyone immersed in online culture. The author argues that the friendships and warm feelings that come from participating in and claiming a group identity are in themselves political.
At the time Keller did her research, the feminist blogosphere consisted of a handful of famous blogs like Jezebel, Feministing, and Racialicious, surrounded by a sprawling network of lesser-trafficked blogs written by a wide diversity of women, including Keller's participants, who identified explicitly as girls. These young women used writing to explore a wide variety of feminist issues, often taking an explicitly didactic or pedagogic approach to teaching themselves and their peers about women's history, feminist theory, or famous feminist figures. (I love Keller's insight that most teenage girls are primarily students, so this point of view is fully understandable viewed in that context.) Community was part and parcel of blogging and intrinsic to the experience. Feminist girl bloggers read each other's blogs, linked to each other's posts, wrote letters, and chatted on comment sections and within platforms like Tumblr. Blogging enabled young women to explore their budding feminist identities in community with other girls at the same stage. Keller makes entries into these networked counterpublics in various ways, examining how young women perform feminist identities online (chapter 1), describing girl-oriented activism (chapter 2), mapping the collective practices of young feminist bloggers (chapter 3), discussing their engagement with women's history (chapter 4), and assessing the strategies of publicness adopted by and the media reception of famous teenage bloggers like Tavi Gevinson of *Rookie Magazine* (chapter 5).

Historically, what is considered activism privileges the experience of white, middle-class men, be they union members or hippies. Feminist history, critical race theory, and cultural studies have created a parallel history of forms of resistance and political participation that may not look exactly like the protest march or the strike; Dick Hebdige's work on subculture remains relevant. But Keller points out that even practices thought of as subcultural or counterhegemonic often exclude the experiences of girls. Girls may live far away from urban centers, lack transportation or income that affords participating in protests, or lack the subcultural capital to adopt resistive identities. If girls are able to participate in adultcentric notions of activism, they may be working in a structure created by adults and for adults that fails to recognize young people's issues. Moreover, girls are usually treated with a mix of protectionism and condensation even by deeply progressive people; either they should be protected from public spaces, or they are too silly or frivolous to participate fully.

In contrast, Keller's account of girl activism encompasses consciousness raising, media making, and education, positioning activism as part of Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber's concept of "bedroom culture" (*McRobbie and Garber [1976] 1993; McRobbie 1990*). McRobbie and Garber criticized British cultural studies for focusing on the activities of young white men in public (hippies, mods, skinheads) while ignoring or dismissing girls' cultural productivity. They argued that girls are often discouraged by their parents from participating in the public sphere. Instead, they are literally and
figuratively confined to their bedrooms, private spaces where it is safe for young women to express anger or frustration. As Linda Duits explains, bedroom culture demonstrated that "the domain of the girl was the home; the personal that feminism aims to make political, visible" (2008, 16). McRobbie and Garber were making a feminist intervention into youth subcultural studies; Keller's participants are making a youth intervention into feminism from the bedroom. It is the bedroom where girls' recent media making has taken place, including diaries, 1990s-era zines made with scissors and tape, and 2000s-era fan fiction created on laptops. But like the postal service or the online fan fic archive, blogs provide a distribution network that simultaneously allows connection and collaboration with like-minded others.

[5] This collaboration and community make feminist blogging resistive to contemporary articulations of postfeminism, "a cultural sensibility" that Keller argues is characterized by "a shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis on surveillance, monitoring, and self-discipline; a rhetoric of individualism, choice, and empowerment" (13). Postfeminism is an ultimately individual, neoliberal discourse, denying structural inequality and emphasizing work on the self and personal success as empowering—which for me is personified by Charlotte in Sex and the City (1998–2004) screaming, "I choose my choice!" when criticized by her friends for quitting her job upon marrying a wealthy man. However, the bloggers in Keller's study did not discount the importance of individual activity; indeed, they saw publicly articulating feminism as crucial to resisting stereotypes. While attempting to separate oneself from the "hairy, man-hating lesbian" trope can reinforce heterosexist, homophobic norms, we must be mindful of girls' location in sexist, often hostile environments, such as many secondary schools. Feminist identities, located outside the acceptable realm of heterosexual expression for teenage girls, were often interpreted by peers and parents as threatening. Keller relates that girl bloggers found that simply identifying publicly as a feminist and finding other young women with similar politics was a deeply affirming and pleasurable act. At the same time, this restricted participation in the young feminist blogosphere. Keller's participants were primarily white and middle class; she suggests that perhaps the restrictive nature of feminist stereotypes made it difficult for girls already denied privileged race or class subjectivities to experiment with nonhegemonic femininity.

[6] The social life of blogging is where Keller begins to theorize a politic of affect and Internet community—although I think this needs to be pushed further. As she notes early on, she characterizes feminist girl blogs as networked counterpublics, drawing from Nancy Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics" as alternatives to a bourgeois, Habermasian view of the "public sphere" (1990), and Mimi Ito (2008) and danah boyd's (2007) theories of networked publics, which describe the discourse and deliberation that take place via social media and earlier technologies. Keller writes:
[7] Girl bloggers are best understood as networked counterpublics, forming networks around particular discursive feminist identities and issues, coming together, dissolving, mutating, and reconvening in a fluid manner... understanding girl feminist bloggers as networked counterpublics both allows us to better understand how contemporary feminism is being practiced, as well as provides a politicized language with which to talk about girl bloggers. (80)

[8] Keller makes a convincing case that social protests like Slutwalk are only intelligible from within these counterpublics, which discussed slut shaming at length. The event must be contextualized within discussions criticizing rape culture, dress codes, and victim blaming; when taken out of that context, these discussions may be misinterpreted. Still, what is most interesting about networked counterpublics is the affective dimension of such activism. There are some lovely moments in the text where the sheer pleasure of feminism comes through in the bloggers' words, in blog posts that bubble with excitement about attending a feminist event, or gushing interview segments about the importance of feminist friendships. (This pleasure is rarely acknowledged, let alone discussed, in popular discussions of feminism.) While Keller examines the importance of these friendships and emotional connections to blogging practice, her short overview of the affective dimensions of girl feminism is fascinating and ought to be taken up by other scholars.

[9] This book provides a thorough overview of scholarship related to girls' activism, blogging, and young feminism. It would be an excellent resource for scholars investigating related issues within fan studies, Internet studies, and media or cultural studies. However, Keller's study has its limitations, which are primarily methodological. While Keller's participants are located within the same network, their voices, for the most part, remain singular. Thick description and ethnographic moments might have enlivened the text, as would have behind-the-scenes examinations of letters or attendance at in-person events. It would also benefit from diverse voices. Although locating the book within the feminist blogosphere enabled Keller to dive deeply into a situated set of practices, examining queer girls, girls of color, or girls with disability active in different blog communities would have opened up a lot of possibilities.

[10] Blogging is no longer the buzzword that it was in a decade ago, and Keller's participants have moved on to graduate school, professional careers, and feminist identities beyond those of girl or student. But for a new generation of young women, digital feminist activism is thriving. Many young feminists have moved to Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and Tumblr, where they learn about feminism, form the same affective attachments documented by Keller, and rapidly engage with current issues,
from high school dress codes to transphobia. This work is increasingly urgent in a political climate where the 2016 election seemingly affirmed rape culture, and where online communities inculcating misogynist thought are tied to global networks of white nationalists. Keller, in this book and in some of her other recent work (Keller and Ringrose 2015; Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2016; Winch, Littler, and Keller 2016), provides important reminders to recognize and affirm young people's political work, even when it comes in the form of selfies, memes, or hashtags.

Works cited


Book review

*International perspectives on shojo and shojo manga*, edited by Masami Toku

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[0.1] Keywords—Anime; Fandom; Transnationalism


[1] As a visual medium, manga is influential in Japan and beyond. Manga developed in Japan after World War II as entertainment for children, but eventually broadened to address different age groups and genders. Since then, manga have been split into two broad categories: comics for girls (shojo) and comics for boys (shonen). Shojo manga were influenced by a long-standing history of girls' magazines since the Meiji era, which portrayed girls with beautiful big eyes and slender bodies. Shojo manga are unique. Unlike comics for boys, they do not focus on fighting, power, or ambition, but can be understood more as coming-of-age stories. Shojo manga emphasize romance and being in the world, and favor social relationships. Even when these stories are set in fantasy worlds, or involve superheroes or magical girls, love remains a common theme. The aesthetic and narrative differences between shojo and shonen have great effects on readership, fandom, and authorship that are worthy of study.

[2] Broadly speaking, the popularity of manga, anime, and gaming has been the subject of many manga studies by Japanese and non-Japanese scholars. The first American book on manga, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Schodt 1983), was published over 30 years ago. Since then, manga has been studied from different angles, focusing on its reception, fandom, visual aesthetics, transmedia qualities, and localization. *International Perspectives on Shojo and Shojo Manga*
International Perspectives on Shojo and Shojo Manga is a timely, global collection that examines manga and its culture. It pays specific attention to an underexplored genre of manga, namely shojo manga. These comics cater specifically to girls, and have a long history that has partly influenced Japanese views on girlhood. Shojo manga are unique, and well-received abroad. As the first collection that focuses specifically on this genre, International Perspectives on Shojo and Shojo Manga has a lot to offer to those who study comics and their transnational reception.

This collection offers a critical and global view on manga beyond the borders of Japan. The book consists of three parts. The first part offers local perspectives on manga culture. The second focuses on global perspectives on manga, and is written primarily by non-Japanese scholars. These essays discuss the influence of manga on other countries, such as Taiwan, Indonesia, and the United States. The third part is a rather exceptional section that offers profiles and interviews with renowned shojo manga critics and artists.

Rather than discussing the chapters individually, I want to address several themes that emerge in this collection. The first is that shojo manga can be a powerful tool for media literacy. Several of the scholars, including Masami Toku herself, discuss the merits of the pictorial style of manga, and how this influences children. In her chapter, Toku integrates a case study of a young boy, Theo, and traces his interest in manga and the development of his manga style. This chapter shows that manga is more than a set of visual tropes, it is a form of media literacy and an aesthetic that influences youth. She argues that shojo manga influences children's aesthetic development, and plays an active role in how they view the world. This is also stressed in the chapter by Michael Bitz, who ran an after-school program in North America in which at-risk students were encouraged to create their own graphic novels. By drawing comics, these children could explore their own life stories and find their voice. Interestingly, most students mimicked manga styles rather than American comics. Bitz explains that it was difficult for children to relate to the perfect superheroes from American comics, and that it was easier for them to identify with the real-world problems that were depicted in manga.

A second theme that emerges is the construction of girlhood, and how this representation was affected by girls' comics within Japan. Shojo manga heavily favor romance over fighting, and emphasize cuteness and beauty. Cuteness is the essence of shojo, as Nozomi Masuda writes in her chapter: "The Japanese word and concept of kawaii ('cute') has become popular in East Asia and Europe as a result of manga and anime and related merchandise. Japan may be a unique country in that kawaii is everywhere in Japan and is loved by people of all ages and genders. The kawaii culture developed alongside shojo (girls') culture, with shojo manga as the benefactor" (p.
She writes that the category of "shojo" was constructed in Japan's modernization process. After the middle Meiji era, a modern education system was developed that separated male and female students in middle and high schools. The concepts of "shojo" and "shonen" related to this division and the consumption society. Boys and girls were conceived of as different target groups. Since the first Shojo-kai, published in 1902 by Kinkodo, many shojo magazines were published that catered specifically to girls. In the post-war era, many of these magazines slowly started to incorporate comics, which drew from a particular visual style that was already developed in the shojo magazines. Popular illustration styles from the magazines, with big eyes and slender bodies, were adopted in the 1970s by famous mangaka such as Riyoko Ikeda.

Cuteness, in other words, slowly became a prominent theme in shojo manga. This collection unpacks the kawaii culture around shojo manga primarily through the formal analysis of comics. Tsuchiya-Dollase analyzes one of the most influential shojo manga characters, Sakura Momoko's Chibimaruko-chan (1986–1996). The titular character is an eternally cute little girl, a third-grader nicknamed "Chibimaruko" (small round girl), who grows up in the 1970s. She is understood as kawaii, but Tsuchiya-Dollase emphasizes this is a special brand of cuteness. Unlike other shojo characters, her cuteness does not stem from weakness, or a need to be protected by a male hero. "What makes Maruko's kawaii interesting is that the flaws of her personality and unfeminine qualities make her cute," the author emphasizes (p. 45). She is a cute little character, and sometimes a bit silly, which brings readers close to the author. This is not a romantic cuteness, but a silly cuteness that brings Japanese women together. Other authors also note that kawaii is a complex, and multifaceted concept. Masuda argues that today, kawaii culture has become less about visualizing or merchandising specific characters, and has extended to embodiment in Japan and elsewhere (pp. 29–30). Through street fashion, Japanese youth embody cuteness by wearing cat ears, colored contact lenses, and Lolita dresses. They remind us that manga visuals are not only flat representations, but that manga itself is a participatory medium, which is also reenacted. Contemporary cuteness, in other words, is visceral.

As a third theme, many of the chapters explore the inclusivity of shojo manga. While romance may be considered the main theme of these comics, many of them focus on love in a broad sense. Yukari Fujimoto writes about Sailor Moon and its controversial reception in other countries. LGBT themes were important in the Japanese version of the anime, but often censored outside of Japan. In Japan, however, these themes were influential in fandom and also boosted the prominence of same-sex romances in mainstream manga. Many fan comics ("dojinshi") in Japan inspired by Sailor Moon emphasized canonical and noncanonical LGBT romances. In addition to this chapter, Kazumi Nagaike focuses on the popularity of "boys' love" in
shojo manga, or same-sex romance between men. This genre is popular among women, but Nagaike interviewed gay men to see how these manga affect the men's identity politics. He argues that boys' love can also be the subject of queer reading, and become a powerful tool for gay readers. Inclusivity, however, does not just pertain to LGBT issues. Shige Suzuki shows that manga can also be an agent of change by representing autism. By closely reading the manga *With the Light*, Suzuki argues that manga can be persuasive, and represent difficult social issues. Prior to this manga, autism was rarely discussed in Japan, but this manga made people aware of disabilities. Suzuki explains, "Tobe's *With the Light* contributed to Japanese society by visualizing the issue of autism that would otherwise have remained marginal, if not invisible" (p. 51). These chapters argue that comics are a powerful tool for social communication and have potential for social change.

[8] Finally, it becomes clear from this collection that manga is best understood as a transnational phenomenon that is no longer restricted to Japan. Jin-Shiow Chen examines how Taiwan has developed its anime and manga fan culture and its own fan comics scene. Cheng Tju Lim also offers an overview of manga's influences in Southeast Asia, and provides examples from manga published in Indonesia. Finally, Frenchy Lunning reads shojo characters as universal figures. Her chapter is a manifesto for shojo culture and its beloved characters and tropes. She unpacks shojo manga through the concept "kyara," a complex way of referring to characters as they become symbols, and spill over into merchandise and visuals. Kyara refers to a kind of proto-character, shaped by visuals rather than by a narrative herself. Perhaps the best example of this is Hello Kitty, who is more a mascot than a character. Lunning explains, "the shojo character of shojo manga is an excellent example of a kyara. The shojo has eclipsed her manga form to become a complex, multilayered, transnational compendium of commodities that circulate in the realms of advertising and packaging, illustration and art, toys, and girls' accessories" (p. 88). While this may seem negative, Lunning is by no means critical of the mass consumption of shojo imagery. In fact, she sees this as a powerful kind of femininity. Girls and their culture are now acknowledged in the patriarchy of Japan and beyond. The shojo character is an agent of positive change. "She is now ubiquitous, transnationally exchanged, and she has begun to inject the feminine into culture. Having gained admittance, she has stealthily brought in her siblings—the adult female heroines of gaming, the gay guys of *yaoi*, and the transgendered hero/heroines of manga—all as subjects in her family of forms" (pp. 98–99).

[9] The last part of the book consists of unique interviews with shojo mangaka and critics. This will interest fans as well as scholars, since several prominent mangaka from the 1970s are included. The authors of the earliest boys' love comics, Moto Hagio (*Heart of Thomas*) and Keiko Takemiya (*Kaze to Ki no Uta*) provide their views on the
craft and the development of shojo manga throughout the years. This is very interesting reading material and worthy of studying further in some form. I wish the editor had written a conclusion to these interviews or done more to position them. This data is unique, but readers need to be informed of manga culture to fully understand and judge the statements of these artists and critics.

[10] *International Perspectives on Shojo and Shojo Manga* is a unique book that emphasizes the cultural specificity and historicity of shojo manga, as well as its circulation outside of Japan. It does justice to shojo's unique imagery, and stands out for its close readings of manga narratives. This is an ideal collection for fan scholars to use to gain more in-depth knowledge about manga as a medium, and its reception. The book's case studies include fan comics inside and outside of Japan, and show that manga is above all participatory. The collection is the first of its kind, and will undoubtedly be of interest to scholars of comics, fan works, and media at large. Moreover, it sheds light on the complex transnational dynamics of media and fandom, of which manga is a pivotal example. The aesthetics of girlhood and cuteness in Japan cannot be compared to how girls are represented in any other country. In this sense, Western countries may learn a thing or two from Japan. In the United States or Europe, we readily dismiss things that are "girly," "cute," or even feminist, but in Japan, cuteness is embraced by all, and can be a powerful agent of social change.