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Editorial

In defense of revision

TWC Editor

[0.1] Abstract—Editorial for *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 30 (September 15, 2019).

[0.2] Keyword—Fan studies


1. TWC's ethos

[1.1] There's an art to writing editorials. The most important part, of course, is the summary of the issue's articles, preferably highlighting their interconnections and showcasing central themes, which serve to hold the essays together and provide a collected issue with identity and meaning. Our special issues are arranged around specific themes, and their introductions tend to offer the general impetus that drew the editors to their theme, a brief discourse on the importance of the topic, and often a bibliographic context in which are situated the issue and its articles. None of this is true, however, for the general issues that TWC publishes every September. Yet the essays deserve to be presented in the purview of the journal and in relation to one another, however accidental this relationship may be.

[1.2] For TWC's general issues, we have discussed the difficulties of creating a journal from scratch; the rationale behind offering TWC as Open Access with a Creative Commons License and using an Open Sources publishing platform; the amazing number of submissions we've received and essays we've published; the impressive breadth of topics, disciplines, and methodologies our authors have deployed; and the overall ethics involved in publishing fan studies research. Yet when we talk to authors and reviewers, we repeatedly find ourselves explaining our rationale surrounding the double-blind peer review and revision processes.

[1.3] These questions often arise in one of two contexts. First, we might ask a new peer reviewer to review an essay, explaining the various evaluation options; and second, authors who have published with us ask about our acceptance rates. Academia by and large functions within an economy of scarcity and competition: if there is one job and 250 candidates, only the best can get the job; if a journal publishes six essays per issue twice a year, only the best twelve will be selected. Of course, this is not solely a function of postsecondary education. Elementary reading competitions crown their winners, transforming the passion of books into a quantifiable race; grading on a curve throughout K–12 teaches students that helping a peer do better may harm their own class standing and grade; and in college, one of the
important metrics a school provides—right up there with student SAT and GPA averages—is the acceptance rate, with lower clearly being better.

[1.4] In contrast, TWC has a really high acceptance rate—or, put differently, we do not have many essays that make it through the review process and are not eventually published. But we are proud of this fact! TWC is an online-only journal, so we don't have physical restrictions like pages. We can publish as many, or as few, essays as we like. Any space limitation would be an artificial one. Further, we don't hold a backlog: each essay is published as soon after acceptance as possible. As a result, we do not encourage reviewers to reject essays to reduce the overall pool of submissions. If the essay shows promise, we suggest that the author revise and resubmit rather than rejecting the essay outright. As a result of this editorial philosophy, TWC No. 30 offers twelve full-length essays (plus five Symposium essays and two book reviews), with time from submission to publication ranging from six to twenty months.

[1.5] Our ability to publish as many essays as we want, without limiting a given issue's size and without holding a backlog, is only part of our reasoning, however. More important is our guiding ethos: we want to encourage young scholars; we want to guide them through the publication process, and we do our best to make sure this is a positive experience. We could not do this without our generous reviewers, who dedicate their valuable time to offer vigorous criticism that endeavors to strengthen the argument of each and every essay. Many reviewers are willing to read an essay repeatedly through various revision stages, and as editors, we encourage that process as long as the revisions continue to show improvement. This is a labor-intensive process for everyone, but we find it well worth our time. In turn, we hope that authors who have published with us and who have profited from an immensely helpful peer review process will in turn help others.

[1.6] Finding good reviewers is thus the second most important job of being an editor—right after soliciting good authors. The essays in this issue have challenged us as much as any issue has: they theorize nonhuman animals and their fannish engagements; autoethnographically study a career assessing the psychology of fans; address musicology in fan vids and pedagogy in combating sports rivalry; discuss disparate texts that analyze eighteenth-century prophecy, 1920s film fans, and 1970s soap opera fans; read an individual femslash story; and study an entire Chinese online community. The essays in this issue range widely, usefully stretching the concept of fan, fandom, and fan studies. Each essay has been vetted and reworked, often through multiple rounds of peer and/or editorial review. The results demonstrate that the hard work of authors, peer reviewers, and production personnel synergistically work to create high-quality scholarship.

2. Theory

[2.1] C. Lee Harrington opens the Theory section with a provocative look at "Animal Fans: Toward a Multispecies Fan Studies." Drawing from various disciplinary approaches to nonhuman animal rights, Harrington posits an unusual question that connects nonhuman fan behavior with ethical questions of personhood to suggest that viewing animals as affirmative fans may challenge fan studies' assumptions in interesting ways. In contrast, Hannah E.
Dahlberg-Dodd focuses on the role of authorship in "The Author in the Postinternet Age" to argue that the author is not ultimately dead but remains a ghost in the archive.

[2.2] Sebastian F. K. Svegaard opens up an important new line of inquiry for vidding research by focusing on its musical aspects in "Toward an Integration of Musicological Methods into Fan Video Studies." Looking at the existing scholarship, which tends to look at the music as serving the narrative or atmosphere of the vid, he proposes to instead foreground the role that music plays for textual vid analysis. Erica Lyn Massey's "Borderland Literature, Female Pleasure, and the Slash Fic Phenomenon" likewise opens up a familiar research topic by introducing a different approach: adopting the notion of a borderlands, most often connected to subaltern literature, and linking it to slash. Massey reinvestigates the various functions of critique and empowerment that slash performs for its readers and writers.

[2.3] An exciting expansion of fan studies is its intersection with historical research, and two essays perform large-scale studies that focus on fan engagement and transformative works in specific historical contexts. Andrew Crome's "Considering Eighteenth-Century Prophecy as Transformative Work" looks at eighteenth-century prophetic writings and the role that self-insertion plays in these works. Although Crome draws on fan studies approaches for his study, he nevertheless argues against a simple ahistorical flattening of transformative works. Leah Steuer looks at predigital fan engagement in "Structural Affects of Soap Opera Fan Correspondence, 1970s–80s." By focusing on the materiality of fan letters in particular, Steuer studies the immersion of fan culture into everyday lives and investigates the creator/fan relationship before the advent of the internet.

3. Praxis

[3.1] The Praxis essays continue the variety of themes and methods. Gayle S. Stever describes the author's thirty-year academic career studying fans in her autoethnographic "Fan Studies in Psychology: A Road Less Traveled." Interestingly, the intense personal focus contrasts with the lack of acafan identity and ethnographic immersion currently used in current fan studies research. Jessica Ethel Tompkins discusses the various motivations and implications of crossplay in "Is Gender Just a Costume? An Exploratory Study of Crossplay." Among her respondents, cross-gender cosplay seems to be a function of the characters' genders rather than a means of performing gender identity. At the same time, however, the performativity inherent in cosplay provides insight into gender as a performative identity in general.

[3.2] One of the central concerns of fan studies is the hierarchical relationship between fans and producers, but over the years, this never wholly distinct dichotomy has continued to merge into a continuum of popularity, fame, and influence. Olympia Kiriakou looks at one form of fan hierarchies in her study of lifestyle influencers in Disney fandom. In "Big Name Fandom and the (Inevitable) Failure of Disflix," she addresses the various ways these fans have shaped Disney fandom and how the community has in turn shaped their fannish experiences and engagements. Xianwei Wu's "Hierarchy within Female ACG Fandom in China" offers an important insight into Chinese female-oriented anime, comics, and gaming
fandom by presenting findings on a specific fan community and its complicated internal hierarchical structure.

[3.3] The Praxis category offers a place to publish case studies and specific focused readings. A case study or a close reading of a novel can often gesture to larger theoretical concerns. However, it is important to also value such analyses in their own right, whether they address a canonical Middle English romance or a contemporary fan story. Angela L. Florschuetz uses the rubric of the discipline of fan studies to discuss "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Canonicity, and Audience Participation." By arguing that the text intertextually engages the Arthurian canon, she describes an early case of active audience and "the struggle over figurative ownership of genres, texts, and characters" (¶ 1). In contrast, Alice Margaret Kelly offers a close reading of a recent text in "Fan Fiction as Feminist Citation: Lesbian (Para)textuality in chainofclovers's 'Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart' (2017)." Kelly suggests that the fan writer uses citations of poetry to supplement her representation of queer characters and relationships in order to write a "narrative of female desire that is not defined by men" (¶ 0.1).

4. Symposium

[4.1] Symposium essays allow whimsical contributions or a focus on a particular fannish issue. They also afford us the opportunity to view snapshots of current and continuing research, as in Xiqing Zheng's "Survival and Migration Patterns of Chinese Online Media Fandoms." Zheng offers an account of Chinese online media fandoms in the face of increasing government censorship, addressing concerns facing researchers when dealing with this material. In "Gendered Fairy Tale Heroics: Ginny Weasley in The Source," Effie Sapuridis offers a close reading of one particular Harry Potter novel to discuss the feminist potential of fan fiction focused on a minor female character. Finally, Cody T. Havard's "Introducing Sport Rivalry Man, Protector of Positive Fan Behavior" describes how a comic strip he created acts as a pedagogical tool to teach students about engagement with a sports rivalry team.

[4.2] The final two Symposium essays use the recent conclusion of the major Marvel Cinematic Universe arc to discuss audience responses as well as academic parallels. Martyna Szczepaniak's "Death in Marvel" surveys fan reactions to the extreme death toll in Avengers: Infinity War (2018). The essay addresses the relationship between emotional responses to the individual film and the audience's awareness of the larger MCU franchise. Likewise, Cody T. Havard, Rhema D. Fuller, Timothy D. Ryan, and Frederick G. Grieve use the entirety of the Marvel franchise in their "Using the Marvel Cinematic Universe to Build a Defined Research Line," which draws analogies between the different MCU texts to suggest analogies that represent different research approaches within fan studies and beyond.

5. Book reviews

[5.1] The two books reviewed in this issue gesture toward a new level of fan studies that can take for granted and build on more introductory and general assumptions. Abby Waysdorf
reviews Framing Fan Fiction: Literary and Social Practices in Fan Fiction Communities by Kristina Busse, which focuses exclusively on fan fiction and the communities surrounding it. Whereas Busse relies on a fairly narrow definition of fandom, Dorothy Wai Sim Lau's Chinese Stardom in Participatory Cybertulture, reviewed by Wikanda Promkhunthong, offers a markedly different perspective regarding fan objects and fan engagement. Both books showcase the wide range of subjects and the multivocal disciplinary approaches that fan studies uses while gesturing toward the many connections that remain to be made.

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Abstract—In an exploration of the potential for (and implications of) animal fans—not human fans of animals but nonhuman animals as fans—situated in ongoing debates about the personhood of nonhuman species, I suggest ways that the animal turn taking place in the humanities and social sciences might affect fan studies. I focus on four characteristics associated with both human fans and nonhuman animals: culture, emotionality, sociality, and capacity for creative play.

Keywords—Anthropomorphism; Nonhuman; Personhood

1. Introduction

Fan studies has recently expanded its analytic lens to include a broad(er) range of fan communities including queer fans, fans of color, fans with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged fans (note 1). This study expands that lens even further to explore the possibility of nonhuman animals as fans. There is a long history of scholarship on animal celebrities, and the emergence of the furry fandom (alongside other fannish developments) has motivated scholars to explore the relationship between animals and fans, but fan studies has yet to examine the possibilities of animals as fans. Situated in ongoing debates about the personhood of nonhuman species and focusing on four characteristics associated with both human fans and nonhuman animals—culture, emotionality, sociality, and capacity for creative play—I suggest ways that the animal turn taking place in the humanities and social sciences might impact fan studies (note 2).

This study was inspired by two recent publications and an oft-cited question posed by Henry Jenkins in 2007. The first article that had me pondering the possibility of animal fans is Ruth A. Deller's (2018) discussion of ethics in fan studies research. In an examination of human subject (IRB) protocol, she comments in a footnote, "I am assuming that very few fan studies researchers will work with animals" (138). The second article is Alan McKee's (2018) discussion of pornography consumers as fans, namely his argument that since fan studies is the study of agentic cultural consumption (509), porn consumers should be thought of as fan culture participants. This led me to explore debates within animal studies on the
agency (among other qualities) of nonhuman animals and the potential implications for fan scholars. These two articles in combination brought me back to Henry Jenkins's (2007) widely discussed question about the future of fandom: "as fandom becomes such an elastic category, one starts to wonder—who isn't a fan? What doesn't constitute fan culture?" (364). In short, I question whether there are qualities and practices of nonhuman species that make it reasonable for us to argue the possibility of animals as fans—potentially both textual and object fans, presumably affirmational rather than transformative fans. Or does this possibility stretch the elasticity of fan studies beyond a reasonable point?

[1.3] The practice of anthropomorphism provides important contextual background to my research interests. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman animals and is represented throughout the history of popular media, from Aesop's fables to animated TV cartoons to fantasy fiction to gaming avatars (e.g., Strike 2017). Moreover, "The reflexive assumption that animals are like us […] is not confined to popular culture. From Aristotle to Darwin down to the present, naturalists have credited bees with monarchies, ants with honesty, and dogs with tender consciences, all on the basis of firsthand observation" (Daston and Mitman 2004, 1). The rise of modern science in the early nineteenth century led to a decline of anthropomorphism for reasons both historical and methodological (how can humans know what animals are thinking and feeling?) and by the late twentieth century, "the default assumption that other species thought and felt as humans did seemed lazy, a failure of scientific ingenuity to formulate and test alternative hypotheses" (3). Contemporary critiques of anthropomorphism are based in morality: "to imagine that animals think like humans or to cast animals in human roles is a form of self-centered narcissism: one looks outward to their world and sees only one's own reflection mirrored therein" (3–4). However, resurgent debates about the personhood of nonhumans and the animal turn within the academy raise new questions about the value of anthropomorphism.

[1.4] I discuss personhood and the animal turn in the following section. In an effort to bring relevant literatures together in dialogue, subsequent sections explore animals as celebrities and animals and/as fans. In the conclusion of this necessarily speculative essay, I offer thoughts on the potential elasticity of fan studies. I note that the meaning(s) of the terms human and animal, the potential personhood of other species, and the animal turn itself are hotly debated across the academy. I am unable to do justice to these debates—indeed, I suspect my presentation of the debates is itself open to contestation given the rapidly unfolding nature of this conversation. My goal is simply to lay the groundwork for consideration of a multispecies fan studies.

2. The personhood of nonhumans and the animal turn in academia

[2.1] Scholarly arguments for the personhood of nonhumans are relevant to the possibility of animal fans since they inherently draw linkages between human and (other) animals' behaviors and experiences. Contemporary arguments for the personhood of nonhumans are rooted in the belief that a false human/animal binary has been constructed solely to lay claim to human exceptionalism: "The 'human' and 'animal' are mutually constituting concepts: the superiority and entitlement of the first depends upon the inferiority and subordination of the second" (Varsava 2014, 521). Over time, personhood became rooted in the presence or
acquisition of certain qualities such as language, intellectual capacity, development of secondary emotions, and self-awareness (see Midgley 1986). There are, however, numerous precedents of calling nonhumans persons, including the personhood of God and angels (DeGrazia 2005, 41), the case of "corporate bodies such as cities or colleges," which can count as persons for legal purposes (Midgley 53), and "certain imaginary nonhuman beings" including Spock, the extraterrestrial E.T., and "the speaking, encultured apes of The Planet of the Apes" (DeGrazia 2005, 41). British law has sometimes held animals responsible for their behavior, which makes them liable for committing crimes (Mills 2017, 151), and animals have been considered potential witnesses in modern criminal trials (Bryan 2017). Perhaps most engagingly, and speaking to questions surrounding contemporary celebritification, animal selfies are now in vogue after Naruto, a macaque, gained unexpected fame for taking the world's first monkey selfie (Slotkin 2017).

[2.2] Legal debate over Naruto's selfie is important in efforts by animal rights activists to expand legal rights for nonhumans (note 3). Under current US law, one is either a person or a thing, with no third option available. "If you are a person, you have the capacity for rights, including the right to habeas corpus relief, which protects you from unlawful confinement. If you are a thing, you do not have the capacity for rights" (Sebo 2018). Activists argue that under these limited options, great apes, elephants, dolphins, and whales should be considered persons on the basis of "evolving standards of morality, scientific discovery, and human experience" (https://www.nonhumanrights.org/who-we-are/). As a point of comparison, several countries have granted rights to river watersheds and designated forests, and the city of Toledo, Ohio, recently passed the Lake Erie Bill of Rights, which "establishes the huge lake as a person and grants it the legal rights that a human being or corporation would have" (Guardian 2019). These ongoing debates over who or what constitutes a person have helped generate the "animalisation of the academy" (Mills 2017, 12) within the humanities and social sciences.

[2.3] Multispecies scholarship now appears in a wide range of disciplines including film and television studies, feminist studies, cultural/literary studies, legal studies, philosophy, anthropology, history, geography, and sociology (Wilkie 2015), and reflects growing interest in "animals as subjects rather than objects, in animals as parts of human society rather than just symbols of it, and in human interactions and relationships with animals rather than simply human representations of animals" (Knight 2005, 1; emphasis in original).

[2.4] Media scholars are raising innovative questions about the taken-for-granted emphasis on the term human in humanities, exploring new implications of a posthumanist or nonhumanist perspective. For example, Pick and Narraway's (2013) Screening Nature attempts to write nature back into film studies by "exposing the field to ecological thinking not as an exclusive substream or strand, but absorbing every aspect of the study and understanding of film" (1–2). Pick (2015) subsequently revisits John Berger's classic essay "Why Look at Animals?" (1980) by engaging novel questions of looking and seeing (and not-looking and not-seeing) regarding film animals in an age of mass surveillance. Mills (2017) takes a TV studies perspective in arguing that TV "endumbs" animals as both voiceless and stupid, "disregard[ing] animals' subjectivity and instead offer[ing] them up as objects that are interesting only insomuch as they conform to human understandings, and
uses, of animals" (211). Ultimately rejecting the term humanities, Mills proposes "animalities" as replacement and suggests that TV studies is a good starting point for establishing the animalities given the field's longstanding "concerns about exclusion, drawing on a politics attuned to social power" (229). Fan studies is similarly concerned with such politics.

[2.5] My own discipline of sociology was late in joining the animal turn, facing a comparable challenge as the humanities in that sociology is widely understood as the study of human groups and societies. In recent years, however, sociologists engaged in multispecies scholarship have explored problematics central to the discipline, including the acceptable content of sociological inquiry, the permissibility of advocacy-oriented sociology, and the admissibility of nonhuman animal advocacy to advocacy-oriented sociology (Peggs 2013; Cudworth 2016). Sociologists have focused particular interest on linkages between speciesism and other interlocking systems of power including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. For example, Nibert (2003) reconsiders the term "minority group" in terms of human-animal relations, Peggs focuses on "sociological engagement with the material reality of Others who are non-human animals" (601), and Wilkie (2015) aims to "animalise the sociological imagination" and "sociologise" human-animal studies (323) (note 4). Bridging emergent multispecies scholarship is an interest in fundamentally new questions related to power, oppression, exploitation, liberation, dignity, object versus subject identities and relations, and public versus private domains.

[2.6] This section has reviewed contemporary research on the personhood of nonhuman animals and the animal turn within academia. In an effort to bring extant celebrity and fan studies scholarship on animals into conversation with my current project, in the following sections I review work on celebrity animals as well as animals and fans before shifting to my core focus of animals as fans. The goal is to examine the current treatment (and potential futures) of nonhuman species and human-animal relationships in these related fields.

3. Animal celebrities

[3.1] While the idea of celebrity is typically associated with humans, there is a long history of animal stars dating back at least to the 1500s (Hutchinson 2014). The contemporary appeal of animals' celebrity is rooted in their apparent authenticity. In contrast to humans' ability to misrepresent themselves, animals "wear the badge of authenticity that is held to be so important for credible image-management; there is never any question as to whether or not they are 'being themselves'" (Blewitt 2013, 117). Scholars debate whether animals vary in this capacity. For example, O'Meara (2014) draws a distinction between dog and cat videos on YouTube, arguing that while dog videos "are marked by a mode of performance" wherein "the dogs seem to present self-consciously for the camera," cat videos are marked by a seeming unselfconsciousness "associated with privacy, intimacy, naivety and, increasingly, with impossibility." This unselfconsciousness is key to the global popularity of cat videos, according to O'Meara, since it "offers viewers the prospect that it is possible to live without the gaze of surveillance." In contrast, Giles (2013) argues that any notion of animal personality (on-screen or off) is merely an anthropomorphic projection by humans (116). Claiming that "the less species-appropriate the behaviour, the greater the chances of
celebrification" (118), Giles counters O'Meara's proposed connection of animal celebrity to species authenticity.

[3.2] Working toward a taxonomy of animal celebrity, Giles (2013) proposes four broad categories: (1) anthropomorphic, or animals who have human qualities attributed to them; (2) promotional, which "involves captive animals which have been the subject of a news story and have subsequently generated a fan following"; (3) freak, or animals celebrated for their freakishness; and (4) celebrity pets (118–19). Giles aims to rethink our overall understanding of celebrity through a consideration of nonhuman species, thus linking contemporary celebrity studies to the animal turn. This research trajectory joins film studies' long attunement to animals' on-screen performances (e.g. as laborers), with TV scholars only recently questioning "what happens to thinking about television if animals are attended to, if we take seriously thinking about what it means to consider living beings beyond the human?" (Mills 2017, 2).

[3.3] As Giles (2013) notes, the twenty-first-century escalation of animal celebrity is inextricably tied to the rise of consumer spending on pets. Ninety-four percent of US pet owners see pets as part of their family, and 80 percent report treating pets as surrogate children (Arenofsky 2017). Americans' spending on pets is projected to be $100 billion by 2020 and the industry as a whole is considered recession-resistant because of (1) the multigenerational appeal of pets; (2) growing evidence for a correlation between pet ownership and human health; (3) global expansion of pet ownership; (4) the spread of pet parenting noted above; and (5) a growing pet celebrity culture (Arenofsky). These factors have contributed to now ubiquitous petnetworking, or the efforts of human cultural intermediaries operating social networks for animals: Instagram accounts, YouTube videos, Twitter feeds, and so on (e.g., Hutchinson 2014). As such, modern celebrity studies' embrace of multispecies scholarship seems well on its way, but as discussed below, the status within fan studies is less clear.

4. Animals and/as fans

[4.1] There is growing scholarly interest in animals and fans as a result of the centrality in popular media of animated cartoons, fantasy art and literature, anime, cosplay, avatars, sport team mascots, puppetry, and perhaps most of all the emergence of the furry fandom in the mid-1980s (note 5). For reasons of space constraints this section focuses solely on furry studies and I adopt Strike's (2017) definitions:

[4.2] A furry human is anyone with an above-average interest in anthropomorphic characters, whether or not they consider themselves furry—or have even heard of the fandom [...] A furry animal is any animal with any human characteristics, no matter what its origin: entertainment, mythology, advertising, kids' books or adult literature. To put it simply, Furry is about the idea of animals—what they represent in our minds. (4; emphasis in original)

[4.3] As these definitions imply, some furries share an interest in both anthropomorphism (seeing animals as having human traits) and zoomorphism (seeing humans as having animal
traits) (Gerbasi et al. 2008; Strike 2017). Studies into furry identities by the Furscience research collective (note 6) have generated interesting findings albeit contested within animal studies. For example, an early survey of furries attending a convention found that 25 percent said "yes" to the questions "do you consider yourself to be less than 100% human?" and "if you could become 0% human, would you?," leading the research team to suggest a possible parallel to gender identity disorder (Gerbasi et al. 2008, 197). This study was subsequently critiqued from an animal studies perspective for its design, its objectives, and "its utilization of gender identity disorder [while ignoring its controversial history] as a foundation for species identity disorder" (Probyn-Rapsey 2011, 295). What kind of foundation might gender disorder provide? How would species identity disorder be diagnosed and/or treated?

[4.4] Treatment for gender identity disorder can include limiting opportunities for cross-dressing, positive reinforcement of the gender of the "body," and encouraging play with same-sex friends. Might species identity disorder treatment follow a similar pattern, including, perhaps, redirecting a child's attention away from cross-dressing as an animal, limiting the influence of humanimal creatures liked stuffed toys, companion species, Disney characters, and the characters on Sesame Street, as well as Arthur, Skippy, the Muppets, Angelina Ballerina, and Olivia? (Probyn-Rapsey 2011, 298)

[4.5] Moreover, Gerbasi's (2008) study explicitly defined furries but did not define humans, leading Probyn-Rapsey (2011) to argue that 'the problem' the researchers identify might not lie with furries who identify as 'less than 100% human'; the problem may lie more broadly in the regulatory fictions around what constitutes the 'properly human' subject" (299).

[4.6] Furscience's research into therians also complicates debates within animal studies over the human/animal binary—its perpetuation and its dismantlement, depending on one's perspective. Therians are a small (20 percent) subset of furries with a "spiritual connection with animals, belief in an animal spirit guide, or the belief that they are the reincarnation of an animal spirit" (Roberts et al. 2015, 535). A Furscience study investigating furries' relationship with nonhuman animals found that to "the extent a person likes animals, they may be more likely to anthropomorphize them" whereas those who "spiritually connected to animals did not anthropomorphize them" and for those "whose connection to animals involved identifying as an animal, there was an inclination not to anthropomorphize but to zoomorphize animals, seeing them as particularly distinct from humans" (Roberts et al. 543). As with much multispecies research, this trajectory of fan studies aims for a social justice orientation with the finding that both anthropomorphizing nonhuman animals and identifying oneself as nonhuman is associated with greater concern for animal wellbeing (Plante et al. 2018, 174) (note 7). Within animal studies, which has historically critiqued anthropomorphism for reasons discussed earlier, the empathic potential of the practice is under renewed debate. For example, Weil (2010) suggests that "the turn to ethics in animal studies has brought a new focus on [...] anthropomorphism, regarded not only as a problem but also as a potentially productive critical tool that has similarities to empathy within recent historical research" (15). From this perspective, our awareness that "we're not the only sentient creature with feelings" comes with "enormous responsibility and obligation to treat
other beings with respect, appreciation, compassion, and love" (Bekoff 2007, xxi).

[4.7] However, other scholars argue that such "anthropo-insistence" enables rather than dismantles the human/animal binary. For example, Varsava (2014) agrees that "it is simply in the best interest of animals to be perceived and represented as more human than animal" (526; emphasis deleted) but goes on to note that animals' "ethical consideration, or lack thereof, depends upon how they measure up in terms of the human. To this extent, both the anthropodeniers and the anthropo-insisters (no matter how animal-friendly their intentions) underwrite the human/animal binary" (526). In short, animals and fans research exists in uneasy relationship with animal studies, as each scholarly pursuit wrestles mostly independently with questions about the humanness of humans, the personhood of nonhumans, and the rewards versus pitfalls of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. Below, I turn to a consideration of the possibility of nonhuman animals as fans, ultimately suggesting the potential for fan studies to join the animal turn in embracing multispecies scholarship.

[4.8] Let me state up-front as someone who has been engaged in (human) fan studies for decades that I'm not wholly convinced we could or should move in this direction, but I do think we should consider its promise and implications for our field. In his advocacy for pornography consumers to be seen as fans, McKee (2018) argues that if fan studies is the study of agentic cultural consumption, then porn consumers meet that criteria in that their practices align with well-established fan activities: namely, fans like to collect, fans like to taxonomize, fans argue about quality, and fans build community (510). I adopt McKee's approach by making four related arguments about the fannish potential of (at least some) nonhuman species on the basis of scientific establishment of animal culture, emotionality, sociality, and creative play, all considered central elements of contemporary human fandom.

[4.9] Given that participatory culture has been a core assumption of fandom since the publication of Henry Jenkins's Textual Poachers (1992), findings on animal culture are a lead consideration. Laland and Hoppitt (2003) note, "Define culture one way and it is the exclusive province of human beings; another way, and a multitude of species are deemed worthy of the accolade" (150). Adopting a broad definition that "Cultures are those group-typical behavior patterns shared by members of a community that rely on socially learned and transmitted information" (151), the authors acknowledge that deciding which animals have culture is fraught with complications. If only "hard experimental evidence" is taken into consideration, the answer is "humans plus a handful of species of birds, one or two whales, and two species of fish" (151). But if a broader range of evidence is taken into consideration on the basis of knowledge of "animal social learning, observations of natural behavior of animals, intuition, and the laws of probability," the answer might be that "many hundreds of species" have culture (151).

[4.10] For example, a seminal meta-analysis of chimpanzees, capturing an accumulated 151 years of scientific observation, emphasizes the same parameters of culture noted above (social learning and information transmission) and finds that "39 different behavior patterns, including tool usage, grooming and courtship behaviours, are customary or habitual in some communities" (Whiten et al. 1999, 682). Similar diversity in behavior "consistent with a
cultural explanation" has been found in other primates including orangutans and capuchins (Laland and Hoppitt 2003, 152). In the context of avians, there is "considerable empirical evidence" that vocal signals represent communicative culture; such evidence has been found in Black-capped chickadees, Brown-headed Cowbirds, Chaffinches, European starlings, House finches, Saddlebacks, Stripe-back wrens, Village Indigobirds, Wood thrushes, Yellow-rumped caciques, and "different populations and subspecies of White-crowned sparrows" (Freeberg 2000, 180–81). Moving underwater, the song patterns of Humpback whales depend on where they live, with populations in different regions singing different songs. In one study, the song of whales in the Pacific Ocean was "replaced rapidly and completely [by] the introduction of only a small number of 'foreign' singers" (Noad et al. 2000), and an eleven-year study of multiple populations of Humpback whales in the South Pacific allowed scientists to "document the rapid and repeated horizontal cultural transmission of multiple song types at the population level" (Garland et al. 2011, 687): "Two types of song change [...] occurred in this ocean basin. The first was progressive cultural evolution in which songs changed from one type to another within each population. The second type of song change [...] involved rapid replacement of a cultural trait, in which a novel song type appeared in each population and rapidly replaced the existing song type. [This represents] culturally driven change at a vast scale" (688).

[4.11] Song changes in both whales and avians are considered by scientists a form of cultural evolution "whereby changes in songs are passed among individuals by learning and accumulate over time" (Noad et al. 2000). Drawing a point of comparison between this body of literature and media (music) fandom, consider a project such as Rap Map in ATLMaps—much as the field of ethology examines the evolutionary history, development, and adaptation of animal behaviors (McFarland 1982), Rap Map is designed to explore "how Metro Atlanta has influenced not just the artists that call the city home but a whole genre of music by spatializing that impact" and aims to "show the significance of music as a source for an aural history of cities and towns" (https://atlmaps.org/project/239). Chimpanzees and birds and whales thus join rap fans (and TV fans and gaming fans and so on) in the acquisition and cultural/spatial transmission of knowledge and behavior.

[4.12] Research on animal emotionality is also crucial to the possibility of animal fans since it is widely accepted that fandom stems from affective investments in favored texts and objects. While those of us who live with cats and dogs and hamsters and so on "know firsthand that animals have feelings—it's a no-brainer" (Bekoff 2007, xx), the emotionality of nonhumans remains controversial among scientists, who agree that a wide range of nonhumans experience primary emotions such as anger, sadness, joy, pain, fear, and disgust (Demoulin 2004, 72), but disagree about the presence of secondary emotions such as shame, guilt, or love (note 8). Scientists' skepticism rests in the following: "From a theoretical perspective it is claimed that self-consciousness is necessary for the emergence of secondary emotions, and from an empirical perspective there is thought to be little evidence for self-consciousness in most animals" (Morris, Doe, and Godsell 2008, 4–5).

[4.13] Despite the skepticism, laypersons, pet owners, and numerous scientists who work closely with nonhumans argue for the full range of human emotions in (at least some) animal species. For example, Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, a psychologist and primatologist who has
conducted foundational research with bonobos, reports that "There are few feelings the apes do not share with us, except perhaps self-hatred. They certainly experience and express exuberance, joy, guilt, remorse, disdain, disbelief, awe, sadness, wonder, tenderness, loyalty, anger, distrust and love" (quoted in Mason and McCarthy 1994, 17). Moreover, pet owners with "years of interactive experience with their animals" report that cats, dogs, horses, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, rats and birds feel "sadness, anxiety, surprise, anger, curiosity, interest, affection, joy and fear," with most dog and horse owners also reporting "a restricted range of secondary emotions (jealousy and guilt in dogs, jealousy and pride in horses) at levels comparable with primary emotions" (Morris, Doe, and Godsell 2008, 12). Revisiting the methodological critique of anthropomorphism noted earlier, while we may be uncomfortable concluding that human love or guilt is the same as the love or guilt felt by a rat, a cat, or even a bonobo, there is "no universally accepted scientific proof of human feelings. What one person feels is never entirely available to another" (Mason and McCarthy 37; emphasis deleted). As Bekoff (2007) puts it, 'Dogs are happy, not 'happy' [...] the truth is simply that a dog has rich emotional and cognitive experiences of the dog kind' (9, 15; emphasis in original).

[4.14] With culture and emotionality of certain animal species now recognized within the scientific community, animal sociality is our next consideration—or, as McKee (2018) frames it in the context of porn consumers, their community-building potential. In my own recent scholarship (Harrington and Bielby 2018), I argued that the solitary, private, perhaps solely internally identified human fan still counts as a fan, but I acknowledge that twenty-first-century fandom is more widely understood by my peers as a mostly online networked practice. I presume most animals spend little or no time online, but the scientific literature on nonhumans is "more and more speckled with the language of sociality: cooperation, fairness, reciprocity, empathy, trust, consolation, altruism" (Pierce and Bekoff 2012, 124). For example, prosocial behavior in primates is well established, with primates engaging in "consolation behavior, conflict resolution, coalition building, retribution and punishment for cheaters or free-loaders" (126) (that certainly resonates with human fandom), and speaking to the question of self-awareness in nonhumans, DeGrazia (2005) argues that mammals have social self-awareness: "an awareness of how they fit into group structures, the expectations that come with their positions in the group, what may happen if they act against those expectations, and so on" (42; see also Bekoff 2007) (note 9). According to noted animal rights scholar Mary Midgley (1986), this hardwired sociality justifies the personhood of (at least some) nonhumans—thus perhaps further justifying their fannish potential: "What makes creatures our fellow beings, entitled to basic consideration, is surely not intellectual capacity but emotional fellowship. And if we ask what powers can justify a higher claim, bringing some creatures nearer to the degree of consideration which is due to humans, those that seem to be most relevant are sensibility, social and emotional complexity of the kind which is expressed by the formation of deep, subtle and lasting relationships" (60). While animals have long facilitated human sociality, as anyone at a dog park can attest, scientific research increasingly recognizes the inherent sociality of multiple nonhuman species.

[4.15] My final reflection is on animals' creative play, another foundational basis of human fandom in both affective (e.g., Hills 2002) and material (e.g., Heljakka 2013) forms. The scientific literature is clear that numerous species of nonhumans play for fun as well as
function, and the neurochemical changes that render play enjoyable are shared by both humans and animals (Bekoff 2007, 56). Play among juvenile nonhumans has well-established developmental functions, but its purpose goes beyond that and is clearly beyond that for adult animals (Hall 1998). Some animals play in solitude whereas others seem to enjoy social play. Some animals engage in object play, and this can be seen in animals that aren't known to play with other animals (Mason and McCarthy 1994, 150). In the absence of human-manufactured toys, "domestic, captive and wild animals may use a variety of tools such as sticks, rocks, leaves, fruit, feathers, dead prey animals and even items of discarded bric-a-brac to play with" (Hall 1998, 45). Object play has been observed in a wide range of nonhumans including elephants, spotted hyenas, bears, leopards, hooded crows, Komodo dragons, dolphins, beluga whales, lions, gorillas, and chimpanzees (Mason and McCarthy 148, 150). Perhaps most intriguingly from a fan studies perspective, some species engage in imaginary play both alone and with others (Patterson and Gordon 1993), and the artistic creativity of certain animals is widely publicized—the paintings and drawings of animals in captivity as well as the (intentional? unintentional?) monkey selfie mentioned earlier. "The boredom or leisure of captivity must be considered as a motivating factor for all such animals, yet it is interesting that [some] appear to find the act of drawing or painting rewarding in itself" (Mason and McCarthy 198). Consistent with the animal turn in academia, these findings raise ethical implications for humans: given the playfulness of nonhumans, "Must we change our relationships with them? Have we obligations to them?" (Mason and McCarthy 215). These questions are relevant to future fan studies scholarship on or with nonhumans (e.g., Deller 2018).

[4.16] This section has explored four foundational aspects of human fandom—culture, emotionality, sociality, and play—and suggested that their shared presence among some species of nonhuman animals raises the possibility of a multispecies fan studies. Below, I explore implications of that possibility.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] I have aimed to sketch a pathway toward the joining of fan studies to the animal turn taking place in the humanities and social sciences. A multispecies fan studies raises obvious questions, most notably the question of animals as fans of what, exactly. Clearly nonhumans are not engaged with popular media texts and objects to the same extent as humans, although that is arguably an open research question and there is tantalizing evidence to the contrary. For example, consider anecdotal data on long-lasting animal-object relationships (e.g. https://www.thedodo.com/pets-with-toys-1125699167.html), which clearly evokes scholarship on (human) object fandom and reminds us that fandom exists in concrete practices and artifacts (Rehak 2014, ¶ 1.1). The cited web page features then and now photos of cats and dogs who have "Loved the Same Toy Since Forever," with some of the now photos featuring objects tattered beyond recognition. The page reminds me of Mark Nixon's wonderful portraiture book Much Loved (2013), a celebration of people's lifelong attachments with cherished stuffed animals that have been "loved to bits" (in Nixon's words), and resonates with fan studies scholarship on aging, human development, and the life course (Harrington and Bielby 2010). For example, just as humans mature and develop over time, dog personalities have been found to differ by age (Chopik and Weaver 2019), thus
potentially reshaping and re-reshaping enduring relationships between canines and their favorite toys (note 10). Or consider the launch of DOGTV in 2009, a 24/7 digital TV channel supported by the Humane Society to provide "dog-friendly programming scientifically developed to provide the right company for dogs when left alone. Through years of research with some of the world's top pet experts, special content was created to meet specific attributes of a dog's sense of vision and hearing and supports their natural behavior patterns. The result: a confident, happy dog, who's less likely to develop stress, separation anxiety or other related problems" (https://www.dogtv.com/).

[5.2] Employing a team including scientists, animal trainers, and pet psychologists, DOGTV's website hosts a blog of "canine enrichment" entries such as "2018's Best Actors Were Animals" and "How to Teach Your Dog to Watch DOGTV" (https://blog.dogtv.com/), thus facilitating animal celebritification as well as animals as fans. Finally, consider Rachel Mayeri, an artist working at the intersections of science and art who was commissioned in 2011 to make original videos for chimpanzees in captivity. Her resulting project, titled Primate Cinema, makes videos for baboons, squirrel monkeys, chimpanzees, and humans. In one video she questions "What would a cinema for squirrel monkeys look like? What do they like to watch?" An experiment with the monkeys, whose attention span is seconds long, revealed one of their favorites to be a sequence of a mouse running—so, squirrel monkeys as fans of mice? Of action movies? Mayeri's conclusion that "Humans and monkeys may both be interested in television because it's a good way to learn about complexities of social life from a safe distance" (http://rachelmayeri.com/blog/2011/01/06/saimiri-cinema/) might be reframed within fan studies by focusing on textual or narrative content of human versus animal fan favorites.

[5.3] While evidence of animals' engagement with textual and object fandom is provocative but perhaps scarce (again, an open research question), we might expand our thinking of animals as fans in context of the perspective on fandom as the primary mode of engagement with our twenty-first-century cultural and political (and natural?) landscapes. In their discussion of three waves of fan studies, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) argued that third-wave scholarship positions fandom as part of the fabric of everyday life: "Studies of fan audiences help us to understand and meet challenges far beyond the realm of popular culture because they tell us something about the way in which we relate to those around us [...]. Perhaps the most important contribution of contemporary research into fan audiences thus lies in furthering our understanding of how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world" (10; see updated discussion in Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2017).

[5.4] Treating animals seriously as one type of emotional relationship "we form with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world" opens the door to a multispecies fan studies. Other questions to be considered before fan studies embraces multispecies scholarship include which species might be welcomed under an expanded fannish umbrella (chimpanzees? dolphins? cats? flies?) and, as noted, reconsideration of the ethics of empirical fan scholarship (Deller 2018).

[5.5] Perhaps the most central question is whether a multispecies approach stretches the
elasticity of fan studies too far—"who isn't a fan? What doesn't constitute fan culture?" (Jenkins 2007, 364). In large part Jenkins was critiquing scholars' persistent interest in fan psychologies, but he goes on to caution that "As fandom becomes part of the normal way that creative industries operate, then fandom may cease to function as a meaningful category of cultural analysis" (364). However, the last decade of fan studies, including scholars' direct engagement with his provocation, seems to have tempered this cautionary note. Indeed, Jenkins (2014) subsequently acknowledged that mapping fan subjectivities remains an important scholarly project, a point resonating perhaps unexpectedly with animal scholars' insistence that we take animal subjectivities and human-animal relations more seriously (Knight 2005). Moreover, much as fandom becoming "part of the normal way that the creative industries operate" has not decimated fan studies but actually energized it, so too have other studies been energized: film studies by "rediscover[ing] what is surely most visible about film: its entanglements in the world it shoots, edits and projects" (Pick and Narraway 2013, 2); celebrity studies by considering whether it is possible that animals "allow us to see the operation of the celebrity system untroubled by any phenomenological considerations" (Giles 2013, 116); and TV studies by questioning "what happens to thinking about television if animals are attended to" (Mills 2017, 2). Following this latter question, what happens to thinking about fans and fandoms if we embrace multispecies scholarship? What do we gain and what do we lose?

6. Notes

1. For example, see Transformative Works and Cultures special issues on queer female fandom (no. 24, 2017) and on fans and fandoms of color in (no. 29, 2019); Ellcessor (2018) explores fans and disabilities, and Geraghty (2018) examines fans and socioeconomic class.

2. Lamerichs (2018) explores the role of nonhumans in fandom through a different lens than mine here. Speculating on the future of fandom, she focuses on disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and big data. Her forecast predicts two essential aspects of future fandom: "we will share participatory culture with nonhuman entities; we will celebrate creative products created by nonhuman entities" (¶ 2.4).

3. After the dispute began, the US Copyright Office added "a photograph taken by a monkey" as an item that cannot be copyrighted (neither can artwork by elephants; Slotkin 2017).

4. The sociological imagination is a classic concept developed in the late 1950s referring to the ability to see links between individual circumstances and larger social structures. Human-animal studies is devoted to examining, understanding, and evaluating the relationships between humans and other animals (Wilkie 2015, 326).

5. For an illustrated chronology of furry fandom see Patten (2012); for full-length discussion of the origins and development of the fandom in the United States, see Strike (2017).

6. According to their website, "Furscience is the public face of the International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP), a multidisciplinary team of scientists studying
the furry fandom. Asking psychological, anthropological, and sociological questions, our team examines furry culture to help both furries and non-furries better understand the furry community" (https://furscience.com/who-we-are/).

7. Strike (2017) elaborates as follows: "And there's a lot more reasons why furs identify with animals on a deeper level: a growing awareness of how a ravaged environment threatens everyone [...] and a way to distance ourselves from the humans who seem intent on destroying the planet; a sense of kinship with the natural world springing from alternative spiritual beliefs; and scientific research revealing animals are far more intelligent—and genetically linked to us far more closely—than we had previously imagined" (12).

8. Explains biologist Mark Bekoff (2007), primary emotions are inborn and require no conscious thought. In contrast, "Secondary emotions are not automatic: they are processed in the brain, and the individual thinks about them and considers what to do about them" (8).


10. Intriguingly, this research further suggests that "exposure to current cultural phenomena (e.g. social media, a culture of egotism) or broader generational/cultural changes in humans" might also affect dogs, implying that as human fandom changes so too might canine fandom (Chopik and Weaver 2019, 24).

7. References


Theory

The author in the postinternet age: Fan works, authorial function, and the archive

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[0.1] Abstract—Fifty years since Roland Barthes proclaimed the death of the author, there still exists difficulty in framing the nature of interaction between commercial (professional) creators and fan (transformative) authors. In the postinternet age, the visibility of unsanctioned (or tacitly sanctioned) derivative fictional works has only increased, as have the number of commercial creators with experience in creating derivative works for a fan audience. It has therefore become necessary to interrogate whether the author has truly died in the Barthian sense, and if not, what role the construct of the author plays in today's popular mediascape. In an analysis of the Foucauldian author function (that is, the role discursively constructed authors play relative to their work) assessing both Euro-American and Japanese histories of fan practice, a move to a more open-source style of fan practice is evident. The author in an open-source fandom functions as a heuristic device through which fans may access and search the database, as well as a means of decentralizing commercial authority over media content.

[0.2] Keywords—Anime; Authorship; Doujinshi; Fan fiction; Fandom; Manga


1. Introduction

[1.1] Fifty years after the publication of Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" (1967), it remains difficult to frame the nature of the interaction between commercial (professional) authors and fan (transformative) authors. In the postinternet age, the visibility of unsanctioned (or tacitly sanctioned) transformative fictional works has only increased, as have commercial creators with experience in creating transformative works for a fan audience. As such, it has become necessary to interrogate directly whether the author has truly died in the Barthian sense, and if not, what role the construct of the author plays in today's popular mediascape. The author as construct has been mentioned in recent scholarship in fan studies, but there exists some disagreement as to what extent, and in what form, the author exists. Coppa (2014, 242), for example, calls on Barthes's essay to assert that the author is dead within both the realm of conventional literary theory and the realm of fandom. In place of the author, however, lives a different construct, the writer, which Coppa
distinguishes from the author by nature of the writer's accessibility to their audience. On the other hand, in a discussion of BL (boys' love, a genre written predominantly by women that is centered on romantic and sexual between male characters) *dōjinshi*, Hemmann (2015) also invokes Barthes's essay to state that though "the individual author may be dead," what remains alive is instead the "corporate author." However, the focus of recent works such as these is not on the author as a concept; rather, these works mention the idea of the author in passing in pursuit of a different point. This suggests a need to interrogate the concept directly.

[1.2] With this contention in mind, this paper explores what Michel Foucault ([1969] 1998) refers to as the "author function," or what role a discursively constructed author plays relative to their work in today's mediascape. To approach this concept, however, it is critical to consider fan practice outside of predominately North American and European fandoms. In light of the tendency of English-language works to proliferate worldwide, in this paper, I will discuss these works that originate in English and generate fandoms among a global English-speaking community as Anglophone. This is not to suggest that the fans that participate in these fandoms are necessarily native English speakers but rather to specify that the original language of the media object is English and that at least some interaction within that fandom more broadly occurs in English.

[1.3] With the dramatic increase in widespread internet use in the late 1990s and early 2000s, interacting with popular media across cultural and linguistic borders has become exceedingly easy, resulting in a blurring of lines in fan-based creative practices with the increase in transcultural and transnational media fandoms (Morimoto 2017; Annett 2014). This period, which can be considered the age of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2007) or the postinternet age (McHugh 2011), is characterized by the decentralization and democratization of the internet as a platform as well as increased access to media that may have previously been out of reach. As such, I will discuss not only present creative fan practices online but will also focus on the history of transformative fan practices in Japanese-language fandoms. By analyzing how the balance between work and creator is maintained in the Japanese mediascape, I propose that it is possible to better understand the current flattening of hierarchies in non-Japanese fandoms by flattening the relationship between producer and produced in globalized fan culture as a whole.

[1.4] After summarizing previous approaches to the concept of the author in contemporary media, I will begin with a brief history of transformative writing practices in Anglophone fandoms and current trends in creative fan practices with regard to the participatory nature of postinternet fandoms. Next, I will summarize transformative writing practices in Japan, which has a history that is similar to but ultimately separate from those in the Anglophone cultural sphere. The reason Japan is under consideration in this paper, as opposed to any other non-Anglophone cultural area, is Japan's recent history of exporting their popular culture products through the government-driven Cool Japan project (e.g., Iwabuchi 2012). Furthermore, since the early 1990s, Japanese popular media fandoms have increasingly intermingled with Anglophone ones, a tendency that is evidenced both by the ever-growing presence of Japanese media-related programing at traditionally Anglophone science fiction and fantasy conventions and by the popularity of works such as BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–17)
in Japan. By examining different approaches to the author function across linguistic and cultural boundaries, I assert that, rather than Barthes's conclusion that the author is dead, the hierarchical position of authors has flattened, yet authors themselves remain alive. Invoking both Azuma's (2009) model of popular media consumption driven by the idea of the "database" and De Kosnik's (2016)—née Derecho (2006)—analyses of fan fiction practice as resembling a Derridean archive, I maintain that while the Romantic image of the author presupposed by Barthes may no longer be the primary point of interaction with a given work, the author continues to live on as an heuristic device through which we consume and interact with popular media content; in other words, the author is a ghost in the archive.

2. The author is (not) dead

[2.1] In 1967, Roland Barthes published the essay "The Death of the Author," questioning what role authorial intention plays in reader reception. In his essay, he contends that in modern literature, we are able to bury the author by engaging with a text through only the perspective of the reader; invoking linguistics, he contends that "the whole of enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors" (145). Indeed, he goes on to state that writing "designates exactly what linguists…call a performative…in which the enunciation has no other content than the act by which it is uttered" (145–46). In other words, Barthes asserts that the author is divisible from their works, claiming that a given work exists in and of itself; the creators behind works, as well as any intentions they may have had with regard to those works, are functionally buried, leaving the meaning of a text to be deciphered and decided purely by the reader.

[2.2] Two years after the publication of Barthes's essay, Michel Foucault ([1969] 1998) gave a lecture of his own entitled "What Is an Author?" to the Société française de philosophie. Though his lecture does not directly mention Barthes's essay, it is generally assumed that Foucault's lecture is a response to Barthes. In this lecture, Foucault states that "it is not enough to…repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared," opting instead to examine what is left behind in "the space left empty by the author's disappearance" (209). Foucault does not dispute Barthes's point that the author, or the concept of an absolute, objective authority on a work, has died. Rather, he opts to discuss the author not as an absolute authority but as a discursive construct, which he refers to as the "author function" (211). He argues that with regard to authorship, the questions we ask should not be, "Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?" (222). Rather, the point of interrogation should concern the "modes of existence of [that] discourse" and "where it has been used, where it can circulate, and who can appropriate it from himself" (222). In other words, we should focus less on who the author of a given text is and more on what difference it makes to assign that text an author at all.

[2.3] In the same year that Barthes declared the author effectively dead, the first Star Trek fanzine, Spockanalia (1967–70), entered circulation. Typically obtained either through mail order or at conventions, fanzines were hard copy, amateur publications "that collected fan-written stories and artwork" (Hellekson and Busse 2014, 4). Prior to the internet, these
publications were essential for not only the distribution of fan fiction and other fan-written related texts but also to connect media fans and create a fan community. These zines were not a new concept in the 1960s, as fan-created zines had been distributed within the science fiction fandoms of the 1920s and 30s (Coppa 2006). *Spockanalia*, however, and other fanzines released shortly thereafter contained something that earlier fanzines did not: creative fan works, or fan fiction, for consumption by other fans (Hellekson and Busse 2014, 6).

[2.4] The transformative writing practices of media fandoms were likely outside of the theoretical consideration, not to mention awareness, of Barthes. As pointed out by Katyal (2006, 477), Barthes's image of the author relies predominately on that of the Romantic author or the author-genius as it emerged in the eighteenth century. With the birth of the Romantic author, works became viewed as inseparable from an author's personality, and the only person with the key to the true interpretation of a work was the author (Katyal 2006, 477; Heymann 2005, 1387–88). In postmodern terms, Barthes's 1967 essay liberates the work from the author as far as literary criticism is concerned. However, to proclaim the author functionally dead ignores what Foucault refers to in his speech as the "classificatory function" of the author, or more specifically, the name of the author ([1969] 1998, 210). For works where the assignment of an author is appropriate, the name of the author in and of itself "serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse" (211). Referred to as an "authornym" by Heymann (2005), this classificatory nature of authorship serves as the point of departure for this paper.

[2.5] While critics such as Heymann (2005) have focused mainly on the tension between trademark and copyright law with regard to authornyms, or pseudonyms that function for the purpose of statements of authorship, in this paper I instead focus on the discursive role of the author within transformative media fandom. Namely, because works across the internet are most often not authored anonymously but classified according to some sort of handle, if not the author's legal name, calling the author dead becomes problematic. Certainly, one is able to interpret that work in any way that suits one, but as pointed out by Foucault ([1969] 1998) above, there still exists some classificatory function to the category of author in certain discourses. This is a function that demands to be interrogated with regard to today's fan practices.

[2.6] While previous literature has approached this construct of the author through the term "author," this paper will instead opt for the more general, auto-descriptive term "content creator" or simply "creator." Literally referring to anyone who creates content, this term avoids privileging the written word over other kinds of creative practice, such as visual art, music videos and visualizations, playlists, and so forth. Particularly with regard to fan practice, by more clearly incorporating those who engage in fandom outside of writing fan fiction, it is possible to construct a more holistic, inclusive approach to today's creative practices. This is especially the case with regard to what is typically referred to in Japan as "media mix" (e.g., Steinberg 2012), a term that refers to the dispersal of content within a given media franchise across multiple representations, including manga, anime, live-action drama and movies, tie-in goods, and so forth. While the term is used most commonly when referring to the Japanese popular media environment, transformations of works into different
media formats is prevalent in Anglophone mediaspheres as well, and this phenomenon further illustrates the usefulness of utilizing a more inclusive term, like creator.

[2.7] Given that the realm of content creation extends beyond written works, it has become necessary to engage with the role of content creators through the lens of greater media theory rather than literary theory. More specifically, this paper proposes the application of Azuma's (2009) concept of the "database," as well as De Kosnik’s (2016; Derecho 2006) explorations of the Derridean archive, as primary frameworks of interaction with today's creator. Before approaching these concepts with regard to today's fan practices, however, it is first necessary to discuss said fan practices themselves and to analyze the interaction between fan creators and commercial creators within both Anglophone and Japanese mediaspheres.

3. Fan creators, commercial creators

[3.1] In the Anglophone mediascape today, there is less resistance to the idea of transformative fan works than even ten years ago, a situation that is at least partially the result of the increasingly easy access to and visibility of fan works through the internet. Compared with the early stages of fan engagement, which took place largely through self-published, mail order zines, it has become substantially easier to share and manipulate content due to the proliferation of internet technology since the late 1990s (Hadas 2009; Jenkins 2006). Known as Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2007), or the postinternet age more generally (McHugh 2011), this period is characterized by the decentralization and democratization of the internet as a platform, as well as increased access to media that may have previously been out of reach without importation. As such, the internet moved from presenting users with strictly finished products for consumption to providing users with frameworks for interaction and creation—in other words, as Hadas puts it, an internet "by and for the people." This shift toward a participatory model of internet usage is similar in theory to that of the one that drives fandom and, as such, has further eroded the borders between consumer and producer.

[3.2] That being said, this erosion complicates the analysis of the role of creators with regard to their works, making a simple explanation such as the Barthian death-of-the-author framework unrealistic. Certainly, commercially successful creators such as Anne Rice (2009), Orson Scott Card (quoted in Patta 1997), and Diana Gabaldon (2010) have taken notoriously negative positions with regard to transformative fan works. Creators who have entered the industry more recently, however, generally take much more positive stances toward creative fan practices. For example, the creators of the Welcome to Night Vale (2012–) podcast, Joseph Fink and Jeffrey Cranor, stated in an interview that while they do not personally consume any fan works, they deeply appreciate the works being created: "I'm super thrilled it exists...It's an expression of love to build a fan canon" (quoted in Scribner 2015). Young adult author John Green (2017) takes a similarly supportive stance toward creative fan works, and has elaborated on the topic several times on the YouTube channel he shares with his brother, Hank Green. On the topic of selling movie rights to a recent novel of his, Green (2017) states in video,

[3.3] I have often stated over the years that I believe books belong to their
readers...I don't think we should privilege the author's voice when it comes to matters outside the text, like for instance what happens to characters after the story ends, because I don't think that's up to the author. I think that's up to us, as readers. My books belong to me while I'm working on them, and then when I am finished, they don't.

[3.4] Though taking an overall Barthian approach to his status as a creator, later in the same video, he goes on to state that there are a few problems with an extreme stance regarding that viewpoint, namely that "it's a little bit disingenuous to pretend that the author isn't present in the book at all, especially in our personality-driven culture," and secondly, "while the book belongs to the reader, the author has to make a lot of decisions on behalf of the book," such as legal decisions regarding movie adaptation rights (Green 2017). In other words, for Green, while the interpretation of that work may be left up to the consumer, the creator of that work is not nonexistent, and indeed, as in the case of Green, may engage to varying degrees with fans.

[3.5] In addition to those commercially successful creators with positive attitudes concerning creative fan works, there are also an increasing number of creators who either have histories in creative fan practice or continue to take part in fan culture on the side. At the time that Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* was published in 1992, Jenkins commented that "only a small but growing number of fans have gone on to become professional writers of media texts" (49). Twenty-six years later, it is not uncommon for media creators to have engaged in fan practices of some sort, especially writing or reading fan fiction. Lev Grossman, the author of *The Magicians* (2009), which was adapted into a television show for SyFy in 2015, has written for fandoms for series such as *Harry Potter* (1997–), *Adventure Time* (2010–18), *Star Wars* (1977–), and *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010–), largely for the entertainment of his children, and many of his works are available on his personal blog (Grossman 2017). Cassandra Clare, the author of The Mortal Instruments (2007–14) series, also has a background in writing fan fiction for the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* fandoms (Alter 2012). The most notable example of this trend, however, is E. L. James, whose Twilight fan fiction "Master of the Universe" was published as the Fifty Shades (2011–12) trilogy, selling more than 125 million copies worldwide. Interestingly, though the most successful in terms of monetary gain, E. L. James is not the only Twilight fan fiction author to have published — according to the website TwiFanfictionRecs, as of November 30, 2017, over 400 fan fictions had been published either independently or through a publishing company (TwiFanfictionRecs 2017).

[3.6] The other side of transformative fan works becoming more visible, as well as a more common past or present activity among commercial media creators, is movement by industry professionals to commodify and exploit fan work for commercial gain (Noppe 2011; Pearson 2010). As part of its Make It Digital campaign, the BBC began the project Mission Dalek, an effort to solicit entries from fans for a ninety-second *Doctor Who* (1963–89, 2005–) episode featuring the show's Twelfth Doctor. Winners of their contest had their entries posted on the official BBC website and were treated to a visit with the cast on the set of the show in Cardiff, UK. Steven Moffat, the showrunner for both *Doctor Who* (1963–89, 2005–) and BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–17), is himself a former fan fiction writer and actively encourages fan
fiction from both shows' fans (quoted in Hibberd 2015). Orson Scott Card, formerly against fan fiction, more recently sponsored a campaign to incorporate a fan work as part of the canon in a short story collection. The existence of projects such as these, as well as other existing forms of fan labor commodification through venues such as Amazon's Kindle Worlds, suggests that while transformative fan practices may increasingly be seen as acceptable, their acceptability is accompanied by an increase in attempts to exploit the free labor of fan writers.

[3.7] If we consider the increased visibility of fan work more broadly, its continuing proliferation and increasing acceptance by commercial entities indicates a movement toward the decentralization of the source creator as a critical figure to the work's existence. There are Anne Rice fans who continued to publish fan works based on her novels, for example, regardless of her requests not to do so. Further, while fans in the Harry Potter fandom may pay some attention to J. K. Rowling's comments about the universe, as well as to the addition of extra canon material released through Pottermore, we also see attempts to diversify what is seen as a rather white-centered, able-body-centered, cisnormative/heteronormative canon (Hampton 2014). Despite what appear to be moves toward decentralization of the commercial creator, with the free creation of fan material, activities on the part of commercial creators such as Moffat, Card, and so forth can be interpreted as attempts to recenter the author as the primary authority figure within a given media fandom; if the commercial creator remains the ultimate authority on what qualifies as canon, and if fans continue to privilege canonical materials over fan-created materials, the cultural capital of fan works as a whole diminishes under the weight of what essentially amounts to content gatekeeping.

[3.8] Noppe (2011, 2014) engages with this tension between commercial creators and fan creators through an economic lens by utilizing the idea of the "hybrid economy." According to Lessig (2008, 177), we can broadly consider two types of economies: commercial economies, which "build value with money at their core," and sharing economies, which "build value, ignoring money." A third variety, the "hybrid economy," can be understood as a compromise between these two. "The hybrid is either a commercial entity that aims to leverage value from a sharing economy," writes Lessig (177), "or it is a sharing economy that builds a commercial entity to better support its sharing aims." He emphasizes, however, that it is the maintenance of a distinction between the two that allows the hybrid to exist. Noppe (2011) points out that the idea of the hybrid economy fits "contemporary media fandom exceedingly well," serving as an apt tool for talking about the economic relationship between fan-produced works and commercially produced works, especially with regard to the fan markets of transformative works in Japanese media fandoms.

[3.9] In addition to the economic perspective that Noppe (2014) explores, the relationship expressed by the hybrid economy framework is also useful for thinking about the role that content creators, both commercial and otherwise, fulfill with relation to their works and the consumers of those works. The commercial economy can be considered to represent a more centralized view of the author; the sharing economy, a more decentralized view. Noppe's (2011, 2014) research, however, relies almost exclusively on Japanese fan practices, a milieu that often goes unconsidered in research on Anglophone fan cultures. Citing difficulties
obtaining research materials or language barriers, earlier Western works in fan studies tended
to omit Japanese-language media fandom, though there has been more movement towards a
translinguistic, transnational approach in the last few years (e.g., Annett 2014; Brienza 2015;
Chambers 2015; Kuwahara 2014; Morimoto 2017).

[3.10] Drawing a hard line between Anglophone and Japanese fan practices results in
analytical problems. Though Japanese popular media has been trickling into the West nearly
as long as the Star Trek (1966–) series has been around, the inability of fans outside of Japan
to access Japanese media content was a barrier prior to the internet, limiting the scope of
Japanese media fandoms in the Anglosphere prior to the 1990s. With the advancement of
widespread internet access, however, global interest in Japanese popular media has increased
(Coppa 2014). Now, it is difficult to find media fans in the West who are exclusively fans of
either Anglophone or Japanese media works; even conventions that are traditionally oriented
toward science fiction fandoms, such as the annual Dragon*Con in Atlanta, feature at least
some content related to Japanese popular media. Furthermore, as interest in media that
traverses cultural borders has increased, so, too, has contact between fans across borders
both by way of the social internet and through the overall increased mobility of fans
worldwide. As such, dividing fan behavior strictly along the lines of so-called Western and
Eastern consumption practices is increasingly artificial. With a flattening of hierarchical
structures between consumer and creator in this postinternet age, as well as an increase in
access to popular media and fan groups in spite of cultural or linguistic borders, engaging
with Foucault's ([1969] 1998) idea of author function with fan practice in mind requires a
consideration of fan practices outside of predominantly Anglophone spaces.

4. Dōjin culture and the creator

[4.1] Existing literature on Anglophone transformative writing practices frequently
emphasizes that this is not a new phenomenon, and Japan is no different. Utilizing the first
half of an existing tanka poem and innovating a new second half has been a common
creative practice since at least the Heian Period (794CE–1185) (Nihonshi Daijiten 1994).
The Tale of Heike, an epic account of the Genpei War dating to sometime before 1330, is
commonly the source text of transformative works, including the Kabuki play Atsumori by
Zeami (1998), which focuses on the death of Atsumori, a side character in The Tale of the
Heike, and his killer. Murasaki Shikibu's Heian period novel The Tale Genji has also been
subject to countless transformative versions, ranging from Koizumi Yoshihiro's Maro, n? (2002), a retelling in which all the characters are replaced with chestnuts, to numerous erotic
versions.

[4.2] Today in Japan, transformative fan works fall under the umbrella of dōjin. This term
refers to self-published works that may be either transformative or original in nature, not
unlike the zines self-published and distributed in early North American zine culture. Dōjin
may form compounds with different words or morphemes as a prefix, allowing it to refer to
different kinds of self-produced works. One of the most common, dōjinshi, refers
specifically to written content, typically in the form of manga, novels, or magazines, though
dōjin may also refer to video games (dōjin geemu or dōjin sofuto), music (dōjin ongaku), and
so forth. While the history of the Tale of Heike and the Tale of Genji illustrate a long history
of composing transformative works in Japan, scholars tend to date the direct ancestor to dōjinshī publication to the beginnings of magazine publication itself during the Meiji Period (1868–1912) (Ajima 2004; Nagamine 1997). At the time, however, dōjinshī were not fan works but rather limited-circulation literary magazines (bungei dōjinshī) in which authors could distribute their poetry and other fictional writings (Circles' Square 2012). Dōjinshī were not only for literary content, however, as researchers, collectors, and other types of hobbyists would publish dōjinshī for others within their respective hobby groups, known as "circles" (sākuru), a term that is still in use today (Noppe 2014). During the Taishō (1912–26) and early Shōwa periods (1926–89), which were particularly tumultuous politically, dōjinshī also became outlets for politically motivated content (Ajima 2004). In this way, it is possible to see that by this period, dōjinshī "were already fulfilling several of the functions that they would go on to fill for Japanese later," as they served as "outlets for creators who could or would not publish through 'regular' channels" (Noppe 2014, 83).

[4.3] It is important to remember, however, that manga as we see it today in dōjinshī did not yet exist during this period; what we think of as manga did not become an industry until the 1930s, and while there were some dōjinshī written by and for comic enthusiasts prior to this decade, they were by no means large in number (Noppe 2014; Norris 2009). With the spread of manga came increases in the number of manga-related circles, in which fans would meet to discuss previously published works as well as to create their own original or transformative works. In the 1970s, however, cheap, portable printing and photocopying equipment became more readily available to the public (Kinsella 1998). Additionally, fan conventions began to take off, including Comiket in 1975, the first fan-only convention (Comic Market Junbikai 2005). In this way, fandom in Japan had a parallel but separate development of widespread transformative fan culture as compared to that of fandom in the Anglophone world.

[4.4] Conventions such as Comiket, as well as the numerous ones that have formed since, serve as venues for fan creators to sell their goods to other fans, and of these goods, dōjinshī are the most popular. Transformative dōjinshī are generally separable into two types: shōsetsu dōjinshī, text-only works, and manga dōjinshī, which are comics-based works, though it is possible to observe in stores that sell new and second-hand dōjinshī (e.g., Mandarake, Animate, Toranoana, etc.) that manga dōjinshī are by far the more common of the two. It is important to note, however, that not all dōjin works are necessarily transformative; original works (gensaku or ichiji sōsaku) comprise a substantial portion of dōjin works. That being said, transformative works (niji sōsaku) comprise a majority of those sold, and indeed, the proliferation of so-called parody works was one of the main forces that helped Comiket grow to the size that it is today (Lam 2010). In fact, the popularity of transformative works has been enough to justify numerous fandom-specific, and even romantic pairing-specific, dōjinshī conventions throughout the years. For example, the fandom for Kuroko no Basuke, a sports anime about basketball that has a large slash following, held seventy-nine events across Japan in 2017, many of which were for specific romantic pairings within the fandom (Kuroko no Basuke Onrī Ibento: Shadow Trickster n.d.).

[4.5] Dōjinshī authors in Japan, unlike those participating in creative fan practices in
Anglophone fandoms, have been able to operate in relative freedom from copyright-related intervention. However, this freedom is not due to a difference in the legal status of transformative works but rather to a difference in the degree of prosecution on the part of copyright holders. Ichikawa Koichi, one of the main organizers for Comiket, states that part of the reason copyright holders and publishers do not file lawsuits has to do with the fact that "publishers understand that this does not diminish the sales of the original product but may increase them" (quoted in Pink 2007). Furthermore, having large, fan-run events such as Comiket provides publishers with what is essentially free market research. As Ichikawa further states, "They're seeing the market in action...They're seeing the trends" (quoted in Pink 2007). This is not to say that suits have not been filed. In 2006, the author of a dōjinshi work derived from the popular manga and anime series Doraemon (1970–96) titled "Doraemon Saishūwa" ["Last Episode of Doraemon"] received a cease-and-desist letter from Doraemon's publishing company, Shogakukan. The work, which had originally been sold discreetly in 2005 among other dōjinshi, gained a lot of attention online due to its high quality of publication and the fact that the art closely mimicked that of the source work, and because of its notoriety, it sold over 15,500 copies before Shogakukan ordered the author to stop sales (J-Cast 2007).

Occasional lawsuit aside, however, Japanese commercial creators and fan creators seem to maintain a more balanced relationship compared to those between Anglo-American commercial creators and fan creators. The reason for this likely stems from the fact that in Japan, it is far more common for commercially successful authors to have also participated in creative fan practice—in fact, the commercial entertainment industry has been recruiting from Comiket since the 1980s, and commercial booths are openly present at such events (Lam 2010; Tamagawa 2012). Not only are individuals regularly hired because of exposure at Comiket but entire dōjinshi circles as well. For example, the manga studio CLAMP began in the mid-1980s as an all-female circle producing dōjinshi of Captain Tsubasa (1981–88) and Saint Seiya (1986–90), but they debuted professionally with an original work in 1989 (Clamp-Net n.d.). Perhaps because of their origin as a dōjinshi circle, CLAMP has been vocal about their intent to never prohibit transformative works inspired by CLAMP properties. In a 2015 blog post clarifying their position on transformative works in light of a recent plagiarism incident, the CLAMP group classed the creation of transformative works in the same category as cosplay in terms of different ways to enjoy a given work (Clamp-Net 2015). Of commercially successful creators with a history as a fan creator, one of the most vocal is Ken Akamatsu, author of such works as A.I. Love You (1994–97), Love Hina (1998–2001), and Magical Teacher Negima! (2003–12), and he published under the name Mizuno Awa in the circle CU-LITTLE while he was in college. More recently, Akamatsu also spearheaded a movement by dōjinshi authors protesting the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) out of concern that Japan's entering the TPP would make copyright violations prosecutable, even if the copyright holder did not file a complaint (Tai 2015).

Moreover, authors do not necessarily quit writing dōjinshi once they become commercially successful. Murakami Maki, the author of the BL manga Gravitation (1996–2002), for example, continued to publish transformative works of her own series under the pen name Gangster Yoshio as part of her one-person dōjinshi circle, CROCODILE-Ave. The dōjinshi she produced within her universe were known for being
highly explicit; by producing them as dōjinshi and selling them herself at conventions and through the circle's website, she had full creative license. Similarly, authors Eiki Eiki and Zaoh Taishi regularly publish both commercially licensed works and dōjinshi as the circle KOZOUYA within the genres of BL and yuri (Kozouya n.d.), a genre written predominately by women that is centered on romantic and sexual relationships between female characters (Welker 2006).

[4.8] Zaoh Taishi, in addition to her work with Eiki Eiki, also publishes under the name Tsuda Mikiyo for works that she writes for a more general audience (Kozouya n.d.). Her choice to publish under different authornyms is not an uncommon one for authors who work within more than one genre in Japanese popular media. One example of this phenomenon is the author Yumeka Sumomo, who, under that name, publishes works predominately in the BL genre. However, she also publishes under the names Sahara Mizu (for seinen works, or those aimed at young adult men), Sahara Keita (for shōjo works, or those aimed at young and adolescent girls), and Sasshi, which she uses within her dōjin circle CHIKYUUYA (Kawahara 2008). Though Yumeka Sumomo is perhaps on the more extreme end in terms of number of various authornyms, because she publishes in multiple genres, she serves as an apt example of the phenomenon of clearly delineating the genres of one's works through the use of multiple names.

[4.9] As demonstrated by Akamatsu's work as a proponent of transformative fan works despite his status as a commercially successful creator, creators in Japan frequently maintain a positive relationship with the creative fan community. Indeed, a number of creators continue to openly take part in creative fan practice after becoming commercially successful, as in the case of Zaoh Taishi, Eiki Eiki, and Murakami Maki. On top of this sustained relationship between the commercial creative realm and creative fandom, creators regularly make extensive use of authornyms, as in the case of Zaoh Taishi, Yumeka Sumomo, and even Eiki Eiki herself (whose legal name is Naitō Eiki). As such, it is possible to see that among Japanese media creators, the distance between the commercial author and the fan author is essentially nonexistent, allowing both to exist even within the same person. In comparison, among Anglophone media creators, while an increasing number of creators engage in both commercial and fan creative practices, there is still a distance between the two. This is demonstrated by commercially successful authors' denial of current participation in creative fan practices despite their acknowledgement of their knowledge of creative fan practices or their previous engagement in fandom.

[4.10] The environment of creation in Japan, in which works are attributed to creators but the creators' names do not necessarily reveal the humans behind the works, as well as in which a given creator may operate under any number of authornyms, is similar in spirit to that of the Anglophone proliferation of creative fan works on the internet. Japanese fan creators often avoid sharing completed works on websites such as Pixiv not only because it is common to exchange their works for money but also because it is often prudent to avoid excessive notoriety (such as in the case of the creator of Doraemon fan work "Doraemon Saihōwa"). Meanwhile, in Anglophone fan circles, some selling of works such as fan art is possible, but generally the exchange of fan works occurs without monetary transaction. However, the authornyms under which Japanese fan creators share and market their works operate
similarly to the use of user handles more broadly on websites like Pixiv, Archive of Our Own, and Tumblr. With these similarities and differences in mind, it is necessary to interrogate what purpose the attribution of works to creators serves and what role the classificatory function (i.e., Foucault [1969] 1998) of the authornym fulfills in fan practice as a whole.

5. Creative fan practice and the database

[5.1] Similarly stated by both Ohkawa Ageha, founding member of CLAMP (Pink 2007), and Yonezawa Yoshihiro, one of the founding organizers of Comiket (Yonezawa 2001), not to mention by Jeffrey Fink and Joseph Cranor on the Anglophone side (Scribner 2015), the creation of transformative fan works is a labor of love on the part of fans. Taking the source material and creating a "remix," as Ohkawa puts it in an interview (quoted in Pink 2007), is an expression of the fact that someone engaged with a particular work. This viewpoint stands in clear contrast to that of American authors with longer commercial careers, many of whom have exhibited strong resistance to fans' creating in the sandbox of their constructed worlds. Recent popular media creators in Japan, and an increasing number in the Anglophone mediascape, approach transformative works not as a form of intellectual theft but rather as a kind of fan engagement. Much of this approach in Japan is attributable to the fact that there is virtually no distance between fan creators and commercial creators, as it has been common for a given creator to have been both at some point. While this distance still exists in the Anglophone mediascape, it is growing less pronounced.

[5.2] Returning once more to Barthes's framework, in a creative environment such as that of the Japanese mediascape, Barthes could hypothetically call the author dead. Indeed, being the creator of a highly popular work does not guarantee a cult status, as was perhaps more imaginable in the era of the Romantic author, and in a number of cases, the attributed creator of a given work does not readily map onto an identifiable person. That being said, such a cult status is not impossible, either, given the amount of media attention given to J. K. Rowling more than ten years after the release of the last Harry Potter book. Rather than considering the author dead, then, using Foucault's ([1969] 1998) suggestion in his lecture "What is an Author?"—that more theoretical attention be placed on the author's discursive role relative to their work—is perhaps more apt. One such role he proposed is the "classificatory function" to be found in the authornym (Foucault [1969] 1998, 210; Heymann 2005, 1381). It is within the context of creative fan communities that this classificatory function of the authornym truly shines.

[5.3] Given the multimodal nature of popular media today, approaching the creator construct through media theory as a whole, rather than strictly literary theory, is appropriate. Given the histories of creative fan practice in the Anglophone and Japanese fanspheres, I assert that current discursive renderings of creatorship may be approached through the idea of the database, as put forth separately by both Azuma (2009) and Manovich (2001). Though both approach a similar idea through different cultural practices, each revolve around the fact that "[t]he database becomes the center of the creative process in the computer age" (Azuma 2009, 227). According to Azuma, this model of consumption came about after an epistemological shift to postmodern society, which resulted in a shift from a world image of
what he refers to as the "tree" model to that of the "database." Invoking Jean-François Lyotard's idea of the postmodern collapse of grand narratives (e.g., ideals or ideologies) ([1976] 1984), Azuma claims that grand narratives have been replaced by a massive database of small narratives. To put it differently, in the modern era, we interacted with small narratives through the lens of the grand narrative, or as Schäfer and Roth (2012, 208–9) put it, "cultural and social…criticism consisted in analyzing grand narratives as reflected within various small narratives." In the postmodern era, however, we are without a single defining grand narrative, and it is instead through a database consisting of the characteristics of small narratives that we interface with small narratives. Azuma exemplifies this phenomenon by invoking practices of preferring fictional characters, or certain characteristics of characters, over any original narrative in which they may have appeared. For example, should one desire to consume a character with cat ears, it is possible to search for that character in an actual, online database based entirely on a search query featuring cat ears. Similarly, it is not uncommon for a narrative to come second to a character, created in response to the popularity of a narrativeless character that may have originated in, for example, advertisements.

[5.4] It is readily apparent that the database consumption model is at work in today's creative fan practices. Logging on to any fan fiction website, one can see it demonstrated through tagging, a practice by which works are broken down into their requisite parts. Fans looking for a work that features a hurt/comfort narrative may very easily find one, or to be even more specific, a hurt/comfort narrative that features Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy in a Pacific Rim alternate universe setting. There are no limits to what one may search; no border exists at the edge of a fandom. In this paper I assert that, in addition to the features of the database consumption model discussed by Azuma, not only are specific elements within the work part of the database but the creators themselves are key features of the postmodern popular media database. This is evidenced in particular by authorial naming practices among Japanese popular media creators; authors like Yumeka Sumomo and Zaoh Taishi, for example, adjust their authornym in accordance with the genre of a work, allowing their works to be classified by both author and genre. A person not interested in BL, for example, would have no need to see Zaoh Taishi's work but may be interested in works within Tsuda Mikiyo's repertoire, even though both are ultimately penned by the same hand. This function also applies in situations where the author, whose name is commercially associated with a given work, may publish dōjinshi centered on that same work under a different name. In all of these cases, the author's name serves as a search parameter to designate the scope of a query within a given author's repertoire. In Anglophone fandoms, such a function is observable in the use of screen names on fan fiction websites, allowing users to search works within a given genre, fandom, or even tag by the screen names of those works' creators. Compared to the role of the creator in the Japanese popular mediascape, however, where so many of today's commercial creators were at one time also active fan creators, the databasification of the author in Anglophone fandoms feels as though it is still in development.

[5.5] Considering the author function through the concept of the database pairs well with what Derecho (2006) refers to as "archontic" writing practices, an idea that De Kosnik (2016) explores in depth in Rogue Archives. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's characterization of archives as "forever open to new entries" and never closed (quoted in Derecho 2006, 64),
De Kosnik (2016; Derecho 2006) defines an archontic text, or source text, as one which "allow[s], or even invite[s], writers to enter it, select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and then deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive" (64–65). Once the source text leaves the hands of the initial creator, that product functionally belongs to those who consume it; once it enters the popular mediascape, the world of that text becomes an archive to which any fan could hypothetically contribute, regardless of whether the author of the source text holds the copyright. If we consider a given media product as a new archive, (or a new extension of one large archive, if we consider crossover works), then the database becomes our means of accessing and interfacing with that archive. In the same way that a given tag, relationship pairing, or character quality allows us to search the archive for particular kinds of media, so, too, does the authornym. When using the authornym to access works, we are afforded the same quality of expectation as if searching using any other field. In spirit, considering creative fan works as archontic (i.e., adding to the archive) approaches a similar theoretical issue as that of the database; both of these concepts engage with the relationship between consumer, consumed, and text. Though the archontic approach deals predominantly with the fan-driven material that is generated around a source text (or group of source texts) and the database approach engages with popular media as a whole, both suggest that the span of a work is potentially infinite. Moreover, both rely heavily on a flattening of the commercial creator-fan creator hierarchy, instead imagining a fan future that is driven less by necessarily commercial interests and more by engagement.

[5.6] Japan has developed a precariously balanced relationship between commercial creator and fan creator, allowing both to exist simultaneously, even within the same person; the main differences between the two creator varieties are predominately ones of scope and financial backing, neither of which negate the other. The Anglophone mediascape, on the other hand, has not yet established such a balance, but it is not hard to imagine such a future. Earlier Anglophone authors of source texts with large fan followings, as mentioned above, did not support the lack of distance between commercial and fan creator. Anne Rice (2009), for example, has made it clear that she is not comfortable with the recent fan practices of remixing and reinterpreting her works. More recent commercial content creators, however, have interfaced with media during a period when this more egalitarian style of media consumption and consumer interaction has been common practice.

[5.7] Popular media consumption habits in Japan and those predominant in the Anglophone mediascape do not exist in total isolation from one another. As evidenced by the degree of overlap both on the internet and in the heightened mobility of consumers, it is becoming increasingly difficult to consider one while excluding the other. Participants in creative fan practices become commercial media creators, and in more recent generations of commercial creators, many have likely had experience in transnational fandoms. With ever more contact between Japanese and Anglophone fandoms, the commercial fan-creator hierarchy may increasingly flatten within the Anglophone mediascape. Such an eventuality repositions source text creators as an heuristic device within media databases rather than as a representation of absolute content authority. While the Romantic image of the author presupposed by Barthes may no longer be a major point of interaction with a given work, the author continues to live as an heuristic tool through which we consume and interface with
popular media content.

6. References


Theory

Toward an integration of musicological methods into fan video studies

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Abstract—Methods are emerging regarding the analysis of fan videos and vidding. In an expansion of existing analytical methods, I add musical analysis to the repertoire. Assessing music on a deeper, more conscious level takes into account the affective contributions of music in vids, as well as how elements of music contribute to the structuring and creation of vids—for example, in how mood and tone of voice influence the emotional impact of a vid, and in how both rhythm and instrumentation are used by vidders in their creative process. This analytical method opens up a new and fruitful understanding of the art of vidding, the vids themselves, and the vids' creators.

Keywords—Audiovisual music; Fan vid; Method; Music; Music analysis; Musicology; Textual analysis; Vidding; Vids


1. Introduction

Vids are a relatively small area of studies within the field of fan studies, but they are also a growing one. As such, it is timely to take a look at the ways we study vids. I am particularly interested in looking at how fan studies has so far analyzed vids as texts, with the specific aim of extending such analyses by taking music into account. It is impossible to divorce music from the multimedia experience of watching a vid, especially given music's ability to affect an audience member's emotional response. Yet there is a gap (one I hope to begin to fill here) in the existing vid scholarship with regard to music—something other scholars have also been trying to address, notably Tisha Turk (2015) and Nina Treadwell (2018).

2. Vids

Vids are short remix videos made by media fans. As Francesca Coppa (2008) has pointed out, vids present an argument and are a narrative art form distinct from commercial music videos and from other forms of remix video and fan-produced video content. Vids'
boundaries are as blurry as any other genre divide, though it is possible to identify vids on the basis of generic conventions of aesthetics as well as creator position and intent. Drawing on the scholarship on fan vids, I here fuse existing analytical methods with methods drawn from research I have conducted on audiovisual music. The resulting method is a form of textual analysis that synthesizes tools from several different analytical modes. Of course, there is research into aspects of vids and vidding that do not rely on textual analysis, including work regarding vidding history, vid dissemination and reception, and sociological approaches to vidding culture. However, such topics are outside my scope here, where I focus strictly on an examination and expansion of textual analysis of vids.

[2.2] Textual analysis is itself a wide-ranging category that incorporates and uses a number of different approaches, and it is a common mode of analysis in fan studies. As Steve Bailey notes, textual analysis is an approach to fan works that is "particularly critical in providing a strong sense of the semiotic contours of the fan's symbolic world" (2005, 51). Further, Alan McKee (2007) argues that scholars must take fan works as seriously as we take any other text. Vids are fruitful to study at the textual level for several reasons. They are poststructural artworks; they literally deconstruct a text to examine, reconfigure, and analyze. The argument has even been made that vids contain elements of critique regardless of their actual narrative content (Lothian 2015). This deconstructive property, along with the fact that the vid can illustrate a fan's path through the text (Gray 2010), even directing the way the vidder herself reads and/or analyzes the text, makes textual analysis particularly productive as a method for vid analysis. If vids are understood as a form of analysis and/or directed reading, then applying textual analysis means using a method that is analogous to the way vids themselves work. We can thus read with the vid and the vidder, and try to follow the paths they signal to us (note 1).

[2.3] Especially in such a relatively small area of study as that of vids and vidding, it is not surprising that methods are still developing and emerging (Evans and Stasi 2014). While vids were mentioned at least as early as 1992 by both Camille Bacon-Smith and Henry Jenkins, a focus on vids as a research subject within fan studies may likely be dated to 2008, with the publication of Francesca Coppa's foundational work in the area. Despite the relatively short time that vids have been the focus of specific scholarship, some methodological commonalities and trends have emerged.

[2.4] Among previously published vid research, several texts analyze vids on the basis of lyrics and image together, and most of these also mention music without going into detail about it. This lack likely reflects the backgrounds of the scholars performing the analysis. Present-day fan studies has contributors from many fields, though these fields' impact is not evenly distributed, with some fields better represented than others. Musicology, where I have my background, is one of the fan studies fields with a gap in the existing scholarship—one I hope to address here. Past analyses read image and lyrics together as they match up in the vids under discussion, a method that has yielded some rich and influential work. Lyrics can be understood as standing in for the music to a certain degree, as they are often an integral part of the music half of vids. However, more may be found in the music when we include the sound as well—something that becomes especially clear when we consider that there are vids that use music without lyrics. Such vids still communicate to their audiences, so music
and images can be enough on their own for a vid to be successful as art and as communication. But it is time for the scholarly field of vidding to start looking more, and differently, at what music contributes to vids and to the process of vidding. As Turk notes, "Vids are not about music in the way commercial music videos are," but "the soundtrack to a vid is not simply background music; it is integral to vidders' creative process and central to vids' rhetorical and emotional effects on their audience" (2015, 164).

[2.5] Despite these similarities in method, the details in how the lyrics-and-images approach is used vary, not least because of the different research focuses. As Charlotte Stevens (2015) has pointed out, a small canon exists of vids that have been the subjects of academic research; some of these vids show up in multiple scholarly works. Yet the aims and details of this research differ even though the material may overlap. These previous studies have close readings of lyrics and images as a common factor. For instance, Louisa Ellen Stein (2010) deploys such a reading, describing parts of the two vids she is analyzing in terms of visual action matching the lyrics. From this, she interprets the vids and notes what she perceives they are accomplishing. Stein mentions that the music is a part of setting the mood for one of the vids she discusses, but she does not elaborate on how this specifically plays out in the vid. However, music greatly affects audience members' readings of an audiovisual text, as well as their affective response to and immersion in such a text.

[2.6] Another close reading is that of Alexis Lothian (2015), who discusses one vid at length while drawing on a few others, providing brief examples of lyrics-and-images moments to show vidders' response to concerns about copyright. Lothian remarks on the dance beat of the song—and that the vid premiered at Club Vivid, a dance night at Vividcon, a vidding convention—to illustrate her point. Lothian's method of focusing on one vid with a strong argument, then using vids with similar points to expand on her analysis, is useful for working with vids' messages or narrative content. Because these vids have a narrative mode in common, Lothian shows that we can look at similar and contrasting ways of creating and framing any kind of argument communicated in vids, and how it is relevant to compare several vids when doing so.

[2.7] Coppa (2009) uses a different method to explore the path taken by vidders through the tropes of popular culture as explored in the vid "A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness" by the Clucking Belles (2005). Coppa's analysis rests on an overview of what the vid is and does, with a wealth of examples drawn from particular clips in the vid. This method of giving the outline of a vid in a reading that is still close to the text but not quite as detail oriented is also one that appears in the analyses mentioned above. Coppa (2011) uses the same method elsewhere, though with shorter analyses of a selection of critical vids. Both articles have in common that they show the unique and vital role of women and feminism in vidding. Coppa's concern therefore crosses into fandom history and the role of women in that history. Sarah Fiona Winters (2012) uses a similar method to explore what two vids, "Closer," created by T. Jonesy and Killa (2004, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKaL_T1ud0o), and "On the Prowl," created by sisabet and sweetestdrain (2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M392_kR1xjA), say about fandom. She describes a particular way that these fans engage with and reflect on a text. Both articles still use lyrics-and-images-focused analytical tools, though they use them for a different purpose and by a different mode of reading than
do Stein (2010) and Lothian (2015). The difference is mainly in the relative closeness of the reading versus expanding the view into wider vidding/fandom culture, practice, and history.

[2.8] This representative previous research makes it possible to draw a preliminary conclusion that textual analyses of vids have so far primarily focused on lyrics and images, with scholars using this method to address different aspects of vids, vidders, and vid readings, as well as analyzing varying corpus sizes. These articles do indeed mention music in some capacity, albeit in passing, and recognize music's importance, but they do not further delve into the role of music. The strength of these close readings is their attention to detail, which can show a vid's excellence or a vidder's craft, and the way in which the elements of a vid come together to form a whole, which is more or different than the sum of its parts.

[2.9] To go beyond the lyrics-and-images focus of previous scholarship, we must expand our methods to include the nature of the music itself—that is, we need a musicological focus. An analysis of bironic's fan vid "The Greatest" (2018) provides a practical example (note 2). This multisource vid explores and celebrates characters of color in horror, science fiction, and fantasy over approximately the last decade of film and TV. With more than a hundred sources, the vid could easily have been confusing to view, but it is structured along thematically similar clips. Further, the clips are also structured so that the themes they examine correspond to the affective impact of the music.

"The Greatest" - a multifandom vid of characters of color in...


[2.10] The vid's song, Sia's "The Greatest" (2016), has a melancholic note to it as well as moments of defiance, but it rises throughout to become triumphant before it fades out. bironic uses this to construct a vid that feels narratively whole: the visuals progress from fighting, to resistance, to love and kindness, and to triumphing over even death, before showing that happiness is possible in the end. bironic uses the different elements of the song
to different effect—note, for example, the way bironic uses the soft B section, which focuses on the lyrics "don't give up," versus the way the vidder uses the (increasingly) powerful chorus with its central line, "I'm the greatest." The B section sounds soft, sad, and melancholic, in symmetry with the lyrics, and bironic uses this to illustrate sorrow and loss, but also to illustrate how people can come together to overcome them. These are scenes of reaching out to one another, crying together, comforting one another, even holding a dead or dying loved one. The tone of the music in these pieces lends itself well to this. It is soft, contemplative, and melancholy—moods mirrored by the characters' moods. In contrast, the chorus, which revolves around the words "the greatest," shows the many ways characters show greatness. The chorus adds power by following softer, melancholy sections and by contrasting with the subdued, then powerful, vocals, along with a shift from a minor to a major chord as the transition happens, strengthening the shift from a feeling of longing to one of triumph. This, along with a rise in dynamics as well as in the amount of instrumentation used, creates an overall rising effect, implying strength and power while still maintaining the note of longing.

[2.11] The final chorus, which leads into the repeated "the greatest" that makes up the outro of the song, is especially strong. The effect of this final chorus is enhanced by its following a musically subdued rap, then kicking in with the full orchestration of the piece—something the vid echoes with a shot of Quake (Chloe Bennet) from Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. (2013—) breaking out of her rock chrysalis as the chorus explodes after the subdued B section preceding it. It opens with a montage of triumph that rides on the rush of the music as the chorus begins. The combined effect is powerful in the way that a well-performed march can be a call to battle. Yet here we are called to celebrate—and also to fight for more of what we are seeing in the vid: characters of color triumphing.

[2.12] Although an impressive collection of characters and texts is included in the vid, it also illustrates the continuing disparity in casting in Western media in general by drawing attention to the many minor and one-off characters who are included. The vid also accomplishes this in part through music. By leading us to empathize with the characters, to feel their grief and joy, to be thrilled when we see scenes of triumph and overcoming obstacles, we celebrate them all, minor characters as well as leads, which also leads us to crave more of them—in turn revealing another message from the vid: that more characters of color are needed in popular culture. The vid affectively guides us via the use of music along with the images, and therein lies its power.

3. Audiovisual music

[3.1] This analysis of "The Greatest" is based on work done on audiovisual music, to which I now turn. Turk's (2015) work on integrating the understanding and analysis of music further into the study of vids is groundbreaking because it provides precedence for how to accomplish an expansion of vid analysis that more fully accounts for the role of music. Turk explains the centrality of song choice to vidders as part of the vidding process, referring to it as "generative" (2015, 165). She shows the importance of song to vidding choices, including editing and mood setting, and she shows how vidders are aware of and utilize musical structure and terminology. Finally, Turk demonstrates that it is not only visuals that are
transformed in the vid's remix but also music (note 3). The music takes on new meaning by being set to images that were previously unassociated with it. Turk's point about the transformation of the music feeds into her larger point, one crucially important to vidders, fan advocates, and legal scholars: the need for and appropriateness of copyright exemption for vidders. In the United States, such exemption hinges on the notion of transformation. The legal advocacy work done by the Organization for Transformative Works (https://www.transformativeworks.org/) is based on the premise that vids are visually transformative. But what about the auditory side? Because vidders usually use music without significantly altering it—as opposed to the obvious cutting and remixing of visuals—the fact that music is transformed by being part of a Gesamtkunstwerk is a vital point in arguing for fair use regarding vids. (The legal aspect of vids, vidding, and music is outside my scope and expertise here.)

[3.2] For the purpose of exploring methodology, the main point to be taken from Turk (2015) is that there is much to be gained for vid studies by looking toward musicology for added methods to include in our analytical toolbox. As Turk points out, although music is almost always mentioned in vid research, we can expand further into music analysis and gain much from it. Vidders are aware of the functions of music, and they use music in their creative process (Turk 2015). Indeed, in my experience, vidders speak of finding their song first, with it being the spark or idea—the generative aspect. Likewise, vidders agree that they cannot start work on a vid until they decide on a song. The song is vital for editing where beat and instrumentation are important, but it is vital also for the kind of emotional engagement that vidders wish to communicate. I turn now to a (necessarily brief) look at existing scholarship into audiovisual music, especially music that plays a part in furthering a narrative for an audience. The narrative and affective properties of audiovisual music have been studied more within film music scholarship than in related areas such as art video or music video studies, which might on the surface appear to be more applicable to vidding than film. (It seems that the musical gap in vid studies is also present in these areas.) I therefore draw on the methods of film music scholarship in what follows.

[3.3] Within musicology and film/television studies, diverging views exist on exactly how the audience experiences an audiovisual soundtrack, and what the roles of images and music are in relation to one another and as a whole. Claudia Gorbman (1987) argues that music in film works because it is heard (as opposed to seen)—or rather, not quite heard—and notes that since Plato, music has been considered to have a more direct access to our emotions than any other art form. Her claim rests on a psychoanalytical approach as well as the idea that hearing is less immediate, or lazier, than sight, and thus easily slips into the background and into our subconscious. Kathryn Kalinak (1992) agrees, although without using the same theoretical framework. Instead, she bases her arguments in the history of acoustics and classic film music. Another key point is that music and image in a film have "mutual implication" in terms of narrative power, and that any music applied to film will "do something" (Gorbman 1987, 15). Kalinak (1992) also points to an affective link between what is seen and what is heard—an influence that goes both ways. She also speaks of a projection from the aural realm onto the visual field, and of the associative power of music to make us recall visual input—all of which Turk (2015) applies to vids. This mutual implication shows us that music influences how we read the images in a vid, and vice versa:
we cannot fully understand one without the other. (This mutual implication further backs the case for vids' being transformative for their music source.)

[3.4] These two points are crucial to an understanding of what music does or contributes in vids. Mutuality is crucial to the reading of any vid. That music definitely does something is why song choice is vital to both the creation and reception of a vid. It may be viewed as something of a paradox that film music is sometimes referred to as unheard (indeed, Gorbman’s 1987 book is titled *Unheard Melodies*) or considered to be music that is supposed to be unremarkable. Although I disagree in general with the assumption that audiovisual music is unheard or unremarkable, I paradoxically use this theory as a foundation when I want to listen more, and to listen with more intent, especially when considering music in vids, which is so vital to the vidding process and which is definitely intended to be heard, to the point that instrumental details and single words take on vital roles. If fan studies academics hear but do not consciously listen to what the music contributes, then are we truly hearing it?

[3.5] Vids have the power to make the audience react emotionally, and music must be part of how and why this happens. Yet discussing music and what it does is difficult. What we can do, however, is express our emotional responses, which often link, directly or indirectly, to music. Comments and feedback on fan vids do not always make such links explicit, but commenters pointing out moments that were satisfying, or where sound and image synched up particularly well, are common, as are comments on how a vid makes someone feel—about the vid, the canon, the characters, or the wider subject matter. This ability to engage the audience emotionally is the central reason why we need to think more about music; music has strong affective properties, and that which is not consciously heard is still (subconsciously) influential. The methods used to study film music are therefore relevant to the study of fan vids because film music is explicitly meant to influence the audience's emotions and affective responses. Further, film music is created to further a narrative, which relates to the narrative and argumentative nature of vids (Coppa 2008). As fan works, vids are affective; they are created to share fan responses and feelings with other fans.

[3.6] Musical analysis can take many forms; it can study written music on its own, or it can address performance practice or study the sound. Some of these focus on what music does and how it is used (including emotional effects); others are more interested in the formal construction of music. The former can be said to be focused on the performative and affective aspects of music, whereas the latter is more concerned with music as an entity in and of itself, rather like the study of grammar or textual form. Both could be applied to vids, but my approach uses the former, more ethnographically informed mode of analysis. (If using the latter, it would isolate the music from the vid, thus defeating vids' very purpose—and mine with this article.) I also use this approach because the affective aspects of music are analyzed here, and fandom, as Stein (2015) notes, a "feels" culture, where emotional responses and the sharing of them are central. Vids are intended to communicate emotions as part of their narrative.

[3.7] As noted above, previous scholarship on vids has focused on the lyrics-and-images moments of the texts being analyzed. I add to this a third element: music. On a formal level,
most of the film music scholarship I use to construct my method focuses on sound, aided by some sheet music study as a form of written documentation of the sounds; the scholarship rarely delves into studying written music as a primary focus. As such, this music analysis is interested in what music does when heard and what it contributes in an audiovisual context. It is less interested in the formal aspects, such as tonality or melodic structure, outside the affective influences stemming from these. For example, the scholarship in film music includes work dedicated to the meaning of particular types of music or instrumentation, such as the military inflections of a march, the heroics of horns, and the soft intensity of strings (Gorbman 1987; Kalinak 1992). However, I am more interested in considering music as a narrative and affective force in vids. Examples of this form of analysis applied to film can be found in, among others, the work of Claudia Gorbman (1987, 2006), Anahid Kassabian (2001, 2013), and Ronald Rodman (2006).

[3.8] Of these film music scholars, Kassabian (2013) is of particular interest because she is specifically interested in the affective aspect of music—not only within an audiovisual source but also in how we, as human beings living in an age where music is ever present, relate to music, including reflections on music as an identity marker. Music is often used by people within Western culture (a transcultural approach is beyond my remit here) to relate to one another, as evidenced by music preference being common on dating profiles, or as icebreakers and topics of small talk. Not much research currently exists that goes into why or how vidders select the music for their vids, although Turk (2015) touches on this, noting that vidders choose songs on the basis of personal taste and suitability for their project. Indeed, as Turk and Johnson (2012) show, reading vids within a particular fandom is based on a communal knowledge and understanding of text. The shared skill of vid watching includes reading and understanding the clips, with watchers noting the clips' original context, the lyrics, the music, and the new narrative being constructed, all at the same time. It is a specialized and demanding mode of reading, a literal "blink and you'll miss something." Of course, as they construct their own narrative or story, sometimes vids will use clips to signify something outside their original context—for example, repurposing a clip to illustrate something that never happened in the canonical text. Academic readings of vids are largely analogous to this fannish approach, meaning that vid scholars are directly building on fan practice and knowledge.

[3.9] There are particularly strong parallels between the use of preexisting music in film (a praxis sometimes colloquially, and datedly, termed a "needle drop"), especially popular music, that provides the soundtrack to the majority of vids and the use of music in vids (Duffett 2014). While the previously mentioned scholarship has primarily dealt with compositions created for a specific film, film music scholarship also exists on the use of preexisting music in film, some of which is collected in Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell's aptly named edited volume, *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* (2006). Its chapters explore this theme in various ways, especially Ronald Rodman's exploration of popular songs as leitmotifs and Vanessa Knights's work on the queerness of mismatched gender between the voice in a song and the perceived gender of the performer. Rodman likens the relationship with specific songs in certain films to the use of leitmotifs (originally popularized by Wagner in his operas), such as those used by John Williams. However, Rodman also notes that the ways popular songs signify a character are different than other
forms of scoring. Style and associations with the songs play into the audience's perception of a character. His example is Vincent Vega (John Travolta) from *Pulp Fiction* (1994). He also shows how this can be true with an entire film, as per Iggy Pop and (especially) "Lust for Life" in *Trainspotting* (1996), a film that also uses different music styles for each of its characters in order to tell us something more about them. The way songs are linked to public perception of a character or film in Rodman's work has an analogy in vid watching, where repeated viewings of a vid can lead audiences (as per my own experience) to associate a song with a character or text.

[3.10] The key to vid analysis's being a simultaneous reading of both image and sound leads me directly to another key scholar. Michel Chion (1994) is interested in the ways music directly interacts with images. He claims that there is no soundtrack and film but rather that both must be considered as a whole. The same is true for vids: consider the moments when the audience member (and the vidder) feels that a particular match of image, sound, and lyrics is particularly well created. Chion uses the term "synchrony" to refer to the vertical coreading of sound and image (and, for fan vids, I would argue, lyrics) as they happen together. Chion poetically refers to it as "the forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears" (1994, 5).

[3.11] To turn to my exemplar text, this forging perfectly encapsulates bironic's matching moments of rising, stretching wings, and exploding out of bonds to a rising musical moment in "The Greatest." Such a relationship can also be applied to moments where the image and the lyrics show the same thing, thereby expressing a literalism. In "The Greatest," such instances are clearly seen in the rapped section of the vid, where literal matches appear. The words "pay dues" aptly illustrate a clip of Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) from the film *Black Panther* (2018) as he cries at the memory of his father's death—a scene where paying your dues to your ancestors is in play in several levels of the plot. But the clip alludes to more than this text; it could also be seen as drawing on Jordan's past appearances in the TV serial *The Wire* (2002–8) and the film *Creed* (2015), where his characters have similar responsibilities to pay their dues and live up to paternal names and expectations. This clip therefore functions as both literal and symbolic literalism at once. Such matches make up much of how vids are created and read.

4. Audiovisual analysis

[4.1] What remains to be explored here is what this analytical approach actually does, and how it differs from and adds to existing methods. This may be illustrated by some exemplary moments that will show the importance of music in vid analysis.

[4.2] On the level of editing, vidders use rhythm as an editing tool (Coppa 2008; Turk 2015). However, instrumentation is used as well. Vidders will match visual movement to a riff, or they will make an effect or impactful moment match an auditory effect, such as the crash of a drum. This may extend to matching one instrument to another, often similar, instrument being played on screen (note 4), or even, though rarely, implying that drawn-out vocals are sung not by the song's vocalist but by someone in the vid. Shorter vocal matches may also occur, but these are harder to spot because of the quick pace of vid editing. Although these
examples may not add to a deep understanding of the meaning or narrative of a vid, they are testament to the skill, technical knowledge, and creativity of the vidder, as well as to the level of detail that goes into the production of vids—not just the details in the visual editing but also the care that goes into the use of music. They may also serve as part of setting the mood for a vid, as such effects can be used humorously or seriously. There is a world of difference between signaling a character's proficiency with a musical instrument and lip-synching an "aaaaah" to someone who might in fact have been screaming or laughing in the clip's original context. Although such effects are rare in vidding, they are a particularly visually strong use of music and therefore worth emphasizing.

[4.3] As I note above, the mood or tone of a song profoundly influences the production and reception of a vid. Turk (2015), for example, shows how vidders consider the particular fit of a song to their vid idea. When watching a vid, mood and tone are important in understanding its narrative. For some vids, this may be more significant than for others. In vids such as "Women's Work," by Luminosity and sisabet (2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4E7T5kIllM), the anger performed in the song, especially in the voice of singer Courtney Love (singing "Violet," 1994, as a member of the group Hole), is important: this vid is not a celebration of the moments of violence toward women presented in the vid but rather a critique of it, as well as a reflection of the anger felt by many fans toward such treatment of female characters. Likewise, it is hard to imagine a deeply felt shipping vid that does not use a song with a fitting emotional impact. In character study vids, the song acts as a window into the emotional inner life of the character, and the mood is as important to take into consideration as the lyrics. Is this a person who feels profound sadness, or is it someone who is essentially an optimist? The music will guide that understanding. Are we in the territory of melancholy singer-songwriters or upbeat dance music? This is not (just) about genre, though genre factors into it, but about tone of voice, style of singing, key, instrumentation, beat, production, orchestra size, presence of backing vocals—in other words, every detail of a piece of music. What I am here referring to as mood may also influence vidding down to small moments; dynamics and instrumentation also influence vidding production, and this is reflected in mood as well. When a song swells (when the dynamics increase), it is natural for the vid to rise in intensity too, and when it becomes quieter, the vid follows. The affective relationship between vid and audience here becomes particularly poignant. Songs that increase in intensity toward a climax, such as a power ballad or a hard rock anthem, do so in a similar manner, but with a different emotional impact: listening to Whitney Houston is not the same experience as listening to Rage against the Machine, even if the songs these two artists are known for rise in intensity in analogous ways. Even two recordings of the same orchestral piece can have different emotional impacts—not to mention what happens with cover versions of songs.

[4.4] The problem with analyzing music is that it is hard to quantify a mood or an emotional impact; we do not all experience a song the same way—although some basics will almost always be at the very least similar. For example, a romantic ballad may be joyful or melancholy to listeners based on their life experiences or current mood, but listeners will not be likely to understand the song as communicating anger. This links back to what Gorbman (1987), writing within the context of Western art music, explores regarding the universality of some musical experiences. But differing readings of a text are hardly unheard of; certainly
we are generally unused to considering music in this way, although we do it with literature and film all the time. Conflicting interpretations of other forms of art coexist within both the academy and the wider world, not necessarily easily or harmoniously, but we recognize that multiple readings are possibly, perhaps even simultaneously, valid. This must be true for music as well. When considering a vid, which can (and perhaps should) be understood as a Gesamtkunstwerk, it is not remarkable that interpretations may differ among the audience, and that the impact of the music can be part of this. In other words, although such differing interpretations should be taken into consideration, they do not invalidate the importance of music to understanding vids.

[4.5] Before finishing this brief rundown of how music analysis can add to vid analysis, I want to mention voice specifically. This topic deserves more exploration than I have been able to afford it so far because it is how the lyrics, one of the three parts of a vid, are communicated. Voice is a particularly interesting aspect of music, and in vidding, it plays a unique role. As Turk (2015) notes, the "I" in a song becomes the de facto "I" of the character in focus in a vid, and as Turk also points out, some vidders will choose a cover of a song to match the gender of the voice of their protagonist. This demonstrates the importance of point of view in a vid song as well as the importance of congruence in the portrayal of characters. However, sometimes the genders of the song's "I" and the vid's "I" do not match. Vanessa Knights (2006) explores what happens when song gender and performer gender do not match, and while she focuses on lip-syncing and sing-alongs in film, there are parallels to be made to vids. Knights refers to the effect of this as the song's being "transexuated," although I think a better term for the effect might be cross-voicing, as this is more a case of gender play (or trouble) and not about a shift in the performer's gender identity. What does it mean if Iron Man expresses his inner life through the voice of Regina Spector? Is this significantly different from when his voice is that of Steve Tyler? What does it mean if I know of more vids where he has a female voice than I know of vids where Captain America does? Gender is something that vidders take care to match between singer and character, so it begs a closer look when they do not do so. Which types of characters are cross-voiced, and how? Are there any patterns pointing toward different masculinities and femininities being explored in the vids in question, while taking into account voices that defy gender stereotypes, such as countertenors, and voices that belong to transgender or nonbinary artists? This topic deserves more analysis than I can provide here.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] Adding music to critical examinations of vids opens up a whole new dimension of analysis; it includes a vital aspect of vids and vidding that has been too little dealt with. Adding musicological methods adds another tool to the toolbox of fan studies scholars. Vid viewers all read differently, but discounting music would effectively be ignoring half of the vid. It is therefore doubly important to address the music and its characteristics apart from lyrics. It is past time for scholars of vids to make the subconscious conscious and the unheard heard.

6. Notes
1. bironic has kindly provided consent to the vid's being included in the wider research project of which this article is a part. Luminosity and sisabet's "Women's Work" has a blanket permission for study—something I ascertained as part of a previous publication (Svegaard 2019). I would like to thank all three vidders for their generosity—and their amazing vids.

2. Several vid scholars are also vidders themselves, and have spoken and written about this as part of their academic work. For example, Louisa Ellen Stein spoke about her vidding as part of her keynote address at the Fan Studies Network conference in 2017 at the University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom. I myself am working on my first vid. This scholar-creative overlap is not uncommon in fan studies as whole, where many scholars find themselves in both academic and fan groups at once (thus the term "acafan"), but it is worth mentioning here to acknowledge that vidding practice and research can go hand in hand.

3. Camille Bacon-Smith notices this as well, pointing out that "the artist deconstructs the text of both source products—video and audio—and reconstructs not only their forms but in many cases their messages" (1992, 176), when vids were referred to as songtapes, reflecting their medium at the time: VHS tapes. Copyright issues were far different at the time before online file sharing was widespread, so Bacon-Smith does not go into this part of the debate.

4. For whatever reason, I have seen this most often with violins, perhaps because of the pleasing visuals of a bow stroking strings, which illustrates the sound better than, for example, a piano key being struck.

7. References


Abstract—In the discussion of media and borderlands theory, current scholarship primarily attends to investigating borderlands as metaphors for broader minority critique, where niche, representative publications resist hegemonic mass-market productions. However, scholarship has yet to formally extend the borderlands paradigm to slash fan fiction—that is, examining a subaltern where residents display a hybridity of opposing culture. Looking at slash and its predominantly female, often queer, writers through the lens of Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of a borderlands offers insight into the values and motivations of writers and consumers in their production of fan fiction, not just within the microcosm of fandom but also pertaining to wider social and cultural transformations. This investigation considers the circumstances dictating female fan experience by examining the practical and contextual dimensions of fandom and illustrating how fan works differ ontologically, epistemologically, and functionally from mainstream productions, thus facilitating a critique on how fans construct and mobilize imaginary as means of negotiating the real social structures that otherwise limit their enjoyment of consumable media and the transformative works they create that nonetheless mirror the systems of marginalization found in the real world.

Keywords—AO3; Fandom studies; Gloria Anzaldúa; Marvel; Queer; Sex; Slash; Women

1. Introduction: Slash

If the Fifty Shades of Grey franchise (2011–) has taught the academic community anything, it's that transformative works are eminently socially relevant. Originally erotic fan fiction of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight world, Fifty Shades amassed a rabid online following before it became the best-selling fictional phenomenon that spawned the film franchise we all know today. However, E. L. James's success was not a fluke; in fact, the fandom world has had significant impacts on the broader publishing industry in the last decade with the rise of digital publishing and e-books. In recent years, it has become increasingly common to find
previous or current fan fiction authors traditionally or self-publishing original content. While not as widely known as James, authors like Laura Baumbach, Jordan S. Brock, and C. S. Pacat all began their writing careers as fan fiction authors who, using the skills they cultivated in fandom, later found success in marketing original content. The key difference between authors like these and E. L. James is that these authors' works centralize homosexual slash relationships rather than heterosexual ones (note 1). In fact, E. L. James is something of a statistical outlier.

[1.2] Today, the majority of fandom writers entering the publishing industry do so through digitally published books, and the genre that the majority of fandom writers transition into is the LGBT e-book market, the fastest growing digital genre globally. Between 2015 and 2016 alone, e-book sales of LGBT fiction grew by 225 percent (Nielsen 2016). The majority of these works are written by women, and routinely many of the highest-rated and best-selling titles within this genre are authored by women who previously wrote or currently write fan fiction. These women produce original content that often mirrors the tropes and engagement techniques emblematic of slash fandom spaces. Despite this, Fifty Shades enjoys prominent scholarly attention while the multitude of slash authors finding success receive little to no attention. Perhaps this is because of the content of slash work itself. However, if Fifty Shades unequivocally established the potential for fan fiction to be worthy of scholarly attention, there is no reason that slash works should not enjoy the same treatment as serious documents of literary and cultural importance.

[1.3] It is here that I must make an important distinction. Today, fandom is an amorphous term and fan writers a massive worldwide creative force spread across dozens of platforms. For the sake of this essay, when I speak of fandom and fan works, I speak very specifically to the group of adult content creators who utilize the platform Archive of our Own, or AO3, to disseminate transformative content. I focus on AO3 because it is one of the largest archives in the world, its interface allows for in-depth statistical analysis, and, perhaps most important to my argument, it currently hosts more adult content (rated mature or explicit) than any other fan fiction platform (note 2). It is necessary to make this distinction because we cannot definitively state that the majority of fandom shows preferential treatment to homosexual pairings, nor would it be accurate to say that a majority of fandom enjoys creating and reading adult-rated content. However, both of these things are true of AO3 and its users. Half of the works hosted by AO3 feature a male/male couple, while, comparatively, male/female couples are featured in less than 25 percent of works (note 3). Indeed, all ten of the highest-production ships, or relationships, on AO3 feature male couples. Additionally, of the over 4.5 million works currently hosted by the archive, a third feature mature or explicit ratings and, as I've already stated, the predominance of explicit sexual content involves encounters between men.

[1.4] This perhaps raises the question: Who is writing all this gay sex? The answer is, while admittedly nuanced, predominantly women. In a census of AO3 users that took place at the end of 2013 (http://centrumlumina.tumblr.com/post/63208278796/ao3-census-masterpost), out of over ten thousand respondents, 80 percent reported their gender as female. The second-highest percentage, 6 percent, identified as genderqueer, and the third-highest, 4 percent, identified as male. Women being the driving force behind transformative works isn't
a phenomenon isolated to AO3 or the digital world, however. Henry Jenkins addressed the gender discrepancy broadly in transformative fandom spaces as early as 1992 in his seminal work *Textual Poachers*. He hypothesized that the reason for such a massive schism between male and female producers is that transformative works represent a medium in which female audience members try to repackage mass-produced media that caters mostly to males in a format that brings them—rather than men—pleasure.

[1.5] If, as Jenkins and many of his scholarly successors assert, women are writing fan fiction, in this case, slash, for their own pleasure—catering to their own preferences as both creators and consumers—this prompts another key question: Why do so many women get pleasure out of reading and writing gay fan fiction? This is a question that has been asked before. Constance Penley described slash in 1992 as a "unique hybrid genre of romance, pornography and utopian science fiction" that female fans utilize for social and sexual experimentation (479). In a panel at the Escapade slash convention in 1998, she called it "a continuation of women's writing, combining women's romance and the male quest romance" into a new genre form. Joanna Russ similarly lauded slash as the only form of female writing where women could produce fantasies without censorship, arguing additionally that "the writers and readers of these fantasies can do what most of us can't do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is, they can act sexually at their own pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen" (Russ 1985, 90). Later, Russ described the production of slash as a form of inventive fantasy, writing where women create narratives free of the burden of expectations (Russ 2011). Sara Gwenllian Jones also praises the romantic freedom of slash, focusing on slash not as a new or unique form of writing but rather one that emulates romance novels with the purpose of challenging normative gender constraints. She argues that slash allows readers and writers to explore their own questions and desires in a safe space while anchored to well-known, loved characters (Jones 2002). Indeed, fandom scholars generally agree that slash is a beneficial form of writing for women because of the freedoms it allows.

[1.6] While scholars may generally agree about its benefits, they do not, historically, agree when attempting to categorize slash as a genre. As illustrated above, some believe that slash is a unique form of writing, while others treat it as a subset of romance writing. However, recent publications by Kristina Busse (2017), Lucy Neville (2018), and Elizabeth Woledge (2006) challenge these more black-and-white approaches. These authors focus not only on the content of slash but the importance of surrounding fan culture in conversation with and in response to the content of slash works. In "Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and Mainstream," Woledge situates slash within a wider literary context where she discusses the subversive potential of slash, focusing not on the erotics of romance but rather the intimacy present in slash works. Neville observes that involvement in reading and writing slash often affects women's views on gender and sexuality, political engagement, and LGBTQ rights. She notes slash fandom not only as a safe space for women to explore their sexualities and gender identities but also discusses how access to this space affects women's real-world lives. Similarly, Busse argues in *Framing Fan Fiction* that looking at any form of media fandom, including slash, necessitates a combination of both cultural and literary studies because fan fiction is both literary work and cultural document. Busse adeptly illustrates the complexity of communally created social and literary works, highlighting the
work fandom does intertextually as well as paratextually. Slash, then, assists in exploring issues of gender, sexuality, performativity, and self-identity. It emerges not as a regurgitation of romantic genre forms or as an entirely original medium but rather as a medium that thrives on the repetition of community-appreciated tropes and ideals that encourages both personal and social introspection.

[1.7] Building upon these insights, I argue that the now-recognized complexity of slash gestures to the scholarly potential for a multitude of literary and cultural examinations that address the intersection of slash’s content and communities. Specifically, if we consider slash as both literary and cultural document, then theory that focuses on the intersection between culture and literature—particularly culture and literature historically recognized as both subversive and amalgamative—is a useful method for considering the work slash performs.

2. Slash and borderlands

[2.1] Demarcating the participants of slash fandom as a distinct social group that, despite differences, amalgamates and perpetuates content relatable to their fringe societies according to dominant narrative structures, is a helpful basis for identifying and defining the cultural aspect of fandom. One might further conceptualize the cultural experience of adult slash spaces like AO3 through the lens of borderlands theory, and one might use this theory to make sense of fan-produced content that both perpetuates and opposes hegemonic narratives. By invoking the term "borderlands," I address Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) formative text Borderlands/La Frontera. Here, Anzaldúa attends to the overlapping spaces in which groups interact—where residents display a hybridity of opposing culture. While Anzaldúa focuses on this dynamic in terms of Mexico and the United States, she states that "the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest" but are present "whenever two or more cultures edge each other" (I). Residents of borderlands exist in a "place of contradictions," where they must keep intact their "shifting and multiple identities" (I). Therefore, Anzaldúa's theory addresses intercultural differences in any margin scenario, whether it be related to class, race, sex, gender, or otherwise. In these margin scenarios, the concept of borderlands more broadly critiques binary thinking, colonialism, and colonialism's use of culture and myth to create stereotypes and social subjugation.

[2.2] The versatility of borderlands as a literary tool is something that Anzaldúa scholar AnaLouise Keating examines in both Women Reading Women Writing (1996) and The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader (2009). In Women Reading Women Writing, Keating uses borderlands to discuss women's use of creative and critical writing as a method of self- and cultural analysis and critique, allowing the deconstruction and reconstruction of belief and perception through "alternative myth." In doing so, she attends to the sometimes related, sometimes distinct, worlds of feminist women, queer women, and women of color, considering how these women create content that is interactive with each other and with the power structures that limit them. Here, borderlands emerges as a tool for understanding the distinctions and intersections of identity and how women's writing itself can blur some of these boundaries and destabilize previous classification structures. Keating more explicitly explains in The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader her belief that Anzaldúa's borderlands is applicable for all manner
of binaries. She says of her experience teaching that she is often "struck by the profound way [Anzaldúa's] words resonate with so many different kinds of people"—even those who do not identify as Chicana, Latina, or queer (3). She notes that Anzaldúa herself refused to "be contained within any single group or belief system" and "maintained multiple allegiances," locating herself in multiple worlds (2). Keating also notes that Anzaldúa freely suggested the applicability of her borderlands theory in all manner of threshold existence scenarios and spoke to the broad usefulness of her methods for overcoming alienation and oppression. I suggest that for the purpose of this essay we consider borderlands in this way, in which notions of hybridity might be used as a theoretical gateway for forms of cultural interaction independent from the specificity of place or race.

[2.3] Within the academic world, scholars have already begun investigating both borderlands as a metaphor for broader critique and fandom as culture but have yet to formally extend this paradigm as a means of critical interpretation for slash fan fiction. Doing so, I suggest, offers insight into cultural value and motivations of female fan creators, not just within the microcosm of slash or even fandom but perhaps pertaining to wider social and cultural transformations as well.

[2.4] To consider borderlands in this way, we must return to the initial question of why women write slash for personal enjoyment. Past scholars, including already mentioned authors like Penley, Jenkins, Russ, Busse, and Woledge, note that women largely fall into one or more of four categories when explaining their enjoyment of slash. The first is queer women who identify in some way with the visual or textual imagery of male pleasure. Here, women reconsider, and sometimes actively reconfigure, what masculinity and femininity mean to them outside the constraints of typical sexual gender composition. The second reason, in contrast, is that many women prefer not to see any characters with whom they identify or have to concern themselves with ethically. Slash offers a solution for those who disapprove of the objectification of women often found in pornography, because there are no women present, subjugated or otherwise. A third party of viewers simply enjoy reading depictions of male pleasure. Finally, many women cite the relationship dynamics present between male characters in mass-produced media as a driving force for their interest in slash. This final reason is particularly noteworthy because it is isolated (by its very construction) from the reasoning women give for enjoying other forms of m/m erotica, like gay porn. Mass-produced media's representations of interpersonal relationships between male characters are often very compelling but unexplored on-screen or in text in their cannons. Television shows give viewers three-dimensional male characters who evolve over seasons, who develop close bonds and irrefutable chemistry with other, similarly well-developed, male characters, while often the women in these shows, movies, and books are background characters or those who appear briefly as shallow unappealing plot devices and love interests. Often these women are introduced, seduced, and killed or otherwise disposed of within the space of a few episodes. As a result, fans find writing the more deeply developed male characters' relationships more rewarding.

[2.5] There is also a sociocultural aspect of slash production that is unique to the fan fiction genre—purely because of the way fan readers and writers interact in online forums. Transformative fandom generally appears to support writers who tackle subjects and
storylines that mainstream editing and publishing avenues often do not welcome. Fandom benefits writers twofold—in helping them hone their craft but also in bridging the gap between fandom writing and original content. This is particularly clear in the recent insurgence of slash writers translating their fandom followings into e-book sales for original m/m content, as already discussed—when fans of slash follow their favorite authors from AO3 to the Kindle marketplace to purchase their most recent original creations. Fandom is a community—one that is both rebellious and incorporative in its transformative nature. By taking hegemonic patriarchal narratives about heterosexual characters and transforming them into gay narratives, slash becomes pleasurable for female audiences and consumers in both its subversive nature and its content. Writers utilize fan works as a challenge of perception that reflects the ideology behind Anzaldúa's (1987) conception of a "mestiza consciousness" in Borderlands. Anzaldúa describes the mestiza consciousness as a "crossbreeding" like corn—where preservation and evolution coincide. It is a consciousness of duality where "contradiction" is not only encouraged but necessary. Anzaldúa states,

[2.6] By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness. The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject/object duality that keeps [a woman] prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem…lies in healing the split… A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness. (65)

[2.7] For this reason, it is useful to consider borderlands theory as a tool for conceptualizing fandom involvement in slash, where many participants strive for both inclusivity and subversion within their performance of pleasure. Moreover, the application of borderlands to slash specifically helps us understand female pleasure in new ways. Here, slash works emerge as the epitome of narrative metalepsis, revealing themselves to be the literal imposition of extradiegetic female desires on fictional worlds and characters. These works are ontologically different from other forms of media production in that fandom creators and contributors understand that they are in a conversation with both each other and their audiences, as well as source material. This reflects the perspective from the "cracks" that Anzaldúa describes, where creators use their unique perspectives, both incorporative of mainstream narratives and characters and reflective of personal or community lived experiences, to produce holistic, transformative content (1987, 236).

3. A case study

[3.1] To further illustrate the usefulness of borderlands, I suggest a short case study of a highly lauded slash work entitled Ain't No Grave (Can Keep My Body Down) (2015) by author Spitandvinegar on AO3 (https://archiveofourown.org/works/5094785). It is a canon-compliant story in the Marvel universe that takes place following the canonical events of Captain America: The First Avenger (2011) and Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014), films that document the lives of Bucky Barnes and Steve Rogers—best friends who grow up in the Depression era, go to war, and become superhuman soldiers. In the first film, set during World War II, Bucky falls several hundred feet from a moving train, and everyone
in his unit assumes he has died. Shortly afterward, Steve crashes a plane with a nuclear weapon in it into the Arctic Ocean to save humanity. Decades later, scientists locate the frozen plane, and when they remove Steve's body, they find he has been kept alive, in stasis. They revive him, and he tries to adapt to the twenty-first century. In the second film, Steve discovers that Bucky is also still alive, turned into a brainwashed assassin by Hydra, a remnant of the Soviet government. In the penultimate scene, Bucky recognizes Steve and saves his life. *Ain't No Grave* picks up where the films leave off, documenting Steve and Bucky's recovery as they grapple with the mental and physical ramifications of their Depression-era youth, religious upbringings, repressed sexuality, WWII experiences, and Bucky's torture at the hands of Hydra, where he was both brainwashed and received a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

[3.2] Spitandvinegar published *Ain't No Grave* chapter by chapter between 2015 and 2016. It comprises ten chapters, 107,076 words, and is well known within the fan fiction community, even by those who do not typically consume Marvel works.

[3.3] With 204,903 hits, 4,918 bookmarks, 9,522 kudos, and 2,574 comments (as of July 19, 2019), the explicit-rated work has drawn cross-fandom readership from all over the globe. Aside from witty dialogue and plain good writing, according to the comments posted on each chapter, readers find the story compelling because it represents two people dealing with trauma in every aspect of their life—including sex. Spitandvinegar documents the minutia of recovery, Steve and Bucky's progress, and setbacks. She follows her characters' struggles with love and lust, self-doubt, and repression. This is part of what makes the work so compelling for readership and subversive in construction. In taking two of the most hypermasculine figures in popular culture and writing not only about the deep and abiding love they have for each other but also their struggles to be intimate because of their environments and histories, Spitandvinegar addresses two topics that remain transgressive in widely produced narratives: homosexual intimacy between equally masculine partners and realistic portrayals of the struggle that queer individuals often have with issues of gender, religion, and trauma. In being a woman producing this narrative not as original content but as a transformative work of a genre that usually opposes such narratives, she introduces a third transgression—the one we've discussed at length—by the very means of the story's construction. Here, Spitandvinegar takes up the work of a threshold person, someone who, according to Anzaldúa, straddles the divide between a binary and creates within this divide a catalyst for representation or change (1987).

[3.4] In *Ain't No Grave*, Spitandvinegar addresses trauma recovery on an entirely level playing field. Neither Steve nor Bucky hold primary power in their relationship. They both suffer from many of the common effects of PTSD: panic attacks, flashbacks, nightmares, disassociation, and substance abuse, while Bucky deals with ongoing complications from a TBI: memory problems, time loss, ticking, stuttering, and migraines. Spitandvinegar's handling of both the in-text depictions of trauma recovery and her conversations with readers about their reactions to and appreciation of the characters' struggles reflects Anzaldúa's assertions about the ability of borderlands storytellers to reconstruct trauma in new forms in order to help others and themselves grapple with trauma they personally have experienced. Anzaldúa asserts that these creators can locate themselves in a world between where they
can be a healing voice to their listeners, or, in this case, readers (1987). Not only does Spitandvinegar provide an accurate and well-researched portrayal of PTSD and TBI recovery, where neither character is demonized nor turned into a caretaking martyr, she also incorporates sexual and gender exploration into the recovery narrative—something many readers praised in their comments.

[3.5] This reoccurring theme of gender and sexuality begins in the third chapter when Sam Wilson (Falcon), who is also a counselor at the VA, works with Bucky to help him stop disassociating and reclaim his body as his own. Taking Sam's advice, Bucky looks at his naked body in the mirror:

[3.6] He goes to Steve's apartment and he runs a bath and he takes off his clothes and he looks at the body.

The body—

The body is negative.

Wilsonsamuelthomas would say that the feelings about the body are negative.

Buck thinks that's some doubletalking bullshit. (chapter 3)

[3.7] Bucky realizes that he can't recall the last time he used his body as something other than a weapon and, in an attempt to begin reclamation of his body, he tries to masturbate. His first attempt results in a panic attack. Thinking about Steve centers him, and he tries again, successfully this time. Spitandvinegar writes, "Steve is positive. Think about Steve. His hands. Positive. His voice. Positive. His eyes. Very positive. His mouth. Highly positive. The mission is go" (chapter 3). Afterward, Bucky has something of an existential crisis—realizing that there is some piece of his humanity still left and that Hydra hasn't taken everything away from him.

[3.8] He just lies there and laughs, because Christ, he's a disaster, he's a walking trash fire, he's an eight-car pileup, he's a threshing machine wrapped in a dead man's skin, and he feels better than he has since they ripped his soul out of his piece of garbage horrorshow of a body seventy fucking shitstained years ago. (chapter 3)

[3.9] The majority of readers found the frankness with which Spitandvinegar discusses Bucky's issues with his body refreshing. She addresses his disassociation not only regarding his physical disabilities but also his sexuality and performance of gender often and in great detail. She also addresses the fact that many real-life trauma survivors struggle with sexual issues but are often too ashamed to discuss them. She emphasizes in the story that there is no shame in having these kinds of problems and explorations nor in talking about such struggles with close friends or partners. In the subsequent chapters, sex is an ongoing issue for Bucky, which he talks candidly about with both Sam and Steve, who handle the conversations with empathy and humor.
"So when you say you can't," Steve says, "You mean, uh—"

"I mean, it ain't b-b-broken," Bucky says. "I can still get off sometimes. It's just shy, you know? Like a classy dame with sensitive nerves."

"Oh, well, that makes sense then," Steve says. "That is what I always think of when I think about your johnson. A classy dame. With sensitive nerves."

"Aw, you've been th-th-thinking about my dick, sweetheart? I'm flattered."

"Oh, yeah," Steve says. "It's one of the only four things I ever think about. You know: liberty, justice, your dick and the asshole it's attached to—"

Bucky tackles him to the floor. (chapter 7)

Similarly, Spitandvinegar documents Steve's struggles with his sexuality and, more specifically, religion as well. While Steve hasn't undergone the trauma of brainwashing that Bucky has, his Catholic upbringing in the early 1900s as a frail, disabled kid has left him with obstacles to overcome before he can become intimate with Bucky. Both men have tried most of their lives to suppress admitting their interest in each other, and Steve, in particular, struggles with confronting his sexuality. After several chapters, Steve finally says out loud to Sam that he's bisexual. They have a conversation that many commenters identify with, saying they've had similar conversations or made similar revelations in their own lives and with their own partners, necessitating a reconsideration of their religious dogma. After being intimate one night, Steve returns to the bed with his Bible in hand and asks if he can read a passage to Bucky:

[3.12] Steve clears his throat, and starts to read, that big deep voice of his soft and gentle on the words.

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go." (chapter 8)

This is one of the chapters with the most reader comments—with responders of all ages and genders empathizing with the struggle Steve and Bucky undertake in reconciling both religion and their sexuality and citing Spitandvinegar's story as a therapeutic way to work through their own experiences. This reflects the shamanistic aspect of borderlands creators that Anzaldúa (1987) describes, where storytellers share transformative narratives that transcend class, race, and sexuality. "The ability of story (prose and poetry)," Anzaldúa says, is the ability "to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else" (66). Here, Spitandvinegar and slash writers like her walk the path between the self, the community, and the broader world, creating a bridge between these borders. Additionally, readers praised Spitandvinegar for the way in which Steve established that he liked both men
and women. For many bisexual readers, this was its own form of relief—where an authority figure (Captain America himself) clearly states that he is bisexual and that being in a homosexual relationship doesn't negate that. Similar to her challenging of preconceived notions about trauma, Spitandvinegar challenges preconceived notions about bisexuality with a character that vocally opposes common stereotypes across gender and goes on to then challenge the very concept of gender within a monogamous relationship as well.

[3.14] Because of their early 1900s upbringings, Bucky and Steve are an apt couple to complicate notions of gender and gendered behavior within the domestic sphere. Bucky, the Winter Soldier, a cybernetically enhanced Soviet super spy and lethal assassin, likes the color pink, strawberry milkshakes, fluffy blankets, and having his hair brushed.

[3.15] [He buys] a new powder-pink hoodie with an extra-soft lining. He wears it almost all the time, padding silently around the apartment with his hair hanging in his face. He keeps giving Steve these weird sidelong glances when he wears it, like he's daring him to say something about it. Finally, one day he comes up to Steve while he's reading on the couch.

"Steve."

"Mm."

"Do you like. My sweater?"

"Your hoodie?" Steve blinks. "Yeah, I like it a lot."

…Then he says, "Do I look. Dangerous?"

"No," says Steve. He thinks he's catching on. "You look really cute."

"Cute," Buck says happily. (chapter 9)

[3.16] Steve Rogers, Captain America, the indestructible muscle-bound super soldier, leader of the Avengers, and arguably the most masculine figure in the Marvel universe, enjoys being taken care of and recalls fondly when he was small and couldn't work because of his health problems. During that time, he shared an apartment with Bucky and took over the womanly duties of cooking and cleaning and making Bucky's lunches. He liked doing those things for Bucky and finally admits that he misses those days, sharing that he used to fantasize, in the 1940s, that he'd been born a woman and could marry Bucky.

[3.17] Buck blinks, then grins. "You mean, like, it's right after the war, and I've just gotten off work at the garage, and I get home to the dump in Red Hook and you're fixing me dinner—"

"Oh, Lord," Steve says. He's sounding a little strangled.

"I like all of my pink stuff because I like feeling all s-s-soft and cute and harmless
and shit," Buck says, considering. "What's it all about for you, punk? It's embarrassing? You want to feel embarrassed?"

"I'm your wife," Steve says softly. "And all I gotta do is stay at home and cook and clean, and I know you're gonna come home every night and take care of me." (chapter 10)

[3.18] Bucky understands how important it is that Steve is willing to admit this to him and encourages Steve to tell him the rest of his fantasy in detail when he is embarrassed and uncertain of his fantasy's reception. Steve tells him that he'd be a "lucky girl" who wouldn't have to worry about Bucky his "good husband" straying (chapter 10). Even though Bucky is the one facilitating Steve in the following intimate scene, Spitandvinegar makes sure that Steve is not the only one showing vulnerability, nor is he the only one challenging preconceived notions of masculinity. When Steve asks if Bucky would like to penetrate him, Bucky says he's not comfortable with that yet and suggests, instead, that he be the receptive partner. Despite Steve intentionally playing a feminine role, he is the stereotypically dominant partner, who even displays masculine-coded aggression at times, picking Bucky up and moving to position him as he wants. Even within this intentionally gendered fantasy, there is no distinct power imbalance in their lovemaking, with both Steve and Bucky stopping and resuming amorous activities as necessary to facilitate enjoyment. Importantly, throughout this and other scenes, Bucky's trauma-related issues don't go away once they become intimate, but rather are incorporated into the scene. Spitandvinegar writes:

[3.19] "The classy dame kinda decides to make an exit for a little while, for no fucking good reason that Buck can figure out, but Steve just keeps talking to him and kissing his shoulders and touching him like it doesn't matter at all, and eventually she gets back in line… So maybe Buck cries a little, who the fuck cares, so what, Stevie doesn't mind. (chapter 10).

[3.20] Steve, sharing a fantasy in which he plays a female domestic role, Bucky referring to Steve and his own dick with female pronouns, and the unapologetic emotion of the scene, all gesture to the broader queer work that Spitandvinegar's writing, and the writing of many female slash contributors, seeks to accomplish. This work reflects the traversing of the gender binary that Anzaldúa discusses, saying, "There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds…We are suffering from an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the hieros gamos: the coming together of opposite qualities within" (1987, 41).

[3.21] The slash community has created a space where queer and straight women alike can work through everything from personal trauma to religion to questioning gender conformity to sexual curiosity and arousal, in a format abstracted from typical literary and cultural constraints. While it would be patently untrue to say that all slash is progressive and that all female slash writers are a positive force in fandom, the way in which AO3 is structured —allowing diverse, mature, content, as well as community interaction— provides a platform
for progressive stories and authors like Spitandvinegar to gain a following. The story Spitandvinegar writes, both deeply introspective and interpersonal, is a kind of narrative largely unseen in most popular media. In this particular case, this dearth is a consequence of genre and market expectations. Added to the high-adrenaline action sequences that define comic forms, the entertainment industry's commitment to producing comic movies that echo the intensity of the genre with heavy doses of special effects has further concretized traditional superhero narratives away from cultural investments such as allowing the psychologically complex, action-light process of recovery or gender exploration to develop in print or onscreen. That being said, the lack of industry interest in imagining these stories has not been lost on the consumers who maintain the industry. While these themes may not typically appear within movie or comic formats, they are acutely present in Marvel fan works, particularly slash works. Unlike mass-produced publications, which abide by hegemonic narratives and necessitate a strict dichotomy between creator and consumer, Spitandvinegar's work here is reflective of any borderlands production in that it is deconstructive, reformatory, and transformative, a collaborative work that both incorporates, yet remains resistant to, imposed, nonprogressive narratives.

4. Conclusion

[4.1] While the plot-centered demands of standard fare narratives within film and print may not often allow for these psychologically complex, sexually exploratory, action-light processes, these themes are uniquely suited to a fan fiction format. Because there is an assumed preconception of the characters and their histories inherent to the genre, slash fiction does not have to concern itself with the standard protocols of backstories, action-intensive plot, and so on (unless it wants to), and can instead centralize its attention on the interpersonal, physiological, political, and psychosexual lives of known characters. This freedom results in the queer fandom phenomenon we see today in slash. By invoking the term "queer," I do not merely refer to the fact that slash focuses on gay relationships. Rather, I point to the work that slash is doing—the sort of transformative, incorporative, yet subversive, work that Anzaldúa's borderland ideology supports. For this reason, digital archives like AO3 are important creative spaces and a platform on which authors can modify characters and storylines popularized by comics, books, and film. Importantly, slash is not a genre that caters only to women. While that has been the focus of my essay, and women have certainly capitalized on the allowances that slash and fandom communities surrounding slash works facilitate, this is an inherently queer genre that welcomes all writers or readers who seek a pleasurable, therapeutic method of working through any number of binary-related issues, preconceived notions, and so on, whether these concerns are related to conceptions of gender, sexuality, religion, trauma, or more—something Ain't No Grave (Can Keep My Body Down) illustrates particularly well.

[4.2] In light of this knowledge, I argue that by allowing slash works broader exploration and analysis—like that afforded to canonical texts and media—the intersection of consumers, creators, and underserved fans may be better understood. While this essay is by no means comprehensive, I hope to illustrate the possibilities within this avenue of fandom studies and the potential this study may have of adding nuance to existing borderlands scholarship. Should slash be given wider attention as a cultural and literary form and theories like
borderlands utilized to examine it, I believe the opportunity for critical analysis is far-reaching.

5. Notes

1. While the term "slash" does not exclusively mean a male/male pairing, for the purposes of this essay, when I use the term "slash," I refer to a homosexual romantic pairing.

2. As of May 2019, 1.5 million of the nearly 5 million works of fan fiction on AO3 were rated mature or explicit, making roughly a third of the works geared to adult audiences.

3. As of May 2019, of the nearly 5 million works of fan fiction on AO3, 2.4 million were tagged with m/m, 1.2 million were tagged with f/m, 400K were tagged with f/f, and fewer still were tagged with gen, multi, and other. AO3 allows overlap of all of these categories and, indeed, a single fic can contain all of these distinctions.

6. References


Theory

Considering eighteenth-century prophecy as transformative work

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[0.1] Abstract—This article explores premodern prophecy as a form of transformative work with connections to contemporary fan fiction. This link is established in three ways: through the archontic nature of prophecy, through the prophet's self-insertion into the biblical text, and by viewing prophetic groups as textual communities marked by affective links to characters. These links are examined through a case study of two prophets, Richard Brothers (1757–1824) and Joanna Southcott (1750–1814), with the conflict between them reconceptualized as an affectively driven dispute over claims to character ownership. The article suggests that approaches from fan studies can offer useful perspectives for historians (and vice versa) while cautioning against overly arbitrary ahistorical comparisons between modern fandom and premodern groups.

[0.2] Keywords—Affect; Character; Fan fiction


1. Introduction

[1.1] The aim of this article is to explore the way in which prophecy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an emerging media age, can be viewed as a form of transformative work with analogies to fan fiction. This approach has a number of advantages. Employing methodologies drawn from contemporary fan studies can help historians to shed new light on the nature of debates on prophecy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As well as further examining the extent to which prophecy was an attempt by those shut out of the public sphere to articulate their concerns, it offers new perspectives on the way in which those who produced and received prophecies engaged creatively with the Bible, and particularly how they understood the characters contained within. Rather than viewing prophecy as simply a way of articulating social or theological concerns, controversies between different prophetic groups can be reinterpreted as affectively driven disputes about character usage and ownership, an approach that helps to articulate why these groups felt so passionately about their interpretations. This also places prophecy, particularly within the later-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, within the context of an emerging media ecology marked by patterns of collecting, textual productivity,
and a nascent celebrity culture. For those working in fan studies, the examination of prophecy through this lens helps articulate fannish practices that existed prior to the twentieth century. Highlighting historical disputes that circulated around character in affective communities provides helpful comparisons that illustrate unique elements of contemporary fandom and reveal which practices and disputes have longer-term historical antecedents. It situates fan fiction as part of a historical tradition of textual reclamation, particularly by women in patriarchal societies. Examining the way in which male writers, even when also members of subaltern groups, fought against these practices provides insight and context to contemporary discussions of toxic masculinity within fan cultures (Salter and Blodgett 2017).

[1.2] While this article will touch on a variety of prophets, it will concentrate particularly on the historical controversy surrounding two major prophetic figures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott. Through their writings and their interactions with political and religious authorities and with one another, I will trace the ways in which prophecy might be considered a form of transformative work. In doing so, I also will examine the way in which the Bible, as the most widely circulated text of the period, acted as a nexus for the formation of imaginative communities.

2. Fan fiction in historical context

[2.1] Studies of fan fiction have often pointed to historical precedents to contemporary fan practices, particularly to the way in which characters from ancient myth and medieval romance were transferred into new narrative contexts (e.g., Pugh 2005, 13–15; Jamison 2013, 26–36; Keller 2011; Simonova 2012). Recent work has emphasized the way in which readers in early modern Europe reworked and expanded canonical texts such as Virgilian epics (Basu 2016), how medieval women writers reworked the romance tradition to express their gender (Nielsen 2017), and the way in which manuscript culture allowed women to engage in textual productivity (Coker 2017). Although each of these examples is carefully argued, with awareness of the importance of historical context, comparisons between contemporary and historical rewriting practices can sometimes be overly arbitrary, employing what Natasha Simonova describes as "a very generalising view of literary history" (2015, 2). There remains an additional danger that historians might search for apparent antecedents to contemporary fan practices as a way of justifying the existence of fan studies to more established disciplines. Simple comparisons between contemporary fan fiction and historical practices therefore risk both losing the historical context of the historical works examined and effacing genuinely new practices in contemporary fandom.

[2.2] Rather than simply search for comparisons between modern fandom and historical practices, a further step is needed. Recent studies have suggested that this should involve an emphasis on affective reading, community formation, and the links that readers develop with characters. These emphases provide the historian with tools drawn from fan studies that might offer new ways of understanding historical communities and reading practices. Writing about the ancient context, Shannon K. Farley has noted that there is more to fan fiction than simply transferring existing characters across narratives. She emphasizes that the importance of community and the affective responses of fans set modern fan works apart
from rewritten texts such as the *Aeneid* and its reuse of Homer's characters (2016, ¶ 3.9). Anna Wilson has recently called for an emphasis on the "loving reader" in the study of precursors to modern fan fiction, highlighting the importance of "a shared affective" community receiving and continuing to rewrite texts (Wilson 2016, ¶ 1.1–1.3).

[2.3] Prophecy therefore offers an ideal case study of this connection. Although often popularly referred to as predictions of the future, prophecy is a broader phenomenon that can be traced back to the ancient world. At its most basic level, prophecy refers to an individual offering an inspired utterance, acting as a conduit for a message from a deity or deities. In the Christian tradition, this was often expressed orally, and it could include forms as benign as a popular sermon or as potentially disturbing as speaking in an ecstatic trance. Prophecy could also be embodied—as, for example, when Quaker prophets in the mid-seventeenth century interrupted church services naked to serve as a sign of their moral innocence (Crome 2016, 4–5). Although this suggests that prophecy was spontaneous and ephemeral, from the sixteenth century onward it increasingly circulated in manuscript and print, as evidenced by the Tudor legislation against subversive political prophecy passed in 1541–1542, 1549–1550, and 1563 (Thornton 2006, 14–52). By the seventeenth century, prophecy was primarily a textual phenomenon, whether in printed form, as manuscript, or as epistolary. Increasingly, as the early modern period wore on, print became its most common form (Bouldin 2015, 6–9).

[2.4] Although prophecy was (for the prophet, at least) an inspired utterance, a large part of it included elements of engagement with and exegesis of sacred texts—in the Christian context, the Bible. The scriptures offered prophets a way to justify their activity. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and those of the New Testament, such as John the Baptist, provided a model for prophetic activity. Prophets were expected to speak in a biblical idiom and, at times, to mirror the role of their scriptural predecessors. In this sense, prophecy encouraged a sort of role-playing, in which the prophet could consciously imitate historical events from scripture in the present. This was often politically provocative. After the Quaker James Nayler attempted to re-create Christ's triumphal entry to Jerusalem as he entered Bristol in October 1656, he was tried for blasphemy and came close to being executed. Less politically scandalous (but potentially just as controversial), prophecy usually involved a reinterpretation of scripture that often found ways to use the text to criticize prevailing social and cultural norms.

[2.5] This was particularly the case for female prophets. The Bible contained predictions that prophecy would return to God's people in the end times. God promised that he would "pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions" (Joel 2:28, New International Version). The universality of this promise, which spoke particularly about female involvement, also opened up a space for women to engage in broader social, political, and religious discourse. Although the majority of Christian traditions have historically disapproved of women's preaching, the promise that women could prophesy under God's spirit allowed them to become participants in religious debates. As Elizabeth Bouldin noted, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "prophecy was a vehicle that allowed women to be heard, to challenge authority, and to stake a claim" (2015, 11).
Much of the academic study of prophecy in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries has focused upon the way in which women used it as a means of self-expression and of displaying political and social agency. In the 1640s and 1650s, for example, Quaker women prophets preached openly. Prophets like Elizabeth Poole were consulted by Oliver Cromwell and the English Council of State, while Lady Eleanor Davis continued to publish copious volumes of prophecy even during her imprisonment for political sedition. Prophets tended to gather interpretative communities around them, each evincing a shared approach to the biblical text. These could constitute a physical community or a wider network of national or transnational readers. Ann Bathurst, for example, kept a diary of her prophecies and dreams from 1679–1696 and circulated them within her Philadelphian community in London. The Philadelphians' most famous prophet, Jane Lead (1624–1704), kept a similar journal but published it along with other prophecies. This allowed the wide dissemination of her work and attracted readers who corresponded from Germany, France, and America (Hessayon 2016).

Whether their communities of readers were local or international, they came together around a shared appreciation of the Bible and the value of a prophet's interpretations of it. These readings were often resistive and found space for women or disenfranchised men to find themselves in the biblical text. Their prophecies found them inhabiting the roles of Old Testament prophets, or speaking to angels, biblical characters, God, and even Satan. This is where viewing prophecy through the lens of fan fiction can be particularly helpful. Much of the scholarship on fan fiction has emphasized the way in which it has offered marginalized groups, especially women, opportunities to express themselves through exploring gaps in narratives and reimagining characters (Jenkins [1992] 2013). Examinations of historical antecedents of fan fiction have also often noted the way in which these reimaginings could reclaim traditions and texts for marginalized groups, as E. J. Nielsen (2017) does in her examination of Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* as a reworking of the medieval exemplary tradition in order to favor women. Contemporary fan communities are additionally marked by "loving intimacy" with their texts that makes their consumption "an example of affective reception" (Wilson 2016, ¶ 1.1, 1.2). A combination of the appropriation and reworking of characters and a reclamatory reading of a beloved text—in this case, the Bible—by a dedicated community offers a point of contact between fan fiction and early modern prophecy.

As noted previously, it is important to guard against what has at times been a somewhat arbitrary comparison between modern fandom and historical practice (e.g., Keller 2011). Although fan fiction and historical prophecy may share features, there are a number of apparent problems with any direct comparison. First, fan fiction is often associated with an intentional reworking and appropriation of a source text (e.g., Jenkins [1992] 2013), reshaped by an author's agency in a "purposeful" manner (De Kosnik 2016, 277). Prophecy as a spontaneous (and sometimes unwanted) inspired utterance might appear to attribute all authorship to God rather than to the prophet themselves. It could therefore seem to downplay the agency and individuality of the prophet as the origin of their reworking of the Bible. However, as Carme Font (2017) noted, the prophet's individuality was a key part in the transmission of a prophecy. The prophet's individual attributes (such as bodily weakness, personality, or social position) all contributed to the nature of the message. As Susan Juster
has argued, by the late eighteenth century prophets tended to view themselves as God's spokespeople rather than channels of a directly ventriloquized message (2003, 122). This allowed them to use prophecy as a way of creatively exploring the Bible and its characters. Especially for female prophets, a disclaiming of agency for their compositions was used to justify reinterpretations of the Bible that, paradoxically, granted them the right to reinterpret it. In this way, prophets were able to work as "co-creators" who could "gradually blur God's unambiguous presence to keep themselves and the word [of God] in the text" (Font 2017, 4). The text became what Font has described as a "textual laboratory" for engaging in new forms of literary work (221).

[2.9] Another reason why prophecy might initially seem to offer an unpromising comparison with fan fiction is its link to eschatology. Most prophets made extensive use of the Bible's apocalyptic books—particularly Daniel and Revelation—in order to proclaim a coming judgment and overturning of unjust social structures (Crome 2016). These texts might appear tied to rigid predetermination, offering tightly prescribed endings and few spaces for narrative exploration. For example, the book of Revelation concludes with a warning that those who either added or removed any element of it would experience eternal punishment. However, although apocalyptic texts are often connected with clearly defined endings (e.g., Kermode 1967), it is also possible to read apocalyptic works such as Revelation as consistently differing their own endings. As Derrida (1984) noted, where readers search for endings and a definitive coming of Christ, they find delays and postponements that open the text. The supposed certainty of Christ's return is mingled with deferments and cries of "How long, Sovereign Lord?" (Rev. 6:10 NIV), and the book closes with the author continuing to implore Christ to "come" (Rev. 22:20 NIV). This explains the ever-expanding range of interpretations that circulate around it, as the text itself encourages new engagements, reinterpretations, and reworkings. In this sense, Revelation encourages textual productivity, as each interpretation of the text builds on those previous to it.

[2.10] As a text that placed readers on a boundary between the delivery of the promises and their fulfilment, Revelation in fact comes close to what Paul Booth identified as the key appeal of the cult text: existing "in between answer and question, in between desire and fulfilment" (2010, 95). This openness of apocalyptic prophecy to reworking is clear from the reaction of prophets to failed predictions. Prophets have not generally abandoned their interpretation when their predictions failed—instead, they have developed new readings that built on their previous work (Dawson 2011). These could be either resistive or supportive of the status quo. For example, in the late eighteenth century, heated interpretive disputes saw nonconformist writers assign Satanic roles in Revelation to Britain and angelic figures to revolutionary France, while Anglican commentators responded by flipping their identification (e.g., contrast Bicheno [1797] and Faber [1806]). In this way, prophecy shared what Abigail De Kosnik has described as the archontic nature of fan fiction: each new interpretation of the text became a resource that could be built upon, thereby encouraging ever-greater productivity and reinterpretation (De Kosnik 2016; Derecho 2006).

[2.11] This archontic nature of prophecy is the first feature that prophecy shares with fan fiction. The second is an element of self-insertion within texts. Studies of fan fiction have often commented upon the (much-maligned) process of author self-insertion through the use
of a "Mary Sue" character (e.g., Jenkins [1992] 2013; Pfleiger 1999). As Kristina Busse has recently noted, self-insertion reflects an affective connection with the text while walking a tightrope between a desire to enter a textual world and the perceived extravagances of the Mary Sue (2016, 162). Similarly, prophets not only interpreted the biblical text but often found themselves referred to within it. This could be through their appropriation of the persona of a particular biblical prophet. For example, the prophet might shape his or her writing to mimic the biblical speeches of Isaiah or Moses, an inherently transformative action for women prophets. This was particularly popular among Quaker prophets in the seventeenth century. For example, Margaret Brewster appeared in sackcloth and ashes in Boston in 1677 to replicate the actions of the biblical prophet Jonah in his preaching to Nineveh. Although Bouldin has argued that this action was a minimization of gender (2015, 62–67), the transposition of a male prophet's language to women unavoidably made a gendered statement (Purkiss 1992, 141–43). At other times, prophets might identify with a particular scriptural character, picturing themselves reliving the experiences of the Apostle Paul or John the Baptist.

[2.12] As medieval mystics such as Margery Kempe imagined that they were personally experiencing the suffering of the Virgin Mary in their imaginative meditation, so prophets found themselves reliving scripture. For example, Jane Lead believed that she reexperienced Mary Magdalene's discovery of the risen Jesus at the tomb (Font 2017, 178). Her fellow Philadelphian prophet Ann Bathurst recorded a remarkable vision in which biblical figures including Amos, Job, Malachi, and Nahum conversed with her. The assembled prophets presented Bathurst with English monarch Mary Tudor, whose reign was infamous for the religious persecution of Protestants, in order for the prophet to learn how to pray for violent rulers (Bouldin 2015, 115). As Wilson has recently argued, these sorts of experiences can be seen as a type of self-insert fan fiction in which the prophet enters the text and engages with its characters (Wilson 2016, ¶ 2.1). In turn, these relate to a final type of self-insertion —where the prophets themselves fully identified as a character from the Biblical text. The book of Revelation, with its complex symbolism and imagery, provided the perfect repository for these images. To use one particularly popular example, several female prophets (including Jane Lead and Joanna Southcott) claimed to be the "woman clothed with the sun" described in Revelation 12.

[2.13] The final area in which prophecy and fan fiction can be compared is through the importance of affective textual communities, formed around both the prophet's writings and biblical texts. These could be physical, as with the Philadelphians who were centered in a London community (Hessayon 2016), or textual, as with the Quaker prophets who shared prophecies across continents through letter-writing networks (Bouldin 2015, 52–61). In these communities, the prophet acted as a living link to the biblical tradition. Supposedly inspired by the same Spirit who had produced the original scriptural texts, the prophet was accessible both as a figure to provide guidance and as an expert exegete with a powerful (and often transformative) engagement with the Bible. As in fan fiction, whereas the canonical author is inaccessible, "the writer—that actively scribbling, embodied woman—is very much alive. You can talk to her; you can write to her and ask her questions about her work, and she will probably write back to you and answer them" (Pugh 2005, 242). In the same way, the prophet was open to engagement and debate.
[2.14] The accessibility of the prophet developed through technological changes from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. As Susan Juster (2003) noted, the emergence of a broader public sphere of print in the eighteenth century allowed prophets to reach a wider audience and to produce work in direct response to challenges and questions. Similarly, the prophets could act as a direct connection between the community and particular biblical characters, offering their followers the opportunity for a more direct and embodied experience of beloved scriptural figures through their link to the divine.

[2.15] This affective, communal link to character can help explain the intensity of disputes between prophets and their opponents. In examining contemporary fandom, Rebecca Williams has argued that a fan's ontological security and attachment to a fan object can be undermined when producers make controversial changes to beloved characters (2015, 45–56). For example, the furious response of some Star Wars fans to the portrayal of Luke Skywalker in *The Last Jedi* (2017) demonstrates precisely this kind of reaction (McCreesh 2017). Thinking about links between ontological security and character serves as a helpful way of thinking about the importance of characters for prophets and their followers. Given that prophetic believers' ontological security rested on scripture and claims of divine approval, arguments that their community had misappropriated the Bible or misused its characters were particularly powerful. Disputes between prophetic communities therefore rested not only on precise (and sometimes abstract) theology but also on arguments about who had the right to make claims on these characters. Defenses based on identifying with particular biblical figures were therefore vital because they protected the community's sense of ontological security.

[2.16] These three areas offer helpful parallels between transformative works and prophecy. Although it would be possible to examine these connections across a variety of contexts, the remainder of this article focuses on late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century prophecy as a case study. The eighteenth century was an important time for the development of transformative works. The rise of the novel as a form of popular recreation led to a surge of popular interest in narratives and characters. Most famously, Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel *Pamela* generated a series of unofficial sequels, parodies, and rewrites from readers. Merchandise surrounding the novel included unofficial illustrations in pirated copies, hand fans, and porcelain figurines (Keymer and Sabor 2005). As David Brewer has argued, readers in that period formed strong affective bonds with characters, writing their own continuations, sequels, and resolutions to plots that dissatisfied them. In particular, characters were viewed as a shared community resource (2005).

[2.17] Textual productivity and the assumed right to authorship troubled some religious and political conservatives. The religious writer and bluestocking Hannah More criticized the novel as producing an out-of-control form of textual productivity: "every raw girl, while she reads, is tempted to fancy she can write" (1799, 184). Elizabeth Judge (2009), in tracing both this form of productivity and the emergence of copyright law, has seen the eighteenth century as central to the emergence of fan fiction. As Orienne Smith (2013) has suggested, the tradition of female prophecy influenced the novels written by women writers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as they used its structures and precedents to justify their intervention into the public sphere.
Brewer argued that the more widely a text was disseminated, the greater the likelihood that its characters came to be seen as community property, free to move between texts (2005, 10–15). Given the Bible's position as the most widely circulated text in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it would appear to be a prime candidate for the formation of imaginative textual communities. These literary developments and links to prophecy make the period ideal for a case study of the way in which insights drawn from the study of fan fiction can help historians to understand prophecy. The following sections will show how two controversial prophets, Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott, wrote transformative works based on the Bible. Both responded, in letter and print, to the Bible, each other, and different prophets writing in their communities. Both inserted themselves into scripture and formed affective communities around themselves. Using fan studies as a lens to view their work offers new insights into the nature of their disagreements and the way in which their followers responded to their competing claims.

3. Richard Brothers, Joanna Southcott, and archontic prophecy

[3.1] Richard Brothers (1757–1824) was a former British naval lieutenant who experienced visions from 1791 onward. In the early years of the decade, he sent warnings to the king, Prime Minister William Pitt, and parliament of imminent judgment but did not publish these until the two-volume *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times* appeared in 1794. The book went through a number of ever-expanding editions over the following year as he incorporated new insights and visions. This included several produced in London and Dublin, eighteen in the United States, and translations into French and German (Madden 2010, 88). Funded by wealthy supporters, Brothers distributed his book freely to visitors—including admirers who learned of him through the press, fashionable curiosity seekers, and mockers (Garrett 1975, 187). He believed that he would claim supreme power and usurp George III, and that he was destined to travel to the Holy Land where he would become universal king in Jerusalem. Brothers attracted followers from across the social spectrum, including artisans and prophetic seekers John Wright and William Bryan, engraver William Sharp, and MP Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, who spoke in his support in parliament. His pictures were widely circulated in popular magazines. For example, *Harrison's Lady Pocket Magazine* offered readers pictures of the Prince of Wales, Richard Brothers, and the Italian Opera House in Haymarket in April 1795 (Madden 2010, 74).

[3.2] Given his work's publication during fears of popular uprisings and war between Britain and revolutionary France, it is unsurprising that he attracted the attention of the authorities. On March 4, 1795, Brothers was arrested on suspicion of treason. He was eventually committed to a private asylum in Islington, where he remained for the next eleven years (Madden 2010, 142–46). He continued to publish during his confinement, although he lost the majority of his supporters to fellow prophet Joanna Southcott (1750–1814) by the early nineteenth century. Southcott was a domestic servant and upholsterer from Exeter, who had received visions since 1792. She first came to London in a bid to obtain Brothers's release in May 1802. However, she soon came to believe that she had inherited Brothers's mantle. Although Brothers and Southcott never met, they engaged in a fierce printed debate (Madden 2010, 261–91). Southcott further developed the nascent celebrity culture that Brothers had tapped into. Her textual productivity (her sixty-five published works amount to five thousand
pages, with double that remaining in manuscript) ensured that her followers seldom lacked new reading material (Bowerbank 2004). Southcott also offered pieces of material culture that allowed her followers to connect with her. Devotees were encouraged to send signed affirmations that they had read her key works, which she would countersign and seal with a special symbol. She distributed at least twenty thousand of these seals, as well as setting up a network of chapels.

[3.3] Brothers's and Southcott's works both show evidence of the three links between prophecy and fan fiction discussed earlier: its archontic nature, self-insertion, and the development of affective textual communities based around characters. Both prophets' attitude to the Bible evidenced an approach of building on past interpretations, filling textual gaps, and moving to correct perceived flaws in the plot or characters described in scripture. According to Brothers, God informed him that "there is no other man" who could correct misinterpretations of the sacred texts "that they may be restored as they were in the beginning, but yourself" (1794b, iii). "The alterations I have made in copying some of the prophecies," he noted, "is by the direction and command of the Lord God" (1794a, 37). The prophet therefore reprinted biblical texts with his own parenthetical comments incorporated in his publications. For example, when quoting Isaiah 11: "And in that day there shall be a ROOT OF JESSE (meaning myself) which shall stand for a SIGN to the People (meaning the Jews) to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his REST (meaning his Government at Jerusalem) shall be glorious" (1794a, 13).

[3.4] When his calculations of prophetic dates proved erroneous, Brothers was therefore able to go back to the Bible and edit the text—the numbers provided in the Book of Daniel, for example, were shown to have been perverted through copying errors that he could correct (Brothers 1795, 19–23). As one contemporary critic noted, "when one visionary being had totally receded from his view, his fertile imagination could directly supply its place with another, which appeared, vanished, and was succeeded by another, for such his creative fancy had always the power to command" (Moser 1795, 28).

[3.5] Southcott employed a slightly different approach to the Bible. She claimed that her prophecies both interpreted and opened the text: "that the Bible was unfinished and pointed to a new fulfilment and a new revelation" in her own works (Niblett 2015, 85). She engaged in creative exploration of the text, rewriting it in the form of rhyming verse interspersed with commentary. She also experimented with textual form—including deliberately playing with the order of texts she received. For example, she published a prophecy in one book and its explanation in another—both parts needing to be read together to make sense of her actual message (Juster 2003, 171–77). At another point, she wove together a series of separate scriptural phrases in reverse order to form a new prophecy that began with the apocalypse, ran through the gospels, prophets, and psalms, and ended with the creation "to begin with the last and to bring it back to the first" (Southcott 1802a, 65).

[3.6] This form of editing, gap-filling, and constant building on previous interpretations might appear to suggest a lack of reverence for scripture. However, the prophets' actions were not representative of a low-view of the text but rather a close affective connection to it. At one point, when Southcott read of Christ's death, "his love and sufferings from the
manger to the cross appeared before me in such lively colours, that it would be fruitless to pen the feelings of my heart." This led her to discuss her personal relationship with the Bible. She recalled that her father had reprimanded her as a girl for becoming too "affected" by the text. Nonetheless, "the more I thought to give it up, the more the Bible broke in upon me" (1802a, 85–86). Southcott therefore denied that she added to the sacred text. Instead, her work elaborated on it, playing at the margins to expand it through her textual productivity. "By adding thereto," she noted in 1802, "is to say things they cannot find scripture proof for. Now if any man will prove that I have spoken what I cannot bring scripture proof for, I will give it up" (1802b, 232).

4. Self-insertion and character ownership

[4.1] While their works transformed and elaborated on the Bible, Brothers and Southcott also practiced self-insertion into the biblical text. First, this was through close identification with biblical characters. This built on the affective tradition in which an individual believed that they were reliving the events in a particular biblical figure's life (Nielsen 2017). For Brothers, this included imaginatively reexperiencing key events in the lives of Moses and Jeremiah. For example, he framed his initial reticence to embrace his calling through a direct reference to a biblical life: "like Moses in the 4th chapter of Exodus, [I] begged earnestly to decline the favour of governing in his [God's] service: no excuse would be admitted" (1795, 30). As with Moses, so Brothers was given a powerful rod through which God would do miracles and therefore prove his prophetic identity (1794b, 25–28; 1795, 33). But Moses was not the only prophet that Brothers appropriated. "The prophecies of JEREMIAH," he noted, "bear so intimate a resemblance to my own, that the LORD GOD, whose servant I am, commands me to refer all people of the present to them." Like Brothers, Jeremiah's contemporaries had mocked and imprisoned him. Yet, as Brothers noted, no reader would now deny "that Jeremiah was a beloved prophet, and a great one also" (1795, 34). So he replicated Jeremiah's experiences, in effect reliving his life.

[4.2] When worrying about how the public would view his interpretations, Brothers spoke to God, "almost similar to what the Prophet Samuel said when he was commanded to anoint David to be King of Israel," and feared the political impact of God's orders (Brothers 1794a, 13, emphasis in original). Most controversially, Brothers claimed the identity of several biblical types usually applied to Jesus. Revelation 5 introduced a figure on a throne that is both the "lion of the tribe of Judah" and "a lamb, as if it has been slain" who opened the sealed books of the prophecy. Commentators, almost universally, applied this to Christ. Brothers, however, believed that the figure referred to him:

[4.3] St. JOHN call him a Lion! because [sic] He's bold,
To open seals, and secret things unfold!
"The only Man on Earth" that could be found,
Or yet in Heaven, or its expanse around,
To open that Book, which God himself had seal'd,
Then shew its contents, as God the parts reveal'd!
For which He suffers, and is nearly slain,
No lamb more innocent—without a stain.
The Bible also proved to be the impetus for Brothers to construct a detailed imagined world. As Mark J. P. Wolf has argued, in contemporary popular culture the Bible has often served as an "Ur-text" for world building, for both historical utopias and contemporary science fiction (2012, 124). Brothers's *A Description of Jerusalem* (1801) engaged in detailed construction of an imagined world. He laid out in detail the rebuilt city and restored Holy Land that would be the site of his future reign. This included architectural maps of the city, the flags and livery of his new nation, and a legal system to govern it. Brothers imagined his readers as literal cocreators in this endeavor. Not only would they contribute to the construction of the city in the future, but they were encouraged to use *A Description* to sketch new plans and pictures of it: "From the regular methodical description I have given, any person that pleases may draw the plan with a pen on paper. Ladies may do it for amusement, gentlemen as an honourable employment to enlarge the sphere of their knowledge, and add new strength to their minds" (27).

Southcott did not chart any imagined cities. However, she was as forceful as Brothers in claiming a place within the biblical narrative. Most notoriously, she claimed to be the "woman clothed with the sun" mentioned in Revelation 12: "I must stand the trial of what I say, as I am ordered to put in print. The woman in the 12th chap. of Revelations [sic] is myself" (1802b, 42). A particularly valued (and respectable) supporter who died suddenly, Basil Bruce, became the child God catches up to the heavens in the same chapter of Revelation, as his untimely death would keep him safe from his doubts and affirm the certainty of Southcott's prophecies (1802a, 32). Like Brothers, she also creatively relived the lives of biblical characters. At one point, she was tested like Abraham and received the same promises from God: "as I did unto Abraham, I will make with thee an everlasting covenant" (1802b, 27).

Given that both prophets inserted themselves into the biblical text, it is perhaps unsurprising that they clashed. Interpretations of this dispute have often centered on gender and personality conflicts. Where viewing prophecy through the lens of fan fiction can help in this discussion is to focus the debate on a different area—the implications of claiming ownership over characters that generated deep affective responses. This sheds new light on the way in which the prophets' dispute was, at its root, a textual claim related to the correct use of characters from the canon of scripture.

For Brothers, Southcott's self-insertion perverted the core text and undermined his claim to be its authoritative interpreter. The woman clothed with the sun, according to him, referred to his future consort as divine king (1794b, 77–79; 1802, 61). As well as misattributing the figure, Brothers argued that Southcott erred in introducing a feminine component to salvation. For Southcott the snake in the Eden narrative was a Miltonic devil, who fought against women throughout the Bible, until she confirmed his defeat ([1802] 1815). For Brothers, the snake was simply a snake. In effect, Southcott had transformed a particular narrative into a general one, leading her to misunderstand the Bible and falsely insert herself in stories in which she didn't belong. To claim to be the woman was, for Brothers, the mark of a "wild, impudent, misguided, seditious, fanatic" (1802, 61).
In response, Southcott found that Brothers's self-insertion into the text was blasphemous. Here her work demonstrated the third intersection between prophecy and fan fiction, as her critique emphasized the affective importance of biblical characters to a community of readers. Brothers claimed that references made to Jesus applied to him, and he appropriated the mantle of the prophets while predicting events that were later falsified. "There were many things he placed to himself," noted Southcott, "which appeared a stumbling-block to them [readers], where he placed himself in many parts of the Scriptures" (1806, 16–17). Brothers's sin was not simply failing to live up to the exalted position he claimed but wrongly implying an ownership over biblical characters who should serve as a community resource. As Judge has noted, eighteenth-century novel writers at times viewed themselves as custodians protecting their characters, whereas readers often viewed their characters as belonging to the wider community (2009, 56). Brothers therefore attempted to limit competing claims on biblical characters—in Southcott's view, denying their wider use to readers.

This links to her criticism of Brothers for his growing pride, including a desire to commercialize his prophecy. From her perspective, Brothers had given into pride and lost sight of the fact that his role was not to exalt himself but to oversee a community of the faithful. As in fan fiction, where some community members feel that commercialization undermines the broader community and the concept of writing as work of love (Jamison 2013, 185–258), so too temptation for personal gain from the marketplace undermined the prophetic office. Dependent mostly on the largesse of her supporters in order to print her works, Southcott did not seek to make money from what she believed was a developing community resource. At one point, she heard Satan tempt her to adapt her works along more commercial lines: "I will make thee the first writer in the world; and where thou hast one friend, I will gain thee one thousand. Now, dost thou now know many have had thousands of pounds for being clever in writing." In response, she affirmed that she would rather die than give up her work (1802c, 9, emphasis in original). Her productivity was a literal labor of love.

As she meditated on Brothers's claims, Southcott was aware that she might be accused of hypocrisy. She feared that "will not the world say, thou hast applied the Scriptures to thyself, as being the woman mentioned in the Revelation?" However, while Brothers's self-insertion closed down meaning by attempting to possess biblical characters and claim them for himself, Southcott claimed them only in a reflective, communal capacity. Southcott therefore argued that while she was the "woman clothed with the sun," "the Scriptures are not pointed out to thee as a mere mortal, only alluding to thyself" (1806, 22). Instead, her narrative interpretation of the Bible allowed for her to serve as a representation of the character that, in turn, would be passed on to her followers. She was the woman of Revelation 12, but this was also a figure who could, through her maternal nature, speak to a community that she metaphorically mothered (1806, 23). For Southcott, these characters therefore formed an affective resource. Her works invited comment and often appeared as a result of correspondence she had received relating to particular claims on character. In her True Explanation of the Bible (1804), for instance, she wrote a meditation for a reader "who having come to the part where Joanna is mentioned as the Bride in the Revelations [sic], was afraid to read any further" (87).
Brothers, on the other hand, promoted the idea of an affective community formed directly around his identity as prophet. The connections that readers had with biblical characters were therefore channeled through him and toward his future hopes that his readers would gather in a restored Jerusalem. This was clear from the descriptions of the future that he imagined, in which his affective response to the city was clearly set out: "Again all is admirable; every new building increases the beauty! While it astonishes one moment, the next it draws the most lively feelings of sensibility from the heart. Sorrow is barely admitted for an instant when it is succeeded by joy" (1801, 19).

Brothers's followers constructed themselves as a textual community built on shared interpretations of scripture. Thomas Taylor, an otherwise unknown disciple driven to print by his desire to vindicate the prophet, described Brothers repeatedly as his "friend," despite acknowledging "I have never seen RICHARD BROTHERS personally." The depth of Brothers's engagement with the Bible, however, changed his mind (1795, A2r). The prophet's former landlady, Sarah Green, had testified that he was insane in the earlier 1790s but was converted when she had dreams of Brothers as John the Baptist, with particular Bible passages inscribed upon his clothing (1795, 6–8). Another follower, Henry Offley, found that Brothers's prophecies reignited his love for scripture. He wrote that, after reading the prophet's work, "I began to feel my deficiency in the knowledge of divine revelation and I began to peruse the scriptures with avidity" (1795, xxiii).

Similarly, Southcott's supporters found that affective responses to her texts brought them together. Partly, this was inspired by encouragement to participatory reading in her works. For example, when the Spirit ordered Southcott to place crosses beside certain parts of her earlier works, she suggested that her readers do the same. Heavily annotated Southcottian bibles suggest that this advice was followed (Juster 2003, 172). The prophet's work could also generate a sense of community in other ways. Basil Bruce, on receiving a personal letter from the prophet in 1801, wrote that "to attempt to describe the emotions of my soul, or the feelings of a heart fraught with the love of God would be in vain" (quoted in Southcott 1802b, 21). He further said that, in reading the letter to his wife, "I was frequently interrupted by the tears of joy gushing from my astonished eyes" (24). Later letters were read in groups, which gathered to analyze them and interpret scripture together. After one such letter, Bruce met with the engraver William Sharp, cobbler William Bryan, and Reverend Thomas Webster. On opening the letters "language cannot express our ravished sense at the perusal of them," and the group spent a "most delightful and heavenly evening" together (Southcott 1802b, 29).

5. Conclusion

I have provided a brief overview of the way in which prophecy in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, with its shifting media ecology, can be viewed as a form of transformative work with significant analogies to fan fiction. Of course, there is a danger in making comparisons between periods without appropriate historical contextualization; prophetic communities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not the same as contemporary fandoms. There are two obvious differences. First, the nature of online communities is very different from the textual culture of circulating letters and books.
in the earlier period. Second, and most importantly, prophets believed that they were genuinely receiving messages from God when they interpreted the Bible. While contemporary fan fiction writers usually engage with a text "as if" real (Saler 2012), Southcott and Brothers genuinely believed that what they wrote represented reality.

[5.2] Nonetheless, viewing prophecy as a form of transformative work is helpful for both historians and contemporary fan fiction scholars. Comparisons between fan fiction and older writing practices can provide new ways of viewing historical actors and their behaviors that benefit both historians and those working on fandom. It offers historians an opportunity to move beyond debates on theology, gender, and politics as motivations in prophecy, and to explore prophecy as a form of affectively motivated textual transformation. Interprophetic disputes thus often focused on characters and the affective links that prophets and their communities built with them. This is not to claim that factors such as theology, gender, and politics were unimportant but to argue that this new way of looking at prophecy opens up insights into the way in which prophetic groups operated and communities formed. Applying a fannish lens to these historical figures helps to explain why they were able to have such influence, and using elements of fan fiction theory can help the historian understand the ways in which they transformed scripture.

[5.3] For those studying fans and fandom, examining prophecy as a form of transformative work provides a further antecedent for contemporary fan practices. It offers a case study of the way in which readers affectively connected with texts and engaged in transformative practices in a very different media ecology. Understanding how these transformations worked and the controversies they caused provides insight into how communities built around texts react to challenges to character ownership and identification, particularly when subaltern groups make claims to them, as Southcott did to the "woman clothed with the sun." Given the fierceness of these debates in contemporary online fandoms, examining earlier attempts by men to reclaim characters from women writers provides helpful background for discussions of toxic masculinity in fandom.

[5.4] Finally, this historical study raises the question of where fan studies draw the boundary when identifying transformative works. If early modern prophecy can be viewed as a transformative work, this suggests that modern prophecy can also be examined in this way. This broadens the sorts of texts that fan studies look at, offering new perspectives on the way in which online religious communities use fannish practices as part of the construction of their lifeworld. Using this lens could therefore provide unexpected insight into how these groups engage with wider society. Like Brothers, the Branch Davidian leader David Koresh (1959–1993) also claimed to be the "slain lamb" of Revelation 5–6, an identity that played a key role in his actions during the 1993 FBI siege of the Davidians' compound in Waco, Texas. Interestingly, although the FBI treated this identification as a sign of his insanity, later scholarship on the siege has suggested that the approaches that treated seriously issues of the ownership and identification of biblical characters were those that got through to the Davidians inside the compound (Wessinger 2000, 91–100). Thinking about prophecy as a form of transformative work thus offers not only different ways of looking at the intersections of religion and broader culture but also better understandings of contemporary prophetic communities.
6. Acknowledgments

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Theory

Structural affects of soap opera fan correspondence, 1970s–80s

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[0.1] Abstract—Paper correspondence between fans and creators/producers is a sort of historiographic challenge to the imagined shift from so-called analog to digital fandom. It opens the possibility of applying digital methodologies to archival objects as researchers continue to historicize fan practices, identities, and cultures. Using the archival papers of soap opera showrunners Frank and Doris Hursley, and Bridget and Jerome Dobson as a case study for this structural-affective analysis, I draw data and metadata from approximately three hundred fan letters and responses. Trends of emotion across the letters figure prominently in an analysis of the affective strategies used by both fans and creators to create an intimately collaborative televisual experience. The letters contain layers of valuable metadata, including filing conventions, typography, and collage; these permit identification of negotiations of power over the televisual narrative, and they provide valuable insights into the affective textures of the soap fan's everyday life. Digital fan studies foregrounds the integration of fandom into one's online life, as well as the importance of social media in closing the gulf between fan and creator. This praxis expands on the value of analog tools—pen, paper, scissors, and typewriter—to the predigital television fan's virtual life. Material communication played and continues to play an important role in fomenting fannish identity, exercising industrial literacy, performing affective engagement, and navigating an enduring, affectionate tension between author and audience.

[0.2] Keywords—Broadcast history; Fandom history; Media archives; Media industries; 1970s television; 1980s television


1. Introduction

[1.1] The fan letter is an enduring symbol of dedication, immersion, and affective engagement. Its emotional content may veer between extremes of adoration and anger; praise and criticism are given equal time, often in the same letter. Though a number of scholars have approached fan correspondence as a unique form of participatory engagement with the text and the creator (Travis 1998; Levine, forthcoming; Bates 2011), the fan letter has been positioned as a historically specific object of study, siloed in a moment before the
rise of digital fandom and internet-based communication between fans and author-producers. However, a methodological and historiographic mission must be undertaken to reframe our thinking of affective fandom as a continuum across time, space, and medium. Analysis of a predigital archive of soap opera fan letters (1970s to 1990s) sheds light on postdigital fan practices of collaborative world building, social networking, and transmedia consumption. Further, a data/metadata approach may usefully be deployed to identify and evaluate fan affects through written communication.

[1.2] The physical fan letter can and should be mined by fan and audience scholars not only for its own sake, but also for its value to digital fan studies. The case study here illustrates the fact that fandom was and is constantly constructing itself before fandom as we now know it was recognized as an audience category. Pre-"fandom" TV fandom grappled with its role in the conditions of media production in ways that feel urgent, alive, and relevant to the current state of fandom. They are a tactile, analog version of the digital circulatory systems and expressions we study now: typed or written by hand, tucked in an envelope, stamped, and sent directly to a media creator, producer, or writer in an effort to produce that elusive and ethereal space of fannish engagement with an object or author.

[1.3] My archival case study is drawn from collections held by the Wisconsin Center for Film and Television Research (WCFTR): the collections of Frank and Doris Hursley, and Bridget and Jerome Dobson, who respectively created, produced, and wrote for the soap operas *Bright Promise* (1969–72) and *Santa Barbara* (1984–93). Hundreds of fan letters are filed in these collections, about three quarters of them written by *Santa Barbara* fans in the 1980s and the rest by *Bright Promise* fans in the early 1970s; about half received recorded responses. Though as Bates notes, "no single-author [or single-creator] study can illustrate every available trend or mode within the genre of fan letters," a texturally rich and well-organized galaxy of correspondence around two specific television texts can certainly accomplish the goal to "illuminate the wider period and…context" (2011 ¶ 1.4). The WCFTR collections certainly cry out for an illumination of context: these programs and their fans emerge from the critically misunderstood genre of the soap opera, a period before television discourse foregrounded narrative "quality," and a historical moment neglected by (television) fan studies. In his work on soap opera fan discussion 1980s to the present (which lays some groundwork for the project I undertake here), Ford writes that "lack of documentation about the power of social connectedness in soaps in…earlier days is unsurprising precisely because discussions were casual and oral" (2008, ¶ 3.4). Though Ford posits that "the idea that fandom can yield significant power when organized or directed toward a common goal is an important component of soap history" (¶ 4.5), he also points out that the varieties of intent and content within fan mail have classically been flattened by media institutions.

[1.4] I diverge from Ford's position, however, that soap opera fan mail contained little "collective action" or gestures to an organizational "infrastructure" (¶ 4.5) of fandom, and that producers remained dismissive of individual letters. Levine writes of *General Hospital* (1963–) correspondence circa the 1990s and 2000s: "While the system in place to handle audience response is thorough and efficient, it does not really account for most viewers' perspectives…The actual words of audience members are only rarely seen by anyone higher
in the chain of command than a writer's assistant" (2007, 146). Ford concurs with this picture of institutional authority within soaps, concluding that "although fan letters provided a way for fans to try and connect directly with the show, it fell short of fans' needs, primarily because it was easier for producers to continue evoking a community of fans while having systems in place to ignore that implied fan ownership when dismissing the specific sentiments of individual fan letters" (2008, ¶ 4.5). Here I endeavor to provide a counterpoint to these trends and perceptions, both within this specific genre and within fandom at large, by using these collections to expose what is surprising about the dynamics of power in fan-letter writing.

[1.5] As Hayward notes, soap opera viewers in particular have long demonstrated a criticality in their consumption: "The conventional 'suspension of disbelief' that audiences supposedly bring to televisual texts is continually challenged by soap viewers as they factor producers', writers', and actors' decisions and motivations into their understanding of the fictional text" (2010, 146). The letters in the WCFTR collections, as well as the attached responses, where applicable, function as solid documentation of a social network with an infrastructure as well as a bold give-and-take between audience and institution. Conceiving the letters' wording as data and aspects such as letter structure, envelopes, and filing systems as metadata, I interpret this correspondence both textually and structurally as follows: negotiations of power over the televisual narrative; flexes in industry knowledge and self-reflexivity; affective fan engagement; and artifacts of a participatory culture.

[1.6] First are negotiations of power over the televisual narrative. Many letters contain speculative content that blurs the line between fan fiction, critique, and writerly employment queries. Methods of filing indicate a tension between author and audience, and paratextual documents such as NBC's fandom reports and communiques between the writer-producers and other network departments illustrate a fascinating preoccupation with the role of the fan in the soap's future.

[1.7] Second are flexes in industry knowledge and self-reflexivity. Fans know who the competition programs are, how television programming works nationally and locally, and how important it is that their viewing practices are captured, logged, and analyzed. Inclusion in their letters of materials such as newspaper clippings or soap opera magazine pages indicates that the fan is claiming multiplatform media citizenship.

[1.8] Third is affective fan engagement, as woven through the texture of everyday life. Not only do we find various colors of emotion in the fan's written word, but also metadata, including typography, handwriting, or stationery, provides insight into the engagement of diverse demographics and, most importantly, where and when the fan chooses to engage. The idly written musing, mailed on the way to school, has a digital immediacy to it that is important to unpack.

[1.9] Fourth and last are artifacts of a participatory culture: these letters are posts to a social network. Though each letter and response embody a highly personal (occasionally even diary-like) relationship, they also contain the performativity of fandom and the hailing of the invisible audience. They also occasionally function as traces of real-life gatherings around
the text, as Ford (2008) describes.

[1.10] Internet fan studies foregrounds the immersion of activities such as shipping and community building into a spaceless and timeless virtual life, as well as the importance of social media in closing the gulf between fan and creator. My work here aims to uncover the tools circa the 1970s and 1980s that enable television fans—via pen, paper, scissors, glue, or typewriter—to live their engagement and pull creators within arm's reach. Combining textual and structural analysis of the contents of the Hursley and Dobson papers makes a compelling case for further integrating historically specific fan communication into a coherent, enduring continuum of fannish affect. Harrington and Bielby (1995) and Bacon-Smith (1992) note that soap opera fans strategically use material communication (notably letter-writing campaigns) to bridge the gap between self and screen and to aid in identity formation, industrial literacy, affective engagement, and the enduring struggle/collaboration between author and audience for command over the text. A close reframing of these communications as complex texts unto themselves yields a vivid and productive historical record of television fandom: not only what it looked like but also what it felt like, and how these stories left marks on the viewers.

2. Contextualizing the case study

[2.1] The contents of the Bridget and Jerome Dobson papers, acquired by the WCFTR in 2012, are fairly evenly split between material pertaining to the Dobsons and the materials of Frank and Doris Hursley (who were the parents of Bridget Dobson). Both couples commanded soap opera empires (Holdship 2013) and were responsible for shepherding hits of the genre both modest and large: the Hursleys created General Hospital (1963–) and Bright Promise, (1969–1972) and the Dobsons stewarded Santa Barbara. Among production files, scripts, headshots, memos, and the like are three folders of fan letters totaling about 250 to 300, pertaining only to Bright Promise and Santa Barbara. About half of the letters are paired with replies from the producer-creators, and in some cases with further correspondence or additional communication on the topic with the network or other colleagues. This particular archive of fan letters offers a unique opportunity to witness the peaks, valleys, and textures of fandom between audiences and industrial forces in real time. Their organization reveals the character of responses to fans after particular narrative events and the traces of baked-in affect, as demonstrated by such things as writing style or use of collage.

[2.2] Also of interest are the notes the showrunners made to one another about the letters, and how they were filed by administrative staff, particularly with an eye toward communicating these affects to the networks and to the writers' room. It is occasionally unclear which of the Hursleys or Dobsons was responsible for handwritten replies, as well as which of them dictated typed responses through their assistants. Though many reply letters are clearly the work of a single writer, I often refer to them simply as "the Hursleys" or "the Dobsons" because I am unable to identify the respective handwriting of Frank, Doris, Jerome, or Bridget.
3. Critical reception and power over the narrative

[3.1] "One of my favorite things in the world is television drama…and so I watch it with a loving and critical eye," a college-age fan writes to the Hursleys in 1971 (Carolyn Lee, Frank and Doris Hursley Collection, 1971). Her letter runs four pages and contains a plethora of constructive notes on story and characterization. Both the content and the organization (such as the common use of a bullet-point structure) indicate a sophisticated knowledge of performance versus dramaturgy versus production choices. As the audience dismantles aspects of the text and reassembles or revamps them, an empowerment comes into play, even the structure of the fan letter indicates a presumption that notes and collaboration are needed. Such an evaluating affect can be made a less slippery business for fan and audience scholars by taking a structural view of communication; the visual contours of a text can be revealing of the fan’s state of mind. The fans who give notes engage in excited, frustrated, and invested collaboration, inserting themselves with engaging specificity by way of bullets (figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. A highly detailed, organized, and enumerated critique. Elizabeth Gauthier to Bridget and Jerome Dobson, Box 44, Folder 3, July 22, 1986, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Papers, Wisconsin Center for Film and Television Research, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Figure 2. A highly detailed, organized, and bullet-pointed critique. Carolyn Lee to Susan Brown (Bright Promise), Box 13, Folder 46, August 26, 1971, Bridget and Jerome Dobson
[3.2] These letters speak to the fan's enduring mission to wrest power away from the author and claim creatorship and/or stewardship over a text (Barthes 1978). While soap fans occasionally rewrite story lines in their letters, their presumption to reimagine the television program as wish fulfillment goes much further than that. "Serialized storytelling," Ford explains, "has been shown to provide ongoing texts on which fan communities can build community through interpretation, speculation, and criticism. This serialized structure has a long narrative history…Television as a commercial medium has accelerated the pace of serialization" as advertising becomes of paramount importance (2008, ¶ 2.1). Multiple airings every week, overloaded with possible interpretations, ensure that fan communities will gather, question, and re-form the source material with zest.

[3.3] Reading the original letter alongside the reply fascinatingly illustrates the tension of authority throughout the content of both the Dobsons' and Hursleys' correspondence. One man wrote in about a currently airing story line about a character's rape, suggesting that a more "respectful" and true emotional development for the victim involving psychological counseling ought to be created. Though this particular letter was not filed with its reply, a photocopy was created, and the suggestion underlined and highlighted by the Dobsons for future review (Carter 1985). Many fans wrote in with story suggestions and changes, followed up by inquiries about openings on the writing staff or opportunities for consultation: "I get some ideas for show storylines now and again. My feverish writer's brain is always working overtime…thinking up things I would like to see happen on the show," confides one writer. "'What if' are my two favorite words," she says, before detailing an elaborate idea about a character escaping prison and asking if the Dobsons might be interested in purchasing it for a future episode (Jennifer Coke, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Collection, 1986). Some fans were more brazen in their assertions of provenance over the program's future narratives; one fan cheekily ends a note with, "I'm sorry my letter didn't reach you before Friday's episode aired" (Arthur Close, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Collection, 1985). The Dobsons' notes in the margins and on the envelopes hint at a bemused confusion with their fans' presumption to not only workshop the show but also ask about employment; one exasperated Post-it note reads: "Bridget—why are we sent this stuff, I wonder?" (Joe Masi, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Collection, 1986). This complex material interplay illustrates the tension Harrington and Bielby point out between legal ownership, creation, and moral authorship that undergirds the soap fan's relationship with writers, networks, and each other. This "fix-it" letter structure provides catharsis and momentum to the fan's "private moral convictions that daytime stories are theirs to tell" (1995, 163), and it provides a visual representation of the ways fans rechoreograph texts for affective pleasure.

4. Further up the chain: Industrial-textual negotiations

[4.1] However, even beyond the pointed critiques, suggestions, and queries found in the letters themselves, a negotiation of authority between fan and creator is engendered in the archival process itself— which we might presume was requested by the writer-producers and completed by their assistants. The Hursley Collection's single folder of fan mail contains
correspondence in which the writers' reply is uniformly clipped on top of the original letter, typed on official NBC letterhead. The same goes for the Dobson papers, in which all fan correspondence is organized into two large folders. The first contains hundreds of letters and replies, all arranged in the following order: writer-producer response, with occasional handwritten memos by the Dobsons to their assistant attached; the letter; any enclosed materials, such as newspaper clippings or collages; and finally the envelope.

[4.2] This particular folder is a wonderful illustration of how even the act of archiving fan correspondence foregrounds the authority of the writer-creator in these interactions—both for them and for us, the future readers. The reply on top gives an indication of the final word on the matter at hand, be it criticism of story, praise, questions about scheduling, and so on (figure 3). The fact that envelopes were saved shows a level of concern and care for having a paper trail back to the most engaged viewership. The other folder is labeled "answered," with the same amount of correspondence, yet does not contain the Dobsons' replies clipped on top of the letters. However, this folder features notes written on the envelopes that summarize the contents of the letter, indicate the tenor of the critique, and occasionally provide a call to action for further review.

Figure 3. Handwritten notes comment, "Well written, intelligent; nice but critical," and "Particularly interesting re: rape." This folder shows a foregrounding of their own authority by the Dobsons but also gestures to some kind of filing system for feedback (Levine 2007 documents this thoroughly). Judy Davis to Bridget and Jerome Dobson, August 3, 1985, Box 44, Folder 3, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Papers, Wisconsin Center for Film and Television Research, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Steve Carter to Jerome Dobson, July 26 1985, Box 44, Folder 3, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Papers, Wisconsin Center for Film and Television Research, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

[4.2] One of the most fascinating and telling aspects of authorial concern with fan engagement are what I term the NBC fandom reports, which were released quarterly for a
large part of the 1980s and 1990s, and which were designed to measure responses to every single story line and character. Hayward details: "Producers and writers study a monthly report detailing the number of letters each actor received, the number of letters the show received, an abstract of particular suggestions…and a synopsis of attitudes towards the show" (2010, 165). Feedback on various aspects of the show like relationships were not culled from fan correspondence but solicited via focus groups (and given ranges of high, middle, and low to indicate success and future viability). They still provide a compelling bit of support for the complex push and pull between the two parties, as well as the network. NBC CEO Grant Tinker in 1984 expressed a need to boost the success of *Santa Barbara* by pleasing its fans: "He hope[s] to see a rise in ratings for NBC's daytime programming, particularly for the new soap opera *Santa Barbara* in which the network has made a $30 million investment. 'Even if we kept our evening ratings the same,' he said, 'if we made daytime work, we would be earning a tremendous profit'" (Kaplan 1984). As figure 4 shows, fans were asked to respond to plot twists, possible and continuing relationship pairings, the appearance of new characters, emotional developments, actor performance, and more. The subsequent reports were circulated to the writing staff of *Santa Barbara* and to NBC executives. Tellingly, the report reveals that the survey was sent again to female fans who had already weighed in previously; the loyalty of continuing fans was hugely valuable to show creators and often made the difference between profits and losses—particularly in the highly competitive 1980s soap landscape.

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**Figure 4.** An NBC audience report on *Santa Barbara*, 1986.

5. Fan flexes in transmedia knowledge
[5.1] The fact that fandom anger and pleasure could make or break the text also becomes apparent in industry-centric discourse through correspondence. Many letters in the Dobson collection include a variety of paratextual and corollary material such as press clippings, cartoons, and even newspaper articles concerning larger social issues covered on *Santa Barbara*. This bricolaging of industrial knowledge inside and outside the media text turns these letters into something more than simple missives full of opinions. Many mediums converge in the soap watcher's active fandom, such as soap magazines and television itself, and these collage letters announce the fan's multiplatform mastery. One writer attaches local newspaper coverage on *Santa Barbara* and handwrites her responses into the margins, indicating a desire to help out with the then fledgling show's ratings. Having underlined that *Santa Barbara* "has survived and is slowly gaining in the ratings," the fan adds, "the ratings would rise faster if [C.C. and Sophia] were on more and do more 'HOT' scenes. Give the NBC censors something to censor!" She also underlines, "It is difficult to steal [the audience] away from the competition. Once a soap is established, an audience is very loyal." Next to this analysis of viewership practices, she simply exclaims, "ME!" (M. Camacho, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Collection, 1984). Countless other letters mention other soaps, particularly *General Hospital*, which faced off against *Santa Barbara* in the same time slot. Soap operas have historically competed in identical time slots (primarily NBC versus CBS), and fans are well aware of these face-offs. The fact that fans were "captured" to the opposing side is not lost on them; they understand the industrial stakes.

[5.2] A framework of transmedia storytelling may be applied here, indicating that the soap fan sees the soap not just as a narrative but—by virtue of its daily airing and treatment of topical issues—a form of social storytelling. This is illustrated beautifully by a young fan's multimedia package of a letter, containing a list of "ship" names, a cartoon representing her passion for the show, and annotated photos and articles taken from a soap opera magazine, indicating her likes and dislikes for the cast (figure 5).
It is also important to note here that other media makes frequent appearances in the letters of both collections, indicating a high level of general media immersion among fans. A history buff and *Bright Promise* viewer writes in 1970 that the Hursleys might consider producing an American soap version of *The Forsyte Saga*, a popular historical BBC miniseries broadcast in 1967 (George Allanson, Frank and Doris Hursley Collection, 1970). We also hear from many fans about the advent of VCR technology in the 1980s and the ways it enables them to fold themselves into the *Santa Barbara* narrative. Fans distinguish themselves as early adopters of technology and networking, which allows for a more convenient and colorful participatory life. This correspondence provides a rich snapshot of just how impactful home recording was for a serial-watching audience, particularly for a text that aired nearly every day of the week.

### 6. Everyday engagement: The affects of daily fandom

Digital fan correspondence deploys username, account design, emojis, GIFs, and more to express the subtleties (and exaggerations) of their affect. Among the Hursley and Dobson fan letters, such information can be conceived as paper or stationery, handwriting, typewriter front, method of address, even the choice of stamp. Far from incidental, these aspects of letter writing indicate the emotional textures of the fan's lived existence—how fans fold their stories into their lives, where and when the engagement occurs, and sometimes even how
much it cost to engage ("AIR MAIL!!!"). Tone and affect thrive on paper. Fonts change, writing becomes messy, punctuation gets extreme; doodles and angry, slashing signatures come together to paint a rare picture of the moment of textual impact (figure 6).

Figure 6. A fan's mixture of typography and handwriting creates deeper colors of affect. Mrs. Rooker is left frustrated and wanting by the dangling narrative between her favorite characters, Cruz and Eden, and makes this clear by both wording and formatting. However, she's not so impolite (or unaffectionate) as to neglect a personalized "Happy Holidays!," and she includes a proper return label. Dottie Rooker to Bridget and Jerome Dobson, October 16, 1986, Box 44, Folder 2, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Papers, Wisconsin Center for Film and Television Research, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

[6.2] The discursive qualities of these fan letters are also bounded by a kind of performative vulnerability and stream-of-consciousness, almost as if writers are addressing their thoughts to a diary rather than a showrunner. The emotiveness that emerges from treating the writer-creator as a confidante helps narrow the distance of time and space implied by sending a letter through the post: "I was trying to say something, and I was hoping you'd listen. It would please me enormously if I knew I had achieved that much" (Lee, 1971). Hayward describes the ways in which "soaps intensify the intermingling of fictional character with audience lives" (2010, 144), to the point that catching one's stories becomes a normal routine of the day. One mother describes her thoughts on the latest week of the program as it unfolded over the course of her busy schedule, joking with the Dobsons that she doesn't want to be interrupted in her viewership unless the house is on fire. Others jot down their feedback quickly—"Well, I've got to run to school now!" (Bogers, 1986)—which not only allows a window into the circumstances under which the correspondence was begun but also indicates just how deeply television fandom was enmeshed into fans' daily lives.

7. Intimacy and social networking

[7.1] Across most of the Dobsons' and Hursleys' correspondence, the letter writers (whether criticizing or supporting the show) address the creator as the program's architect, rather than speaking generally to "the show" or "the text" itself. This acute awareness of the hand that writes is a powerful defining factor of fandom as it has been defined more recently, targeting writers, producers, and directors as the agents of aesthetic and narrative. Long before cult audiences developed around showrunners and their oeuvres (à la Joss Whedon, Shonda Rhimes, and Ryan Murphy), soap fans were creating a specific star culture around television
creators. Though these collections do not include fan mail to the actors, their presence in these letters is interesting. On the one hand, they might be discursively defined as distant untouchable forces; one fan urges the Dobsons to cast her favorite actress and capture "the phoenix in her gilded cage" (Masi 1986). On the other, they are equally treated as pawns to be manipulated by the real artistes: the writer-producers, positioned as powerful, gifted, but altogether accessible creative conduits for fan desires. Fans also see the writers as fallible, susceptible to societal pressures. One man wrote to the Hursleys, responding to a Bright Promises storyline about marijuana use at college: "Please do not televeise what you think the 2:30 PM housewives want to hear, but rather the truth. People do not get 'hung up' on pot any more than they get hung-up on the lies they hear on some television programs...I challenge you to give me an 'educated' reply" (Alice Greenly, Frank and Doris Hursley Collection, 1970). In response, the Hursleys enclosed a copy of a scene from a past episode concerning drug use and wrote defensively back: "Our feeling is that marijuana should not be illegal but discouraged since it results in youth coping out instead of participating...intelligently in the problems of our world" (Frank and Doris Hursley, Frank and Doris Hursley Collection, 1970). A reply from the Dobsons to a fan who took the time to break down almost every line and scene from a recent episode also reveals just how much stock the creators put in these one-to-one exchanges: "Our pain about the failures is probably even more acute than yours.... I hear myself sounding defensive and apologetic. Because we're aware of our deficiencies, we are a little defensive and apologetic" (Bridget and Jerome Dobson, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Collection, 1984).

A key aspect of fandom has always been its ability to diffuse across imaginary communities. Many letters to the Hursleys and Dobsons gesture to some kind of self-recognition as a fan, but as a fan who is part of fandom. "I join the ranks of all those I've poked fun at over the years," writes one woman in resignation (Jane Pellier, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Collection, 1986). In surrendering to the charms of Santa Barbara, she not only hails a community that centers virtually around the text, but she also recognizes the popular discourse around soap operas and their fandom. At a time when the view of television still cleaved to Fiske's (1989) hypodermic needle model, soap audiences recognized that viewing tastes change according to social context, tastes, and proximity. One of the most surprising moments of fan and creator teaming up to defend fandom itself comes up in a letter from a working woman who complained about sexist promotional ads for Santa Barbara: "These ads make me feel like a stupid idiot for watching your show—what about ads about a female executive, etc?" Bridget Dobson attached a note to the letter and forwarded to NBC's advertising operations: "I happen to agree with this lady. Can you pull the ads?" (Paula Grove, Bridget and Jerome Dobson Collection, 1985). Though her reply to the writer is not included in the file, it is notable that feedback from a fan would lead to action being taken by the network in this way.

The Dobson letters in particular offer traces of the real-life social networking that occurred at small fan gatherings and parties, as well as the community building enabled by a national network of soap opera magazines. Fans held viewing parties, invited neighbors over in the afternoon to watch and discuss, and got their friends into their favorite soaps—all of which they proudly document in their letters to the Dobsons. Interestingly, many fans also feel the Dobsons themselves are part of fandom, and fans continually highlight the personal
connection they feel with the couple. I found many congratulatory cards for the Dobsons' anniversaries, inquiries about their birthdays so they could be sent gifts, and so on. The photographs in figure 7 were taken at a *Santa Barbara* party organized by the show's brand-new fan club, which the Dobsons attended in 1984. The fan sent a long letter giving the Dobsons feedback about several recent story lines and included two photographs containing the Dobsons. These snapshots remain the only trace of an ephemeral moment in which audience and creator crossed paths and celebrated their love for the text together.

![Figure 7. Photographs from the 1984 Santa Barbara fan party.](image)

[7.4] These expressions of loyalty to the text as a group indicate that both the Dobsons and their fans are embarking on a secret project, more complex than the critical or popular discourse would allow at the time. In fact, it almost appears that the television audience's dismissive attitude toward soap watchers somehow insulates the fandom and encourages a kind of secrecy, insularity, and environment of open critique and collaboration among friends.

### 8. Conclusion

[8.1] I have delved into the fan letters and replies of the Hursley and Dobson collections in order to create an evidentiary challenge to a scholarly divide of fandom before and after online engagement. These moments of collaboration, confrontation, self-actualization, and celebration through the soap opera texts of *Bright Promise* and *Santa Barbara* characterize
the texture of televisual fandom before it was labeled as something distinct from reception. These letters—particularly those written by fans of a critically undervalued genre to producers of what at the time was a critically undervalued medium—present as analog but have what we might recognize as digital functions and structural aspects. These articles of fan correspondence gesture toward a landscape of predigital social media networking; they also contain layers of valuable metadata. I exhort more scholars conducting archival work in the fields of reception and fandom to foreground the organization of the archive in their inquiries; a tool as simple as a paper clip or a Post-it may speak more eloquently about the power dynamics of production and reception than the actual content of a memo. These soap fans critique with vigor; they wrestle with their role within a heavily serialized narrative that caters to them and yet is just out of their writerly grasp. They straddle interlocking media platforms and leverage their emotion into virtual community building and connection with the text's world builders. Not only that, but the replies reveal a fascinating case study in engagement from the other side—that of the media makers, whose peers (and parent networks) are usually thought to either ignore disorganized fan input or treat it as a monolith. The replies from the Hursleys and Dobsons, as well as other documents such as network audience studies, help construct a more nuanced vision of participatory television fandom in the 1970s and 1980s as a creator-audience give-and-take.

[8.2] The implicit and explicit meanings of these letters, as well as the materials they contain, can be generative for the four areas of interest in fan and audience studies I have identified (and possibly more). First, we see active negotiations between fans and creators for power over the televisual narrative, with the cowriting process expressed in the formatting of the letters. Second, we can identify evidence of fannish self-insertion and self-reflexivity—that is, knowledge of the fan's place in the soap's social universe, as demonstrated through the inclusion of articles, personal artifacts, and trade press with their own annotations. Third, there is structural evidence of contexts of consumption: the time spent watching and writing, the scope of personal collections, and the socioeconomic realities of fans' lives. Finally, these letters suggest the existence of a social network; the writers gesture to the unseen presence of other fans writing letters, joining fan clubs, and more. Yet the isolated letter writer is also in a fandom and knows it.

[8.3] Within even the most minute aspects of these letters, we see evidence of fan activities that we traditionally assign to fans of much more recent media, particularly those in online fandoms. I hope to start extending fandom trends far further into media history by taking a closer look at these artifacts. By these means, I intend to encourage a treatment of historical fan objects as layered traces of lived experience, and I hope this data/metadata approach proves useful to those conducting archival research on audiences in the future.

9. Acknowledgments

[9.1] Thanks to Mary Huelsbeck, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, for her excellent guidance in navigating this archive of correspondence and sorting relevant material, as well as to the staff for their day-to-day assistance. Thanks also to Dr. Eric Hoyt for his thoughtful feedback on an early draft, as well as Dr. Elana Levine for generously sharing her thoughts and strategies for studying soap fans historically as well as her own
upcoming scholarship.

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Praxis

Fan studies in psychology: A road less traveled

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[0.1] Abstract—This article describes the methods and materials used in my various studies of fan cultures in the years from 1988 to 2018. It delineates a mixed methods/multiperspectivist approach and describes the process by which fan groups were selected and studied. Contrary to the concept of the acafan, in which academics study a fan group of which they are already a part, I describe the engagement of a number of fan groups with whom I was not already involved. I traveled throughout North America and Europe in order to observe fan behavior across the human lifespan and across a number of different cultures. Fans of both pop star musicians and television were included. Immersion in the fan culture was the goal in each case, with each study lasting anywhere from four to twelve years.

[0.2] Keywords—Ethnography; Mixed methods; Parasocial; Participant observation; Qualitative analysis


1. Introduction

[1.1] When I began my work in fan studies in the summer of 1988, I faced discouragement from all quarters. The advisors at my university did not think looking at the influence of aspects of popular culture on development constituted a serious study. Some of my advisors made it clear to me that the psychology of fan behavior was a trivial thing to study (the word "trivial" was actually written on an application for graduate student funding that I submitted). If it had not been for my thesis chair, Alan Brown, I would not have been able to do the work I did at all. I was at the very beginning of my academic career, a master's student working on a thesis, and I was brand new to all aspects of research and statistics. In addition, when I surveyed the literature in psychology to explore current work, I found next to nothing, suggesting that perhaps my advisors were not the only ones in the field of psychology who felt this way.

[1.2] This paper can be conceptualized as an autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). In explaining this concept, the authors observe, "As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. When writing an
Autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight ([§5]). This statement describes exactly the process that was used in writing this paper. I have searched through my past publications, data, and other records of my past work in order to assemble a narrative that explains thirty years of methods that I have used in my fan studies. Additionally, as explained by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, I have framed my reflections and recollections in the context of the data I have collected and the analyses, both quantitative and qualitative, that I have performed.

2. Acafan or metafan?

[2.1] When considering methodologies in fan studies, I have realized for some time that the way I approached it when I began my work back in 1988 was not typical. First, I had a question I wanted to answer rather than a specific fandom I wanted to study. As a psychologist, I wanted to understand the roots of superstar mania as exemplified by the Beatles, Elvis, Frank Sinatra, and others I had been exposed to when growing up (I was born in 1954). Therefore, I surveyed the culture of that time and picked the best current exemplar of this phenomenon that I could find, and that was the fandom of Michael Jackson. When scholars study fans, they most often choose a fan group of which they are already a member; they are referred to as acafans (Duffett 2013). In my case, I knew next to nothing about Michael Jackson. I had seen a television special (of the fall 1987 Bad tour in Japan) where superstar mania was evident, and I decided to study his fan base.

[2.2] During a presentation I gave at the Eastern Communication Association in 2010, where I was explaining my research interests, the acafan/metafan issue became clearer to me. I had just given a presentation on the Michael Jackson fandom I had studied as a case of preinternet fandom, compared to the Josh Groban fandom as a case of postinternet fandom. I was trying to explain that I was much more interested in going to fan events to see the fans than to see the particular artist performing at that event. The session chair had an "aha" reaction, an epiphany of sorts, and said, "Oh! You're a metafan!" It was the perfect way to describe the fact that I was, indeed, a fan of fans, so to speak.

[2.3] Each group I have studied represents something that I have developed a passion for in order to engage fully with my participants, many of whom have become dear friends as a result of the length of the studies and the traveling we often did together. But I have always known in my heart of hearts that I was not a true fan because when it was time to move on to the next case study, I never had any trouble leaving behind the one with which I had finished. I talked recently to a woman I had met during the Michael Jackson fandom study and with whom I have not spoken for some years (perhaps as many as twenty?). She had a difficult time believing that I was not a fan in the same way that she is a fan (she still follows him after all this time). I had to point out to her that after moving on from the study, I learned next to nothing about Jackson and his career from the time of about 1992 to the present. When Jackson died in 2009, I had a brief time of interest again as many fans who had known me during the study contacted me to share their grief. I now have about a dozen Michael Jackson fans on my Facebook page with whom I had lost contact from 1992 to 2009.
However, interest in a specific fandom has not ever been sustainable for me. My fascination has always been with the fans.

[2.4] I could tell the same story for the other fan case studies I have done, on the fandoms of Paul McCartney, Madonna, Star Trek, Lord of the Rings, Josh Groban. It could be argued that because I was not a true fan, I could not have understood the fan experience. Again, I point to the conversation I had recently with the Michael Jackson fan. After twenty years, she had forgotten that I was doing research, forgotten the questionnaires and the interviews and all that she knew I was doing at the time, as I have never been covert about my research. She just remembered me as a fan just like her. This is an indication I had succeeded in my goal of full participation.

[2.5] One way that I have connected with various fandoms and become a full and engaged participant has been through charity work. During the time I spent in Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (1993–1999) fandom, I became a coordinator of charity events for the various fan clubs and actors. In the years from 1994 until 2003, the groups raised over $350,000 for the actors' charities, and I was in charge of and coordinated most of that. In the Josh Groban fandom, I became very involved in the Josh Groban Foundation, Grobanites for Charity, and later the Find Your Light Foundation. I coordinated a number of gatherings before various concerts on the different tours and helped raise a significant amount of money for those causes. Indeed, I organized the charity event in 2009 before the Hollywood Bowl concert where Groban was honored as part of the Hollywood Bowl Hall of Fame. We raised $22,000 that night for his foundation.

[2.6] I believe that in order to do authentic participant-observer research, one has to find a way truly to engage with the fandom at a grassroots level with full participation. It means becoming a fan for that time and doing all of the things that fans do. I have done this for the past thirty years. In order to get at the heart of participant meanings in such a social setting, one has to be all in. In one case, the Paul McCartney fandom, I was not interested in or committed to his solo career but was relying on a childhood interest in the Beatles. One of the group members confronted me and said, "You're not one of us," and she was right. She was kind about it, but her comment made clear to me the importance of fully embracing the mission, once it was undertaken. That never happened to me again as it was a mistake from which I learned and did not repeat.

[2.7] One of the benefits of this approach to case studies on fandom was that after I had done a number of them, patterns began to emerge, and overall observations began to guide my writing on the subject. While it is true that a case study is not totally generalizable to a broader set of fan groups, when one is involved in the ninth or tenth group and recognizes that this is yet another example of something observed from the very beginning, the insights gained are very valuable. An example will illustrate this point.

[2.8] Numerous fan studies writers have talked about the ways that fans can meet celebrities. As Hills (2016) and Ferris and Harris (2011) described fan-celebrity interactions, one major type seems to be left out of their classification schemas. They enumerated the prestaged encounter, usually commercial, the fan-staged encounter, which sounds very much like
stalking, and the unstaged or random encounter. The category left out is the informal meeting that is arranged by the celebrity in cooperation with fans. These meetings are not commercial in that no money changes hands. They might be associated with a commercial event but are not part of the official event. When I heard about such meetings during the Michael Jackson fan study, I thought they were an idiosyncrasy of his particular fan group. But thirty years later, having seen these meetings in every single fan group studied, I know now that they are a part of the everyday life of a fandom (Stever 2016). Additionally, Matt Hills stated that "fans are required to respect the celebrity's privacy" (466) and stick to a limited range of conversations. Other scholars have made similar statements; for example, Marwick and boyd (2011) agreed that autograph signings and other opportunities to meet celebrities are "highly managed and limited in scope" (149). I frequently observed in both Star Trek and Josh Groban fandoms that opportunities to have genuine conversations with favorite celebrities are quite commonplace. Important to the current discussion is the fact that I would never have known about this kind of encounter had I not been a participating member in the various fandoms.

[2.9] Ethical considerations were always in the forefront of choices I was making. I was committed to carefully preserving the anonymity of my participants. I also took all chances to debrief fans after having them fill out surveys or give me interviews. If they filled out a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), I was careful to interpret the results with participants and to answer any questions they had. I went through the procedures necessary to become a qualified administrator of the MBTI and familiarized myself with any issues that might arise with helping participants understand their results. Today, self-administered personality inventories are easily found on the internet, but in 1988, the only way to take such an instrument was from a qualified person. I took that responsibility very seriously. My studies were all reviewed and approved by institutional human subjects review committees. I have never solicited participants on the internet. Participants through the mail and at events were given informed consent statements. They were included on all surveys and questionnaires, for example: "This survey is part of research being conducted by Gayle Stever at Institution. Your participation is completely voluntary and if at any point you want to stop participating, you may do so. Your answers are completely confidential and will be kept without identifiers. All data will be reported only in groups of data so that no one individual's replies will be distinct. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask."

3. Disciplinary approaches to fan studies

[3.1] In order to build a literature review for my thesis in 1988, I had to go outside of psychology. The work I summarized came principally from cultural studies, media studies, anthropology, sociology, and communication. I surveyed the academic literature in my field and in the related social sciences and discovered that psychologists had written very little by that time. Featuring prominently in that first literature review were multiple articles by popular culture scholars Browne and Fishwick (1983), as well as studies by sociologists like Kortaba (1989) and Snow (1987). Anthropologist John Caughey (1978, 1984) featured prominently in the earliest works that I cited.

[3.2] When Haspel (2006) did her doctoral dissertation summarizing work in psychology in
the area of fan studies, she recognized that my Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire was one of the first publications in the field in a psychology journal: "Stever expands the concept of spectator/viewer to encompass fans...Significantly, Stever is one of the first researchers to suggest that psychologists should study para-social relationships" (16).

[3.3] One of the things I have encountered through the years has been the differing attitudes toward fans from different disciplines. One of the foundational theories in fan studies is parasocial theory (Stever 2017). While parasocial interaction (PSI) (Horton and Wohl 1956) was first proposed in Psychiatry, the work did not really take off in a major way until the 1970s, and then it was done by communication scholars and not by psychologists (Levy 1979; Rosengren and Windahl 1971). The emphasis in the early literature on PSI and parasocial relationships (PSR) was on consumer behavior with an attempt to identify predictors of PSI and PSR (Giles 2002). Some of the factors looked at were loneliness, gender, and age, although the research expanded to include other things as well (Canary and Spitzberg 1993; Rubin, Perse, and Powell 1985; Rubin and McHugh 1987; Wang, Fink, and Cai 2008).

[3.4] In the early years of the twenty-first century, psychologists reentered the discussion in a major way with the celebrity worship literature (Maltby et al. 2005; Maltby, Houran, and McCutcheon 2003; McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran 2002). Celebrity worship is a very specific kind of PSR, but in the early days of this literature, the terms celebrity worshipper and fan were used as if they were synonyms. This resulted in some justifiable indignation on the part of numerous researchers in fandom who took exception to what they perceived to be the pathologizing of fandom (Jenkins 2014; Larsen and Zubernis 2011). What resulted was the literature breaking apart into two separate pathways: one discussing normal fan practice by both communication and also cultural studies scholars (e.g. Duffett 2013; Sandvoss 2005) and one looking at the fringe of fandom who showed signs of mental illness, this by sociologists and psychologists.

[3.5] As a psychologist who was interested in normal fan behavior and PSRs, I again found myself out of step with my discipline and its emphasis on pathology. In addition to the celebrity worship literature, there were studies being done on erotomania (Houran, Navik, and Zerrusen 2005; McCutcheon et al. 2003) and stalking (Ferris 2005, 2001). While these are each real and legitimate topics, the overgeneralization of these things to all fans created a divide in the world of fan studies.

[3.6] In order to provide support for the hypothesis that these theories did not represent the mainstream of fan cultures, I collected data in 2008–2009 (Stever 2011b) where I took samples of behaviorally identified fans in both Star Trek and Josh Groban fandoms. In each case, the participants were a purposive sample of people who had a strong commitment to their fandoms. By showing that the percentage of people in each category of celebrity worship for the participants from fan groups was the same as from the general community samples used by the celebrity worship scholars, it was quite easy to show that being a fan and being a celebrity worshipper were two distinct and different things.

[3.7] While communication scholars treat the term parasocial as a descriptor of mainstream
behavior, some cultural studies scholars (Duffett 2013) have taken exception to the term and interpreted it as meaning something pathological. I believe that this is a result of that early celebrity worship literature and the problems with it. The term parasocial was never meant to infer pathology and more recent usage (e.g. Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm 2006) bears that out. It is important for the various disciplines to come to a common understanding of these concepts in order to be able to build on each other's work. This has been a longtime professional goal of mine, to attempt to mend the breach and bring these various disciplines together under one umbrella of fan studies.

[3.8] Parasocial theory was originally developed to explain the social relationships and interactions we have with distant others not met face-to-face. Caughey (1984) used the term imaginary social relationships to describe the same phenomenon, an interaction that is carried on vicariously within the thoughts and introspections of the individual without reciprocation. The term secondary attachment was used in developmental psychology to have an equivalent meaning (Adams-Price and Greene 1990). The viewer has an internal representation of the media figure and interacts with that imagined other. Here are three disciplines—Anthropology, developmental psychology, and communication—each with a term for the same phenomenon (Stever 2017). As research has progressed, parasocial appears to have become the term of choice, with PSI, PSR, and parasocial attachment being three levels of parasocial engagement (Tukachinsky and Stever 2018). Since anyone who consumes media engages in parasocial interaction, the idea that it in any way indicates pathology is an impossible construct to support.

4. Procedures

[4.1] There were steps I followed in each of my fandom case studies. First, I chose a fan study case that was potentially interesting to me. Knowing the amount of time I would spend in the fandom, I recognized that trying to study something completely antithetical to my own personality and interests probably was not going to be very productive. In my original round of data collection, using surveys, field notes, interviews, and observations, I focused on first Michael Jackson but then also Bruce Springsteen, Paul McCartney, Madonna, Janet Jackson, Prince, and George Michael. All of these artists were active at that time in either touring or producing new material, or making public appearances, or all of these. In 1991, I began to shift my focus to Star Trek and other science fiction and fantasy fandoms. In 2005, I took on the case of Josh Groban fans, while continuing my work in Star Trek fandom.

[4.2] The second step was to come up to speed on the relevant content of the specific fandom. This meant learning about the music, films, programs, or other content produced by the artist, as well as learning about the kind of events where fans were likely to be found. By the mid-1990s, included in this stage of research was a monitoring of fan web sites and discussion boards on the internet.

[4.3] The third step was to figure out what data I wanted to collect. This resulted in my construction of the Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire (Stever 1991a, 2008), a survey I administered at fifteen Michael Jackson concerts, six Madonna concerts, two Janet Jackson concerts, and one Paul McCartney stadium show, as well as a number of samples taken
through the mail. I later used it in 2007 on the Josh Groban *Awake* tour. In addition, I planned to do open-ended interviews, later using grounded theory coding on those interviews (Strauss 1987). I also had fan-written accounts submitted to me through the mail. This narrative data formed the data set for my qualitative doctoral dissertation analysis (Stever 1994). I also did quite a bit of interviewing over the telephone, investing a substantial sum in long distance charges, as this was another good way to reach out to fans across the country. Local fans were interviewed mostly in person.

[4.4] The fourth aspect of the work I did, possibly the most important and potentially unique aspect, involved traveling…a lot of traveling! I felt that it was important to see fans in a naturalistic setting among other fans and at events where they would be seeing, in person, the object of their fan interest. See table 1 for a list of the fan events attended from 1988 to 2018.

Table 1. Summary of fan events attended from 1988 to 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist or Program</th>
<th>Concerts/Conventions</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Special Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>15, 1988–1992</td>
<td>Landover, MD; Irvine Meadows, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London, UK; Leeds, UK; Cardiff, Wales</td>
<td>6 awards shows, charity events or tributes. One press conference. Michælfest '89 and '90.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul McCartney</td>
<td>1/2, 1989–1990</td>
<td>Tempe, AZ; Los Angeles Beatlefests (2)</td>
<td>Local fan club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madonna</td>
<td>6, 1990</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA; Worcester, MA; Landover, MD</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet Jackson</td>
<td>2, 1989</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>1990 Walk of Fame Star awarded in Hollywood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lord of the Rings</td>
<td>1, 2003</td>
<td>Hollywood, CA: The One Ring.Net's Return of the King Oscar Celebration</td>
<td>Comicon 2003 LOTR panels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[4.5] After making these trips I would pull together the data I had collected from that trip, whether surveys, interviews, or observational notes. This process ended up yielding a book (Stever 2019) and numerous published papers, plus my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation in the years from 1990 to the present.

[4.6] The other thing I did over these years was to join fan groups and fully participate in whatever it was they were doing. My research was not covert in that the people I engaged as participants knew what I was doing. In about 90 percent of the cases, the reception was welcoming, and fans were eager to cooperate because they were motivated to try to understand their own interest and wanted to talk to me about this as a form of self-exploration. My training as a counselor doubtless helped me, as I knew how to ask probing questions that would get below the surface of what I was investigating, and I was fully versed in the ethics of this kind of situation, having taken a graduate-level course in ethics and also being very careful to guard the anonymity of my participants. Again, at both Arizona State and years later at my current SUNY College (Empire State), I passed human subjects review for my research.

5. Instruments: Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire, Celebrity Attitude Scale, and MBTI

[5.1] As a graduate student heading out to large venue concerts in order to collect data on fans, I looked for instruments I could use to explore the questions that were of interest to me. I was most interested in discovering why fans were so devoted to their celebrity of interest. After an exhaustive search of the academic literature yielded no help, I set about constructing my own questionnaire with the assistance of my graduate dissertation committee member, statistics professor David Krus. Under his guidance, I developed an instrument composed of Likert scales that factor analyzed into four discrete categories, each describing an aspect of attraction to celebrities. These included sex appeal, hero/role model, mystique, and entertainer groupings of items. These groupings each successfully predicted a superordinate Likert scale that asked "How big a fan are you of X?" I used the Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire in my early work on pop stars and again when I engaged the Josh Groban fandom (Stever 1991a, 2008).

[5.2] Lynn McCutcheon, John Maltby, and others have developed the already mentioned theory known as celebrity worship and have been doing studies in this area beginning in the early 2000s. For this purpose, they developed the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) (McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran 2002). This particular theory focuses on the less healthy
aspects of fan behavior, defining borderline pathological celebrity worship with items like "If my favorite celebrity were to ask me to do something illegal, I would do it." The Intense Personal scale on their instrument contained items like "My favorite celebrity is my soul mate" and "If my favorite celebrity were to die, I wouldn't want to live." Both of these categories have correlated in the research literature with various kinds of problem behaviors, for example eating disorders (Maltby et al. 2005) or addiction (Maltby, Houran, and McCutcheon 2003). A third category, entertainment-social, was more reflective of mainstream fan behaviors.

[5.3] In early work in this area, authors neglected to make a clear distinction between celebrity worship and ordinary fandom. To fill in this gap, I gave the CAS to 212 behaviorally identified fans of either Star Trek or Josh Groban, showing that the percentage of celebrity worshippers among identified fans was no higher than among general population samples or samples of convenience that had been used in the celebrity worship studies (Stever 2011b). My study contrasted the two fan populations I surveyed with various other samples, showing that in fan and nonfan populations alike, borderline pathological celebrity worshippers comprised 3 to 5 percent of all groups (fan or nonfan). Intense personal celebrity worshippers comprised 15 to 20 percent of surveyed groups. Clearly, fans and nonfans alike share the problem behaviors and conditions of celebrity worship.

[5.4] The hypothesis of my master's thesis (Stever 1990) was that fans were attracted to celebrities that they perceived to be congruent with their own personality types. I asked participants to fill out a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) for themselves and then fill out a second one the way the celebrity might answer. MBTI measures personality dichotomies including extrovert/introvert, sensing/intuition, and thinking/feeling. Using this procedure in a number of fan groups, I found that several findings emerged, available in two articles published in the Journal of Psychological Type (Stever 1991b, 1995). Overall, the studies suggested a congruence between the fan's personality type and the perceived type of the favorite celebrity (note 1).

6. Qualitative methods: Grounded theory and ethnographic content analysis

[6.1] Grounded theory is the qualitative methodology of choice in an area where there is not much theory or literature in existing academic writings (Charmaz 2008). For this reason, it was a good way to approach fan studies in psychology, an area not much explored, as has already been discussed. Charmaz identifies key principles of this approach that include "minimizing preconceived ideas about the research problem and the data," and "using simultaneous data collection and analysis to inform each other" (155) (note 2).

[6.2] Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) was a technique developed to incorporate constant comparison in order to discover emerging patterns and themes in qualitative data. The technique makes use of a database program such as Excel in order to organize and sort data. For more detail on using this technique, see Altheide (1987). His discussion specifically contrasts ECA with the then more commonly used qualitative content analysis (QCA), with the observation that ECA is more appropriate for discovery and validity while QCA is more often used for verification and reliability. ECA was the form of analysis I used in my
doctoral dissertation and subsequent work that built on the dissertation.

7. Conclusions

[7.1] In thirty years of work, I have concluded that participant-observer ethnography is a highly effective way to explore fan groups of which one is not already a part. Multiperspectivist analysis (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004) that incorporates both quantitative (mostly survey) and qualitative data analysis is most likely to lead to conclusions that stand up to scrutiny and repeat studies.

[7.2] To summarize, my quantitative research involved using research instruments including the Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire, The Celebrity Attitude Scale, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Qualitative data collected included observational field notes, written documents (mostly letters from fans as much of the research was preinternet), transcribed interviews, and analysis of social media web sites (mostly Twitter). From my observations of various works in fan studies, what made my work unique was the blending of these various methodologies and the movement from one fan group to another.

[7.3] One cannot diminish the longitudinal perspective gained from having done this work over the span of half a lifetime. There are fans I met and interviewed in 1988 at my first Michael Jackson concerts that I still know today. Indeed, in 2009 when Jackson passed away, at least a dozen of the original participants from my dissertation contacted me on Facebook to share their grief. There are Star Trek fans I met in 1993 when I began that work that I still know today, twenty-five years later. There are many Josh Groban fans I met back in 2006, when I began that work in earnest (having done preliminary background work in 2005), that I still know today. Knowing people over many years and seeing the impact their fan interest has had on them over a long period of time has added significantly to my thinking about how fan participation affects development across the human lifespan.

[7.4] Mixing quantitative with qualitative methods allowed me to look at not only larger data sets with the surveys but also individual cases with focused interviews. For fan scholars considering these approaches, it is helpful to consider each fan group with both breadth and depth. By doing both kinds of data collection and analysis, I could not only take an interpretivist approach, considering the meaningfulness of fan activity to the participant, but also look at larger issues like fan demographics. The Celebrity Appeal Questionnaire looked in a quantitative way at motivations to be a fan, and then the ethnographic content analysis of interview and other narrative documents provided a different window into those same kinds of motivations. An analysis of the areas where findings converged supported the validity of those findings.

[7.5] Ultimately all of this allowed me to write theoretical articles based on my experiences and observations, for example the developmental model of the way parasocial relationships progress in fandoms (Tukachinsky and Stever 2018) or a model of parasocial attachment that emerged from findings (Stever 2013). A third example was Stever (2011a) where I was able to use qualitative methodologies based on the work of George and Bennett (2005). They proposed that when comparative case studies are done, a single researcher best conducts
them, and three things need to be defined: the phenomenon of interest from which the two cases are taken, the overall objective of the description, and the standardized general questions that should be asked of each case. In general, it is helpful to find models of analysis for qualitative studies in order to have firm protocols to follow. Several have been described here but others are available, for example, Creswell (2007).

[7.6] A conversation I had on the telephone in October 1989 with Park Dietz, a noted forensic psychologist and recognized expert in fan behavior, shaped the nature of my ongoing research in a major way. At that time, he was well known for having been an expert witness in the John Hinkley trial, a trial that resulted in a redefining of erotomanic schizophrenia (the delusional belief that someone of high status is in love with you). During that call, I asked him how many fans he had met in person and he replied, "I haven't met any fans." His studies in fan psychology principally were an analysis of fan mail (Dietz et al. 1991). It was at that point, motivated by that conversation, that I decided that if one was going to understand fans, one had to meet and talk to fans. That was the beginning of what was to become a thirty-year journey into participant-observer fan studies (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994).

7. Notes

1. For more information on the MBTI, see Myers and Myers (2010).

2. There are a number of books on this subject including Strauss (1987). See also Creswell (2007).

8. References


Praxis

Is gender just a costume? An exploratory study of crossplay

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[0.1] Abstract—Cosplay, a portmanteau of costume and play, is a costume inspired by a fictional character originating from a variety of media texts and is typically worn to pop culture conventions. When cosplayers dress up as a fictional character of a different gender than the cosplayer's self-identified gender, this is known as crossplay. It has been argued that this fannish activity challenges status quo notions of gender through bodily performance, but some scholars have been skeptical about the emancipatory politics surrounding crossplay culture. Thus, an online survey probed on the motivations to do crossplay as well as on the lived experiences of crossplayers. Responses to questions about crossplay motivations as well as social interactions that occurred while wearing crossplay were analyzed using the grounded theory approach. Results suggest that respondents are motivated to perform crossplay by an attachment to a favorite fictional character rather than to express alternative gender identities. However, some respondents indicated that crossplay was a socially acceptable way to present oneself as another gender. A close look at participants' responses about positive and negative feedback from other convention attendees while the participants were engaging in crossplay indicates that gender inequality persists for self-identified men and nonbinary individuals who choose to dress as female characters. This suggests that masculine performativity remains hegemonic even within the play space of fan conventions.

[0.2] Keywords—Cosplay; Costume play; Gender performativity


1. Introduction

[1.1] Cosplay, a portmanteau of costume and play, is the practice of wearing a costume inspired by a fictional character from media including literature, films, television shows, comic books, video games, and other popular texts. As a practice, cosplay is the craft of the costume and the performance of the character in a public or virtual space, such as sharing an image on social media platforms like Instagram or on websites such as Cosplay.com (Galbraith 2013). Fandom conventions for popular genre media, such as science fiction and fantasy, are typical physical sites for cosplay. Cosplayers, or individuals who make and/or
wear cosplay, typically convene at conventions to pay homage to their favorite media franchises and to interact with other aficionados while wearing their costumes.

[1.2] Cosplay is often an expressive, affective practice that demonstrates a passion for a particular media text and/or fictional character (Hale 2014; Lamerichs 2011, 2013; Peirson-Smith 2013). The play associated with this fannish activity has been linked to gendered performativity, especially when self-identified women dress as male characters and vice versa (Norris and Bainbridge 2009). Here, it is important to recognize that cosplay might involve both performance (i.e., enactment) as well as performativity (i.e., practice/doing). Cosplayers who dress up as characters who are a different gender than their self-identified gender, a practice called crossplay (combining crossdress and cosplay), may be engaging in a kind of identity play or alternative gender performativity in which gender is done (Butler 1993; Connell 1999; West and Zimmerman 1987). Sex, the socially agreed upon criteria for being male or female, is determined by genitalia, while gender is the extent to which an individual identifies as masculine or feminine. In social interactions, sex categorization occurs when an actor is identified as fitting the mental model of male or female and is placed into either category by another—regardless of how the actor being labelled actually identifies (West and Zimmerman). Doing gender, according to Butler (1990), is the enactment of a social identity assigned to individuals at birth. The social construction of bodies as having gender is regulated by societal discourses on what is and is not permissible for each binary sex category. Crossplay is typically not undertaken as a form of parody or gender exaggeration but rather aims for an authentic transformation of a mundane, gendered body into a cross-gender body of a mediated character. Case studies and participant-observation studies have revealed that crossplay challenges existing gender norms (Hjorth 2009; Lamerichs 2011; Norris and Bainbridge 2009), yet others have doubted that the practice is transformative or a move toward reconceptualizing traditional gender schemas (Gn 2011). Moreover, cosplay does not occur in a vacuum; crossplay activities at conventions may involve photoshoots and acted skits in which embodiment of the character becomes salient for performers and spectators. Reactions to crossplay might provide insight on how such practices are interpreted, encouraged, and/or discouraged according to gender norms. It is clear that more research is needed to understand the ways in which crossplay may disrupt normative gender schemas and/or perpetuate the status quo.

[1.3] To explore whether crossplay is motivated by a desire to perform an alternative gender, an online questionnaire with closed- and open-ended questions was distributed. The answers were analyzed for the present study. Results suggest that most respondents found crossplay enjoyable because it allowed them to express their attachment to a favorite fictional character rather than because it allowed them to perform alternative gender identities. While some respondents indicated that crossplay was perceived as a (mostly) acceptable way to present themselves as another gender, their costumes were normative or slightly exaggerated in nature. Spectator feedback suggests that self-identified men and nonbinary individuals who chose to dress up as feminine characters incurred social penalties such as mockery and masculinity challenges. These findings are discussed in consideration of several gender theories, including Butler’s (1990, 1993) notion of gender performativity, Connell’s (1995) theory of gender as body-reflexive practice, and West and Zimmerman’s (1987) concept of "doing gender."
2. Who are cosplayers?

[2.1] The term costume play was coined by Japanese game designer Takahashi Nobuyuki after he observed fan-made costumes at a Los Angeles science fiction convention (Winge 2006). Thereafter, costume play was shortened to the portmanteau cosplay and was embraced at Japanese anime and manga conventions (Winge). Today, the global exchange of media texts has facilitated a globalized cosplay culture in which North Americans and Europeans dress as Japanese anime characters and Asians dress up as American Marvel superheroes (Lamerichs 2011, 2013; Peirson-Smith 2013; Winge 2006). The typical cosplay convention space in North America and Europe affords various degrees of performance that range from scripted, staged skits to simply roaming the venue in costume and connecting with other fans (Lamerichs 2013).

[2.2] Conventions are generally an inclusive environment where individuals may violate gendered norms and expectations, since costumed dress is expected. However, it should be noted that while cosplayers are generally drawn to the inclusive atmosphere of the cosplay community at conventions (Lome 2016), there are cases of documented sexual harassment and assault experienced by cosplayers—particularly women (Close 2016; Cosplay Deviants 2018; Nigatu 2013). Thus, when I label cosplay and crossplay as safe performances at conventions, I am making a comparison with day-to-day life, in which gender-nonconforming dress and performativity may be perceived as socially taboo or confusing in Western cultures (West and Zimmerman 1987), rather than to suggest that sexual harassment or assault do not occur.

[2.3] Cosplayers at conventions are viewed, photographed, and filmed by other attendees. The cosplay spectacle is often a highlight of convention culture, and media industries have taken notice. Cosplayers have an increasing presence and importance in the culture industries (Hjorth 2009), with some cosplayers being hired to increase fan engagement and leverage brands to new consumers. Media producers promote cosplayers in online contests, circulate their photos on social media, and host costume competitions at conventions. For instance, video game companies sponsor cosplay videos shot by professional videographers at large gaming conventions (League of Legends 2018). Irrational Games hired a cosplayer to represent the heroine of BioShock Infinite at events (Levine 2012), and more recently, a cosplayer portraying a female character from an upcoming fighting game was featured prominently in an online advertisement video (Soulcalibur 2018). A cosplayer who becomes the sponsored face of a character for marketing purposes highlights the complexity of media convergence practices in which consumers are increasingly active participants in media production processes (Jenkins 2006). Yet only a few notable cosplayers break such ground. Cosplay is typically pursued as a creative endeavor that signifies fannish status.

[2.4] At the global level, cosplays represent sign systems that bridge communities of fans: a cosplayer dressed as a Jedi is probably a Star Wars fan (Hale 2014). At the individual level, cosplay involves identity play through the creative appropriation of popular culture and performance (Kirkpatrick 2015; Lamerichs 2011, 2013; Rahman, Wing-sun, and Cheung 2012). Cosplay is a transformative practice involving not only mimetic crafting and clothing but also imitation through poses (Peirson-Smith 2013) and speech, such as character
catchphrases (Hale 2014). Kirkpatrick labels this behavior "embodied translation" since a cosplayer's material actualization of the character will never fully realize the authenticity of the source text. Even so, the derivative and performative qualities of cosplay provide opportunities for self-expression through the embodiment of fictional characters, as aspects of a cosplayer's identity may entwine with that of the fictional character (Amon 2014; Peirson-Smith). Indeed, cosplayers in Hong Kong expressed that cosplay was, for them, a form of identity transformation and escapism (Rahman, Wing-sun, and Cheung). The extant research thus suggests that some cosplayers are motivated by the opportunity to embody an alternative identity.

3. Cosplay and gender at the convention

[3.1] The referential nature of cosplay, combined with the cosplayer's affective attachment to a media character, may result in a cosplayer's modeling a character's personality or performing aspects of their identity. Cosplay involves adapting and embodying a character physically, and some cosplayers transform a character for their own purposes through cosplay (Hale 2014). Original characters may be embellished, reinterpreted, and reimagined through creative play, such as through crossplay. When a woman crossplays as a male character, the original character is translated via embodiment on a different body (Kirkpatrick 2015), with practices such as chest binding typically undertaken to modify female-signifying traits of the crossplayer's body (Okabe 2012). Costumed dress, makeup, and gendered body language may be strategies employed by a female-to-male crossplayer in translating her female body as a masculine one. Thus, the crossplay practice reveals the performativity of different genders on bodies (Butler 1990, 1993), in which certain bodies may not necessarily predispose a particular kind of gendered behavior.

[3.2] For some, crossplay may be an alternative practice of doing gender, or a way to challenge the socially and psychologically ingrained constructs of normative gender practices (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, Gn (2011) argues that conscious gender politics are virtually absent within the cosplay community and critiques the theoretical underpinnings of subversion in current arguments about cosplay: "To conclude that cosplayers are only subverting established gender roles...negate[s] the affective qualities of the image that are being embodied by the performer" (586). Gn asserts that the primary motivation for cosplay involves an intense fixation with the fictional character and questions whether crossplayers consciously devote their craft to gender performativity. Indeed, female-to-male crossplayers who perform as characters from boys' love (yaoi) narratives have been shown to be motivated by an affective attachment to the homosexual pairing rather than a desire to perform a male gender identity (King 2013). There are also practical reasons that motivate women to dress up as male characters: some women crossplay as male characters to deter sexual harassment (Hale 2014).

[3.3] However, Gn's (2011) argument that crossplay is devoid of gender politics is problematized by Connell's (1999) position that gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do. According to Connell, bodies are both agents and objects, making gender practices body reflexive yet external to the individual. Because crossplay involves the costumed embodiment of a gender other than one's self-identified
gender, it may also involve the different bodily practices associated with the gender of the fictional character. Thus, crossplay may be subversive to the extent that it enables a wider range of gendered practices beyond the heteronormative. Crossplay may also provide a relatively safe way for individuals to experiment with their bodies, gender performativity, and identity. Indeed, crossplayers, regardless of gender identity and intention, engage in the queering of gender roles beyond heteronormative behaviors (Norris and Bainbridge 2009).

[3.4] Gender is highly performative, encompassing what an individual does rather than is, and such practices materialize gender ideals and roles in society (Butler 1993; Connell 1999; West and Zimmerman 1987). Yet, extant research has not investigated whether crossplayers themselves are motivated to crossplay to embody alternative gender identities and whether this practice leads to bodies that are freed from the seemingly natural gender discourses mapped onto biology (Butler 1990). As such, this study asks whether some crossplayers are motivated to crossplay to explore their gender identity.

[3.5] Some forms of crossplay may be perceived as more acceptable than others. When a self-identified woman dresses as a male character, this act may arouse less scrutiny than when a self-identified man dresses as a female character. The female-to-male crossplayer is seen as moving up the gender hierarchy as a result of a cultural belief that masculinity is associated with authority and power (Connell 1987, 1995). Previous research has shown that women feel empowered when they crossplay but that men feel disempowered (Peirson-Smith 2013; Rahman, Wing-sun, and Cheung 2012).

[3.6] Okabe (2012) observed female-to-male crossplay in Japan as conveying an alternative masculinity outside heteronormativity—a kind of masculinity typically only found in Japanese manga, anime, and video games, where masculinity includes beauty and/or androgyny. Indeed, the proliferation of androgynous or beautiful male characters in digital games may provide opportunities for self-identified females to engage with "new 'flexible' modes of gender performativity" (Hjorth 2009, ¶ 14) that are deemed acceptable for their physical bodies and facial features. Yet the observations of Hjorth and Okabe perhaps speak to the notion that women may embody effeminate male characters though crossplay because such portrayals convey the femininized, discursively coded traits of the characters. Similarly, King (2013) argues that the male characters typically found in boy's love narratives cannot be convincingly performed by male cosplayers because the original source material features extremely feminized men who are emotionally gendered as more female than male. Thus, female-to-male crossplay may be particularly accepted within the cosplay community when the source character embodies traditionally feminine personality traits and features. But because femininity has historically been seen as inferior to masculinity, male-to-female crossplayers may incur a social penalty for deviating from the status quo associated with their gender (Connell 1987, 1995). Since previous research on crossplay did not engage with spectator responses, this study additionally examines how convention attendees reacted to crossplayers.

4. Method

[4.1] I distributed an online survey to assess the social and psychological motivations of
cosplayers to wear cosplay costumes at fan conventions, as well as to glean insights on gender performativity in the crossplay community. The questionnaire was approved by a university institutional review board prior to circulation. The survey link was distributed on several websites and message boards dedicated to cosplay and/or fan conventions, including Cosplay.com's forums, the Replicate Prop Forum, SubReddits dedicated to cosplay/crossplay, NerdReactor.com, and my social media accounts and personal WordPress blog. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with others, which generated a snowball sample of cosplayers. Responses were recorded for a period of about five months to ensure sufficient data collection, as cosplay is a niche hobby among the general population of internet users. All respondents were presented with an informed consent statement at the beginning of the survey, which explained my intent and my background as a cosplayer, fan, and PhD student.

[4.2] The original purpose of the survey was to collect quantitative and qualitative data about the social psychological motivations of respondents to perform cosplay inspired by a favorite fictional media character. Along with demographic questions (e.g., age, occupation, self-identified gender, race/ethnicity, etc.), the names of the respondents' favorite characters portrayed through cosplay and the media franchise that the characters belong to were recorded.

[4.3] Respondents who responded "yes" to a question asking, "Is your favorite character that you have portrayed through cosplay a different sex/gender than your self-identified sex/gender?" were additionally asked about their experiences with crossplay through open-ended questions. These asked about their level of enjoyment with crossplay and the kinds of responses they have received from others while wearing crossplay. The responses to both questions were analyzed for recurring themes about respondents' experiences. Themes were used to make an argument on the emancipatory limitations of gender performativity in the crossplay community.

5. Respondents

[5.1] Respondents were recruited online. They had to proficiently read and write English to complete the survey. Fans who had worn at least one cosplay costume to a fan convention within the past year were invited to participate. Demographic data, including respondents' ages, self-identified genders, race/ethnicity, country of current residence, years of cosplay participation, and number of costumes worn within the past twelve months, were collected. Afterward, respondents were directed to a series of Likert-scale items pertaining to their social psychological motivations for wearing cosplay. Respondents were prompted to consider their favorite cosplay/crossplay character throughout the survey. This prompt was provided to increase the likelihood that respondents would consistently interpret each question considering a single, salient cosplay, improving internal reliability within the sample.

[5.2] Over 260 survey attempts were logged, but the sample was reduced to 171 respondents after incomplete responses were removed. The quantitative data related to general cosplay motivations produced no statistically significant outcomes by self-identified gender, years of
participation in cosplay, and number of costumes worn within the past twelve months. Thus, these findings are not reported here. However, a closer inspection of the open-ended questions related to crossplay provided a rich set of data about crossplay experiences. A subsample (n = 67) of the data were analyzed to address the research questions about crossplay. Only data pertaining to crossplayers is reported in the current study.

[5.3] Responses to the question "Is your favorite character that you have portrayed through cosplay a different sex/gender than your self-identified sex/gender? (e.g. a self-identified female portrays a male character; this is also called 'crossplay')" were used as the criterion for having participated in crossplay. To provide a visual reference, I embedded two images: one of myself crossplaying as Loki from the 2012 film *The Avengers*, and one of actor Tom Hiddleston portraying Loki in the film. However, as individuals who do crossplay may also perform cosplay that conforms to their self-identified gender, given the wording of the question, some respondents who engage with crossplay may have been excluded from the sample, as their favorite cosplay character was not different from their self-identified gender.

[5.4] The ages of respondents who crossplayed ranged from eighteen to fifty-two (mean = 25.86, standard deviation = 7.3). Respondents were asked to provide their self-identified gender. Less than half of the respondents identified as female (38.8 percent) and less than half reported their gender as male (43.3 percent). Nine respondents selected other for their gender (13.4 percent), with these individuals identifying as agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, intersex, nonbinary, and transmasculine genderqueer. Three respondents chose not to answer this question. Most respondents identified as white/Caucasian (n = 51). Table 1 lists participants' race/ethnicity by sex/gender. The majority of respondents currently reside in North America (82.1 percent), followed by Western Europe (10.4 percent), Australia (4.5 percent), China (1.5 percent), and other areas of the world (1.5 percent). The number of years that respondents took part in cosplay was coded into three groups: up to three years of participation (41.8 percent); four to six years (31.3 percent); and seven or more years (26.8 percent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>No Answer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Respondents' race/ethnicity by self-identified gender
6. Results


[6.2] Two open-ended questions were analyzed for discursive themes using the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990), extracting meaning from participants' lived experiences of crossplay. Analysis followed an open coding procedure in which conceptually similar responses were grouped into emergent themes. Similar themes were grouped into single categories and assigned conceptual labels, capturing the meaning behind the categorization (Strauss and Corbin).

[6.3] The first open-ended question analyzed asked participants who responded "yes" to a yes/no question to elaborate regarding why they enjoyed or did not enjoy their experiences with crossplay. Fifty respondents (74.63 percent) answered this question. Only three responses were not analyzed because of insufficient information (e.g., "looks better"; "it confuses people"). Most of the comments contained enough information pertaining to a single theme, but because participants could write multiple sentences, several comments contained elements of two themes, providing fifty instances total of each theme. Table 2 lists the coded themes by respondents' self-identified gender.

Table 2. Coded themes by respondents' self-identified gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Choose Not to Answer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costume/character</td>
<td>Character trumps gender</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prefers design of cross-gender</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The costume-salient category consists of four themes relating to the costume and/or embodiment of a fictional identity. Each theme within this category is discussed in order of frequency (highest to lowest).

The character trumps gender (n = 18) theme refers to crossplay as an expression of appreciation for a fictional character, suggesting that the enjoyment derived from crossplay arises from attachment toward a favorite media character regardless of the character's gender.

The prefers design of cross-gender characters (n = 11) theme emerged from responses in which participants indicated a preference for the design and outfits of cross-gender characters. Practical considerations, such as comfort of attire, were mentioned.

Following this theme, creativity/challenge (n = 6) was expressed as an enjoyable aspect of doing crossplay. Respondents whose answers were categorized under this theme considered crossplay a way to challenge their skill at the cosplay craft.

A smaller number of respondents indicated that crossplay simply enabled them to be someone different than their everyday selves, which was categorized as to be someone different (n = 4).

The gender-salient category consists of two themes that collectively speak to notions that crossplayers enjoyed cross-gender character costumes for reasons pertaining to gender expression/performativity. Each theme within this category is discussed in order of frequency (highest to lowest).

Responses coded as belonging to the explore/express gender (n = 8) theme indicated that crossplay was an outlet for exploring different gender roles and/or to express an alternative gender.
The most infrequent theme, \textit{body lends itself to crossplay} (n = 4), includes answers in which respondents expressed that their physical body was particularly suitable for performing crossplay because their bodies did not strongly signify their self-identified gender.

The questionnaire also explored community reactions to crossplay. To address spectator responses to crossplay at conventions, another open-ended question was analyzed: "What types of reactions and/or feedback have you received from other cosplayers or convention attendees when you are dressed as a character that is a different sex/gender than your self-identified sex/gender?" Thirty-six participants replied to this question. Responses were coded as positive when participants expressed that they received approval, praise, or positive reactions from other cosplayers or convention attendees. Although some participants expressed negative responses, these reactions were generally coded as mixed because respondents disclosed both positive and negative reactions to their crossplays.

Most responses were thematically positive (n = 30). A minority of respondents indicated that they tended to receive mixed reactions to crossplay (n = 6).

A self-identified male who crossplays as Kyouko Kirigiri from the Japanese video games \textit{Danganronpa} (2010–), commented,

> Reactions have been entirely positive. Conventions, in my experience, are very diverse and inclusive environments, and all of the feedback I received was warm and supportive. In fact, I received more attention when I was crossplaying than when I was cosplaying male characters—reactions to my cosplays were positive across the board, but perhaps more overtly so when I was crossplaying.

Although most respondents reported receiving positive feedback at conventions while wearing crossplay, several indicated that it was generally more acceptable for women to crossplay as male characters than for men to crossplay as female characters. A self-identified female who indicated her favorite crossplay character was the male Professor Ozpin from the YouTube series \textit{RWBY} (2013–) expressed receiving "overwhelmingly positive" feedback but also acknowledged, "Crossplay is becoming a norm at cons (although I admit girls cosplaying male characters is more widely accepted than men cosplaying female characters)."

7. Discussion

Overall, the responses presented above corroborate Gn's (2011) critique of the academic application of gender politics to the cosplay community: most crossplayers indicate that embodying a favorite character and/or creativity are the primary reasons that crossplay is enjoyable to them. Indeed, three of the themes are categorized as \textit{costume/character} because the responses included virtually no discussions of gender. Respondents were most likely to indicate that portraying a character is an enjoyable reason to crossplay (character trumps gender) and/or that they have practical or aesthetic reasons for dressing-up as characters of a different gender (prefers design of cross-gender characters). A
few respondents simply find the challenge of doing crossplay an enjoyable motivating factor (challenge/creativity), while others indicate that enjoyment is derived in being someone different from their everyday selves (to be someone different). These themes parallel the observations of King (2013), who found that many female-to-male crossplayers expressed an overall attraction to the overall character rather than merely to the gender of the character and that doing crossplay convincingly was no different than becoming proficient at wig styling or sewing.

[7.2] The character trumps gender theme was the most prominent (Table 2), suggesting that many respondents take part in the hobby to pay homage to their favorite character rather than for gender expression. A self-identified male whose favorite crossplay is of the female character Kyouko Kirigiri from Danganronpa stated, "I enjoy doing it because I like the character. The actual sex[/gender] of the character is secondary to me; I simply enjoy cosplaying as characters I like first and foremost." Similarly, a self-identified female whose favorite crossplay character is a male, Rock Lee from the Japanese anime and manga series Naruto Shippuden (1999–2017), expressed, "I am a straight female and don't consider crossdressing making a difference towards my sexuality. I choose cosplays based on challenge, love for character and design, regardless of the gender. After all, the character is fictional."

[7.3] The second most frequent theme is prefers design of cross-gender characters. For instance, a respondent who identified as genderfluid and indicated their favorite cosplay character is Captain America, a male, replied, "I generally prefer their [male] clothing/armor /designs more than most female characters, and feel more comfortable wearing them than the minimalist outfits that most female characters wear." The "minimalist outfits" of female characters referenced by this crossplayer likely alludes to the provocative, skin-baring attire worn by many fictional female characters in video games (Lynch et al. 2016), comics, and genre films (Brown 2004). For this individual, crossplay involves dressing as a fictional character who happens to wear clothing that appeals to them.

[7.4] A respondent who identified as genderfluid and who specified their favorite character was Ryuko Matoi from the anime Kill la Kill (2013–14) wrote, "I don't strongly/permanently identify as any one [gender], and it gives me far more variety, plus female (I am male genetically) characters have more variety and are more interesting." As this quote illustrates, interesting characterizations were more salient than gender in choosing to crossplay.

[7.5] The language employed in the responses coded to be someone different did not evoke gender but rather emphasized difference. For these respondents, gender is just another aspect of the costume of their chosen character, and the exploration of gender performativity is seemingly not an important factor to crossplay. A self-identified male who enjoys dressing up as comic heroine Wonder Woman (1941–) at conventions simply wrote, "I enjoy presenting myself as someone that is completely different than who I am in real life." Another self-identified male whose favorite character to dress as is the female character Cadence from the video game Crypt of the NecroDancer (2015) stated, "I enjoy feeling like I'm looking at life and presenting to other[s] a different view than usual."
However, while most responses did not discuss gender performativity, some participants' responses are categorized as related to gender. The two themes comprising this category indicate that crossplay is enjoyable because it allows individuals to explore and/or express a different gender within a relatively safe community of peers (explore/express gender). A few participants indicate that they find crossplay enjoyable because their physical body enables them to convincingly dress up as a cross-gender character (body lends itself to crossplay).

For example, a respondent who identified the titular character from *Sailor Moon* (manga, 1991–97; anime, 1992–97) as their favorite cosplay character expressed, "I'm nonbinary but present masculine in my daily life. Cosplay gave me a safe space to practice presenting feminine and to wear things that I would normally not get to wear." For this individual, dressing as a female character at fan conventions provided an outlet for feminine expression. For others, crossplay enabled alternative gender performativity. A self-identified female who indicated Rick Grimes, a male character from *The Walking Dead* (2010–), as her favorite crossplay character, stated, "I have gender issues in my normal life, cosplay is a great time for me to feel comfortable in myself."

The most infrequent theme in responses to the first open-ended question analyzed in the present study, *body lends itself to crossplay*, has compelling implications about crossplay and gender performativity. Four participants expressed that their physical body was particularly suitable for performing crossplay because their bodies did not strongly signify their self-identified gender. For instance, a self-identified female whose favorite character to cosplay is Zuko from the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005–8) replied,

My body structure typically lends itself better to cosplaying as taller, thinner male characters from animated series than it does female animated characters (who are often quite a bit more buxom). I prefer cosplaying characters with similar body types; I think it helps make a more convincing costume and helps me feel more "in character."

It was not merely her attachment to a favorite media character that made crossplay enjoyable but also her physical appearance, which she finds more appropriate for performance as a male character with an androgynous physique.

A self-identified male who indicated his favorite crossplay character was Arisato Hamuko, a protagonist from the video game series *Persona* (1996–), likewise commented, "Due to my slender frame, for the most part I can more accurately portray female characters that I like, while portraying male characters that are designed as likeable characters in any given series is difficult." The Arisato character is highly feminine; she wears a traditional Japanese schoolgirl uniform and conveys a cute and innocent aura befitting of a *shojo*, a character trope of an adolescent girl popular within Japanese anime and manga (Lunning 2011; Napier 1998).

This theme was also found for an individual who did not identify with their biological sex category. A participant expressing their favorite crossplay character as the tenth Doctor
from *Doctor Who* (1963–89, 2005−) lamented, "I identify female, but am biologically male and have a very masculine look. It's unpleasant to cosplay female characters because my body image doesn't match what I want to portray." While this individual would seemingly prefer cosplaying as a female, they experience discomfort doing so because their body is sex categorized as male and therefore as inaccurate for female characters. Thus, social knowledge that a male-sexed body is also categorized as male by others has foreclosed feminine performativity for this crossplayer.

[7.13] The notion that crossplay is enjoyable and/or doable for some because their body is suited to crossplay reveals the discursive nature of bodies; bodies are associated with norms attributed to biological sex yet actually maintained through social ritual (Butler 1993), bodily practices (Connell 1999), and social relational ways of doing (West and Zimmerman 1987)—in other words, bodies suited to convincingly crossplay performed normative notions of binary genders, not necessarily alternative gender schemas. This notion suggests that crossplayers maintain normative notions of male/masculinity and female/femininity as "gender projects" through embodied performance (Connell 1999, 45).

[7.14] The male-to-female crossplayer who indicated his favorite cosplay character as the Japanese schoolgirl Arisato Hamuko expressed the desire to "accurately portray female characters" through his slender body. His commentary suggests that his male body deviates from normative masculinity, including characteristics such as the strength and muscularity embodied by many male heroes in media. For this respondent, crossplaying as a feminine, female character is an achievement maintained through costumed performance but enabled by social norms and expectations for women's bodies. Just as the *shojo* cosplayer enacts an idealized and universalized femininity (Lunning 2011), self-identified men performing crossplay may perform ideal, even emphasized, notions of femininity.

[7.15] Gn (2011) argues that crossplay is only transgressive with respect to the gendered norms associated with the subject's sociocultural position. Consistent with the theme of *explore/express gender*, the practice only subverts gender in consideration of respondents' subject positions in everyday life. To offer nuance to Gn's argument, respondents who stated that crossplay was enjoyable because it enabled alternative gender expression were arguably engaging in gender subversion. Yet it is not so simple to claim that crossplay is a gender-liberating practice. When participants find crossplay enjoyable because their body is suited to it, crossplay reinforces gendered norms, mapped onto sexed and sex-categorized bodies, that are imitated and maintained through appropriate dress and comportment. In this sense, gender signifiers that materialized male or female codes on a particular body reify gender as costume—a costume that we have socially learned through discursive practices.

[7.16] In summary, most themes that emerged from the survey responses to the first open-ended question analyzed did not speak to crossplay and gender expression/performativity. Rather, crossplay was considered to be just another facet of costumed performance. Enjoyment of crossplay was attributed to attachment to the character, a preference for the character's attire, the challenge of making a costume and accurately embodying a character/enacting a role, and a desire to escape from mundane self-presentation. Indeed, challenge was associated with costumed performance and notions of authentic gender
performativity, suggesting that crossplayers who enjoy the challenge of crossplay inform their performance with body-reflexive practices (Connell 1999) that are discursively linked to male and female bodies. Even those who expressed that their body lends itself to crossplay performed gender according to (hetero)normative schemas. To be sure, crossplay did serve as a means for alternative gender expression/performativity as indicated by the gender categories, but only for individuals who felt they could do so authentically.

[7.17] Regarding community reactions to crossplay, respondents suggested that it was their ability to convincingly perform an alternative gender that warranted positive feedback from others. A self-identified female who indicated her favorite crossplay character was Haru Nanase from the Japanese anime Free! (2013–) stated, "I feel like when I crossplay, I get more attention. My features easily translate between male and female when I put on the appropriate makeup so I'm happy that people think I look cool even when I cross-play." With respect to the performative nature of crossplay, this response is parallel to the body lends itself to crossplay theme discussed earlier. Because this respondent has features that allow her to perform as either a male or female character when in costume, she has not experienced any obvious social penalty or stigmatization for doing so.

[7.18] Crossplay may be more acceptable for women who crossplay as somewhat androgynous male characters because their features are usually suited for such a character. Indeed, a female who expressed her favorite crossplay character as Aoba from the Japanese boys' love visual novel series DRAMAtical Murder (2012–) indicated this privilege in her response: "I've generally just gotten positive feedback on my costumes. I tend to look pretty convincing when I go for 'male,' so people might not notice at first. More androgynous looks get me compliments too, though!"

[7.19] In this sample, a pattern of gender inequality emerged for self-identified males and nonbinary individuals who choose to crossplay as feminine characters. A nonbinary individual who presents as masculine in their daily life experienced social penalties while crossplaying as their favorite character Sailor Mercury, a feminine schoolgirl from Sailor Moon:

[7.20] The majority of reactions I have received have been very encouraging, but the occasional negative comments stick out much more. The most common type of negative reaction I receive is someone treating me like a joke ("Did you lose a bet?," "I showed my friend a photo of you and made them guess your sex," etc.).

[7.21] The mixed response provided by this respondent demonstrates the gender inequality for sex-categorized men who perform crossplay as feminine characters. While women in this sample expressed positive reactions, particularly for convincingly performing as androgynous male characters, men or masculine-presenting nonbinary individuals may encounter social stigma for choosing to perform femininity with their male bodies.

[7.22] Inequality for male and nonbinary crossplayers was observed in the reactions to crossplay, while female-to-male crossplayers spoke of generally positive responses to their authentic performances of the male gender. This privilege is not unlike the experience of
transmen (individuals assigned female at birth whose gender identity is male) in the workplace, who ultimately experience the social privileges and benefits of the male gender after transitioning (Schilt 2010). Likewise, female-to-male crossplayers in anime culture may experience praise for accurately portraying androgynous male characters. Okabe (2012) observed among female Japanese cosplayers that crossplay was particularly appreciated when the female crossplayer looked beautiful as a male character, an attribute unique to beautiful male characters in Japanese media.

Crossplay may be a more acceptable practice for women than for men because men face a higher penalty for violation of gender norms, especially when a body is sex categorized as male but the performance of dress and behavior is coded feminine (Schilt 2010). In the above quote, the feminine clothing of the Sailor Moon character was deemed inappropriate for a male-categorized body, which resulted in the crossplayer incurring a social penalty in the form of mockery.

Since masculinity in geek culture is positioned as a subordinate masculinity (Jenkins 1992), the male-to-female crossplayer incurs a double-penalty from some spectators. As a geek, the cosplayer is already feminized within mainstream culture, but the male-to-female crossplayer portrays an effeminate masculinity that is often the target of cruel discourse (Close 2016). When spectators make degrading comments, the language acts as a masculinity challenge, that is, a social interaction that shames the recipient for appearing to lack masculinity (Messerschmidt 2000). Such masculinity challenges reveal the penalty incurred when men perform femininity via crossplay, an issue not reported by female-to-male crossplayers in this survey.

8. Limitations and conclusion

To address debates questioning the gender politics of crossplay (Gn 2011), an online survey was employed to explore the ways in which crossplay perpetuates and/or disrupts traditional ways of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) outside mainstream culture. Overall, Gn's position was supported: for respondents of this survey, exploring gender was not a salient factor contributing to the enjoyment of crossplay. However, some respondents did express that crossplay enabled alternative gender performativity within a relatively supportive community. Extant research has argued that the performance of exaggerated femininity and masculinity is common in cosplay (Norris and Bainbridge 2009). This study found that this was also true for crossplay—some crossplayers experience enjoyment through gender portrayals that capture ideal or stereotypical notions of what it means to be female or male.

Indeed, the hypergendered performance of cosplay reveals the inherently performative nature of gender in everyday social interactions (Norris and Bainbridge 2009) that are inscribed in societal norms and encouraged through repetition (Butler 1993). Thus, crossplay in Western cultures may affirm rather than challenge stereotypes about masculinity and femininity. For respondents in this survey, crossplay did not serve to free their bodies from the discursive limits of sex/gender; rather, crossplay performance frequently aligned with heteronormative gender discourse. In this sense, gender was perceived as naturally
coinciding with sex categories materialized in physical bodies (Butler).

[8.3] To be sure, cosplayers may embody a media character for a multitude of reasons; they may identify with a character, enjoy the look or challenge of creating a particular costume, or feel that that they bear a physical resemblance to a character (Peirson-Smith 2013). Costumed performance signifies to other fans and attendees that a cosplayer personally identifies with the portrayed character and larger fan community (Hale 2014) and is often an avenue for making new friends within a fandom, especially among women in male-dominated gamer culture (Hjorth 2009). Thus, crossplay is not only an individual activity but a communal one through which participants exchange a shared passion for the source media. Indeed, as cosplayers/crossplayers perform within the context of globalized media industries, "gender performativity becomes infused with processes of localization" (Hjorth, ¶ 19).

[8.4] A limitation of this study is that most participants were from North America and Europe. This limitation may have been a result of the language used in the survey or to the homogeneity of the communities in which links were posted. Future studies should attempt to recruit a broader sample or conduct case studies of the crossplay phenomenon in other communities. Another limitation pertains to the survey's wording. The question pertaining to crossplay asked participants to identify whether their favorite character to cosplay was a different sex/gender than their self-identified sex/gender. Some respondents who crossplay may nonetheless have identified their favorite cosplay character as a same-gendered cosplay and were likely excluded. Finally, the data should not be interpreted to mean that crossplayers in this survey favored crossplay over cosplay. It is possible, indeed, even likely, that many crossplayers in this survey also participated in making/wearing gender-conforming cosplay in addition to making/wearing crossplay.

[8.5] Although the results of this survey suggest that many crossplayers are not motivated by alternative gender expression, the performance of alternative genders may be more salient for nonbinary individuals who employ crossplay as a socially acceptable way to explore their identity. More work on gender-nonconforming and nonbinary individuals in cosplay/crossplay should be undertaken.

[8.6] Finally, while many respondents suggested that crossplay at conventions served as a safe environment in which to perform an alternative gender via embodiment of a fictional character, the analysis offered here suggests that not all crossplayers are treated equally. Men and nonbinary individuals who perform femininity by embodying female characters are often penalized, which affirms the hegemonic status of masculinity in contemporary culture (Connell 1995), even within the playful space of a fan convention.

9. Acknowledgments

[9.1] I thank Nicole Martins for her assistance with survey design and data analysis. I thank Youngjoo Cha and Cate Taylor for their feedback. I am similarly grateful to Dongeun Shin for her comments.

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Praxis

Big name fandom and the (inevitable) failure of Disflix

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[0.1] Abstract—Big name fans are those who have attained a level of recognition within a fan community without necessarily knowing each participant in the subculture and who have the power to influence how other fans in their community engage with the object of their shared fandom. Their niche celebrity status can be achieved through the range of knowledge, access, and official or exclusive information available to them, as well as the degree to which they produce their own media content. In the Disney fan community, big name fans are also sometimes known as lifestylers (lifestyle influencers), and their status is derived primarily from their social media celebrity. These fans document their frequent visits to the Disney parks and official Disney media events on social media, and they use their online platform to interact with their followers and share how they incorporate Disney into all aspects of their lives. Their microcelebrity status gives them power to shape and commodify what it means to be a Disney fan in the new media age through an emphasis on producing and sharing marketable personal brand content. This article seeks to understand the ways the influencer phenomenon has affected the Disney fan community and how this group of fans has shifted the practices, interactions, and habits associated with Disney fandom; it also addresses the limits of their impact among their peers.

[0.2] Keywords—Content sharing; Disney; Influencer; Interactivity; Netflix; Social media


1. Introduction

[1.1] In a March 17, 2015, post on WDWMagic, a popular online forum for Disney fans, user ItsgrlBella asked, "The term 'Lifestyler' has popped up here and there throughout threads and I'm trying to figure out what it means. Is it a WDW subculture? People who work at WDW? People that have no jobs and endless money and practically 'live' at WDW? People that ONLY vacation at WDW? Are we lifestylers because we're active in the boards and follow WDW news? All of the above?" In the thread that followed, fans discussed the origins and qualifications of the term "lifestyler," asking such questions as, "Can anyone just become a lifestyler? Is there a 'how to' to becoming one?" (Johnson 2015), and wondering whether certain high-profile Disney fan are considered a member of this influential group (wdwfan4ever 2015).
Lifestyler, a term synonymous with the more common term "influencer," is a title that applies to high-profile fans in the Disney community who are known for, and sometimes make a living from, sharing their opinions and news about the US Disney theme parks on social media. Like Disneyland and Walt Disney World locals, lifestylers are fans that typically frequent the Disney parks more than once or twice a week, but what distinguishes them from their peers is primarily their social media presence and large following. Some, like Tim Tracker, run popular Disney-themed YouTube channels, while others, like Francis Dominic, have garnered their reputation through their presence on image-based social media platforms like Instagram.

In the years since the term first appeared on the WDWMagic forums, the lifestyler trend has steadily gained traction within the online Disney community, which boasts hundreds of thousands of members across multiple platforms. (There are also subgroups within the larger community whose fandom focuses on different spheres of the Disney company.) The Disney lifestyler phenomenon emerged within the sharing culture of social media, and, as a result of their subcultural celebrity status, their collective discursive power has shaped what it means to be a Disney fan in the new media age through an emphasis on producing and sharing curated and marketable brand content. Today, Disney parks fandom is measured in part by the ways in which it is made visible to the community on social media. Along the way, lifestylers have found ways to monetize the practices and habits associated with Disney fandom, a trend that reached its zenith in April 2017 with the creation of the short-lived subscription platform Disflix. With the promise of original shows, live streams, and online classes curated by Disney lifestylers, Disflix was marketed as a monthly subscription service to teach fans how to build their own lucrative Disney-themed social media brand. However, even before the platform's official launch, the company faced backlash from a large segment of the community, many of whom argued that Disflix exploited the foundation of Disney fandom.

An analysis of the official press releases and fan reactions on social media demonstrate Disflix's failure as both a business model and social experiment, thereby indicating the limits of the persuasive power of big name fans within a fan community. In an effort to cash in on their subcultural celebrity, these lifestylers violated the largely unspoken rules of Disney fandom and fan communities as a whole, calling into question the limits of influencers as arbiters of fan community trends.

2. Big name fans

Disney lifestylers can be described as big name fans, a nomenclature (known sometimes by its initialism, BNF) that grew out of science fiction fan communities of the 1930s. Originally conceived to describe fans who contributed to fanzines, participated in or organized conventions, or wrote fan fiction, today it also encompasses fandom on digital platforms. Matt Hills writes that the big name fan is "one of the fan-cultural or subcultural terms for fans who have attained a wide degree of recognition in the community, and so who are known to others via subcultural mediation without personally knowing all those other subcultural participants" (2006, 9). The big name fan is a subcultural celebrity, recognized simply by name or image (in a social media context, usually a combination of the two);
outside of their community, their niche celebrity status holds little to no clout, but among their peers, they are instantly recognizable and often reap the rewards that come with such fame. Hills also explains that the big name fans exist "inside and outside the process of commodification, experiencing an intensely personal 'use-value' in relation to the object of their fandom, and then being re-positioned within more general and systematic processes of 'exchange-value'" (2006, 19).

[2.2] The Disney lifestylers' park visits are central to their social media identities, and they obsessively document every trip, snack, and ride on attractions, then share their experiences with their followers. Their collective use value lies in their willingness to provide Disney with marketable content that at first glance appears to constitute a form of free fan labor, which Abigail de Kosnik describes as being imperative to "corporations in an era of market fragmentation" (2013, 99). But their social media posts are in fact compensated labor: as a reward for their eagerness to give Disney unsolicited and (usually) positive publicity, Disney often grants them access to special events; previews of new dining, merchandise, or hotel offerings; and, for a lucky few, even complimentary Disney vacations. For de Kosnik, this mutually beneficial relationship is dependent on "both the fans and corporations acknowledging that fandom is a form of labor that adds value to mass-produced commodities and is worthy of compensation" (2013, 110). For the corporations, it gives them a better understanding of their most loyal (and often most critical) consumers, allowing a company to hone their products and marketing to maximize their revenue. Because this form of social media advertising is being produced, written, and photographed by the fans, the messaging is decorporatized, thereby appearing more authentic and honest to the community.

[2.3] For lifestylers, the perks of being a loyal Disney fan puts them in a privileged position, as they are able to have unique experiences beyond what is accessible to the average park visitor or fan. For example, in February 2018, Francis Dominic posted several photos of him at a screening of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood to promote the film's Blu-ray rerelease. In one of his captions, he thanked Disney for inviting him to the screening, writing, "It's so cool watching THE PRINCESS THAT STARTED IT ALL ON THE BIG SCREENS." Similarly, in late April 2017, Dominic posted a photo of one of the pools at Aulani: A Disney Resort and Spa, with the caption, "I did nothing but lay out for 5 hours today and I'm getting paid while I'm down here this weekend to do just that" (2017a). Having access to these types of special events or vacation perks elevates the lifestylers' statuses and personal brands; such access makes them stand out in the highly saturated online Disney fan community. While Dominic never revealed the details of how Disney compensated his vacation, his posts from the pricey Hawaiian resort (where rooms can cost up to $700 or $800 per night) drew the attention of his nearly 76,000 Instagram followers. With comments such as, "Literally what do I have to do to do that. Omg." and "I want that job. No fair!!" (Dominic 2017a), his followers shared their envy about his relationship with Disney.

[2.4] For their part, popular lifestylers like Dominic have taken advantage of their subcultural celebrity status, producing their own news websites, books, and travel guides. For example, Dominic's loyal following has led to a collaboration with Disney-inspired clothing companies, including 2319 Threads and My Oh My Supply Co. 2319 Thread's
Francis Dominic Collection was made up of T-shirts, sweatshirts, and hats emblazoned with Disney-inspired graphics, as well as statements reflecting his brand message of acceptance and positivity, summarized by his catchphrase "love yourself" (Dominic 2017c). The teaser trailer for Dominic's season 2 collection encapsulates his big name fandom. It features a purple-black background with graphics of stars and colorful light patterns, with catchy techno dance music playing. The words "The wait is over" flash on screen, followed by the date and time of the collection's release date and the phrase "Get ready to be shook" underneath. Next, Dominic's logo (his initials) appears on screen. The image turns to black, then the hashtags "the FD collection" and "love yourself" fade in (2319 Threads 2017). Dominic is noticeably absent from this promotional video; instead, he is represented entirely by his initials and catchphrase. He personifies the subcultural fan celebrity insofar as his recognizability is carried through his name (and in this case, his logo) rather than his iconicity. One of the notable pieces in the season 2 collection was a simple white T-shirt with the phrase "lol ur not francis dominic" written in black (Dominic 2017b). The shirt, a re-creation of the one worn in 2016 by model Gigi Hadid in homage to her then boyfriend, singer and former One Direction member Zayn Malik (Torgerson 2016), is similarly predicated on Dominic's name recognition, though at a much more niche level than the original it is based on. The reliance on Dominic's logo and name to signify his brand reveals his ubiquity within the Disney fan community, demonstrating the level of subcultural fame and brand relevance he holds among his peers.

[2.5] The ability to monetize celebrity is not new; nor is it a phenomenon specific to the Disney fan community. It began in the 1920s when studios realized that using their contract stars to promote specific commodities like cigarettes, clothes, and cars in film and print media would in the short run help boost box-office sales, and in the long run reinforce audience investment in their products (Eckert [1978] 2000). Through the trappings of glamour and fame associated with stardom, these star promotions also sold more elusive concepts like upward mobility, financial success, and, by extension, Hollywood itself—all within reach through direct consumption. According to Richard deCordova, the Walt Disney Company was a pioneer in this type of brand promotion, so much so that in a 1932 letter to toy licensee George Borgfeldt, Roy Disney explained that each Mickey Mouse doll sold is "a daily advertisement...for our company and keeps [consumers] all 'Mickey Mouse Minded'" (1994, 205). Roy's strategy quickly paid off: in 1932, they had nearly sixty separate licensing agreements with manufacturers in the United States, and by 1948, the company had made close to $100 million in revenue solely from Disney character merchandise (Bryman 2004, 83). The practice of cultivating public interest in stars via commodifiable products continues to this day, with celebrities like Gigi Hadid, Kanye West, and Justin Bieber all launching their own merchandise lines or embarking on corporate partnership agreements. Given the historical precedent, it is not illogical to assume this business model would extend to realm of subcultural celebrities in various forms—and in different fan communities.

[2.6] Is subcultural fame a prerequisite for merchandise success? Not necessarily. Even the most unknown fan can grow to become a BNF through strategic self-promotion. For example, fan fiction writers can gain a community following, and for the lucky few, this popularity can lead to book deals. Author E. L. James is arguably the most famous example of this phenomenon. Her Bella/Edward fan fiction in the Twilight franchise became popular
on an online fan fiction site, but some readers thought that her stories were too provocative. This pushback prompted James to create a website called 50shades.com where she could post her content, including *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which in 2011 she self-published through a writers' community called the Writer's Coffee Shop. After selling nearly thirty thousand copies of her e-book, James caught the attention of literary agents, and in 2012, she signed a contract with Random House, then later that same year a $5 million movie rights deal with Universal (Business Insider 2015; McClintock 2018). James's success led to an appearance at the San Diego Comic-Con in 2012, where she was able to meet fellow Twilight fans—and, notably, fans of her own. While James is perhaps an extreme example, her case is offered here to show how influencers are widespread beyond Disney fandom, and that the relationship dynamics between subcultural celebrities and fans can be fairly similar.

[2.7] What unites the Disney lifestylers is the way they make their fandom visible to their community on various social media platforms. The satiric line "do it for the 'gram" rings true within Disney fandom: there is an emphasis on creating curated content for social media that fits the theme of one's profile in order to demonstrate to others in the community that they are actively engaging with the object of their fandom. In her study of internet fandom, Kristina Busse writes that big name fans treat their microcelebrity "as something to be aspired to...[their] online persona is indeed an important aspect of many fans' identity and affect their self-worth in a supposedly separate 'real life' as well" (2006, 222). Busse's idea gets to the heart of one of the criticisms of social media, and one not necessarily specific to Disney fandom: the extent to which, through social pressure, people present the best version of themselves, all for the sake of likes, followers, and increased visibility (Fox 2017). In discourses about postmodern celebrity, Busse argues that "we have become accustomed to the various manipulations of reality and the way reality is already narrativized and packaged to entertain" (2006, 222). For example, when social media celebrities post a photo on Instagram, their followers often do not see the work involved in taking the photo, nor the potentially dozens of other bad takes. This hidden labor often amplifies what Christina Best calls "messages of self-enhancement," or the tendency to oversell oneself to others (2016, 62). The public performance of fandom is critical to success as an influencer, and the extent to which Disney lifestylers present their personal brand in an aesthetically conscious and engaging way on social media correlates to the potential for financial rewards or corporate compensation they receive from Disney and other affiliated companies.

[2.8] The focus on aesthetics in Disney fandom takes form through various means. One popular fan trend at the Disney parks is Disneybounding, which is a phenomenon similar to cosplay. However, rather than dressing in full costume, Disney fans wear colors that are reminiscent of a particular character. For example, if I were to Disneybound as Mickey Mouse, I might wear a black top, red bottoms, and yellow shoes (plus appropriately styled accessories). Disneybounding was conceived by fan Leslie Kay on her Tumblr account, DisneyBound, where in 2011 she began posting collages of outfit ideas for various Disney characters as mainstream as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, and as obscure as Benny, the skeleton cab driver from *Halloweentown* (1998) (Kay 2018). Fans can either bound solo or with other fans in a group representing different characters from a particular franchise. For example, for Disney California Adventure's 2019 Lunar New Year celebration, fans Rayna and Sydney (@magicbymuses) Disneybounded as Mulan and Ping (Mulan's male disguise).
Although Kay explains that Disneybounding began as a personal hobby to express her creativity (Borrensen 2017), it is also the practical response to a real problem. Cosplay violates Disney's theme park costume guidelines. Outside of hard-ticketed events that occur during specific times of the year, guests fourteen and older are prohibited from entering the park dressed in costumes that would cause them to be mistaken for Disney character performers (https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/faq/parks/dress/). Disneybounding therefore maintains the spirit of cosplay while reflecting the limits of self-expression set out by Disney's park mandate.

[2.9] In addition to Disneybounding, another popular trend is wall photos, where fans take pictures in front of painted walls. It began in 2017 when several high-profile lifestylers began posting photos on Instagram. There is an obvious Instagrammable quality to these Disney walls: they are brightly colored, and they add a vibrancy to one's feed. Disney fans have since flocked to take their pictures in front of walls, which can be found around the resorts on both coasts. At Disney's California Adventure, there is the blue wall and the Buzz Lightyear wall (added to promote the official opening of the park's rethemed land, Pixar Pier, on June 23, 2018); the bubblegum wall at Epcot; and the moss wall in Pandora at Disney's Animal Kingdom (Fickley-Baker 2017). The walls have become so popular within the Disney fan community that each has its own devoted hashtags and Instagram accounts boasting several thousand followers each, which showcases photos of fans posing against them wearing their best Disney-inspired outfits. Undeniably, the most famous of all of the walls is the purple wall in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, which, as a result of its immense popularity as the original wall that inspired this trend, has been the subject of a months-long refurbishment that transformed it from solid lavender to a geometric-shaped purple color scheme. In their official press release for the purple wall updates, Disney writes, "As the popular Disney saying goes, 'It all started with a mouse!' But for Instagrammers, the #DisneyWall trend all started with a wall—a purple wall to be exact, that sits to the right of the entrance into Tomorrowland" (Fickley-Baker 2018). Invoking Walt Disney's famous phrase about Mickey Mouse to describe the wall photo trend weaves Disney consumers and fans into the company's history, tying the trendsetting activities of Disney's most powerful fans with the company's creator. While such a comparison may raise eyebrows to those outside of the community, Disney's blog post reveals just how much fan-generated content influences the company's online brand identity and the extent to which they monitor the activities and habits of their most loyal consumers.

[2.10] Unsurprisingly, Disney has tried to profit from this lifestyler trend. Shortly after Pandora opened at Disney's Animal Kingdom in May 2017, Disney temporarily assigned a Photopass Cast Member (the term Disney uses for their employees) to stand at the moss wall to take high-quality photos of park guests—that guests would then have to purchase (Killebrew 2018). A Disney Parks blog article entitled "9 'Walls' Disney Parks Super Fans Deem Instagram Worthy" gives readers the exact location of the walls, featuring photos taken from the Instagram accounts of some popular lifestylers posing at each location (Fickley-Baker 2017). Notably, Disney does not describe the fans according to their community-given name but instead designates them as superfans, thus reproducing the stereotype of fandom as being simultaneously hierarchical and excessive (Jenkins 1992). But apparently it was not excessive enough for Disney to see the market value of this fan trend.
In January 2018, they released a baseball hat in the same shade of purple as the purple wall, with the words "meet me at the" on the back and "Purple Wall" on the front in the Tomorrowland font (a typographical nod to the wall's location in the Magic Kingdom), as well as a Magic Band with the same phrase on the side. In July 2019, they released a windbreaker with a pattern that exactly matches the purple wall. In their press release for the new merchandise items, Disney claims, "Fans can now show off their appreciation for the famous and Instagram-worthy Purple Wall...which our team has carefully designed to match the exact color shade" (Jarvis 2018). Thus, Disney fully capitalizes on a fan trend that only became popular through lifestyler influence. While Disney's "vampiric appropriation" of this fan trend upholds the producer-consumer balance of power (Kiriakou 2018), it also demonstrates the level of influence these high-profile fans have on Disney corporate decisions. It also has obvious benefits for Disney: in an effort to compete for distinct consumer demographic dollars, Disney uses the oversharing component of social media to their advantage. Social media provides them with a window into the tastes, habits, and opinions of their consumers, allowing them to precisely target their messaging and products to increasingly diverse segments of their consumer base.

3. Disflix

[3.1] The lifestylers' effect reached its peak in mid-April 2017 with the short-lived company Disflix. Cofounded by former Inside the Magic merchandise specialist Corinne Anderson, Disflix was conceived as a subscription service that offered fans services such as trip planning, live-streams, and videos that were to be curated by at least a dozen or so of the community's most popular lifestylers. In a post on the now-deleted Disflix website (archived on the fan-run Disney website Theme Park University), Anderson explains the idea behind the venture: "It started with the intention of creating a collaboration of people in the Disney community and building a place for fans and vacationers. Many were eager to be a part of the project, in part because the collaboration aspect of the model and wanting to be a part of something positive and new" (Young 2017). Anderson and her team emphasized that Disflix was conceived as a community-building enterprise designed to bring together big name fans and those new to Disney fandom. It is impossible to describe Disflix in more concrete terms because it never materialized, but the rhetoric in this statement suggests that the platform was to be a virtual gathering space that could expand to accommodate a wide range of users, all united by their interest in Disney and the shared goal of growing their social media presence. Ostensibly, too, additional lifestylers could join the Disflix influencer team to better target different segments of the diverse Disney fan community.

[3.2] To promote their new project, on April 11, 2017, accounts associated with Disflix posted a teaser video on social media featuring several prominent lifestylers, including those behind the accounts @meettheroyers and @spokesmayne, in front of Cinderella Castle in the Magic Kingdom. The phrase "Now you can be part of the magic in a whole new way" appears atop images of the lifestylers, as well as a list of services available on the platform. The images are accompanied by the song "The Trouble" (2014) by Pogo, who is known for remixing audio from well-known film and television soundtracks. Implicit in this video's messaging is the lifestylers' assumption of their perceived clout within the community; Disflix hosts have each built their own brands, and they are now offering their advice and
tips (for a fee) to other Disney fans. This is when things went south. Almost immediately, Disney parks fans began to voice their opinions about the project on social media. For once, the usually polarized community seemed to agree that Disflix was a step too far.

[3.3] On a methodological level, it is challenging to track this sort of information (particularly when, as in this case, the series of events occurred in a compounded forty-eight-hour period), which speaks to the problems scholars can encounter when trying to contextualize contemporary social media practices. Inevitably there will be missing information that affects how an event or period of time is recounted. Another issue is synthesizing the vast quantity and scope of social media activity into a cohesive argument. Social media is a lot like deep space: there is a seemingly endless horizon, and you do not quite know what you'll come across. From a user's perspective, there is a lot of shouting into the void, and unless you have a large follower count or one of your posts goes viral, in most instances, you're only interacting with a small number of people. Additionally, there is the question of the motivations behind fan discourse. Transparency in social media advertising has recently been a hot-button issue, with companies like Twitter, Facebook, and Facebook's subsidiary, Instagram, all pledging to better disclose the nature of their sponsored content. In an effort to rehabilitate their image after it was revealed that the Russian government used Facebook to spread misinformation in an effort to sway the outcome of the 2016 US presidential election, the company announced that they were launching a feature called View Ads, which "allows users to see every active ad" as well as make available information about the creator, cost, and target demographic on all of Facebook's social media platforms (Lapowsky and Matskis 2018).

[3.4] This is a step in the right direction, but it does not get to the heart of the other side of the transparency issue: sponsored content by social media users. A tool like View Ads might force a company like Disney to indicate that their social media posts are advertisements, but it does not compel an influencer to do the same. So, for example, when I see one of my favorite lifestylers talking about how great the latest Marvel movie was, or how he or she cannot wait until the next Kingdom Hearts game is released, what remains hidden is the potential financial arrangement that person has with Disney. In 2018, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) updated its endorsement guidelines in an effort to make social media influencers disclose their corporate deals. Subsequently, Instagram added a promotions feature on their platform that allows influencers to include the phrase "paid partnership with" at the top of a post (Chacon 2017). Influencers also have the option to simply add #ad or #sponsored at the end of their caption, which, ironically, has led to a peculiar trend of aspiring influencers using these same hashtags to appear as though they have sponsorship deals, when in fact they don't (Lorenz 2018). Unfortunately, the FTC admits that they do not actively monitor social media posts; nor do they require any uniformity in the way influencers disclose their sponsored content (Federal Trade Commission 2017). As a result, it is often difficult to discern the motives behind an influencer's post. This hampers our understanding of the fan reaction toward Disflix because it is impossible to determine with certainty whether fans' reactions to the platform is a result of their (alleged) financial ties to Disney. Determining intentionality is a futile endeavor from the start, but it is complicated even further by the opacity of social media discourse.
In spite of the hurdles I have just laid out, I will nonetheless attempt to evaluate the community discourse around Disflix in order to situate the quantity and range of responses against my wider argument. On April 11 alone, around two hundred tweets with the #disflix tag appeared on Twitter, plus several dozen more on both Facebook and Instagram—a comparatively minuscule number compared to the trending hashtags that appear on Twitter, but notable given the niche market Disflix was targeting. Many more replies to those initial tweets also exist but do not include the Disflix hashtag, which makes it hard to determine the total amount of traffic around Disflix during this preview period. Ever since the failed Disflix rollout in April 2017, there have been an additional couple dozen tweets that include the #disflix hashtag, many of which use the company name as a reference point to measure any type of controversy, noteworthy headline news, or flopped business venture (Disney or otherwise). For example, in summer 2018, when it was reported that MoviePass was raising their subscription fees in an effort to stabilize the value of their stock, Disney podcaster Tim Grassey (2018) joked, "BREAKING: Movie Pass change its model once again. Still cheaper than DisFlix." Likewise, in reaction to the news that White House press secretary Anthony Scaramucci was leaving his position after only ten days on the job, Grassey's cohost, Derek Burgan (2017), sarcastically tweeted, "Disflix lasted longer than Scaramucci." Within the Disney community, the term "Disflix" has come to stand in for wide-ranging failure, short-sightedness, or greed.

Searching through the #disflix tweets results in a high percentage of negative reactions, save for a handful of sympathetic posts. Those in the latter category share sentiments similar to that of user Savannah Dison (2017), who reminds fellow fans that "you can absolutely disagree with the premise of Disflix without sending out a witch hunt to be mean to people." Like Dison, user Dan-O (2017) writes, "I feel bad for the #Disflix hosts, I bet they never predicted a reception like this. Best of luck to fellow Dis creators though." The majority of posts in favor of Disflix appear not to necessarily be championing the service, but rather reacting to the hostile community reception toward Disflix's creators. To that end, the tweets that are critical of Disflix cite the creators' perceived overinflated egos, the cost, and the fact that they were charging for content that can be found online for free. For example, user Starport Seven-Five (2017) writes, "Disflix feels to me like all the popular kids are charging you to sit at the lunch table next to theirs and watch them be popular." The Disflix controversy even caught the attention of Universal, Disney's biggest competitor in the central Florida market. The official Universal Orlando Resort Twitter account tweeted on April 11, 2017, "We're totally going to make Uniflix a thing." Late in the evening of April 11, Disflix had issued a statement promising full refunds to anyone who had already purchased a subscription, and by April 13, they had taken down their website. The unsigned message, briefly uploaded to their now-deleted site, stated in part: "Unfortunately social media, being what it is, created a negative and hateful view of the business…We weren't trying to offend anyone, just having the courage to pursue another dream or venture. We wanted to test the business model and try something new. If the Disney community is determined to be against it, then we see no reason to continue pursuing it" (Disflix 2017).

The sentiment about the motive behind Disflix vaguely mirrors that found in their initial press release. Several fans mocked this message, including a popular Disney-themed YouTube vlogger, whose tweet paraphrased the statement as, "Our business model sucks and
everyone online is saying so. Let's cancel everything and just blame them.'—#Disflix" (Plays 2017b). In a similar vein, user Victoria Castle (2017) tweeted, "The Disney community on Twitter is full of negative and mean people.' No, we just don't fall for your Instagram life crap #disflix." It seems that that not all fans were buying their explanation. Many clearly viewed Disflix as a thinly veiled attempt to exploit the community. Fans were also irked by the tone of the statement. Rather than take responsibility for their actions, it was perceived that the Disflix creators were shifting the blame to social media and, by extension, to the very fans whom they were targeting as their audience.

Disflix failed for a number of reasons. First, aesthetically, it was a rip-off of Netflix; it even used the same font and logo style, as well as a similar color scheme. As a service, it drew inspiration from both Netflix and Disney, yet it wasn't officially affiliated with either company, thereby hinting that this fan-generated platform could enter precarious legal waters. In another since-deleted promotional video, the creators touted Disflix as "the Netflix of Disney" (WDW Kingdomcast 2017), yet the introductory rate for their service was set at $9.99, which at the time was about $2 more than a basic Netflix package. Many in the community felt this was both uninspiring and greedy. As a tweet from one Disney fan summarizes, "If Netflix can fork out original content like House of Cards for less a month what kind of Sistine Chapel stuff was #disflix planning?" (Helms 2017). Whether out of hubris or ignorance, the Disflix website had a copyright page that explained that the company was concerned with protecting their hosts' ideas and content (Disflix 2017). However, at the most basic level, Disflix breached Disney's own terms and conditions. A simple search on the official Walt Disney World website reveals among the list of park rules and regulations no "photography, videography or recording of any kind for commercial purposes" (https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/en_CA/park-rules/). To that end, user WDW Crane (2017) tweeted, "The highlight of #disflix would have been them confronted during a live stream, trespassed and escorted out for commercial filming."

Second, virtually all of Disflix's promised content is already available online for free. For example, searching for "Wishes," the old fireworks show at the Magic Kingdom, results in 106,000 videos. Universal TIMation Resort (2017) writes, "#Disflix is $9 a month? But I can get this on YouTube right now for $0 a month." Similarly, on a 2017 episode of the podcast WDW Kingdomcast, host Gary asks, "Why would you spend $9.99 to watch a shitty quality video on Periscope when you can watch the same content for free on YouTube?" The logic behind charging a fee for content that is available on other platforms for free presumes either that their content is of better quality, or that they are filling a void or reaching an untapped segment of the market. Yet as Gary rightly points out, the image quality of livestreams (whether on Periscope, Instagram, or YouTube) is poor compared to uploaded videos because most of these platforms operate on devices and networks with limited streaming speeds.

Third, and most important, Disflix was ill conceived because its creators were never clear about whom they were targeting as their primary audience. Locals and frequent theme park visitors would find no need for their services; they arguably are as knowledgeable and spend as much time in the parks as the lifestylers. In their press release, Anderson also cites "[theme park] visitors" as one of their main demographics, but reason would suggest this
would not be the case: first-time guests or casual Disney fans either might not know to look for the service or would be unlikely to pay a monthly subscription fee for a service that would only briefly be useful to them. Twitter user Isabel (@BornToDisney), on April 11, 2017, wrote in a now-deleted post, "Disflix is IMO completely unnecessary and made to set a hierarchy in fandom." Such a comment suggests that fans perceived a self-serving goal underlying Disflix—namely to give these social media influencers an even bigger platform to expand their personal brands within the community (and beyond). The fact that their community collectively viewed it as inauthentic speaks to the limits of acceptable fan practices—what Michelle McCudden describes as activities that signal when one's fandom can become "too big" or goes "too far" to the point of being undesirable (2011, 58), disruptive, and potentially destructive to the community in question.

4. What can we learn from Disflix?

[4.1] Although it was marketed as a community-building service, Disflix was also conceived as a platform to teach subscribers how to be popular and money-making Disney fans. Ostensibly, by taking their classes and watching the video tutorials, one would be armed with the necessary tools to not only tour the parks efficiently but also to create one's own Disney-inspired brand according to the templates set out by the lifestylers. The biggest criticism of Disflix's subscription-service model was what it would mean for other fan-run accounts that provide content for free and make their money through ads or sponsorship deals. Should Disflix enter any legal battle with Disney, how might that affect vloggers who film in the parks?

[4.2] Such a question points to one of the fundamental reasons why Disflix failed: it was perceived that the creators were trying to commodify the discursive power associated with their subcultural status for personal gain. In other words, rather than selling merchandise or an official Disney product or service, they were selling the very idea of big name fandom, as well as access to the community influence that goes along with being a BNF. Disney fan and popular YouTube vlogger Adam Hattan (2017) writes on Twitter, "I disagree with the #Disflix concept. My content is fun for me to make. I am and always will be happy to share it with you for free." Many Disney fans turn to YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media platforms to share their love of the Disney parks and to forge bonds with fellow fans. These platforms are critical to online fandom, as they function both as a means of self-expression and community building. When a fan practice comes under threat—especially as a result of the actions of people in the community—fans tend to feel exploited. As one YouTuber writes, "I'm laying into #Disflix b/c beyond being a bad idea, it's the kind of thing that can have a ripple effect to other creators" (Plays 2017a). Similarly, in a post on the DISboards forum, user Lesverts (2017) writes, "It could have and honestly still can have a very chilling impact on the Disney online community…Honestly this could be the thing that sparks Disney to take a more proactive stance against stuff like this…I worry this could be the thing, even as a failure, that could change Disney's mind and make the company enforce their rules without allowing for the grey area."

[4.3] In their work on internet fandom, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson write that fan communities operate according to a "fannish code of conduct." Each community follows a
set of "unspoken rules, handed down to new fans and often learned via fannish osmosis or by seeing a clear closing of ranks when these rules are violated" (2012, 42). When those rules are broken, fans justifiably feel like they are being hustled. Such risks have been present in fan communities long before Disflix. For example, in May 2007, the website FanLib was launched as a space for fans to upload their fan fiction. FanLib was created by industry insiders Jon Landau, Jon Moonves, and Anil Singh for $3 million, and their aim was to "commodify fan fiction" by promising users prizes, the prospect of e-publication, and attention from Hollywood producers in exchange for their creative labor (Hellekson 2009, 117). FanLib was shut down in August 2008 after fans criticized the owners for "attempting to control the community component without the community members' cooperation," which for Hellekson shows how fans are central in shaping the discourse, aims, and patterns of behavior in their own community (2009, 118).

[4.4] Unlike FanLib, where slick corporate outsiders attempted to extract revenue from a core fan practice, Disflix originated from within a fan community. Disflix was a business designed by Disney fans to exploit the codes of Disney fandom—the ultimate fan betrayal. As the earlier cited comments make clear, a common fear from some Disney fans on Twitter was the potential repercussions the Disflix business model would have in the community—specifically, that it would push Disney to crack down on content sharing. In today's social media landscape, content sharing is an essential part of Disney fandom and fan communities more broadly. Should Disney tighten their terms and conditions, the changes could fundamentally affect what it means to be a Disney fan.

[4.5] The lifestylers have been able to successfully dictate aesthetic trends within the community, yet they face very real pushback in their attempts to turn the social media practices associated with theme park fandom into a commodity. Ironically, Disney has and continues to do just that, as exemplified by the wall photos. Yet when Disney does this, the fans seem to perceive it positively—regardless of the fact that they receive no financial compensation for their ideas—presumably because in the process, their fandom gets validated, or at least publicly acknowledged, by Disney. The Disflix debacle demonstrates the precarious nature of subcultural celebrity status, although it does not appear that this phenomenon caused any long-term damage to the reputations of the lifestylers involved, including Corinn Anderson, who continues to run her popular Disney Lifestylers Instagram account. However, in their quest for followers and greater influence in their community, these social media influencers exploit the implicitly understood codes of Disney fandom, thereby becoming "bad" fans (temporarily, at least). The Disflix debacle has cast a negative shadow over the lifestyler influence, and it calls into question the staying power and future that this small group of fans will have in the Disney community.

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Praxis

Hierarchy within female ACG fandom in China

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[0.1] Abstract—This case study focuses on a Chinese female-oriented ACG fan community, 3n5b, with an eye to studying how this community creates a sense of exclusivity and hierarchy through the discourses of copyright infringement, fan labor, and quality membership. Through controlling the distribution of rare resources, 3n5b creates high demand for their manga scanlation, and this demand is translated to a highly restricted membership. Membership is valuable because it is closely related to individual member's social and cultural capital, as well as their access to forum resources. Well-behaved members can slowly gain entry into more restricted forums, while members who violate forum rules are punished with loss of forum status or even membership revocation. This hierarchy seeks to raise the forum's overall quality and to wall off unwanted members, but it also replicates offline power relations that inevitably place people of lower social status at a disadvantage.

[0.2] Keywords—Copyright; Cultural capital; Fan community; Scanlation


1. Introduction

[1.1] On April 14, 2018, China's largest social media platform, Sina Weibo, announced that it would be deleting posts containing "manga and videos with pornographic implications, promoting violence or (related to) homosexuality" (Kwong 2018). This and other alarming news, such as the film Call Me by Your Name (2017) being pulled from the 2018 Beijing Film Festival (Keslassy 2018), are widely believed to signal a tougher stance from the government toward homosexual groups and related content. Weibo's announcement received massive backlash not only from the homosexual community but also from the female fan community that avidly consumes homosexual stories, called danmei (Yang and Xu 2016a), and eventually Weibo reversed their decision. This series of events demonstrated that female danmei fandom in China is becoming an increasingly formidable force online; yet the fandom is also under constant threats from governmental persecution. Many LGBT-related fandoms therefore choose to maintain a semi-underground status in order to avoid governmental crackdowns. However, this is not always an easy task in the age of social media and rapid information flow. Instead of resisting censorship, oftentimes communities choose to adopt a series of compromises and control measures to ensure their survival. This article focuses on the efforts of one such community.
[1.2] *Danmei* is a genre of literature and art that depicts male-male romantic and sexual relationships. It is primarily produced for and by women. While there are a large number of *danmei* stories produced by Chinese writers, *danmei* culture originated in Japan, where the genre is commonly referred to as boys' love or BL (Levi 2008). As scholars have noted, Chinese *danmei* culture mainly focuses on novels, while Japanese BL culture thrives through manga (Yang and Xu, 2016b). As this article focuses on the fan community of Japanese BL manga translation, as such, the genre is referred to as BL instead of *danmei* for clarity.

[1.3] Many scholars see the BL community as a queer space that has the potential to subvert existing expectations about gender or sexuality (Stanley 2008; Wood 2006) and the capitalist system itself (Donovan 2008). In the case of China, the BL fan community can also provide a public sphere for female participants to discuss social issues such as governmental policies and writers' ethics (Yang and Xu 2016a). However, due to the sensitive nature of their subject matter and its sexual content, BL and *danmei* communities in China can be quite secretive and restricting: registration is often difficult and requires prior approval, and certain materials are only accessible to high-level members who have spent a lot of time and effort obtaining their status in the forum. This article is a case study that explores the limiting side of a BL fan community 3n5b in China and how the community creates a hierarchical system of membership. It is important to note that many of 3n5b's practices are widespread in China's BL and *danmei* communities and that these practices have mostly been introduced to ensure self-preservation (Yang and Xu 2016c). However, the consequences of the practices remain unexplored, and this article aims to fill this gap in the literature.

[1.4] The specific fan community being studied in this article is one of the oldest and largest Japanese BL fan communities in China: 3n5b. As of December 2014, the community had over 295,000 registered members, and it was celebrating its ninth anniversary. 3n5b's website focuses on the translation, distribution, and discussion of female-oriented manga/comics, fiction, drama CDs, and anime, and it is also the largest scanlation group of Japanese BL manga in China. Scanlation groups buy manga magazines from Japan, scan them into digital formats, translate the dialogue into local dialects, photoshop the dialogue onto the digitalized manga, and then distribute the translated manga through various online channels. It is an extremely time- and resource-consuming task, and this partially explains why 3n5b is protective of their manga scanlations. Due to its niche focus and the selectivity of its membership, 3n5b's member base almost exclusively consists of young female fans of Japanese anime, comics, and game (ACG) culture. The large size of this community and its well-established rules make it a prime example of how hierarchies are realized and maintained online.

[1.5] The central question being addressed in this article is: How does 3n5b maintain control over its members? In order to answer this question, we need to understand the relationship between 3n5b and its members as well as how 3n5b creates its system of hierarchy. By exploring the inner workings of this hierarchical system, I also hope to explain why such practices have taken shape and thrived in this community. Although I have had personal knowledge of 3n5b's production processes since 2009 as an avid BL manga reader, the following analysis will be based solely on my observations of 3n5b's official forum (www.3n5b.com) and their public social media page ([https://weibo.com/3n5b?profile_ftype=1&is_all=1#_0](https://weibo.com/3n5b?profile_ftype=1&is_all=1#_0)) from January to March 2014 ([note 1](#)). During this period, I reregistered as a new member and went through all of
the "new members' missions," or a detailed check-in process, in order to understand the process of obtaining a new membership. Furthermore, I only analyzed posts that were available to new members. In the following sections, I lay out the contextual background of copyright and fandom as well as the theoretical foundations for this project, including Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) theory of distinction and the concept of gamification. I believe these theories will provide a good foundation for understanding how 3n5b is able to create a hierarchical community while still keeping its members engaged and supportive of the system.

2. Copyright and fan activism in China

[2.1] To understand why issues of copyright and piracy are related to the idea of fandom hierarchy, we must first understand how copyright is viewed in the context of Chinese online communities: the relationship of piracy to copyright is not as straightforward as one might think. The issue of piracy is one of the most actively debated topics within fandom studies, particularly within Japanese manga/anime fandom, mainly due to Japan's rigorous copyright laws. However, since most of the current discussions center on US ACG fandoms, the difference between the US and Chinese markets is discussed.

[2.2] While fansub groups that translate and distribute Japanese anime in the US emerged as early as the 1980s (Leonard 2005), their activities were largely ignored by the industry, both in Japan and in the US. The relationship between the industry and the fans began to change after the proliferation of the internet and new technologies, which allowed fans to easily produce and distribute subtitled anime episodes months or even years before their official release in the US (Denison 2011a, 2011b; Hatcher 2005; Koulikov 2010; Lee 2011; Leonard 2005). The central arguments from both sides are mainly economic, with the industry claiming a decline in DVD sales (Koulikov 2010) and the fans defending their actions as a form of free advertisement for the work (Leonard 2005; Jenkins 2006). The same argument can be applied to manga scanlations (Lee 2009, 2012; Anderson-Terpstra 2012). But since US fans are quite respectful of domestic copyright laws, most fansub groups maintain that they will stop translating the anime once it is officially licensed in their region (Ito 2012; Koulikov 2010; Leonard 2005).

[2.3] However, when we shift our focus to China, the landscape becomes very different. It is well-known that China is one of the largest offenders of copyright laws worldwide. Almost all of the content enjoyed by Chinese netizens infringes on copyrights, resulting in over $107 billion in economic loss to the US alone (International Intellectual Property Association 2011). Some scholars have attributed the overflow of pirated materials to the inaction of the bureaucratic Chinese government (Mertha 2005). Others even suspect that the government encourages piracy due to its economic benefits (Li 2013). More importantly, piracy is praised by scholars as a form of resistance, both against government censorship (Li 2013; Meng 2013) and against the hegemony of the global market (Wang 2003). The practice of piracy has already become an integral part of China's grassroots popular culture; not only is it taken for granted but it is also usually appreciated. Therefore criticism toward fansubbers and scanlators in China is minimal, if it exists at all. However, copyright infringement remains a convenient reason for the government to control and censor online content, and crackdowns on fansub and scanlation communities are common occurrences. This is why most communities adamantly maintain a low profile in order
to survive. 3n5b itself has experienced server troubles throughout its existence, presumably the result of government interference; thus, it is quite vigilant about overpublicizing.

[2.4] Unlike in the US, little Japanese manga content is available through official channels in China, mostly due to governmental control. This is especially true for most female-oriented Japanese ACG products, including BL manga, games, and drama CDs that are not available outside of Japan or in any other languages. However, demand for such products remains high due to the rapid flow of information online. Thus, fansub and scanlation groups have become the de facto distributors of Japanese ACG products in China, and their translations are often recognized as the definitive versions. For instance, some fans recently demanded that the official Taiwanese publisher of the BL manga *Kashikomarimashita, Destiny* (2016–17) adapt the scanlation group's translated title, because they felt it was a better translation than the official Taiwanese version. Therefore, many fansub and scanlator groups occupy a semiofficial space between the Japanese ACG industry and fans, and they hold an oligopoly over the kinds of resources available to Chinese audiences.

[2.5] The prestigious status of fansubbers/scanlators in China is mainly due to the voluntary nature of their labor. Their selfless actions ensure that their status within the fan community is above that of the average audience member (Ito 2012). Scanlation groups also tend to reinforce this impression. On the front page of 3n5b's manga scanlation, there is a warning that reads, "This manga is produced and distributed by 3n5b's forum. It is only meant to be used for discussions within the forum, and its appearance any other place is considered stealing! Translating female-oriented content is not easy; please respect the hard work of the 3n5b staff and boycott stealing" (figure 1). There are several important points made here. First, "stealing manga" (or redistributing it without permission) is viewed as undermining the hard work of the "staff" (note 2). Ironically, this warning makes no mention of the original authors, instead positioning 3n5b as the actual producer of the work. By claiming producers' rights over the product, 3n5b is able to assert moral legitimacy over the distribution process. Even though the group does not have legal rights, they are, in fact, the copyright holders in the eyes of the community. Due to the semiofficial status of this scanlation group in China, there is a clear power disparity between the fan producers and the fan audience. Therefore, the audience is more likely to adopt the values and rules that the scanlation group places on the community without hesitation, either because they do not want to anger the scanlation group or because they truly respect the group. This is the reason why "leechers" (fans who do not actively contribute to the community) often feel an ethical obligation to the community and usually do not question the actions of the contributors (Ito 2012).
[2.6] As demonstrated in this section, copyright disputes in China are not only understood in terms of the relationship between publishers and fans but also in terms of the relationships between fan producers and inactive fans. Because there is no official import or copyright to protect, the fans see fan producers and distributors of the copyrighted material as the rightful owners of the translated versions and will often vehemently defend their rights to outsiders. In addition to their intangible status within fandoms, fan producers also receive actual benefits within a scanlation community, such as access to restricted materials. This paper now considers how these benefits are controlled and assigned as a way to demonstrate how hierarchy is created within a fandom.

3. Gamification, hierarchy, and control within fandoms

[3.1] In order to study hierarchy, we need to understand where hierarchy comes from. According to Bourdieu (1986), there are three main types of capital that determine one's standing in society:
economic capital, or money; social capital, or connections; and cultural capital, which can be determined by a person's level of education and their understanding of cultural artifacts. Accumulation of one type of capital can often lead to an increase in the other types of capital. Bourdieu (1984) argues that a society's taste is determined by people who hold the most cultural capital, and those with less cultural capital will adopt this taste as the standard. The same process can happen in a fan community, where the values and tastes of higher-level members can be instilled into lower-level members. However, John Fiske (1992) criticizes Bourdieu for focusing on only class distinctions in his discussion of cultural capital and for ignoring the roles that race, gender, and age play in determining social status. He also believes Bourdieu's ideas lack complexity when describing the culture of the subordinate class. Therefore, Fiske coined the term "popular cultural capital" to account for the capital people gain when engaging with popular culture, particularly fandoms. He saw popular cultural capital as empowering and as allowing those without access to the more prestigious types of cultural capital to gain status within a fan community. Although Fiske believes popular cultural capital rarely transforms into other types of capital, later studies have shown that this is not the case.

[3.2] Later fandom scholars also started to study hierarchy within fandoms more closely. For example, MacDonald (1998) theorized that there are five types of hierarchies present within fandoms: the hierarchy of knowledge; fandom level/quality, which is defined as a fan's amount of participation; access to industry insiders; leaders; and venue, or those who can control where fans meet. All fans at the top of these different types of hierarchy are called "executive" fans. Hills (2002) later proposed to add fans' social capital to the list of hierarchies. McCudden (2011) proposed a similar model, in which official authority, investment, social capital, and cultural capital all determine hierarchy within a fandom. Although the hierarchies are theorized on the individual level, 3n5b is a community that can be viewed as an executive fan organization—it is a high-level community due to its producer status, it offers a venue where others fans interact and gather knowledge, and it acts as a community leader that defines the rules within China's BL fan community.

[3.3] While fandom hierarchy is often viewed critically, hierarchical systems can also be an important motivator for members. The process of gamification provides a good explanation for why members continue to engage in a hierarchical community. Gamification suggests that game mechanics can be used in various application designs to enhance users' experiences (Deterding et. al 2011; Zicherman and Cunningham 2011). Game mechanics can include everything from leveling, ranking, and gaining rewards to information seeking and social engagement (Hulsey 2016). These gamelike mechanics significantly increase the enjoyment of participating in activities that would otherwise be considered mundane, such as exercise (Hulsey 2015) or even managing welfare systems (Bista et. al 2012). Therefore, the use of leveling and point systems in designing forums such 3n5b can be very rewarding for its members: it motivates them to keep coming back to the forum and to keep participating in its activities.

[3.4] While gamified systems use gaming elements to keep their users engaged, they are essentially different from actual games in several respects. First, a game usually has a clearly defined endpoint, whereas the goal of gamified applications is to keep users engaged for as long as possible with no clear end goal (Hulsey 2016). In addition, a central component of any game is rules, but rules in a game can be considered both as a restraint and as a way for players to gain
agency (Tulloch 2014). As Foucault (1990) theorized, power simultaneously controls the subject and needs the subject to manifest itself. Without the players, the games and the rules have no meaning; the players are the ones that create meaning through gameplay. Gameplay is a process of negotiation between the players and the rules, and rules are the basis for players' activities and a source of pleasure. When the rules become too restricting, players can choose to leave or to bend the rules by cheating or "modding" the game (Hulsey 2015; Raessens 2014). But this type of behavior is not viable in gamified applications because their end goal is not to create pleasure but to keep users engaged in productive activities; thus, activities that circumvent rules are highly regulated (Hulsey 2015). Fundamentally, gameplay is a freeing activity, but gamification is not. Gamified systems attempt to control their users by keeping them from reaching an endpoint or changing the rules because the rules are the main form of control within a gamified environment.

[3.5] A gamified environment is quite in keeping with Foucault's idea of governmentality and surveillance (Schrape 2014; Ruffino 2014). In such environments, each user is constantly monitored and controlled by a carefully designed system of engagement. The omnipresence of gamification is evident in the idea of big data. For example, fitness wearables collect users' biodata and compare it with previous data and/or with other users' data in order to motivate users to work harder. Additionally, this data is simultaneously sent to data centers in order to better understand the users' consumption behaviors and health conditions not only to improve the design of future applications but also to market products to consumers more effectively (Schrape). In other words, mechanisms used to motivate engagement are also used to control behavior.

[3.6] As we will see, 3n5b uses various gamified mechanisms to maintain its membership, and these mechanisms in turn create a hierarchical structure that directly relates to a member's level of fandom capital. Through controlling the distribution of their manga, 3n5b effectively disciplines its members and their behaviors. While most gamified systems present their rules more stealthily, 3n5b relies heavily on members' internalizing its rules from the onset and on their strictly policing these rules. Various types of fandom capital can be used as gamified mechanisms to control member activities. While many gamified systems fail to control their users because they cannot continue the process of seduction, or the effort to keep users in the system is too demanding (Hulsey 2015), I believe 3n5b's success lies mainly in the types of content it provides, and the next section briefly outlines the way they maintain new members through that content.

4. Gamifying a community

[4.1] Simply understanding 3n5b's role as a producer and the way it asserts control over its products is not enough to make sense of how it exerts control over its members. In order to get a clearer sense of how power and control influence the individual members, I critically examine discourses used in the posts that all new members are required to read as a part of the new member's mission to show that 3n5b's system of control permeates every aspect of the community.
3n5b's registration is a two-step process; the website manually verifies each email with IP filters to make sure that an applicant is not a sockpuppet, a person with multiple avatars. After email authentication, the website asks a few more questions that are submitted to the website administrators for final approval. These questions include "Where did you learn about the website?", "What are your interests and favorite works within ACG fandom?", "What are your reasons for registering?". All answers must be thirty characters or more. Numerous people have been rejected because they failed to provide a proper description of their motivations. This problem is so pervasive that there are a number of guides available to help people write acceptable reasons for registration specifically for such websites (e.g., http://blog.163.com/vj130ling@126/blog/static/11858302720133205042102/). According to the website's own FAQ (https://www.3n5b.com/t/topic/102832), the applicant's reason for registration has to be expressed in a sincere tone. This means that responses should use formal language and avoid meaningless words such as abbreviations, nicknames for a character, or emoticons. The FAQ likens these registration questions to a job interview, which underscores the formalized nature of the process (note 3). These questions are the beginning of a training sequence that turns uninitiated users into proper members not only of the specific community but of society at large, since it assumes everyone understands the right way to conduct a job interview. Paradoxically, informal language use is extremely common among young adults, who are the primary audience of the website. For people who are already fans of ACG culture, using nicknames to refer to one's favorite character is a common behavior. The rule prohibiting it suggests that the first step to becoming a member is to perform the role of a nonfan or, more precisely, a nonfanatical fan. Potential members must be able to follow instructions and respect the rules set out by the forum from the very beginning. Moreover, the registration also requires applicants to formally check a box and agree to never steal or reupload any unauthorized products acquired from the website, reinforcing the importance of the forum's own copyright laws. It takes three to five days for the registration to be approved (or rejected) by the site administrator. This registration process is a clear example of how the system is gamified: users who wish to register can use a walkthrough, much like they would in playing a game, to help them answer the questions in a way that follows the rules. Furthermore, there is the possibility of being rejected, which adds to the sense of accomplishment if registration is successful. The hard work required to gain access to the forum adds to its prestige, which is one reason why members find it so difficult to abandon it.

After registration, new members begin an internal check-in process, or the new member's mission, by completing their first post. The check-in is mandatory for all newcomers since the check-in forum is the only place they are allowed to access until they have completed it appropriately. All the posts in this forum are restricted to one format with eight questions. Any poster who does not follow the format is penalized twenty forum currency (they start with zero), while those who post correctly will be rewarded ten forum currency. Here new users are asked basic questions such as whether or not they will follow forum rules. The first three questions function as an initiation declaration, where users must formally swear to be respectful and obedient. Next is a set of four questions that ask about four of the most popular subforums' rules regulating spamming or flooding. While the rules are similar, the details in each subforum vary slightly, so new members must go to each section and read the rules carefully before answering the questions in their own words. In this way, the website can ensure that every new member has at least read the forum rules and reiterated them once. This not only results in an internalization
of the rules through memorization but also emphasizes how important these rules are to the community. This type of activity is very typical of gameplay, where a player needs to gather information in order to complete a quest. The final question in the check-in process asks for users' opinions about "re-uploading forum resources without permission" or "stealing." If the importance of this issue is not clear during registration, it is made abundantly clear in the check-in process. Again, answers cannot be copied or pasted and must be thirty characters or more.

[4.4] The phrase "new members' mission" is itself borrowed from games. In games, such missions are designed to teach new players the rules and basic operations of the game. The most important aspects of how to play the game are taught at this stage. The fact that copyright is once again emphasized here shows that it is one of the most essential rules for this forum. New members who do not follow this basic rule cannot be allowed to proceed to the rest of the forum. But unlike in a game, where the new member's mission is more like a guide, the forum's new members' mission is a public statement: breaking the rules means public shaming. Whether or not the statement is sincere is not in question. Rather, by making such a public claim, the new user's identity with regards to the community has already changed. Now the user is either an ethical new member who respects the community or a liar who provided a false answer for personal gain. Either way, membership is defined in conjunction with 3n5b's translation products whether the user likes it or not.

[4.5] Both the registration and the check-in can also be considered an entrance exam, a test of knowledge regarding ACG fandom and proper conduct. There is even a system of pass/fail. As Foucault (1995) notes, the examination is a combination of an "observing hierarchy," or the implementation of a surveillance system, and a normalizing judgment, carried out with the goal of correcting behaviors. The technique of the examination is "the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected" (184). Indoctrinating individuals as a part of the group thus subjects them to the group's norms and values, but the individuals—guided by their own interests—are also acting out of their own free will to become members.

[4.6] The mission functions through the use of open-ended questions, though it is clear to most that there is a correct answer. Ostensibly, the questions themselves do not force the group's value judgments onto individual members and are only asking about individuals' personal opinions. The instructions even specifically forbid copying and pasting and ask members to use their own words in a manner that is suggestive of what Foucault calls "the power of writing" (1995, 189). Each individual has the option of providing a deviant answer, at which time the group casts judgment and denies him or her access. If the individual chooses to answer in accordance with the group's values, then he or she voluntarily becomes an object of the group. The group is then free to document, categorize, and monitor each individual under its own system of social rewards and discipline. The next section focuses on the system of rewards and discipline that 3n5b utilizes to regulate quality and access, their two main concerns. By maintaining a high standard for quality and access, 3n5b remains at the top of both of these hierarchies within the fan community.

5. Access and capital
[5.1] As Hulsey (2015) points out, the key to gamification is seduction, or the notion of unfulfillable desires. But for 3n5b, the desires of its members are not unfulfillable. Instead, members are constantly being seduced by newly-created desires, namely by the large amount of BL manga content produced by Japan and translated by 3n5b. 3n5b carefully controls its distribution channels because if these resources were readily available everywhere, the group would lose its exclusive status and members would not be likely to join or to stay in the group for a prolonged period of time.

[5.2] 3n5b primarily controls its resources through restricted access; only higher-level members have access to restricted resources, and such resources must be purchased using forum currency. Moreover, the list of purchases is only available to forum administrators. In addition, 3n5b also controls the websites that the resources can be (re)uploaded to. As stated on their forum, 3n5b resources can only be reuploaded onto approved websites, the reupload links must be temporary, and the reuploaders must hide the downloadable links from the public by selling the links using virtual currencies available on the approved websites. These rules for requesting permission to reupload resources demonstrate that the focus of 3n5b's control hinges on three things: maintaining the 3n5b brand, protecting the exclusivity of their products, and clearly listing redistribution channels that can be traced back to specific members. All rules are put into place not to promote an open platform for file sharing but to increase the sense of scarcity that adds to 3n5b's prestige. Even though people can access the resources from other sites, they are by no means public. Membership to an established website (recognized by 3n5b) is a prerequisite for acquiring any of 3n5b's resources, and even then, outside members are not granted permanent access. The hierarchy between 3n5b and other websites is made abundantly clear, which in turn increases the attractiveness of a 3n5b membership and drives more traffic toward the website.

[5.3] Since resources are the group's most important asset, members' efforts to gain access to resources go hand in hand with the group's efforts to limit this access. Access to resources in the forum is dependent on two systems: first a point system that is equal to the level of access a member has and second a currency system that can be used to purchase resources once a user has been granted access to them. In the forum, points are associated with social and cultural capital, and currency with economic capital (Bourdieu 1984). While both types of capital can be accumulated through writing posts and replies, only the amount of currency will decrease as a result of consumption. Although there are other kinds of honorary points systems attached to badges and levels (such as ones for long-term membership or services), used as a display of status within the forum, these points have no actual impact on a user's access to forum resources (figure 2). More importantly the points and the currency are the only two things available for purchase using real world currencies, and the price ranges from $10 to $100 (https://www.3n5b.com/t/topic/57150). 3n5b collected around $20,000 in 2013, which shows that there is a large group of people willing to pay for the resources. Paying members will receive a special VIP badge indicating their status to other members, but some of the paid levels are not permanent, and members either have to continue paying to keep their status or spend more money up front. Moreover, since forum currencies decrease with purchases, some paid members still need to find other ways to earn the currencies to keep up with their purchases. For the people who are not willing to pay, posting is the primary way to gain points and currency. Therefore, posting in the forums is more or less equated with the production of actual currency: one can save money by writing posts or spend money and save the effort. Once again, this type
of leveling system is similar to that of a game, where a player's ranking slowly increases after defeating various enemies and real-world currency can be used to purchase powerful items that quickly increase a players' power and status. On its own, this system can be an effective motivator for continued engagement, but when levels are attached to access, members have an even greater incentive to continue participating.

Figure 2. Levels and badge system of 3n5b in 2014.
Within 3n5b, posting behavior is a demonstration of one's cultural capital because of its emphasis on quality. Discussions of quality in fan studies often refer to the quality of the object of fandom; for instance, fans of the Twilight (2005–8) series are looked down upon due to the series' perceived poor literary quality (Pinkowitz 2011). It is assumed that fans of poorer works will automatically be low-quality fans, especially in terms of taste and cultural capital; some examples of these assumptions include fans of the Twilight (2005–8) and the Fifty Shades (2011–17) series (Harman and Jones 2013; Pinkowitz). But in 3n5b's case, the belief is reversed—the quality of the community dictates the quality of the fandom. As a female-oriented community within the male-dominated field of ACG, 3n5b stands out as one of the more disciplined communities, ironically a stereotypically male-oriented quality. But this demand for quality is possibly one of the ways 3n5b protects itself from unwanted attention and criticism. Such a demand is made clear from the moment of registration: one of the statements in the user agreement reads, "Our forum has strict requirements for replies, and is not suitable for those who are accustomed to leeching or those who come from Baidu to register" (3n5b 2013). Baidu is the largest search engine company in China, and it hosts a forum service called "tieba," similar to Reddit. Any user can create a tieba forum and post with few to no restrictions. Tieba's ease of use also makes it a place of rampant manga stealing. This statement clearly establishes a hierarchy between 3n5b and "those who come from Baidu" because of Baidu's low requirements for participation. 3n5b positions itself as the elite of the fan community from the moment a new user enters. Moreover, when new users are accepted as part of the group, they also become elite, implying that they are essentially distinct from the rest of the fandom through their possession of the cultural capital that enabled them to write the appropriate formal responses to the registration questions.

Once new users are in the group, they must prove that they are in fact worthy of their elite status, and the primary way to demonstrate this is by writing quality posts. The superficial definition of a quality post provided by 3n5b states that it must be "30 words or more" and that it must be a "meaningful response" to the topic under discussion. More specific rules list a number of offenses, including posting statements not directly related to the particular manga, direct quotations from other people's replies, purely appreciative statements, vague complaints, a long list of emoticons, or copying things previously written in other posts. As with the registration and check-in, all posts are manually monitored, and violators of forum rules are punished through point and/or currency deductions; on the other hand, excellent posts are rewarded with currency or points. Casual comments like, "This looks great," or, "He is so cute," are not considered high quality; users must write detailed descriptions or analyses to back up their statements. Because of these rules, rewarded posts are usually long and thoughtful responses that show strong emotional or intellectual engagement.

However, while this system of rewards is seemingly gamelike and suggests that the person who displays the most ability should be the most rewarded, the actual outcome is much more arbitrary. Unlike in a game, where rewards are determined by rules and computer algorithms, in the forum, rewards are solely based on the decisions of the administrators, who have their own biases and preferences. In addition, they must read hundreds of posts every day, which is undoubtedly a daunting task. This is why the rewards given for posts are not always consistent. Sometimes lengthy though superficial replies are rewarded, but short and thoughtful posts or ironic posts are ignored or even punished. Users might be able to gain many more points by
writing a large number of superficial posts than by writing shorter, more thoughtful posts. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to say that the most valued quality on the forum is active participation, not thoughtful participation.

[5.7] Another way to earn currency on the forum is to upload private resources that can be sold. Such individual posts can accommodate the more specialized interests of certain fans. These can include scans of Japanese magazines, copies of event/concert DVDs, or rips of drama CDs. All of these resources are predicated upon the poster's buying the products offline in order to share them online. In this way, real world economic capital is directly translated into online economic and cultural capital. Since the main reason most people join the community is to gain access to resources that they cannot otherwise afford, the distinction between those who have means and those who do not is publicly displayed through the relationship between posters and repliers.

[5.8] Additionally, members can join 3n5b's workgroup to help with translation, scanning, and photoshopping. These tasks require far more cultural capital than writing posts and are beyond the reach of most members, who lack the linguistic or technical competency to join the workgroup. Once again, real-world distinctions between those who have the economic or social capital to acquire cultural capital like Japanese language skills and those who do not are replicated online. Several types of fandom hierarchy are at play here: a user's level (or quality) of cultural capital and social capital (if they are a member of the workgroup) is directly translated into access to knowledge and resources. But the difficulty that most members have in contributing to the forum in this manner in essence negates the very reason that they chose to join the community in the first place: to gain access to resources they could not afford or understand.

[5.9] The difference in access for higher-level members and lower-level members is similar to the difference in the relationship between contributors and leechers that I alluded to previously. The leechers understand that they lack the necessary capital to become contributors, and thus recognize the contributors' legitimacy and control, granting them symbolic capital. As Bourdieu (1989) states, "symbolic capital is a credit, it is the power granted to those who have sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition" (23). The untouchable status of the contributors makes it possible for them to impose rules over and to discipline the leechers, partly because the leechers grant them higher status. The power dynamic is already implied in the names "contributor" and "leecher" (Ito 2012). The former carries a positive connotation of giving something to the community, whereas the latter connotes a parasite that only thrives off of the hard work of the contributors. In China, leechers are given an even more degrading name: baipiao, which literally translates to "whoring without pay." This term clearly shows the disdain that some contributors have for leechers, but it also implies that the act of production is a type of prostitution, which contradicts the spirit of volunteerism that many scanlation groups put forth (note 4). This term originated in Japanese male idol fan communities in 2013 and has since been widely used in various female-oriented fandoms, which shows the hatred that some female fans have internalized toward their own gender. This subtle self-hatred that some female fan producers have for their work could also explain the emphasis on rules and disciplines across the community. Since they feel their community does not automatically deserve respect from the outside, they work extra hard to make sure they can earn respect through their actions.
Although most leechers abide by the forum's rules and work hard to earn access, there are always those who are irreverent to the tight control exerted by the group. No matter how strictly 3n5b attempts to control access and distribution, once the resources leave their server, they have no actual control over who will read them. This is why 3n5b implemented a disciplinary system that almost certainly guarantees their dominant status as distributors.

6. Community discipline

[6.1] As Foucault (1990) famously stated, "Where there is power, there is resistance," but at the same time, "[power's] existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations" (95). The place where 3n5b can exert the most power is at the site of resistance, that is, the unauthorized redistribution of their resources or the threat to their hierarchy of access. In a gamified environment, this is also the point where the system begins to break down and the players attempt to bend the rules in their favor. Since gamified systems need to avoid rule breaking to continue operating, punishment for rule breakers is quite severe. As noted above, 3n5b requires all manga resources to be purchased using forum currency so that a complete list of purchasers is available to the administrators. The use of virtual currency to purchase rare items is typical of game designs, and players are often motivated to earn currency because of this design element. But in this context, the use of currency has become a surveillance tool that is used to track the history of each forum member. This is why 3n5b is able to react swiftly and harshly when an instance of manga stealing occurs.

[6.2] On August 10, 2013, 3n5b released a statement that called the act of "stealing resources" "rampant" and pointed to "many problems within [their] members" (3n5b 2013). In the statement, 3n5b expresses a concern over the quality of its members, with "quality" here meaning how well members abide by the rules, which is the fundamental problem that threatens the group's control over its members and resources. The proposition that 3n5b makes in terms of maintaining membership quality is as follows: "We are forced to take collective action against problematic members in our manga resource forums...Your first entry into a problematic area will result in the revocation of your access badge into the manga forums for 30 days, your second, 60 days, and so on" (figure 3). Collective action here means that anyone who downloaded the resources that were stolen will be disciplined under this rule, a punishment that usually affects hundreds of people. Because the forum cannot identify specific offenders, everyone is treated as an offender. This shows that surveillance can only occur within the forum, and actions outside the forum are harder to track. The statement goes on to say that "this collective action is only a warning; please refrain from your habit of being a 'saint' and readily redistributing the resources to everyone. The benefits may be enjoyed by everyone, but the consequences of the collective action are only yours to bear" (figure 3). Once again, the issue of quality membership is brought up as 3n5b sarcastically calls those that redistribute their resources "saints," a term that carries a negative connotation of hypocrisy in Chinese online culture. Ironically, receiving punishment does not necessarily mean that a member has actually violated any rules. As analyzed above, quality for 3n5b primarily means being a rule-abiding member: when you abide by the rules of the forums and participate in the discussions, you will eventually receive enough points/currency to access valuable resources. This is why those punished in the collective action are more likely to be rule-abiding or high-level/quality members. If they were not, they would not have been given access to the stolen resources in the
first place. However, due to 3n5b's cleverly constructed discourse regarding manga stealing, most punished members are likely to blame the few that stole rather than the forum itself.

[6.3] This statement is in line with the modern conception of the penalty, or "the concern with a punishment that is a correction, a therapy, a normalization, the division of the act of judgment" (Foucault 1995, 227). In other words, these disciplinary actions are not designed to seek retribution against the violators who actually stole the resources but rather to instill the norms of the group into all members and prevent future deviancies. The actions seek to restore the overall rule abidingness of the community, not that of individual members. This is the primary way gamified systems deviate from actual games, where players are often encouraged to break rules: in gamification, users are severely punished for rule breaking.

[6.4] With collective actions, many innocent individuals who received wrongful punishment are allowed to argue their cases and have their access reinstated, which means they are guilty until proven innocent. To allow members to argue their cases, 3n5b sends a private message through the forum asking individuals to appeal. At that time, the individual can answer a list of questions for 3n5b's consideration. The instructions are framed as a voluntary confession of innocence: "It is not mandatory to answer all the questions; it is up to your sincerity to determine how much to answer and how truthful your answers are" (figure 3). The list of questions includes what a user's ID is on other manga websites, whether or not the user has shared the manga with other people, a list of the user's various social media accounts, the user's favorite manga genres, and a personal statement that discusses why the user wouldn't steal manga and that lists possible witnesses.
13.8.10更新：8月9号前购买了樱贺 无情的身体第2话
三四年级版本的会员将被分组连坐。

3.8.8截至本帖100楼，所有会员的漫画通行证均已全部返还。

各位会员，耽误大家一点时间，请大家耐心地将本帖看完。

由于在线漫画网站和伊莉等地盗版非常之明显，并且很多漫画都专盗五班的，这说明我们会员内部存在严重的问题。这件事我们只能对单独漫画和漫画连载也实行连坐制度，因为现在很多地方都是群体作案，加大了我们风纪组侦查的难度，所以我们只能对进入问题范围内的会员进行连坐处罚，首次进入问题范围的将被收回漫画区通行证30天，第二次进入问题范围的将被收回漫画区通行证60天，以此类推。

根据风纪组的调查，很多地方盗版都不是直接购买了论坛资源，而是从某些渠道或博客里得到，所以有喜欢在私底下或是群内分享的会员们，请你特别注意了，如果你在私底下或是群内分享的漫画一旦被发现到外面，你们也将被连坐处罚，并且很难获得申诉机会！连坐就是警示，请大家珍惜喜欢漫画的习惯，不要把资源轻易转给其他人，好果子大家吃，但是连坐这种恶果，却是要你自己承担的。更何况，你并无百分百把握你的基友们都是和你有一样的人品不是吗？被如此大批量盗版的后果是什么大家都应该明白，你付出了心意和金钱支援五班，五班才有今天，你可忍心把你的心血慢慢推向毁灭？请停止你的私下分享行为吧，那只会给论坛带来更多的烦恼！你自己被连坐几个月也不会觉得愉快吧？何必呢？请大家珍惜你们的权限，珍惜和五班的缘分，谢谢了！
The members are asked to prove their own worth as quality members of the forum by demonstrating that their social connections, interests, and attitudes are in line with the group's agenda. Their answers are not the only thing being judged; their level of sincerity and truthfulness are also important factors. Moreover, these questions show that 3n5b is not only trying to determine the quality of the individuals but also their knowledge/cultural capital (favorite genre), access (manga purchases in the past ten days), venues (where else they go), and social capital (weibo and blog addresses, VIP status). Almost all aspects of an individual's fandom participation are questioned and investigated in order to determine the final status of that individual. Individuals that score high enough on all fronts are granted reentry into the group. But if by any chance the individual is identified as a thief, she is not on par with the overall quality of 3n5b and therefore her membership is permanently revoked. Innocent members are motivated to surrender their personal information and to be surveilled because they are initially framed as unworthy and guilty. It is only through their self-confessions that their innocence can be restored. As Hulsey (2015) argued, gamified systems do not coerce individuals to be surveilled; these systems only seduce individuals into it. This guilty-until-proven-innocent mentality did not force members to submit their personal information; rather, it only suggested that they do so. Members who feel they are innocent also feel they have nothing to hide, and therefore voluntarily submit their information as a gesture of good faith.

7. Conclusion: Sharing, but only with the right people

[7.1] I would like to share the final paragraph in 3n5b's statement against "resource stealing": "If you value righteousness above kinship and want to report people you know that are sharing manga in their personal blog or chat groups, you will be exonerated, and greatly rewarded. This helps not just those under the discipline of collective action, it is also contributing to the forum. We hope anyone with the means will lend a helping hand" (3n5b 2013; figure 3).

[7.2] China is the birthplace of the famous "human flash search engine" (Wang et. al 2010), or crowdsource vigilante justice. Thus, it is no surprise that 3n5b learned to utilize a similar technique to catch resource stealers. But what is unique about 3n5b's discourse is that it simultaneously affirms the values of a community based on sharing and condemns other similar activities (i.e., stealing manga). The primary distinction between what makes one act of sharing destructive and another constructive is based on the act of production. As Wang and Zhang (2017) argued, gamification of a fan production community has the effect of democratizing content production, which allows ordinary audience members to engage in the process of creation. However, in the case of 3n5b, the gamification of a production community only serves to increase the power difference between the producers and the audience. What caused this discrepancy? Most other scanlation communities in China and overseas have very loose rules about resource sharing, and many scanlations are even uploaded onto open platforms. Therefore, the real reason behind 3n5b's strict rules, I would suggest, is found in the way female-oriented fandom is viewed in China.

[7.3] There is no shortage of academic studies on the female fan. In fact, some of the most influential texts in fandom studies center on the female fans of romance (Radway 1984), soap
operas (Ang 1985), or slash (Jenkins 1992). But despite the efforts of scholars, female fans continue to be ridiculed and stigmatized both inside and outside of fandom (McCudden 2011). For instance, there are a number of studies focusing on fans and anti-fans of the Twilight series (2005–8) that reveal the internal hierarchy of fandom as based on gender and the texts fans are associated with, with female-oriented romance works such as Twilight at the bottom. (Busse 2013; McCudden; Pinkowitz 2011). While there are only a few academic studies on antifans in China, it is clear that the fandoms that attract the most anti-fans are those that consist primarily of female fans, such as Korean pop (Yue 2011). Therefore, I would like to suggest that 3n5b could be considered as consisting of a special type of female fan: fans who are antifans. I do not mean to suggest that this is the fan/antifan relationship proposed by Theodoropoulou's (2007) theorization about sports fans, which argues that the rivalries between sports teams necessarily create rivalries between their fans, thus making them antifans of each other. I am proposing that 3n5b has antifans within their own community in the sense that they are opposed to those within their fandom whom they perceive as less sophisticated, less rational, less analytical, and less rule abiding than themselves. It is a sentiment that is simultaneously elitist and defensive.

[7.4] Pinkowitz's (2011) study on the Anti-Twilight Movement (ATM) provides an illuminating example of my theorization. She suggests that ATM's hatred toward Twilight is not directed against the text itself; members are really against the rabid fans of Twilight. They believe that Twilight fans are "excessive, emotional, irrational, overly invested, out of control, and often young and female" (Pinkowitz 2011, ¶ 5.1), which is the stereotypical construction of the female fan. Members of ATM see themselves as everything opposed to the negative stereotypes of rabid Twilight fans, that is, rational, analytical, and in control. Even though ATM affirms patriarchal ideals that view masculine qualities as superior to feminine ones, they are nonetheless trying to construct a new, positive image of the female fan.

[7.5] By setting tight restrictions on their resources as well as on their membership, 3n5b is also trying to construct an image of itself as a group with high-caliber, well-behaved members. Instead of rabid fans, it is the people from Baidu that they reject. However, the difference is that unlike ATMs, they are a part of the same fandom as the people from Baidu; they read the same genre of manga and watch similar anime. Therefore, the privileges attached to a 3n5b membership—extra and earlier access to resources—become the key distinguishing factor between 3n5b and outsiders. By restricting access to valuable resources, they are restricting opportunities for outsiders to obtain the same level of cultural capital as themselves, thus maintaining the existing hierarchy. This is why stealing resources is considered such an inexcusable offense, because it is not only the resources that are being stolen but the privileges. If the barrier between themselves and the less sophisticated Baidu users breaks down, the group's status within the hierarchy of fandom may be downgraded. Even though they might not become crazy, emotional teenage fan girls themselves, the community as a whole will certainly become associated with that image and face ridicule from the general public. Thus it is a defensive strategy to protect the integrity of their community against both outside stigmas and inside threats. The members of 3n5b are taught that they are better than other fans because they belong to a better-quality community that handpicks the most elite people from the community and gives only its members privileged resources. Anyone that undermines the superiority of this community is also undermining the quality of its members. Therefore, the more important hierarchy being addressed in this article is actually between 3n5b and other similar communities.
As the Chinese government tightens its censorship of LGBT content, there seems to be increasing support for 3n5b's practice of restricting access. More and more BL scanlation communities are setting up forums that resemble 3n5b's system and are adopting its rules, because they believe doing so will protect them from too much outside attention, especially from the government. Ironically, in the effort to evade control and surveillance, the communities themselves inevitably become the mechanisms of control and surveillance.

8. Notes

1. 3n5b's forum underwent a major upgrade at the end of 2017 due to a security breach resulting in member IDs being sold online. While this breach demonstrates the value of 3n5b membership, as a result, many posts discussed here are no longer available. Some web addresses listed here have been updated to reflect the changes; other pages are no longer available.

2. The idea of respecting creator/producer rights over redistribution has a long tradition in Chinese danmei community. As Yang and Xu (2016c) point out, Chinese danmei communities started to develop a system for permission requests in 1998 because Taiwanese romance authors start to notice many of their works were illegally distributed in mainland China and felt disrespected. Systematic rules were gradually developed after danmei communities introduced paid VIP systems. For more historical discussions about copyright traditions in Chinese danmei communities, see Yang and Xu (2016c).

3. The forum's rules and FAQs have changed since the upgrade, but the basic ideas remain the same. Registration is still restricted, and new members still cannot gain access to valuable resources unless they donate money. Some rules, such as more specific membership levels, have been removed, but others, such as badges, remain. Nonetheless, the argument made in this paper is still relevant, as similar procedures and rules also exist in many other forums.

4. The derogatory term baipiao has several possible implications that are beyond the scope of this article, but they are nonetheless worth exploring. The term is closely related to Japan's idol fan culture and consumerism. Since many translation groups consider their work as a sort of advertisement, purchasing is considered a necessary form of support, and thus those who don't are shamed by this term. Yet in this analogy, the idols/creators themselves can also be considered prostitutes. The paradoxical nature of the term is lost on many who use it, particularly female fans, and it is a phenomenon deserving of further research.

9. References


Praxis

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, canonicity, and audience participation

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[0.1] Abstract—One of the pervading threads in fandom studies is the metadiscursive tendency within fan works through which audience members engage with media in creative ways that frequently challenge the limited scope of the available canon. However, the challenge presented by active audiences whose desire to interpret and transform texts to accommodate their own desires is not a creation of the internet age, and the struggle over figurative ownership of genres, texts, and characters is a recurrent theme in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This romance explores the tensions arising from audience investment and participation in a canon that they demand suit their social, political, and emotional ends. Throughout the text, the romance pits Gawain against his canonical textual exploits, the romances read in both courts, and even the narrator's (and by extension the audience's) own heroic and epic expectations. Itself a text working within an existing corpus and reliant on audience familiarity with Arthurian canon for much of its humor and logic, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* highlights a familiar struggle over canonicity and legitimacy, suggesting the potential for interpretive frames arising from fandom studies to illuminate texts often excluded from its purview.

[0.2] Keywords—Archontic literature; Arthurian literature; Audience reception; Fandom studies; Medieval literature; Romance


[1] One of the pervading threads in fandom studies is the metadiscursive tendency within fan works through which audience members engage with media in creative ways that frequently challenge the limited scope of available canon, sometimes leading to uncomfortable encounters between creators, members of fandom, and other parties interested in arbitrating legitimate use and interpretation of texts (note 1). However, the challenge presented by active audiences whose desire to interpret and transform texts to accommodate their own desires is a creation of neither the internet age nor of modern mass media, and the struggle over figurative ownership of genres, texts, and characters is a recurrent theme in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*; ca. fourteenth century), one that often takes turns that are
strongly reminiscent of modern conversations about and within fandom studies. This romance explores the tensions arising from audience investment and participation in a still-developing canon that characters demand fulfill their social, political, and emotional ends. Throughout the text, the romance pits the character Gawain against his own canonical textual exploits, romances read and stories told in both the court he represents and the one to which he travels, and even the narrator's (and by extension, the audience's) own heroic and epic expectations. Moreover, the text metadiscursively emphasizes its own status within existing literary traditions and reliance upon audience familiarity with Arthurian canon for much of its humor and logic. Ultimately, SGGK highlights a familiar struggle over canonicity and legitimacy in which individuals and communities attempt to define and redefine who has authority over characters and narrative authenticity.

[2] The definition of fandom in general and fan fiction in particular is one that is complicated in fandom studies, and depending on how one defines either term, incredibly expansive or limited, with a tendency in the field toward increasingly restrictive definitions that privilege mass media fandoms of the past half century. As Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2014, 6) suggest, the stakes for defining these terms are profound for determining what is included in the purview of fan studies:

[3] These inclusions or exclusions relate to how one thinks of fan fiction. If we think of it as a form of collective storytelling, then the Iliad and the Odyssey might be tagged as the earliest versions of fan fiction. If we think of fan fiction as a response to specific written texts, we can trace fan fiction back to the Middle Ages. If the term is understood to include a legal component, then fan fiction could not have existed before the development of authorial copyright, so the first fan fiction could, for example, be some of the rewrites of Jane Austen by her readers. If the term requires an actual community of fans who share an interest, then Sherlock Holmes would easily qualify as the first fandom, with fan-written Holmes pastiches serving as the beginnings of fan fiction. Finally, if we look at it as a (sometimes purposefully critical) rewriting of shared media, in particular TV texts, then media fan fiction, starting in the 1960s with its base in science fiction fandom and its consequent zine culture, would start fan fiction proper.

[4] Like many scholars in the field, Hellekson and Busse advocate for the delimitation of the term to transformative works that rewrite mass media texts of the past fifty years. Middleton (2016) focuses on the marginalization of fan fiction due to its nonmonetized status as constitutive for both creators and detractors. At the other end of the spectrum, in his foundational work, Textual Poachers (1992), Henry Jenkins posits a much more inclusive conception of fandom and fan works, suggesting that any form of community or collective storytelling or retelling falls under the aegis of fan fiction. More recently, Anna Wilson (2016) argues that the role of affect in the production of fan fiction and within the communities that produce, promote, and exchange fan fiction is crucial both to understanding and defining it as a form of transformative literature distinct from those that precede it.

[5] There are useful and significant reasons for acknowledging the profoundly different
media, social, and legal contexts that give rise to fandom and fan fiction that distinguish them as social and literary acts from other forms of derivative or appropriative literary work, and in focusing a study, very strong methodological incentives for doing so. However, it is useful to think about how some of the approaches and tools of fandom studies might usefully be applied to texts that do not fully meet the criteria of a particular scholar for a text or corpus as belonging to a fandom, but that overtly invoke dynamics that are similar to those associated within fandom studies with modern fandom: an enthusiastic, informed yet critical audience who consume an existing textual corpus defined in some way as preexistent and authoritative yet reject the authority of canonicity. Indeed, in SGGK, we see the self-referential depiction of an Arthurian romance fan community, whose members not only critique the existing Arthurian texts and creators, but go further—inserting themselves within the corpus both as characters and creators, adding to and altering the character of the textual archive itself as an act of consumer, creative, and narrative power. The ways in which this poem delineates a textual and audience experience and behavior in many ways parallel the textual behaviors of modern media fans, suggesting the usefulness of framing an analysis of SGGK through some of the same interpretive tools.

[6] SGGK is a famously intertextual poem in both overt and implicit ways. It is part of an Arthurian tradition both continental and insular, and it playfully draws upon aspects of both major strands of the Arthurian corpus. Gawain is a prominent figure in Arthurian romance in both traditions as Arthur's nephew, and by the early twelfth century, he was "a familiar figure in European ecclesiastical and learned culture" (Hahn 2000, 218). As Cory J. Rushton notes, Gawain is in both English and French traditions consistently linked to "sexual opportunism," "eager for and often unable to resist sexual encounters," a tradition upon which SGGK leans heavily for its comedy as Gawain defies the expectations of its audience (2007, 37). Gawain's reputation for sexual exploits is typically treated differently on the continent and in England: in Middle English romances, around a dozen of which focus specifically on Gawain as protagonist, Gawain's sexual insatiability often leads to his famed many marriages and ultimately to Arthur's political benefit through his nephew's alliance. On the other hand, the French prose Arthurian tradition, as represented in the grail romances of the thirteenth-century French Vulgate Cycle, tends to point to Gawain's sexual misdeeds as sinful and the reason for his inability to achieve the grail. Proliferating Arthurian romances throughout the Middle Ages led to differing emphases and characterizations of the same characters and narratives, so that by the time SGGK was written, Gawain was a familiar character but one who had been given many different, and sometimes contradictory, treatments over time.

[7] SGGK is a complexly layered poem that both situates itself within multiple existing canons and repeatedly defines itself in tension with the audience expectations established by those intertexts and by its own invocation of them. In the opening lines of the poem, the narrator frames the romance within the context of the fall of Troy and the founding of Rome as related in the epic poems of the Iliad and the Aeneid and retold in the French prose romances of the Holy Grail. The poem then goes on to describe the larger postfall Trojan diaspora in a way that places the text within a larger literary tradition while setting clear narrative expectations for the audience. The first and last lines of the poem reference the siege and fall of Troy, the founding of Rome, and the establishment of various European
nations by the descendants of the Trojan refugees, ending with the case of the founder of Britain, Felix Brutus:

[8] On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez

Wyth wynne,

Where werre and wrake and wonder

Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne,

And oft boþe blysse and blunder

Ful skete hatz skyfted synne. (14–19)

[He founds Britain on the broad hillsides with pleasure, where war and woe and wonder have occurred in turn, and often both great joy and strife have alternated since.]

[9] The historical narrative outlined in this opening is cyclical—a series of catastrophes leading to exile, and then foundation, only to start the cycle, one of "blysse and blunder" (joy and strife) again. Britain itself then gains greater focus as a land noted especially for its men who love conflict and battle ("Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofden"), but also as a land marked by the supernatural and marvels, a place where "Mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft / Pen in any oþer pat I wot" (More marvels have taken place in this land, than in any other I know of) (21, 23–24). Having introduced Britain as the site of the most warlike men and the most supernatural wonders, the text continues the train of superlatives in its description of Arthur, the "hendest," or most noble, of Britain's kings (26). The narrative of SGGK is described as "an outrrage awenture of Arthurez wonderez" (29) and as a narrative related both through the spoken and written word, one that is, the narrator notes, "a selly in siȝt summe men hit holden" (itself a marvel considered strange by some men) (28). This opening serves to evoke audience expectation on several levels. First, it introduces its own forthcoming narrative within a context framed by an epic narrative and genealogical background that also recalls the French Arthurian tradition with which, as Edward Donald Kennedy (2007) has noted, at least some of SGGK's audience would likely be familiar. As described above, the Arthurian tradition it invokes is rich, but by characterizing it specifically within the Trojan context, the narrator suggests a framing within a cyclical view of history characterized by periods of disaster and regrowth, implicitly invoking the apocalyptic end to the Arthurian court even as it tells a narrative set during the court's "first age" (54). As critics have noted, this opening operates on multiple levels to call upon the audience's familiarity with preexisting texts in the Arthurian corpus, working to both introduce this text as part of a venerable tradition and to establish itself as part of that tradition and thus subject to a horizon of expectations generated by past exemplars of the romance genre in general and of the Arthurian corpus in particular, and especially those invoked in the opening (note 2). What exact interpretation might be drawn, however, is subject to a particular audience member's individual familiarity with specific precursor texts, as Kennedy suggests (143–44). Furthermore, those expectations are also shaped by the
narrator's own priming in the introduction, through his naming of the romance's precursor intertexts, and by the characteristics of the characters and texts that belong to the body of texts to which *SGGK* is about to be added. Thus, the audience knows to expect a Britain characterized by people who most love to fight and by the most supernatural marvels, an Arthur who is the most noble of its kings, and a tale that is, of all of the wonders associated with Arthur, one of the most extraordinary. Even if, by some chance, an audience member might lack any experience or knowledge of any of the branches of the Arthurian corpus, this introduction alone gives a strong implication of what one might expect from any Arthurian text in general and from this one in particular.

[10] In this opening, the audience is reminded of familiar intertexts and, through the poem's references to them, led to expect both battles and marvels from this narrative and, considering the epic context, battles and marvels with high stakes. Having done so, however, the romance proceeds to repeatedly frustrate those exact desires. This occurs perhaps most blithely in fitt 2, when, at the only point in the poem in which Gawain properly goes to battle, the text refuses to actually describe his defeats of dragons, wolves, woodwose (wild men), bulls, bears, boars and giants, remarking only that Gawain encounters so many marvels in the mountains that "Hit were to tore for to telle of þe ten þe dole"—(it would be too difficult to describe even a tenth of them) (719). Having promised battles, wonders, and adventures, the poem asserts that really, it's too much trouble to bother with such tedious details as fights with dragons. Instead, having promised an "outrrage awenture" (extraordinary adventure), the poem delivers a text in which Arthur's court, initially shocked into paralysis by the very wonders that are said to characterize their lands and their own court's renown, are galvanized not by a love of battle but rather a fear of shame into engaging with the adventures with which their court's reputation has already supposedly become synonymous. For Gawain's part, the romance essentially presents a narrative in which Arthur's preeminent champion beheads an unresisting man in a Christmas game and then must travel a year later to passively await the same fate, along the way avoiding the sexual advances of a seemingly determined seductress, in defiance of Gawain's literary and in-text reputation for insatiable sexual escapades. Similarly, at the end of the romance, the narrator disposes of Gawain's arduous return as a hassle to describe, breezily stating that "Ofte he herbered in house and ofte al þe route, / And mony a venture in vale he venquyst ofte / Pat I ne tyzt at þis tyme in tale to remene" (He slept in buildings and sometimes outside, and so many a dangers he overcame in the valleys, that I can't manage at this point in the tale to recall them) (2481–83). Having established that *SGGK* as a text operates metatextually within a textual tradition and horizon of expectations, even going so far as to outline those expectations in the opening of the romance, the text goes on to demonstrate how it and its protagonist fail to satisfy those expectations, both metatextually for the audience and within the narrative itself, as multiple characters literally inform Gawain that he falls short of what they have been led to expect and desire from previous oral and textual accounts of his exploits. Moreover, the poem is bookended by performative narrative refusals to tell those stories even when they appear to have happened ([note 3](#)). Not only does this romance refuse to perform to specifications; it does so aggressively.

[11] In their treatment of *SGGK*, literary scholars have focused extensively upon its intertextuality and its reliance upon and subversion of treatment of preexisting texts, but it is
also useful to explore it specifically as an archontic text (note 4). In its repeated reference to a greater Arthurian canon or metatext, _SGGK_ invites attention to its own status as a work of archontic literature, or literature that draws and builds upon previously existing textual worlds and that allows for unlimited expansions to the textual conglomeration or archive. Drawing upon Derrida's concept of the archive, Abigail Derecho (2006, 63, 64) coined the term "archontic" to address works previously described as derivative or appropriative, particularly works that draw upon intertextuality and an order in which some texts precede and create a basis for the existence but do not, as those terms might imply, require a sense of hierarchy between them. The lack of implicit hierarchy, a component of Derrida's archive, is necessitated by the way that the archive's open-ended accessibility to new additions means that the character of the archive in its totality is always under construction and always rife with the potential for change: the archive's neverending open-endedness, however comes at a cost: "in the same stroke it loses the absolute and meta-textual authority it may claim to have" (64). That very potential for destabilization or, as Derecho suggests, the futility of stability at the core of the archontic text, leaves it an uncomfortable site of authorization. This openness and lack of hierarchy, she argues, authorizes and invites new writers to enter the archontic text, picking and choosing what they find useful and inserting newly reconstituted works into the archontic text and thereby changing its overall shape and horizon of expectations. We see the self-conscious radical expression of this throughout _SGGK_—its metatextual recognition of its own place within a preexisting corpus; its anticipation of itself as becoming part of that existing canon; its refusal to conform to standards preexisting within that corpus or within an audience's delineated expectations; and its recognition of the proliferation of narrative throughout communities in resistant, contrary, and unexpected ways, as demonstrated through the way that tales of Arthur's knights and of Gawain echo throughout the text but are repeated and reflected in contradictory ways depending on the teller, none of which are arbitrated as more or less true. For example, as discussed above, the expectations set for the text by its opening lines do not resemble the narrative that follows, which in turn frustrates narrative expectations set by well-known precursor intertexts featuring Gawain that are implicitly referenced by the text itself, as when Lady Bertilak professes confusion when Gawain acts in ways out of character with what one might expect from those popular texts.

[12] Beyond this, however, characters in the texts invoke different textual authorities and focus upon different emphases creating their individual expectations. For example, while the narrator invokes the epic examples of the Trojan war and focuses on battles, marvels, and courtesy as the core elements of Arthurian narratives and the tale about to be told, in attempting to seduce Gawain, Lady Bertilak, the wife of Gawain's host, invokes a very different set of core elements to the tales that frame her understanding of the type of narrative she inhabits:

[13] For to telle of þis teuelyng of þis trwe knyȝtez,

Hit is þe tytelet token and tyxt of her werkkez

How ledez for her lele luf hor lyuez han auntered,
Endured for her drury dulful stoundez,
And after wenged with her walour and voyded her care
And broȝt blysse into boure with bountees hor awen. (1514–19)

[For to speak of the trials of these true knights, it is the heading and the title written of their works, how knights have risked their lives for loyal love, endured hard times for their lovesickness, and afterward with their valor avenged this pain and banished their care and brought bliss through their merits to their lovers.]

[14] The Lady's recitation of parameters that define acceptable tales of knights is both prescriptive and strikingly metatextual, referring to the texts, headings, and expected narrative contents she favors: knights' endeavors are not in fact about their love of battle, she suggests, nor the ubiquity of marvels that must be faced, but rather how knights fight and suffer for the love of their ladies—the cycle of care and bliss referring not to historical upheaval and foundation referenced in the opening lines of the poem, but to the rejection and acceptance by the beloved, notably in a "boure" (bower) much like the one in which Gawain is currently entrapped with Lady Bertilak.

[15] Structurally, Lady Bertilak's description of narratives involving knights shares some elements with the narrator's; she will read and evaluate Gawain. While Lady Bertilak's understanding of Arthurian romance bears little resemblance to the expectations set forth in the introduction of SGGK, it does in fact resemble those the text's audience would most likely be familiar with, so her accusation that the alleged Gawain she is encountering is not in fact Gawain would likely ring clear to its audience—this Gawain does not look like the assignation-eager Gawain they would be familiar with from previous romance iterations, nor is he the battle-ready warrior prepared to encounter marvels advertised in the introduction. Framed by two intertextual contexts through which to form expectations for what and who Gawain should be, this Gawain fails to conform to either set of parameters in any way.

[16] SGGK does not only position itself within multiple epic and romance textual traditions; it also references the act of archontic narrative proliferation while including itself metatextually as the potential subject of the stories its characters choose to tell, spread, and benefit from. For example, Arthur's court is introduced as both literally and figuratively dependent upon their marvelous deeds and, significantly, on the stories told about those deeds. These narratives are treated interchangeably with the adventures they are based on and they are associated closely with the court's maintenance through Arthur's vow not to eat until he is treated to either a story of chivalric adventure or to the sight of a chivalric feat itself:

[17] And also anoþer maner meued him eke,
Pat he þurȝ nobelay had nomen:he wode neuer ete
Vpon such a dere day, er hym deuised were
Of sum auenturus þyng, an vncoüpe tale
Of sum mayn meruayle þat he myȝt trawe,
Of alderes, of armes, of oþer auenturus;
Oþer sum seff hym bisoȝt of sum siker knyȝt
To joyne wyth hym in justyng, in jopardé to lay,
Lede, lif for lyf, leue vchon oþer
...
Þis watz kynges countenaunce where he in court were,
At vch farand fest among his fre meny
In halle. (90–102)

[Another motivation moved him: he would never eat upon such a holy day before
he had first heard of some adventurous story, a strange tale of some marvel that he
might believe of princes or arms or other adventures, or that a man might seek a
knight to join with him in jousting to risk life for life, each with the other…This
was the king's custom when he was in court, at each feast among his noble
household.]

[18] By making chivalric adventure or its recitation a precondition of his meal, Arthur
signals his, and by extension, his court's dependence upon chivalric endeavor for their status
and wealth. Moreover, Arthur's conflation of the narratives of adventure and their actual
performance highlights how, for the court, the deeds and their social proliferation as
narrative are largely interchangeable. After all, if a chivalric adventure happens in a forest
and no one hears—or speaks—of it, can it be said to have happened in any significant way?
The metaphor of consumption, it has been noted, suggests extinction or destruction of the
resource being consumed, but in the case of the story, consumption suggests not only telling
but also repetition and retelling. In fact, it is this dynamic upon which the reputation of
Arthur's court relies, as their reputation clearly precedes Gawain's arrival at Hautdesert.
Throughout the romance, it becomes increasingly clear that it is the proliferation of
narratives that predetermine the metatextual identity and fate of Arthur's court.

[19] This identity is externally, socially, and collectively constructed through narrative in the
poem and, as such, it is unstable and vulnerable to revision, critique, and rewriting from the
community of those who engage in what we might reasonably call the text's internal
Arthurian fandom. Arthur's court in this text are treated as celebrities whose qualities are
known, discussed, and worshipped by complete strangers, and stories about them proliferate
to places they have never even heard of. However, this very proliferation exposes the court
to the ever-changing threat of audience desire, interpretation, and critique. In his speech to
Arthur's court, the Green Knight mentions having heard of the courtesy of Arthur's court and their reputation for being the best knights at both fighting and courtliness, an assertion that resonates with the narrator's characterization both of the character of Britain in general and Arthur's court in particular:

[20] þe los of þe, lede, is lyft vp so hyȝe
And þy burȝ and þy burnes best ar holden,
Stifest vnnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,
Þe wyȝtest and þe worpyest of þe worldes kynde,
Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykez,
And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp. (258–63)

[Your fame, sir, has risen to such a level, and your city and men held the best, strongest to bear armor and ride steeds, the most valiant and most courteous men in all the world, tested through their competitions in games and tournaments, and here is found courtesy, or so I have heard said.]

[21] The Green Knight's mention of their reputation aligns it with the narrator's earlier invocation of the Arthurian archive, referencing their superlative force in battle and the court's renowned courtesy. When the court's response to his appearance and offer of an exchange of blows does not live up to the Green Knight's expectations based on the stories he's heard, his response is tellingly not to question the authenticity of the narratives but rather that of his host:

[22] "What, is þis Arþures hous," quoþ þe haþel þenne,
"Pat al þe rous rennes of þurȝ ryalmes so mony?
Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
Your gryndellayk and your greme and your grete wordes?
Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyȝes speche." (309–14)

["What, is this Arthur's house," said the man then, "whose fame is spread through many realms? Where now is your pride and your conquests, your ferocity and your wrath and your great words? Now is the revelry and the renown of the Round Table overthrown with a word of one man's speech."

[23] Significantly, the Green Knight frames his own triumph over the court as the defeat of
his words over other words: the "renoun" of Arthur's court, he claims, is now overthrown or overwritten by his own words. As a result, Arthur and then Gawain work to ensure that their behavior conforms to the standards set by the Green Knight's expectations, which are themselves the product of the very narratives Arthur had earlier desired to experience and supplement. Effectively, the Green Knight's desires and expectations, presumably shaped by the narratives he's heard about them, become the framework for their behaviors. He becomes the author and evaluator of Gawain's next adventure.

[24] There is a sort of recursiveness to this and later exchanges in the poem wherein stories are told about Arthur's court that lead to desires to see those stories embodied and enacted by their main characters, in the same way that the description of the types of narratives apparently already told of Arthurian knights according to the introduction leads to the expectation that this narrative will conform to if not exceed those criteria. Those stories in effect become scripts to be followed lest Arthur's court fail to live up to their own reputation and thus fail to be authentic to the expectations of their audience or fans, a dynamic familiar within modern media fandoms. Authenticity, in this dynamic, is not located in individual actors or storylines but rather in the collectively created discursive construct formed by audience consensus and the desires to which that consensus gives rise. Thus, at Hautdesert, Gawain encounters a community already familiar with what to expect and desire from Gawain, the walking embodiment of a metatext: manners, noble speech, and "luf-talkyng:"

[25] Vch segge ful softly sayde to his fere,

"Now schal we semlych se sleȝtez of þewez
And þe tecceles termes of talking noble
Wich spede is in speche vnspurd may we lerne,
Syn we haf fonged þat fyn fader of nurture.
…
In menyng of manerez mere
Pis burne now schal vus bryng.
I hope þat may him here
Schal lerne of luf-talkyng." (915–27)

[Each man quietly said to his companion, "Now shall we see the seemliest of manners, and the utmost heights of noble speech. Without prompting we will learn the art of genteel conversation, since we have housed the pinnacle of breeding…This man shall bring us the knowledge of good manners. I believe that those who hear him shall learn the ways of courtly love."]
It is notable that this particular iteration of Gawain involves a completely different script than the one invoked by the Green Knight or by the narrator in the poem's opening. The court at Hautdesert, Lady Bertilak, and the Green Knight all appear to pluck their desired version of Gawain from the metatextual stew in order to suit their particular desires and to shape his scripted performance accordingly. Thus, on the first day of their dalliance, Lady Bertilak asserts her familiarity with Gawain, saying "For I wene wel, iwyse, Sir Wowen ʒe are, / Þat alle þe worlde worshipz" (I know well you are Gawain, whom all the world worships), and then proceeds to tell him what she expects to experience in his company and to chastise him when he does not perform to code (1226–27). Notably in this exchange, Lady Bertilak says she will use her time well with tales and immediately offers Gawain access to her body, writing herself and, to some extent, Gawain himself into the types of narratives she's heard of Gawain the philanderer, conflating story with action, much like Arthur had at the feast (1508–34). Lady Bertilak's subsequent willingness to identify Gawain as Gawain is determined by his performance according to the expectations set by the stories circulating about him and through romances, and any deviation from the scripts set by these authorities on all things Gawain leads to an accusation that the man she is with cannot possibly be Gawain, as occurs on each of the three days of his stay at Hautdesert.

This interplay between reputation, narrative, and socially constructed identity compels both Gawain and Arthur to live up to the stated expectations of their audiences. The question they're asked is not literally "Are you such-and-such a person or an imposter?" nor even "Do you live up to your reputation?" but rather "Do you live up to audience expectation/desire as created by the interplay of the texts a specific audience has encountered and the subjective interpretation that audience has subsequently produced of them?" Ultimately, this is a question that revolves around authenticity and legitimacy that has nothing to do with names and everything to do with narrative congruence and desire. To put it into fandom terms, the Green Knight and Lady Bertilak both complain that Arthur's knights are acting out of character and thus are illegitimate iterations of themselves. Then they proceed, through their demands, to script the right version of the story. For all intents and purposes, the Gawain with social force—the Gawain that matters—is not the embodied individual in front of them but the meta-Gawain whose fame goes before him, creates public expectation, enhances the Arthurian court's status, and who would be as familiar to the poem's audience as to Lady Bertilak.

Indeed, much of the romance's humor comes from the audience's familiarity with previous iterations of Arthur's court and of Gawain's character, in which he is typically represented as a bombastic womanizing embodiment of all things swagger. On the surface, Lady Bertilak's accusation that Gawain is not in fact the real Gawain seems absurd, except that the Gawain she refers to is the Gawain of the archontic metatext. Literary critics have long pointed out that Lady Bertilak's dissatisfaction and confusion with Gawain's behavior would make sense to a fourteenth-century audience, used to seeing Gawain represented in Arthurian literature as a consummate and adventurous philanderer. Thomas Hahn (2000, 220) describes Gawain as exemplifying "a distinctive model of masculinity, founded on an unstinting appetite for energetic encounters…that allows Gawain's prowess to outshine that of all other men, and they render him a magnet for the desire of a long sequence of women." Similarly, Rushton (2007, 29) notes that this is a reputation that follows Gawain into the text.
of *SGGK*, as Lady Bertilak knows enough about Gawain to know what to expect as a beautiful lady alone in his company—it is unthinkable that "Gawain might let the opportunity pass him by." And of course, as a conglomerate creation, it is one that is at once cumulative and potentially individual—subject to idiosyncratic reading on the part of the audience. In fact, such an audience, familiar with Gawain's expansive exploits in French and English romance, their expectations freshly primed by the opening to *SGGK*, might reasonably be expected to agree with Lady Bertilak's disappointed and perplexed assertion that whoever this man is, the timid man working so very hard not to seduce her is not the character Gawain. Lady Bertilak's declarations of what romances say Gawain does and thus who he is allow her to effectively script who he decides he ought to be, largely because Gawain accepts her authority over him. Her stated horizon of expectations thus determines his field of acceptable behaviors. It also opens up the possibility for her to indirectly rewrite scenes between Gawain and her husband, increasingly narrowing the options for Gawain's acceptable behaviors to conform to both her expectations and the demands of chivalric performance.

[29] As a result of this dynamic, in spite of the messaging of the pentangle on his shield, Gawain's identity is increasingly represented as malleable and situational, the result of a sort of communal authorship of Gawain: his status is collectively created and archontic. As such, he is constantly subject to reassessment and revision by his audience/critics, who also are effectively the presumed authors of the next instantiation of Gawain in their anticipated retellings of his story. Simultaneously, they also act as supporting characters in the script as well as on-site evaluators of his performance, prompting him when he misses his expected line or behavior. As such, there is a collaborative effort between him and those he meets to make sure that he fulfills their expectations so that that installment is consistent with their desires and thus with his and his court's need for sustained and enhanced reputations. This is most clearly demonstrated in Gawain's interactions with Lady Bertilak in which her declarations of how Gawain acts and her willingness or refusal to concede whether or not Gawain makes the grade effectively allows her to script their interactions in order to conform with her framing of knights as driven primarily by courtly and amorous goals. Similarly, the Green Knight can invoke a version of "Arþures hous" or of Gawain represented in tales known or unknown to the principals and, in doing so, galvanize them into behaving according to his expectations lest they be found lacking, rather than by their customs or common chivalric courtesy. The romance demonstrates how an engaged, desiring, and critical audience is able to change/affect/modify the text to conform to their desires, regardless of whether or not those desires actually represent existing canon. That either character says such a story exists and thus has led to expectation is enough to motivate Arthur and Gawain to comply so as to not lose the cultural capital that sustains their public reputations and identities through complementary narrative and its spread.

[30] While both Arthur and Gawain cede the authority to determine their authenticity to their audience throughout much of the text, once the Green Knight's true identity is revealed and his exoneration of Gawain granted, Gawain attempts to redefine the discursive community granted authority to legitimate him in order to exclude women altogether, suggesting that as for women, "hit were a wynne huge / To luf hom wel and leve hem not, a leude þe;at coupþe;e" (2420–21), or "It would be a great benefit if we could love them well and believe
them not." It's a curious non sequitur in context because, as many have noted, Bertilak is as much if not more a party to Gawain's duping as his wife. However, unlike Lord Bertilak, Lady Bertilak's favorable interpretation of Gawain's story or, for that matter, Morgan le Fay's, is not so comfortingly secured as Bertilak's. After all, Bertilak has already given his kudos to Gawain as the best knight who has ever lived, but if Gawain has learned anything in this adventure, it is that he cannot count on the criteria for his evaluation staying stable; and by the criteria listed by Lady Bertilak so far, he has not measured up, and if those were merely a ruse, who knows what expectations there might be for Gawain now? Morgan likewise, as Gawain's aunt and as the putative true tester of Gawain all along, presents a challenge to Gawain's authenticity that potentially supersedes Bertilak's authority, seeing as she apparently sent him to test Gawain and she is Bertilak's liege. Within that context, Gawain's attempt to foreclose on the participation of women within the interpretive discursive community that grants his legitimacy can be understood to have a distinctly tactical flavor. Gawain's suggestion that men should love women but not believe them works in two ways to exclude women from the community of narrative legitimation: it serves to create an alliance based along gender lines between himself and Lord Bertilak and it suggests that such an alliance is based on a refusal to believe or to listen to what women say, redefining who has access to narrative authority, both as tellers of tales and as arbiters of what counts as an acceptable rendition of what we might call canon. Gawain's assertion that we shouldn't believe or listen to women is not merely about how he was personally tricked but an attempted closing off of women's access to the communal consensus that drives his social economy. In effect, he attempts to reframe women as illegitimate wielders of language whereas before they had been unchallenged fellow participatory consumer/critics. Significantly, Gawain attempts to do this by shifting the archive to which his narrative rightly belongs, claiming his narrative is not a romance or tale of chivalry at all but rather a narrative of the duped man brought low by feminine deceit.

[31] The sequence of revelations at the end of the text effectively sets off a series of potential reframings and reinterpretations of who is in charge of the story, who gets to tell the story, and thus who is eligible to be the antagonists and protagonists—the ladies, the men, or an interpretive free-for-all. At stake in Gawain's attempts to reframe his narrative is his desire to wrest interpretive control of his own story not only from Lady Bertilak but also from her husband. This attempt appears to meet with limited, if any, success. Bertilak's revelation that the entire episode was an attempt by Morgan le Fay to terrify Guinevere to death recasts the entire romance in such a way that the main figures are revealed to be women who never so much as speak within the text, and the entire action of the romance, for all its angst and trauma on Gawain's part, is merely a side effect of a larger conflict offstage. Alternatively, however, his assertion that Morgan desired to test the Arthurian court's reputation for pride (the text uses the term "surquidré," meaning pride as a sin), suggests that the stories proliferating about Arthur are not particularly complimentary (2456–58). It also upends the common romance narrative of the challenger testing himself against the reputation of the renowned in order to gain fame, instead suggesting a theme of deserved chastisement for overbearing pride. Such a revisionary understanding of the text places Gawain back at the center of the text as the court's representative but radically reimagines the status that Arthur's court holds within its larger community—and the criteria by which Gawain is being evaluated. Gawain's refusal to return to Hautdesert to make peace with Lady Bertilak and
Morgan is consistent with his attempts to reframe his story as one entirely mediated between men—one that, in light of the bombshell he's just been dealt, is perhaps unsurprising. Similarly, upon Gawain's return to Arthur's court, he attempts to tell the court how to interpret his story—as the story of a fall from grace—only to find his authority as participant, witness, and storyteller soundly rebuffed as the court greets his sorrowful interpretation with laughter. Significantly, they then proceed to revise his story in ways that allow them to associate their own identities with Gawain's in ultimately advantageous ways that directly contradict his own understanding of his experience. While no women explicitly speak again and Lady Bertilak's rendition or reading of the narrative is notably absent, the ladies of Arthur's court partake in the wearing of the girdle and choose to be marked by its collectively determined meaning—one that ignores Gawain's interpretation, reframing the outcome of his adventure as the court's collective honor rather than Gawain's personal failing. Gawain effectively loses control of his story in order to serve the needs and desires of his community, and at the end of the romance, much like Green Knight or Lady Bertilak, when confronted with a Gawain who does not suit their needs, the court simply rewrites him into the story in such a way that he does. Similarly, the narrator's act of framing the text through the Trojan war, despite its apparent thematic incongruence, works to invoke a narrative model that does not represent the story told but that underscores both the distance between the story he does tell and the narrative tradition to which it belongs, and also the specter of Arthurian calamities. This conclusion to the romance and its famous refusal to impose an authoritative interpretation on Gawain's adventure and its outcome invokes the collective multivalent authority of the community both within and without the text to determine interpretive authenticity and legitimacy, refusing the impulse to locate that authority within the individual actor or storyteller while acknowledging the personal and collective stakes involved in that refusal. The unstable locus of this authority—as well as the desire to impose interpretive order or control—is poignantly demonstrated in the famous inscription at the end of the poem, "HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE" (Shame to him to thinks ill [of it]), a reference to the motto of the recently formed Order of the Garter, established by Edward III in 1348. While the inscription's status is controversial, appearing to have been written in a later hand than the rest of the poem, its liminal position with regard to the text recapitulates the text's larger destabilization of narrative authority. It both is part of the text and supplemental to it, turning inward and remarking on the poem while simultaneously reaching out to the audience of the poem and inviting them to participate in the fun house mirror of engagement. By attempting to demand a particular response on the part of others, the inscription draws attention to the possibility and even likelihood that others have and will continue to read the text wrong. In \textit{SGGK}, archontic breakdown of closure and authority is evoked both at the level of text and narration through the proliferation of interpretations and frames at the end and the failure of narrative framing to accurately represent or contain the narrative. This ultimately places the audience of \textit{SGGK} in a parallel position to Lady Bertilak, at once both inside and outside of the text, critiquing, interpreting, producing, inhabiting the open text/metatext in which the audience is also the critic, writer and, ultimately, character.

\cite{32} \textit{SGGK} reveals the ways in which late medieval romance and, in particular, Arthurian romance operate within an archontic framework that parallels in a striking fashion some key dynamics of modern fan engagement, including the destabilization and decentralization of
canonical authority, the nonhierarchical proliferation of coexisting versions of the same characters and events, the revision of existing texts to suit individual needs and desires, and the implicit and explicit debates and interpretations of the text(s) invited by destabilization and proliferation. The poem's attention to its own metatextual environment and to the ways that romance audiences might engage with—and even insert themselves into—romance narratives shows the ways in which audiences' relationships with texts were recognized as complicated, idiosyncratic, and open in the late Middle Ages. It is perhaps unsurprising that a consistent response to this complication represented both within the romance (Gawain's attempts to limit who can speak authoritatively and to define the meaning of his adventure) and on the text (the inscription at the end of manuscript) is an attempt to shut down or foreclose on these complications by imposing a single authoritative reading, but as SGGK handily demonstrates, no story is singular, and the act of telling a story invites another, at once a love letter and a critique.

Acknowledgments

[33] A preliminary version of this argument was presented at a panel entitled "Fanfiction in Medieval Studies: What Do We Mean When We Say 'Fanfiction'" at the 52nd International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, on May 11, 2017. I am grateful to the members and audience of that panel for their generous feedback.

Notes

1. This has been a running thread in the conversation since the inception of fan studies, though the focus on where and why the friction arises has various explanations. Henry Jenkins (1992) explicitly sets fans in (often ambivalent) tension with canon creators, arguing that they are "unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise," carving out their own space or "poaching," per his central metaphor, in the reserves belonging to others, and in doing so, they "assert their right to form interpretations" (18) that differ from those of the textual authors. More recently, Francesca Middleton (2016) discusses contemporary and classical iterations of this friction, particularly within the context of post-Romantic ideas of literature as a form of self-expression as well as capitalist notions of copyright and property rights.

2. For example, Elizabeth Scala (1994) sees the opening as pointing to yet eliding the French narratives detailing the court's tragic end, framing Gawain's failings as a precursor to the court's eventual collapse. Similarly, Melissa Furrow (2009) argues that SGGK's interpretation hinges on the audience's shared awareness of intertexts that locate Guinevere's adultery as key to the court's downfall. Sheila Fisher (1993, 138) likewise focuses on the intertextual role of women in the Arthurian corpus and points out that the author of the poem and by extension the audience "knew how the story would end, both the story of Arthurian history and the story of his own romance." Rushton (2007) notes the tonal and thematic dependence of the romance on the audience's familiarity with both French and English precursor texts in which Gawain acts as a carefree philanderer archetype whose sexual escapades nevertheless
set the scene for social and political rapprochement.

3. I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers of this article for pointing out the second instance of narrative elision.

4. For example, Elizabeth Scala (1994) notes the parallelism between Gawain's attention to his own reputation and the "poem's awareness of its own literary tradition" (328), and Thomas Hahn (2000) sees SGGK's appeal to English audiences as deriving largely from the character's preexisting popularity, which he attributes to "a cluster of popular English Gawain romances" (222). Sheila Fisher's (1993) reading of SGGK hinges on the audience's awareness of the Arthurian court's tragic ending as it operates in a dialogue with its precursors and attempts to head off the tragedy by cutting women out of the court. Edward Donald Kennedy (2007) sees the difference in the French and English Gawain traditions as crucial to how an individual member of its audience might respond to it.

References


Abstract—A close reading of an exemplar femslash fan fic, chainofclover's "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart" (2017), demonstrates that the language of desire it narrates for canonically heterosexual female characters is anchored by a lesbian (para)textuality. Chainofclovers takes a line from Emily Dickinson’s poem "Wild nights—Wild nights!" for the title of her fan fic for the Grace and Frankie (2015–) TV series. The author enters literary critical discourse and demonstrates feminist models of citation. The use of Dickinson, paired with similar references to the Mojave lesbian poet Natalie Diaz in the chapter epigraphs, provides a new map for the characters to follow, allowing them to travel beyond the canonical confines of compulsory heterosexuality. Just as the canonical characters Grace and Frankie refuse the requirement to cite the men in their lives, instead choosing to cite each other, chainofclovers cites lesbian poetry to imagine a narrative of female desire that is not defined by men. The story thus reflects the feminist citational model that both fan fiction and fan studies can enact, challenging traditional networks of property and ownership by producing a work founded on sustenance and gratitude.

Keywords—Emily Dickinson; Femslash; Grace and Frankie; Lesbian literature; Natalie Diaz

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1. Introduction

In the summary for "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart" (2017), the first instalment of her femslash fan fic for the TV show Grace and Frankie (2015–), chainofclovers writes, "Grace and Frankie keep missing each other, in every sense of the phrase. Can they decide on a definition of home? This is the sequel to 'Let Your Arms Become Propellers.' It's set several months after the end of Season 3. Title is from the pretty gay Emily Dickinson poem 'Wild nights—Wild nights!'" (chainofclovers 2017). Alexandra
Herzog has characterized author notes such as this one as "popular paratextual thresholds that readers cross before entering the fictional universe of a fan text," fan spaces that work to establish the agency of fan authors and vocalize their claim to both their own writing and the source text that inspired it (2012, ¶ 1.2). Conceiving of the author note and other textual spaces that surround the fan work in terms of the paratext invokes Jonathan Gray's work on the paratextuality of promotional materials and how they affect fan engagement or experience. If, as Gray writes, "paratexts tell us what to expect, and in doing so, they shape the reading strategies that we will take with us 'into' the text" (2010, 26), then what chainofclovers is asking us to "take with us 'into'" her text is an understanding of "Wild nights—Wild nights! (269)" as "pretty gay."

[1.2] In this context, the lines "Done with the Compass— / Done with the Chart!" are marked as exemplarily queer, as the "pretty gay"-ness of the poem condenses here in chainofclovers's reference. As Sara Ahmed (2006) suggests, the language of mapping and orientation (via compasses and charts) has always inflected our vocabulary of sexuality: "The normalization of heterosexuality as an orientation toward 'the other sex' can be redescribed in terms of the requirement to follow a straight line, whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct, and honest" (70). In this formulation of heterosexuality as the "requirement to follow a straight line" toward the putatively appropriate object of desire—the opposite sex—queer orientation is not simply the pull toward the same sex but a disavowal of this straight line. In this sense, then, to be "done with the compass" does indeed sound "pretty gay."

[1.3] But it is not just the queerness of the metaphor that chainofclovers instructs us to take with us into her text, through the paratextual threshold of her summary; it is not just the queerness of the words but also of their author. Her reading of "Wild nights—Wild nights! (269)" evokes the lesbian context of Emily Dickinson's work that Ellen Louise Hart argued had been strategically "omitt[ed] and undermin[ed]" by heteropatriarchal scholarship (1990, 268). It evokes Paula Bennett's description of "Wild nights—Wild nights! (269)" as a poem "written from the perspective of one who enters, not one who is entered…effectively exclud[ing] the male…[to] focus on female sexuality instead" (1992, 112). It evokes Annalise Brinck-Johnsen's reading of queer temporality of those wild nights themselves (quite directly, as I will come to in due course) (2018). The assertion by chainofclovers that she has chosen this title because it comes from "the pretty gay Emily Dickinson poem" enters her into a discourse of literary criticism; she could be citing Hart, Bennett, and Brinck-Johnsen (as well as many, many others) when she calls the poem gay, just as they could be citing her fic when they imagine a version of Dickinson who would one day be memorialized as gay (Hart) or argue the poem should be acknowledged for envisioning lesbian sexuality (Bennett) or the nights for representing queer temporality (Brinck-Johnsen).

[1.4] I will argue that the queering that happens, the queer literary reading of a canonical female poet—who has been emphatically, strenuously labeled heterosexual (Comment 2009)—that is invoked when chainofclovers uses Dickinson's lines to title a story about women having sex with each other reflects what happens when fan studies are brought to bear on the hallowed halls of literary criticism. Constituting a reading and a recovery that
resonates with a history of literary scholarship, chainofclovers's title may be thought of as a kind of citation. But because it is a citation that expands, explicates, and explodes an eight-word couplet from a century and a half ago to create new narratives of queerness and queering, it is the kind of citation that is emblematic of the relationship between fan fic and its sources. Here, I analyze one specific fan fic by one specific (prolific) writer to theorize that when she references lesbian textuality, her fan fiction exemplifies the structurally feminist citational model that fan fiction and fan studies represents.

2. Wild nights for Grace and Frankie

[2.1] Brinck-Johnsen identifies the nights of "Wild nights—Wild nights! (269)" as moments of ecstasy and sensuality that celebrate "a different form of time," constructing "a meaning that is not created by an ongoing relationship involving courtship, marriage, or family life" (2018, 343). According to Brinck-Johnsen, Dickinson's exultation of short bursts of erotic fantasy reconceptualizes romantic love as fulfilling because it is pleasurable in the moment rather than because it is expected to fulfill the requirements of a heteronormative marriage timetable.

[2.2] This reading of the poem is emphasized in chainofclovers's reference to it: not only does she use the poem to describe queer space (Ahmed 2006) but, through her navigation of the heteronormative baggage that travels with Grace and Frankie from canon, queer temporality too. *Grace and Frankie* is a Netflix original sitcom centering on the lives of Grace Hanson (played by Jane Fonda) and Frankie Bergstein (played by Lily Tomlin) who (accidentally) move in together after their respective husbands have left them for each other after a twenty-year affair. In the mold of what Alexander Doty calls the "lesbian sitcom," the show thus presents "heterosexually marked characters in lesbian-charged spaces" (1993, 41–43), such as the beach house Grace and Frankie are initially reluctant to share but that soon becomes a material symbol of the freedom and joy of their entwining lives. It is a show in which the audience is encouraged to "identify with" and "take pleasure in" the depth of the bond between these women, "situating most male characters as potential threats to the spectator's narrative pleasure" (41–42). Although *Grace and Frankie* may appear to be organized around male desire, as the title relationship is entirely catalyzed by the decision of their exes to leave them, this structure is essentially challenged from the moment of its inception. Much of the show's narrative trajectory follows these women prioritizing their own needs over those of the men in their lives, quite literally in the case of the substantial storyline that sees Grace and Frankie become business partners in designing, marketing, and selling vibrators for older women.

[2.3] The very existence of *Grace and Frankie* femslash fandom further decenters men from the women's relationship, as the catalyst for fan narratives is not the bond between their ex-husbands but the one between these female characters. Building on Doty, Mel Stanfill writes of "structurally lesbian media after the Internet," arguing that some texts are "femslashier than others" (2017, 2), carrying "lesbian potential energy like a compressed spring," which "may or may not ever become kinetic in the media object itself" but on which fans "run their communities…either way" (9). As Stanfill suggests, what fuels female fandom of these femslashier texts comes from the ever-present possibility of lesbianism within the text itself,
rather than as an erroneous, unreasonable desire from its audience. There is a latent intimacy and affection between Grace and Frankie throughout the series, which manifests as queer—as nonnormative and label-defying—in any surface reading of the premise of the show, before we even get into the nature of their business venture, or their emotional dependence on each other, or any of the many, many scenes of tactile affection and flirtation between them. As a show so structured by the ending of heteronormative happily ever afters, beginning with the dissolution of that happy ending (the open credits feature a collapsing wedding cake, reiterating this dissolution at the start of every episode) and indeed exposing that happy ending as a lie, *Grace and Frankie* femslash fandom runs counter to heteronormative time. The very idea of the two women as a romantic pair is infused with the kind of queer understanding of time that Brinck-Johnsen sees in Dickinson’s "Wild nights." Over the course of chainofclovers's "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart," this queered timeline is emphasized by the temporal triggering of kinetic queerness and, as I will go on to argue later, built into its core with a chapter structure that follows the adjustment of the nuclear family to queerer timetables.

[2.4] Nighttime becomes a decidedly queer plane for Grace and Frankie in the first two chapters of the fic (chapter 1 is from Grace's perspective, and chapter 2 is from Frankie's), when a long-distance goodnight phone call becomes unexpectedly erotic. The fic is set after the end of the third season, the finale of which suggested that Frankie, urged on by a conflicted Grace, would move to Santa Fe to be with her boyfriend Jacob. After Frankie asks her if she has been taking care of herself and performing quality control for their vibrator company, Grace decides she cannot wait for the call to end "to run the fingers of her right hand down her [own] neck, to graze the collar of her pajamas, to streak a bit lower until she's touching one of her breasts through her shirt," a decision that ultimately leads an aroused and confused Frankie to hang up (chainofclovers 2017). Chapter 2 follows the consequences of the call for Frankie as she returns to her nighttime routine with Jacob; as he washes up, lightly asking after Grace, Frankie blurts, "We almost had phone sex" (chainofclovers 2017). This fic's premise of intimacy revolves around the idea of "wild nights" as a time of queerness, manifesting as a moment in which ecstasy and sensuality between women—Grace touching herself through her shirt, while Frankie listens—is privileged over the monotonous rituals of heteronormative domesticity.

[2.5] The epigraph that precipitates chapter 1—forming another layer of literary paratextual threshold for the fic's readers—underlines this queer nightscape imagined here, as chainofclovers cites the American Mojave lesbian poet Natalie Diaz, and her poem "From the Desire Field" (2017):

[2.6] Maybe this is what Lorca meant
    when he said, verde que te quiero verde—
    because when the shade of night comes,
    I am a field of it, of any worry ready to flower in my chest.

[2.7] Giving words to the burgeoning, burdened desire blooming between Grace and Frankie "when the shade of the night comes," this second extratextual (intertextual) reference works alongside the first, that of "the pretty gay Emily Dickinson poem," to alert the reader to the
specific temporality in which the queerness that defines the text will become, in Stanfill's word, "kinetic": the night. As each of the Grace chapters (1, 6, and 10) begins with another epigraph from "From the Desire Field," Diaz's words offer chainofclovers a greater lexicon with which to signal to her readers the thematics and schematics of the instalments that follow them.

[2.8] Where chapter 6 is headed by Diaz's "Let me call my anxiety, desire, then. / Let me call it, a garden,? the following chapter gives voice to Grace's desire for Frankie as an intersection of fear and yearning: "There's a little lightning bolt of apprehension as Grace rolls onto her back, but it's smaller than what she wants, which is to show Frankie, for Frankie to look at her, for Frankie to touch" (chainofclovers 2017). To give shape to the "lightning bolt of apprehension" Grace feels, chainofclovers asks us to take with us into this chapter Diaz's "anxiety as desire as garden" so that we might imagine Grace's experience here in terms of fecundity, growth, and nature. Similarly, in chapter 10, the Diaz epigraph "I want her green life. Her inside me / in a green hour I can't stop" foreshadows the needs Grace hopes Frankie can satiate: ",Everywhere,' Grace murmurs, meaning I feel this everywhere, meaning You can touch me everywhere" (chainofclovers 2017). The epigraph could be seen as framing Grace's desire for Frankie in terms of penetration ("Her inside me"), but it also insists we conceive of their sexual encounter as "green"—connoting freshness, even purity, and rooting this sensation in nature again—so that the boundlessness of Grace's erotic sensations are primed for the reader by a paratext that colors everything that follows. Throughout the fic, Diaz's garden imagery forms a vocabulary of lesbian sexuality—one that is not on offer from the source text, Grace and Frankie—that prefigures the articulation of a romantic, explicitly sexual, relationship between these "heterosexually marked characters" (Doty 1993, 43). To speak desires the show leaves unspoken, or refuses to find words for, chainofclovers refers her writing to another text.

[2.9] Only the Grace chapters feature epigraphs, which means that Diaz's naturescape is exclusively tied to Grace's experience of her emerging sexuality, so this particular paratext is embedded inextricably into the interior landscape of this particular character. The specific paratextual foreshadowing of the Grace chapter epigraphs exemplifies and also highlights the way the overarching paratext of Dickinson's "Wild nights—Wild nights! (269)" affects the more general structure of the text. "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart" follows the queer temporality that Brinck-Johnsen identifies in "Wild nights—Wild nights! (269)"; where Brinck-Johnsen sees this poem as Dickinson's rejection of the heteronormative timetable of marriage and family (in favor of immediacy and hedonistic pleasure), the chapter breakdown of chainofclovers's fic explores how family and domestic union can adapt to the timelines of queer pleasure.

[2.10] In addition to the three chapters from Grace's perspective and the three from Frankie's, the remaining four chapters follow each of their adult children as they learn that Frankie has decided to return to San Diego to be with Grace. From each of Frankie's sons respectively wondering, upon finding out about the new relationship, why they had already been subconsciously referring to Grace as a stepparent, to Grace's youngest daughter feeling "not a reversal, exactly, but a responsibility" to question Frankie as her father had done when she'd brought boys home, the familial roles both women have been playing in each other's
lives (and families) are parodied, rehearsed, rehashed, and interrogated. Chainofclovers infuses these maternal relationships with the insistence that not only would they withstand queering, not only would each supporting character adapt to structural lesbianism becoming manifest, but that the text and its characters would survive because these relationships have been queer—or queer-able—all along.

[2.11] In chapter 9, the sensual and ecstatic construction of time to which Brinck-Johnsen's reading suggests Dickinson's "wild nights" allude is even more directly explored, as Grace, effectively coming out to her oldest daughter Brianna, imagines a narrative for herself in which her life would have been organized by pleasure rather than conformity:

[2.12] "I just—I really want you of all people to know that if I hadn't been so dead, if I'd known sooner, really known, I'd have done something about it." She swipes at tears with the back of her wrist. "Maybe you and Mal would've been bullied at school. I would have hated that, but even that would've been better than all the lies I was telling you without even realizing it."

"Oh, Mommy." So dead. She was dead. The whole time she was making Brianna's teenage years a screaming nightmare, and Brianna was paying her back tenfold? A dead woman. Her mother. (chainofclovers 2017)

[2.13] The queer temporality that the reference to "Wild nights—Wild nights! (269)" invokes is extrapolated on and reimagined in challenging and meaningful ways by chainofclovers, as both Grace and her daughter are confronted with the damage that conforming to heteronormative familial roles has done to their relationship. While the ecstasy and joy of Grace and Frankie's erotic contact infuses the story, it brings with it an awareness of the attendant acceptance of the unecstatic or joylessness that straight temporality can demand and has demanded of them up until now. By citing Dickinson's "pretty gay" poem, chainofclovers queers not only that text—and its author, and the source text upon which her writing expands, and the characters her writing reanimates—but all of the pasts, presents, and futures she has imagined for them. In this way, chainofclovers's citations both of Diaz and Dickinson work like Clare Hemmings describes when she calls citation the technique through which narratives "are secured and made believable" (2011, 20). This paratextuality of lesbian literature signals and cements the queer narrative potential of chainofclovers's version of these characters by providing a language with which to speak it.

3. Feminist citation

[3.1] In Living a Feminist Life, Ahmed builds on her work in Queer Phenomenology to conceptualize a feminist citation policy through a lexicon of orientation. Describing citation as "feminist memory," Ahmed explains that "citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow" (2017, 15–16). In Ahmed's construction, feminist citation can be thought of as another way of being "done with the compass, done with the chart" of heteropatriarchy and choosing instead to follow the tracks that have been obscured by its scholarship. Her decision not to cite white men is an effort to
rely instead on "the intellectual genealogy of feminism and antiracism, including work that has been too quickly (in my view) cast aside or left behind, work that lays out other paths, paths we can call desire lines, created by not following the official paths laid out by disciplines" (15). She explains that the term "desire lines" comes from "landscape architecture for the paths on the ground created when enough people do not take the official route" (270). Enough people not taking the official route "laid out by disciplines" resonates with fan studies as a field of knowledge, but it also names femslash fan fiction as a practice—the decision of enough people to be "done with the compass" of compulsory heterosexuality, the map that only ever directs female characters toward men.

[3.2] Eugenia Zuroske's reading of Ahmed's citation policy evokes something of the citational relationships fan fiction represents. Zuroski writes that the patriarchal model of citation "would say to *you*: your idea would be nothing without this wisdom you received from me, so make sure to put my name on it. It's proprietary—designed to make sure the same handful of experts get credited for all work in the field, which they consider theirs" (2018a). She contrasts this with what she calls "the feminist model of citation," which she says "honors your agency as a scholar to determine the intellectual lineage you wish to represent and move forward. A citation is a form of gratitude and you are allowed to withhold it" (2018b). Against the patriarchal paradigm of citation as the institutional mechanism by which certain ideas are secured as belonging to "the same handful of experts," feminist citation is the practice of new scholars thanking old ones for their inspiration. In other words, where patriarchal citation excludes, recirculating the same small number of rightful knowledge-bearers, feminist citation includes, inviting us to acknowledge that which keeps us going and which we, in turn, would like to keep going.

[3.3] I am particularly struck by Zuroske's description of patriarchal citation as proprietary, as opposed to the way she talks of feminist citation in terms of sustenance, because of the resonance these terms carry for the relationship between fans, the work that sustains them (source texts), and the work they produce to sustain it and each other (fan works). As Francesca Coppa contends, fan fiction, as a category, draws attention to the discourses of property and ownership that stratify cultural production: "The definition of fan fiction as applying only to works currently covered by copyright, trademark, or some other intellectual property scheme serves to emphasize the (very odd) fact that stories can be owned" (2017, 6). In this way, fan fiction marks and is marked by the space between imagination and property, the tension inherent in the idea that some narratives are so defined as belonging to certain people that those who repeat those narratives owe their owners a debt.

[3.4] This difference between the "thank you" of feminist citation versus the "I owe you" of traditional patriarchal citation naturally evokes the dynamic of fandom's gift economy. Karen Hellekson argues that the gift economy is an innately feminist social structure. She contends that in patriarchal economies women are the gifts, the objects of exchange; but "in female fandom's gift culture," because "gifts correlate to aspects of the self, such as time or talent," "this sort of exchange turns one role of woman and gift on its head: the woman is still the gift, but now she can give herself" (2009, 116). Rather than an object of exchange, the women are subjects of exchange in fannish gift culture, both in the sense of being the economic actors circulating their wares and of selecting the highly individualized parts of
themselves (desires, interpretations, voices) that they choose to give and receive. Where Hellekson argues that the "new gendered space" this exchange creates coheres through "the circulation of gifts" rather than money—which is "deliberately repudiate[d]...because it is gendered male"—she reminds me of the way that Ahmed and Zuroski conceptualize citations as objects of exchange. Feminist citational models repudiate the circulation of citations as markers of intellectual currency paid to enshrine the academic status of certain (white male) thinkers, ones that erode the subjective voice of the person citing to secure the objective wisdom of the person being cited. Instead, feminist citation seeks a "new gendered space" of exchange, built on gratitude and shared memory, that, like any "thank you," invites and celebrates the subjectivity of both parties in the exchange. In this way, then, we can think of feminist citation as the academic equivalent of the fannish gift economy that Hellekson describes.

[3.5] There are obvious limitations to any argument that relies on the infallibility of the gift economy's feminist credentials. Tisha Turk points out that the gift economy is hardly egalitarian, describing it as "fundamentally asymmetrical," given that "most fans receive far more gifts than we give" (2014, ¶ 3.4). Abigail De Kosnik, meanwhile, maintains that "even though fan fiction is exchanged for free" money is being made from it but only by the "corporate owners of the media properties that fic authors so creatively elaborate on" because its proliferation still "works as advertising" for said properties (2009, 124). As Suzanne Scott writes, the very existence of fandom as "grassroots production...inspired by the consumption of commercial media texts" means that the fannish gift economy is "always already enmeshed" in capitalism's commodity culture (2009, ¶ 1.4).

[3.6] However, the interplay between the gifting of the fan text and the property of the media object actually reinforces rather than foreclosing the citational analogy. In "Writing Bodies in Space," Coppa speaks to that interplay as another layer of fan fiction's textuality that can be thought of as citational. She posits fan fiction as "more a kind of theatre than a kind of prose" (2006, 222), arguing that

[3.7] If traditional theatre takes a script and makes it three-dimensional in a potentially infinite number of productions, modern fandom takes something three-dimensional and then produces an infinite number of scripts. This is not authoring texts, but making productions—relying on the audience's shared extratextual knowledge of sets and wardrobes, of the actors' bodies and their smiles and movements—to direct a living theatre in the mind. (239)

[3.8] The connection between the fan text and this extratextual knowledge (which comes from the consumption of the commercial media property) to which the fan writer is always referring—actors, sets, costumes—mirrors the way citations work academically, as objects of shared knowledge exchanged between the writer and the reader to build a consensus and secure the vision the writer is trying to share. When chainofclovers writes, "Grace can picture the way Frankie's eyes crinkle with joy as she says her name" (chainofclovers 2017), she is citing an extratextual element (Lily Tomlin's eyes) that she knows the reader can picture (because of their Netflix subscription), just like Grace. She is saying to us, "So, you know when Lily-Tomlin-as-Frankie crinkles her eyes with joy? Well, this is what she looks
like now in the story”—which isn't so dissimilar from me saying, "So you know when Sara Ahmed calls citation 'feminist memory'? Well, that's like what I'm saying now in my essay." We are both trying to "secure" our narratives; we are both trying to "make them believable" (Hemmings 2011). If the patriarchal citational model works to perpetuate the idea that certain ideas are owned, and feminist citation works against this model to create and replenish those "desire lines" that lead us away from it, I see fan fiction as feminist citation in action: a lineage of desires that require something already-said—what Coppa, borrowing from Schechner, calls "twice-behaved behaviors" (2006, 228)—to be said again, in a different way.

[3.9] Judith Fathallah's work on the way fan writers enunciate their author role when their authority is denied by the creators of the sources that have inspired them suggests that fan fiction can operate like feminist citation (honoring those who've gone before, who've created our desire lines, rather than being indebted to the genius who owns the story), even when it is bound by frameworks of patriarchal property. Where George R. R. Martin disavows the right of fan fiction of his A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF) series to exist, what Fathallah calls the "legitimation paradox"—where the transformative power of the fan work to reevaluate "the Other…is enabled and enacted through the cultural capital of the White male" (2017, 9–10)—is complicated by the fact that fan works keep being produced despite Martin's disapproval. Fathallah argues that in the relationship between Martin and ASOIAF and Game of Thrones fan writers, "the fan's writing stakes out its own place in defiance of those power structures already defined by the author and the legal frameworks he invokes" (2016, 76). In the face of a proprietary citational relationship between fan work and source text, ongoing fan production becomes "deconstructive of the concept of original, essentialist texts authored by God and White men" (2017, 13). Thus, the citation that fan fiction constitutes, the connection invoked between fan work and source text, can be feminist, can acknowledge the sustenance of an idea, and can develop it so it can continue to sustain, even when the patriarchal model of property and debt is being demanded of it.

[3.10] To describe feminist citation in these terms is to evoke Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "reparative reading position," which teaches us "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even from a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (2002, 150–51). In spite of a cultural product that comes with an avowed, stated desire for fan work to be prohibited, the ASOIAF/Game of Thrones fan writers of whom Fathallah writes continue to extract sustenance—and, crucially, to sustain each other—nonetheless. Rita Felski's description of "reparative reading" as a "stance that looks to a work of art for solace and replenishment" (2015, 151) applies not just to the approach of fan writers to source texts but also to the way fan fiction can circulate for its readers, as the Tumblr user sproings writes: "They read it when they're feeling down. They open it in the waiting room at the doctors office, or in the lonesome dark of night. They turn to it in celebration when they did something right. They open it over and over so they can send the link to their friends, or just to revisit the characters that they love" (sproings 2015). Fan fiction is both a product and a producer of reparative reading, representing not only the effort to turn to a work of art for replenishment (even if that artwork works against replenishing certain consumers) but also the replenishment one reparative reading can produce for others. It is this reparative aspect of Ahmed's construction
of feminist citation that I think is most at stake in chainofclovers's citations in "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart."

4. Citation needed: A life without men

[4.1] Ahmed's argument of compulsory heterosexuality—"in effect, a citational relational, a requirement to live a life by citing men" (2017, 216)—is at the crux of both the narrative chainofclovers tells of two women extricating themselves from that requirement and my understanding of how she tells that story. Thinking of heteronormativity as a citational policy, as a social structure in which female sexuality is only imaginable as it relates to the desires of men (so male desire may be the point around which female desire is oriented and organized), suggests that to escape this kind of topography would require another map altogether. To be truly done with the compass, you need desire lines to help you find your way. This is where the lesbian paratextual bibliography chainofclovers creates comes into play as feminist methodology.

[4.2] The "citational relational" of compulsory heterosexuality also describes the scripts that those Dickinson scholars choosing to read her queerly must work against (Comment 2009). In order to make her case for the lesbian content of Dickinson's writing, Bennett challenges feminist-heterosexual readings of Dickinson by comparing her more unambiguously heterosexual poetry to her queerer works. Reading "The Daisy follows the Sun," Bennett draws attention to the gendered power dynamics at play in this text's construction of desire: "For her to have power equal to her male lover's, she had to take, steal, or seduce it from him—or they both had to be dead. Given nineteenth-century gender arrangements (including the arrangements within the Dickinson household), it is not surprising that the poet thought of heterosexual relationships in this way" (1992, 108). Bennett argues that heterosexual love in Dickinson's writing often exists around, through, and in the gaps of the patriarchal structures that stratify the articulation of desire or locate it within the body of the straight white male. Bennett goes on to contend that when Dickinson scholars deny the primacy of homoeroticism in her work, they privilege male sexuality as meaning-making by default: "feminist-heterosexual interpretations of Dickinson's poetry testify all too vividly to the degree to which, as Irigaray says, female sexuality remains 'enveloped' in the needs and desires of men, despite the woman-centeredness of the feminist vision" (121).

[4.3] Just as Bennett's queer reading of Dickinson insists on a feminist understanding of sexuality in her poetry—where prioritizing the desire of women for women necessarily means prioritizing female desire that is not defined in relation to men—chainofclovers's "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart" redirects the putatively feminist narrative of Grace and Frankie, two older women rediscovering their desires away from the hidden centrality of the needs of men. When chainofclovers cites "the pretty gay Emily Dickinson poem" for her title, she is referencing what Bennett calls Dickinson's "woman-centred sexuality and textuality" (1992, 118) to build new citational relational pathways, following those desire lines off the beaten track of compulsory heterosexuality. She is relying on a different bibliography, a different word-history, to voice her version of these characters. As Herzog writes, "In an essential way, it is this paratext that serves to liberate the fan text from the voice of the original producers and replace it with the fannish voice" (2012, 5.3).
[4.4] Chainofclovers's fannish voice regularly interrogates the citational requirement of compulsory heterosexuality. Her characters deal with the canonical baggage of "the needs and desires of men" (Bennett 1992, 121) that structure their lives in the show, time and again:

[4.5] Deep down, Frankie has known for a long time that Grace would be happier with a woman. Even when Grace has genuinely cared for a man, their connection has been discordant—tortured, even—and ultimately disappointing. It's still hard for her to talk about Phil. And when she admitted to Frankie that she'd finally made good on her agreement to spend two hours with Nick "Skullcap" Skolka, she tried to laugh off her revulsion, the way she'd ducked away from his goodnight kiss, but panic undercut every sentence. "I'm fluent in Nick," she'd said. "But I can't keep forgiving myself for it." (chainofclovers 2017)

[4.6] Frankie's thoughts on the heterosexual romances that occupy Grace in canon reflect how dominant her interactions with men have been in shaping her character on the show. In the fic, however, these relationships are recontextualised to read as part of a broader narrative of inevitable lesbian desire, which also constitutes a much deeper meditation on her identity than the canon offers. Similarly, Frankie's relationship with Jacob is reframed as part of a commentary on the citational relational of compulsory heterosexuality, when she remembers Grace's thoughts about her decision to move to Santa Fe: "Before Frankie left La Jolla, Grace had worried—out loud, of course—about Frankie's decision to sell her car, and for the first time she understands what Grace meant by 'trading one kind of dependency for another.' What if Jacob wasn't a good person?" (chainofclovers 2017). Over the course of "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart," this citational relational is exposed and repaired, as both Grace and Frankie move from being able to identify the way each other's lives have been organized by the requirement to cite men to reflecting on their own dependencies.

[4.7] The intense nature of Frankie's ongoing relationship with her ex-husband Sol is a source of much conflict on the show because he remains the primary point of contact in her life long after he divorces her, but in "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart" she questions her own impulses to share so much of herself with him. When Grace chooses to gradually reduce her alcohol consumption in order to safely abide by Frankie's request that she be sober for the first time they have sex, Frankie wants "to ask Sol if he thinks the internet is reputable enough for Grace to take its tapering advice" but resolves that he "knows less about the internet than she does. He knows less about Grace" (chainofclovers 2017). Instead, she decides that Grace is the person she needs to talk to about their relationship, not Sol:

[4.8] Until she and Grace have talked more, Sol doesn't deserve to know that Grace and alcohol are "It's Complicated." She thinks 2007 called and wants its joke back, and even that's something Sol wouldn't understand. He doesn't deserve to know that she and Grace are in love. It's theirs, their knowledge to treasure, to tend and keep safe. Sol will be the last to know. (chainofclovers 2017)

[4.9] In place of her lifelong dependency on Sol, she begins to imagine herself, her desires,
her future, not just with someone else but in a relationship that does not require Sol's input in any way, a relationship he does not define, did not inspire, and for which he does not need to be credited or acknowledged. Her decisions are hers to make here, a discourse that also threads through Grace's thoughts on their new life together.

[4.10] When Grace tells Brianna about her feelings for Frankie, the citational relational—the, in this case, almost literal requirement to cite men—that structured her marriage to Robert is central to how she understands, and has understood, her own relationship to desire:

[4.11] "One time I asked your dad if we could get a cat," Grace says. "It must have been forty years ago."

\textit{So you've always liked pussy!}, Brianna manages not to say. If this conversation was with anyone but her mother—literally anyone—she wouldn't have managed such restraint. "Okay," Brianna says.

"Did you hear me, though?"

"You asked Dad if you could get one. Like, you had to get his permission."

(chainofclovers 2017)

[4.12] Although her interpretation is obviously expressed in a completely different register from that of Grace, it is significant that Brianna, albeit comically, hears this as a chapter of Grace's coming out narrative. Grace's story suggests that, for her, not being married means not needing to ask Robert's permission; her post-divorce life, as chainofclovers imagines it, is constituted by the lack of the citational relational of which Ahmed writes; but her post-divorce life, and indeed this very conversation with Brianna, is also constituted by her desire for Frankie. This narrative, and particularly the unspoken association Brianna makes upon hearing it, suggests that Grace's feelings for Frankie, their life together, allows her "to exit from the requirements of compulsory heterosexuality" (Ahmed 2017, 216). Their sexual contact is marked by this lack of citation. Indeed, Grace's story is echoed in the following chapter when she asks Frankie if she can touch herself: "'Grace,' Frankie breathes, 'do this whenever you want. Alone, in front of me, doesn't matter. You don't need my permission. [...] You know that, right? You don't need my permission?'" (chainofclovers 2017). In chainofclovers's version, Grace and Frankie's choices not to cite the men in their lives, not to ask permission for their desires, not to require the structure of heteronormativity to define their sexuality, are tied up in their decision to cite each other. Lesbianism is framed as a remedy for these characters, a desire line that allows them to deviate from the path of compulsory heterosexuality (the straight and narrow) and step into a female textuality/sexuality, given voice by Dickinson and Diaz.

[4.13] When Grace allows herself to fantasize about what this new citational strategy might look like, we are reminded again of the queer temporality Dickinson's wild nights offer as paratextual reference. The sensual pleasure that Brinck-Johnsen identifies in the poem and reads as troubling to heteronormative timelines that value marriage and family life as natural happy endings manifests in Grace's longer ruminations on what her life would have looked like without the citational relational of her heterosexual marriage. As Grace remembers
"Brianna in her lavender prom dress, impatiently posing for photos in the front yard" and "Robert's doting, hand-wringing concern [which] had felt tiresome and dated even then," she realizes she no longer has "to bother with Robert's part in the story": "She moves the memory to the beach house, replaces Robert with Frankie, lets herself imagine Frankie embarrassing Brianna, the oldest of the four kids" (chainofclovers 2017). Grace's real-life memory of her younger daughter, Mallory, "taking mental notes for own prom two years down the road" is also transported to "this revision of history," where she is joined by Frankie's sons. Grace imagines the boys pointedly ignoring the occasion and clamoring to order in for dinner as soon as Brianna and her date drive away:

[4.14] And how would the delivery man know he was at the right house? Because of the mailbox, clearly labeled not only with the house number but with BERGSTEIN and HANSON, their names borrowed from two men they'd stopped needing. Or maybe, consciousnesses raised, they would have returned those names. But would she and Frankie have wanted to take back quiet, painful names from quiet, painful fathers? Would they have invented something else to call themselves— (chainofclovers 2017)

[4.15] A longer consideration of how a queerer familial structure could have made Grace's memories more pleasurable, this domestic scene imagines the joy of her life with Frankie in relation to their successful renunciation of the citational relational. In Grace's fantastical queer timeline, they require neither husbands, "two men they'd stopped needing," nor "quiet, painful fathers" to provide them with the language to signify what is between them. The question of how to name what they have created together is instead answered by a lesbian paratextuality that calls it "green life" (Diaz) and a life "without compass, without chart" (Dickinson). These words "secure" it and "make it believable" (Hemmings 2011) because they give it a history; they remind us that the citational relational can be replaced and overcome.

5. Citing chainofclovers

[5.1] For Bennett, the lesbian textuality that Dickinson left behind, which she tracks through the poet's continual use of clitoral symbols (such as crumb, jewel, berry, pea, pebble, bee, pearl), is characterized as the refusal to define her sexuality in relation to men, to cite her desire as belonging to them: "In privileging the clitoris over the vagina, Dickinson privileged the female sexual organ whose pleasure was clearly independent of the male" (1992, 123). Deploying many of the terms from what she calls Dickinson's "clitoral poetry," Bennett concludes her paper with the idea that "her 'crumb' was 'small' but it was also 'plenty.' It was 'enough'" (123). From my own correspondence with chainofclovers, it strikes me that her queer reading of Grace and Frankie is enough for her, too, when she writes, "because I trust the characters and the acting more than I trust the showrunners or the framing of the show, I'm okay with injecting that queerness myself" (chainofclovers, email to author, November 1, 2018). Because of the "living theatre of the mind" (Coppa 2006, 239), chainofclovers is able to direct for herself and her readers; she can see that queerness there, even if others cannot, so she can build her own lesbian textuality for the audience that wants to see it, too.
This point, or how I am able to make it, brings me to perhaps the most keenly feminist citational practice that the study of fan fiction engenders. Where Fathallah contends that fan works can deconstruct the founding concept of an originary, hermetic text belonging to the (white male) author-God (2017, 13), Coppa retools the cultural distinctions between author and (fan-)writer, which typically elevate the work of the former, to posit the (female) fan fiction writer as the author-God's antithesis:

In fandom, the author may be dead, but the writer—that actively scribbling, embodied woman—is very much alive. You can talk to her; you can write to her and ask her questions about her work, and she will probably write back to you and answer them. She might enjoy discussing larger plot, style, and characterization points with you if you engage her in critical conversation. (2006, 238–39).

In researching this paper, I engaged chainofclovers in such a conversation about the references she uses for her title and the epigraphs to her "Grace" chapters. Her response greatly affected how I came to see my own understanding of her writing.

Where I had been conceiving of her use of Dickinson as "taking mainstream, canonical poetry and insisting that it speaks a language of queer love and sexuality" to provide "both a queer reading of Dickinson and a legitimisation" of the queer story she wanted to tell (Alice Margaret Kelly, email to chainofclovers, November 2, 2018), she replied that

The Dickinson title is absolutely a queer reading of a work/person/segment of history that isn't KNOWN as queer even if Dickinson's read as queer, assumed queer, etc. I wanted the title to queer up both the way the poem gets read and the fic itself, to kind of say "If you're past the point where your map or compass are of any use to you, fuck it, you have to go your own way. The poem said it, and now the characters in this story need to change in that same way, need to make that leap. Let's put in the work to turn this into something queer, to help these characters make the decisions they need to make. (chainofclovers, email to author, December 6, 2018)

Dickinson's establishment within the literary canon helped chainofclovers to "put in the work" of queering putatively heterosexual characters by providing the desire lines that can redirect them from the map of heteronormativity they must follow on the show. Although this tallied with my own interpretation of the Dickinson title, chainofclovers urged me to look again at the role of her Diaz epigraphs, arguing "the Dickinson and Diaz references sort of do something opposite from each other":

With Diaz, who's a contemporary lesbian poet writing poems that are explicitly, straightforwardly about love of women—among so many other things—it felt more like saying of course all this is queer. Unlike with Dickinson, there's no need for me or any other writer to "insist [Diaz's poem] speaks a language of queer love and sexuality" because Diaz laid it all out there, didn't even need to insist. And there's no need to stretch or alter or reframe Grace
Hanson's experiences of desire to fit that queer narrative; this poem about—among so many other things—queer desire isn't a potential destination or unturned possibility for Grace, but a reflection of what's there. (chainofclovers, email to author, November 1, 2018)

[5.9] This idea that the lesbian (para)textuality chainofclovers gives her version of Grace—in the form of her Diaz epigraphs—reflects not the "unturned possibility" but the path she is obviously ("of course") already taking contrasts to her use of Dickinson to name the "leap" she wanted these characters to make. Yet while both references might describe contradictory conceptualizations of queer desire (from queerness as a movement, as something the body takes itself toward in the Dickinson, to the inevitability and stillness of Diaz's desire, emanating from the body from the inside out) textually, they both perform the same task. They secure and make believable chainofclovers's proposition that Grace Hanson and Frankie Bergstein could choose to turn toward each other and away from men.

[5.10] The cultural space in which this choice exists, a fan work that commits to it joyfully regardless of whether it might ever manifest in canon, evokes again the time and space of Dickinson's poem. Brinck-Johnsen reminds us that though "these nights are described as the product of an ongoing relationship, the entire poem is a thought experiment—'were I with thee'" (2018, 343). Crucially, while these wild nights "occur solely in the conditional…the use of exclamation points serves to make the theorizing of the nights seem ecstatically joyful, not tragic or melancholy" (343). The thought experiment of the poem does not make the sensuality imagined therein any less pleasurable or material. We might, then, think of the conditionality of the poem's eroticism as a cited fantasy; if you were with me, it would sound like this. The citational practice of fan fiction is built on "were I with thee"s, as writers like chainofclovers take the words of desire that have been spoken before and put in the work required to make the specific characters they need to speak them, speak them anew.

[5.11] In a similar vein, I have found the words to describe how I feel about chainofclovers's "Done with the Compass, Done with the Chart" in Coppa's description of a Star Trek fan song, which had been described by Joan Marie Verba as a poem. Coppa analyses the "stage directions" of the work, the idea that it is meant to performed by "two voices and a Vulcan harp," to suggest that "perhaps some readers actually sang the song with their friends" (2006, 229). From this, Coppa concludes that "it's not a poem, it's a party; it's an artwork that implies a community." The way chainofclovers refers to "the pretty gay Emily Dickinson poem" means that it is also not a poem but a party, a community of readers who believe in women choosing each other, a culture of feminist art that is not structured by the requirement to cite men but by the desire lines of lesbian textuality.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] In her use of Dickinson and Diaz, chainofclovers queers both the literary canon—brining one famous poet who is sometimes read as queer into the same orbit as one contemporary one who is openly LGBTQ—and the canon of Grace and Frankie. The textual framework she constructs around her story of lesbian desire, knitting together a lexicon of female-centered eroticism, acts as a scaffold for the narrative she tells of two women
choosing to cite (to turn to, to ask of, to find security in, to credit) each other rather than the
men in their lives. The feminist model of citation that takes place within "Done with the
Compass, Done with the Chart" thus mirrors the feminist model of citation that is taking
place outside of it, as chainofclovers builds a lesbian (para)textuality, a bibliography of queer
female references, upon which to articulate the possibility of this relationship. In this way,
her fic draws attention to the extent to which feminist citational models organize fan work as
a cultural practice. As feminist citation in action, fan fiction can give us the map to our desire
lines, guiding us away from the expected tracks of compulsory heterosexuality and into the
"green life," "without compass, without chart."

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Symposium

Survival and migration patterns of Chinese online media fandoms

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[0.1] Abstract—Chinese online media fandoms over the past two decades have been shaped and erased by natural website deaths and data loss, but also by governmental censorship, especially under the pressure of three major censorship campaigns that targeted pornographic and copyright-infringing publications. The preservation of this history, although necessary, also leads to ethical debates regarding exposing fandoms to censors.

[0.2] Keywords—Archive; Censorship; China; Ethical dilemma; Fan history


1. Introduction

[1.1] Being a fan signifies two different cultural identities and practices in the current Chinese cultural environment. Voluntarily engaging in the celebrity economy and star system, actively purchasing everything related to the celebrities, and voluntarily supporting and publicizing beloved celebrity and media products are not only tolerated but welcomed by the industry, and sometimes even the government. However, if fans commits their time to writing fan fiction, creating fan art, and editing fan videos—that is, if they engage in secondary creations that do not generate visible revenue for either the industry or the government—such fans will too often be ignored, marginalized, and erased. Here I discuss this second group of fans, the ones whose interest and pleasure lies in producing and consuming fan works that mainly circulate inside the fan community. Although this group of fans in China is not necessarily identical with media fans in the English-speaking world, I nonetheless refer to them as media fans who work inside Chinese online media fandoms.

[1.2] Chinese online media fandom started about twenty years ago, but its history has been so fraught with conflicts and interruptions that it cannot be approached through empirical data and evidence directly drawn from websites. The first generation of Chinese online media fans emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century, which coincided with the coming of age of the first generation of young enthusiasts of Japanese anime and manga after complete marketization of the Chinese mainland in 1992. Blockbuster English-language fantasy media franchises, such as The Lord of the Rings film franchise (2001–3) and the
Harry Potter books and films (1997–), also greatly influenced Chinese media fandom. Indigenous Chinese media products also had their share of fans in the culturescape, but their portion was comparatively marginal until around 2005. Therefore, Chinese online media fandom is in itself a product of translation, intercultural communication, and negotiation among communities with distinctive rules and conventions.

[1.3] Although I call it Chinese media fandom, it has never been a national category that exists only within the borders of the Chinese mainland; rather, it is a virtual cultural space that extends its influence to all Chinese-speaking individuals, and it permeates media products originating in other languages, especially English and Japanese. It is difficult for even participants to provide a general history of this community; nor could a signature fandom be presented as an example, as English-language fan studies does with the Star Trek (1966–) or Harry Potter fandoms. To make the situation even more complicated, Chinese media fandom suffers not only from the natural death of websites as their creators move on but also, and more seriously, from censorship campaigns that sift through the internet to strike anything deemed inappropriate.

[1.4] Chinese media fandom is a product of Chinese fans' efforts to establish communities that are based on taste and interest, and it reflects on and reacts to glocal political and cultural shifts. Scholars and fans must attempt to understand this unique history, record the memories of its participants, and analyze its significance as a mode of cultural interaction and cultural formation.

2. The history of Chinese media fandom

[2.1] My colleague, Hanning Gao, and I started a project to record Chinese media fandom's history in 2018. We sought to recover the early stages of development and historical shifts in Chinese online fan fiction through surveys, interviews, and textual analysis of both written historical records of debates and negotiations within the fan community. We wrote a short survey and distributed it on the Chinese SNS website Weibo to recruit interviewees with interesting and representative memories about Chinese media fandom and how it has operated and shifted (note 1). We received more than 3,300 responses to this preliminary survey. Even though we asked only a few simple-to-answer questions, such as, "What significant events can you recall that happened in your fandom?," we discovered that Chinese media fandoms, although comparatively secluded and requiring adequate knowledge of the source texts (thereby making it difficult to enter into wider social discussion and consumption), were extremely dependent on the sociocultural environment as well as sensitive to policy changes and censorship enforcement.

[2.2] One question in the survey asked responders to identify major events that they experienced in online fandoms; 1,106 (48.9 percent) of 2,260 of effective responses directly identified various censorship campaigns that restricted the surviving environment of online fandom. We found that many fans used the keywords hexie, "forum shutdown," and mentioned the sensational cases of Dahuilang, Tianyi, and Shenhai Xiansheng (note 2).

[2.3] Through the migration routes that the respondents identified in the survey, we learned
that over the last two decades, media fandoms in general migrated in the following order: separately operated online forums, larger forums, archival systems, SNS miniblogs, and lightblogs (figure 1). This migration pattern is almost identical to what happened to English-language online media fandom. New technologies and modes of communication change and shape online media fandom in any language. Smartphones and the increasing availability of fast internet connections have led to social networking websites' (Weibo in China, Twitter and Tumblr in the English-speaking world) replacing blogs and forums after 2010. However, in China, censorship has been an influential factor in fandom's migration, as most mass migrations took place during or after large censorship campaigns. A typical case is that of Lofter.

![A Simple Genealogy of Chinese Online Media Fandoms](image)

Figure 1. A simple genealogy of the websites that Chinese media fandoms have migrated through since 1998. Dates denote only the general time period that media fandoms used the websites as the major socializing and exchanging platform, not the websites' dates of launching and closing.

[2.4] Lofter, a lightblogging system operated by NetEase, which originally targeted the community of photography fans and artists (including but not limited to fan artists), has gradually developed into the major publishing and sharing platform in Chinese fan fiction writing communities since its establishment in 2011. The rise of Lofter as a platform that permits exchange of fan fiction is the direct result of a major online censorship campaign that targeted pornographic topics in 2014, thus driving fan users to Lofter as they sought a new forum. Two major venues of Chinese fan fiction publication platform websites in the previous decade, Baidu Tieba and Jinjiang Literature, both promptly gave into political coercion and moved to shut down fan fiction publication forums without notice in about May 2014—likely also a result of fan fiction's being probably the least lucrative of the online communities that depend on commercial websites. The fan fiction section of Jinjiang Literature was made available again after about six months, but the censored stories were never recovered. Our respondents also reported that many Baidu Tieba forums dedicated to
male-male couples were never again available.

3. Three waves of censorship campaigns

[3.1] In the survey, respondents identified three significant waves of censorship campaigns. The first lasted from 2007 to 2008, the second lasted from 2014 to 2015, and the third started in about 2018 and at the time of writing was still in progress. People's anxiety is most acute when campaigns that target pornographic content and illegal publications result in arrests of online danmei (that is, homosexual and homoerotic writings created and consumed by women) writers; such cases have occurred at least three times.

[3.2] The first censorship campaign, although the least intense, resulted in the closure of various fan fiction forums and websites. This campaign started an online carnival in which netizens actively expressed their discontent through memes that alluded to vulgarity, pornography, and other censored or forbidden words. For instance, the "grass mud horse" meme has become a symbol of popular resistance online; the sounds are similar to the curse "fuck your mother" in Chinese (figure 2). This meme has been discussed both in mass media and in scholarly research (Meng 2011). However, such lighthearted mockery and fun were no longer possible during the next two waves of censorship.

Figure 2. Image of the fictional "grass mud horse," which is in fact a llama. The screenshot comes from a YouTube karaoke-style video featuring a song that celebrates the happy life of
the grass mud horse (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xn7q71wCRdg).

[3.3] The second wave of online censorship campaign was much larger in scale. The internet population in China had increased from 162 million to 648 million from 2007 to 2014, so the population affected by this campaign also significantly increased (China Internet Network Information Center 2014). This 2014 censorship campaign is widely known in Chinese as Jingwang Xingdong (internet cleansing movement). Started in April and ending six months later, this government campaign targeted online pornography. In the government's words, the campaign sought to remove illegal content made and communicated online, including illegal publications, pornographic content, and false media (Central Propaganda Department Service Center 2014).

[3.4] Censorship of pornographic content has always been a much-tolerated type of censorship in China. Danmei are among the easiest targets for moral judgments. Before then, Jinjiang Literature, the largest female-oriented literature website, had hosted an enormous and influential group of danmei writings. Danmei was put side by side with heterosexual romance (yanqing) on the website's front page, although it maintained its own channel. After the Jingwang Xingdong, however, Jinjiang Literature created a euphemism to substitute for the easily targeted term danmei: chun'ai, "pure love." As if to demonstrate their sincerity in siding with pure love, Jinjiang Literature further enforced a strict self-censorship system that forbade any sexual content, presented in a widely circulated principle: "No description of anything below the neck" (Guanchazhe 2014). It also started a reporting system that encourages readers to flag anything on the website that they find transgresses the current rules and policies (figure 3).
However, the worst instance of censorship is that of the ongoing third wave. This censorship campaign relies on a large-scale, omnipresent reporting system. Many reports come from informants inside the community, especially antifans of a certain genre of writing, or even antifans of certain slash pairings. Using the power of governmental censorship to persecute people of a different fannish position has been a common practice since 2014, but it has reached new heights in the past year or so.

A young amateur writer of danmei stories using the pen name Tianyi was sentenced to ten and a half years in prison for illegally disseminating pornographic materials in large quantities. Although she was arrested along with the publishers, editors, and printers in 2017, the case was only made public in November 2018, when Tianyi was sentenced (Shepherd 2018). Widespread anxiety and panic resulted, forcing many fan fiction editing and printing outfits to close down. Out of fear, many writers removed their stories from the internet altogether. As a result of strict censorship and control over publication, for decades, Chinese female fan communities relied on a shadow economy of Japanese-style dōjinshi publication—that is, custom printing via amateur self-publication. After the flourishing of websites for person-to-person sales, Chinese fan communities developed a highly efficient network of dōjinshi production and sales, which could have been an excellent example of women's enterprise. However, the lawsuit sent a chilling message to not only danmei writers...
but also to every online writer who does not seek formal publication.

[3.7] The case of Tianyi, the similar case of another female danmei writer, Shenhai Xiansheng (Yang 2019), and the overall tightening of censorship of all Chinese websites finally drove Chinese fans to take refuge at websites like the Archive of Our Own (https://archiveofourown.org/). AO3 is luckily not targeted by the Chinese Great Fire Wall, which has blocked the majority of international large websites, including Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr. The year 2018 could mark the start of Chinese fandoms' migration out of their comfort zone of Chinese-language writing and websites and into participation in English-language fan forums—or it could end if AO3 is blocked by the Great Fire Wall.

4. Chinese media fandoms' vulnerability

[4.1] Chinese media fandoms are sensitive to policy shifts for many reasons, but it boils down to the affect-driven nature of fandoms and the reciprocal gift economy of fan fiction circulation. Because fan fiction writing, especially slash fiction writing, is theoretically not for profit, it lacks the commercial power and representation that might enforce its legitimacy. Chinese media fandoms instead have to migrate through various host websites or host servers whenever a commercial or political decision affects the current host website, thereby leading to vast data loss and frequent negotiations of community decorum, which must be specifically tailored to the host server or website.

[4.2] Chinese media fandoms have never had a website like AO3 that serves solely as an archive for fan fiction creations. In recent years, because of the extremely successful commercialization of nontransformative writings online, most websites dedicated to internet literature attempt to monetize the fiction posted to them. Fannish sites thus become exposed to outside attention that could lead to copyright enforcement, further driving fan fiction outside these sites. In addition, the more commercialized and mainstream the internet literature websites become, the more surveillance from the government they will attract.

[4.3] The government's control and censorship of online writings come in various forms and approaches, but as the respondents to our survey express, the one that affects fan fiction websites the most is the censorship of perceived pornography, which comes in waves of campaigns and movements. Like English-language fan fiction writing communities, Chinese-language ones migrate to places where their cultural products and practices are generally tolerated, but Chinese fans must move content much more often—and in a much more desperate and slapdash fashion. Metaphorically speaking, Chinese online fan communities are tenants. They never own a home; they have to obey whatever rules that the landlord decides on; and they have to move whenever the landlord tells them to. They also have to move to places where their communities are tolerated, even if the houses that the tenants inhabit are less suitable for their living and socializing.

[4.4] Under these circumstance, academic studies on Chinese fandoms are an ethical dilemma. Fan fiction has affected the narratives of a vast number of online fictional writings in China, but fan fiction is also highly vulnerable to policy shifts and government-targeted
attacks. It is important to record the memory and history of online fans, and it is important to destigmatize the female labor and desire involved in these writings. However, doing so would also cause the community to be examined by outsiders and censors. As the cultural and political atmosphere in China grows tighter, attention might lead to devastating consequences, such as what happened to writers Tianyi and Shenhai Xiansheng.

5. Acknowledgment

[5.1] I thank Hanning Gao, Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, for her contributions.

6. Notes

1. The short survey (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeZROR0gDYx5niiZodyUTr1q5JiWxGHxSKXAbhqrc_ACScgA/viewform) asked the following: Can you remember any important events that happened in fandoms that you took part in (e.g., the establishment of a certain important forum)? The influence of censorship? Famous works/events that extended their influence outside fandom? Please do not restrict your answers to the questions we suggest.

2. Hexie, "harmonious," is the keyword for Chinese ex-leader Hu Jintao's signature ideology. It has been used as a euphemism for internet censorship since 2004. The cases of Dahuilang, Tianyi, and Shenhai Xiansheng refer to three danmei writers who were arrested because of their "pornographic" writings or their unauthorized publications. Dahuilang was arrested in 2015, Tianyi and Shenhai Xiansheng in 2017.

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Symposium

Gendered Fairy Tale Heroics: Ginny Weasley in The Source

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[0.1] Abstract—The Harry Potter fan fiction novel *The Source*, by Luckyducky7, centers on Ginny Weasley. This work attempts to carve out a narrative for Ginny Weasley that allows her to be a heroine. This close reading of *The Source* highlights where it succeeds and where it fails in completing this task.

[0.2] Keywords—Close reading; Draco Malfoy; Fairy tale; Fan fiction; Fandom; Harry Potter


[1] Harry Potter fandom decided long ago that Ginny Weasley had been given the short end of the stick in the movies and in the novels. *The Source*, a 2003 fan fiction novel by Luckyducky7 (https://www.fanfiction.net/s/1446745/1/The-Source), is set during Harry Potter's years at Hogwarts, though in an AU scenario wherein Voldemort has already been defeated by him and, as we discover later in the work, Draco Malfoy. The story is told mainly from Ginny Weasley's point of view, though it shifts to Draco Malfoy's at some points. In *The Source*, Ginny Weasley's parents are in debt due to medical bills and all of the Weasley siblings do their best to help. Ginny disguises herself as the Source and sells information about her classmates to each other to contribute to the medical bills. Early in the story, Malfoy wants to hire the Source and decides to discover this person's identity when he realizes she is a woman (chapter 5). Subsequently, Ginny and Draco fall in love while also battling a new villain. In this essay, I attempt to understand whether Ginny Weasley's character, through this fan fiction story, subverts her original canon characterization.

[2] The way that Ginny is described in relation to others throughout *The Source* allows her to undermine some aspects of the original text, but not all of them. In the very first chapter, we are told that Ginny goes unnoticed by most people: "The Trio turned their heads and looked at Ginny. They had forgotten that she was sitting there" (chapter 1). Sharing a scene with major canon characters, she is described using words that characterize her as a shy, introverted person (chapter 1). A few chapters later, she continues to be ignored by her friend Colin and his girlfriend: "so Ginny just walk[s] off" but "they didn't even notice" (chapter 18). There is a perpetual refrain of "they didn't notice" that is reminiscent of her character in
the first few Harry Potter novels. *The Source* 's first chapter was published a handful of days after the publication of *Order of the Phoenix*, which gave Ginny a larger role and introduced readers, and Harry, to a more independent and outgoing character than we'd seen in previous books. Likewise, *The Source* gives us moments of Ginny Weasley as fiery and passionate, but only when she is with Draco Malfoy. In chapter 26, Ginny offers to give Draco a back massage. While she is doing so, she leads him to think that she receives massages from Colin and purposefully baits him. Colin's fingers are "so soft" and he "uses just the right amount of strength," and the experience "really feels like heaven." When this causes Draco to "clutch the quilt" with tension, Ginny can tell and "smile[s] mischievously" at him (chapter 26).

These two sides of her personality—meek and bold—seem out of place, until they're viewed in context. When Ginny occupies a space around the Golden Trio, it's a space we're familiar with from the novels—that of a secondary character. The space she occupies with Draco has no precedent in the series, and she's therefore able to make it her own. She becomes the one who holds the power in this new space.

[3] Throughout *The Source*, Draco attempts to occupy the traditionally male position in romance and adventure stories. Several times in the first half of *The Source*, Draco attempts to woo Ginny through grandiose, public displays. For Valentine's Day, he sends her an extravagant gift, but Ginny rejects it, refusing to take on the traditional role that Draco is attempting to place her in. He quickly gets angry because "any other girl" would be grateful, "fawning over the guy who sent it to them" (chapter 18). However, Ginny continues to resist this trope. Suddenly he is apologizing to her and his tone becomes "gentle." When she accepts the new role that he's positioning himself in, he "sigh[s] in relief" (chapter 18).

[4] Often a female character's agency is enacted through sexualization. In canon, Ginny only begins to gain authority in Harry's life after he sees her as a sexual being, and only then is she given a larger role in the story. We aren't provided any explicit assurance that Harry truly sees her as a whole person. *The Source* gives us that assurance and more—Ginny and Draco only enter an actual relationship in the final chapter, after she has pursued her goals. In *The Source*, Ginny is not sexualized by the narrative, nor is she perceived as a sexual object. She is never objectified by Draco or anyone else. Draco acknowledges his physical attraction to her, often complimenting her; however, this language is never directed at Ginny in a lustful or lecherous manner (chapter 39). On the other hand, Draco treats other women in the story as sexual objects. For instance, when Draco breaks up with OC Felicity Lateris, he tells her their relationship was about "the thrill of the moment" and "that moment has finished" (chapter 23). Ginny's physical attraction to Draco is tempered by friendship, compassion, and love. This allows for a more complex character development to occur and the author's decision to delay any sexual interactions until the end of the story amplifies this. Thus, the lack of sexual interactions between Ginny and Draco do not strip her of her sexuality.

[5] Despite this, there are instances in the first half where Draco, as the male character, attempts to create a more traditional narrative. Early in the story, we can see Draco unconsciously trying to be dominant and exert sexual influence on women. When he realizes the *Source* is a woman, he immediately tries to seduce her and places his hands on her body, caressing her (chapter 5). This could have easily reduced their roles to traditional gender dynamics. Instead, Ginny immediately shuts down this behavior and it does not resurface
without her consent. Draco also exhibits jealousy over Ginny's interactions with other men. Again, Ginny rejects this behavior from him, much like she rejects his previously mentioned grandiose displays of affection (chapter 18). Yet when Draco invites Ginny to watch him compete at the dragon races, his female trainer gives her a quick makeover, and Draco "[is] stunned at how beautiful she look[s] in her dress and with her hair done up" (chapter 30). The makeover scene is a common trope in romance narratives, and even though Luckyducky7 has clearly established that Ginny is not going to occupy the fair maiden role, they're still either unable or unwilling to avoid certain tropes that readers are fond of.

[6] The climax of the story shows a clear shift in Ginny's character. Throughout The Source, her motivation, that of protecting her family, drives almost all her actions. By the end of the story, she is purely fueled by this goal and taps into the resourceful, powerful side of her character to save the day. She demands to be taken to the story's main villain and attempts to strike a deal with him. Here, her behavior and emotions are "bold," "strong," and "brave," and she has "power" (chapter 43)—descriptive language authors would typically use to describe a male hero. Moreover, when the villain reneges on his deal and captures Draco, readers find themselves in a scenario they know well but that has been flipped on its head. Draco is placed in a cage; Ginny kisses him between the bars of the cage and tells him she loves him. She then turns to face the Death Eaters, standing between them and the cage, acting as a physical barrier. In one fell swoop, Ginny uses a spell that takes out all the Death Eaters but leaves Draco "standing on a pile of rubble unscathed" and calling for Ginny. "He didn't know what else he could do. He prayed to Merlin that a miracle could have happened and Ginny was saved" (chapter 43). Ginny lives, but there are weeks of uncertainty before it's confirmed that she will survive. This sequence is well-known to us—the damsel in distress is unable to help and must rely solely on the hero, while he also protects the rest of the world from the villain. In The Source, Draco is the damsel in distress and Ginny is the hero, until this shifts after the climax.

[7] Fairy tales, as portrayed by classic Disney movies, often involve the tropes of a male hero and a damsel in distress. Interestingly, a fairy tale plays an important role in The Source. Ginny bets Draco that he can't get her what she really wants for her birthday: a fairy tale. Draco researches fairy tales and writes one for Ginny (chapter 24). In his fairy tale, Rosalie is taken hostage and must be saved by Prince Drake. Before being saved, she cures him of his illness. This is similar to a subplot of The Source that sees Ginny inventing a potion to treat Draco's chronic illness (chapter 32). Luckyducky7 has created a fan fiction story with the potential for an independent, strong female hero, but Draco's gift shifts her into a fairy tale replete with traditional gender constructs. After Draco gives her this gift, there is a shift in the dynamics of their relationship (chapter 24). Ginny continues to be assertive, particularly near the end of the story, when wars have broken out and a battle must be fought (chapters 42–43). However, between Draco's gift and the final battle wherein Ginny is the hero, there are some troubling changes to the storyline. First, Draco begins saving Ginny's life, rather than the other way around. In two out of the three attacks he saves her from, Ginny is physically unable to do anything, as she has been knocked unconscious (chapter 37). This is reminiscent of vulnerable princesses in fairy tales lying in magical comas, waiting for their prince. In the last attack on her life, Ginny actually falls into a coma. It is only shortly after a visit from Draco, during which he places a kiss on her hand, that she
wakes up (chapter 37). Although this isn't necessarily a regression, it does put Ginny at a less equal position opposite Draco. In fact, Ginny seems to be completely rejecting the notion of herself as the hero. She easily offers the role to Draco and then becomes a damsel in distress for a large portion of the story. As Ginny says to him, "I want you to be the hero, Malfoy" (chapter 13).

[8] By the end, we understand that *The Source* is meant to be reflective of the fairy tale story that Draco writes for Ginny. In the final chapter, Draco rewrites the Rosalie fairy tale so that the love interest, Prince Drake, saves the day and the characters live "happily ever after" (chapter 44). The new version of Rosalie continues to allow the main female character to play the role of heroine, though to a lesser degree, as she needs Prince Drake's help to complete her task. This fairy tale of Rosalie's adventures is written solely to woo Ginny. Just as the dynamic of the characters shifts when he gifts her the fairy tale, so does the fairy tale itself shift to reflect this a few chapters later (chapter 44).

[9] This fan fiction story has few female characters besides Ginny. Not only are there no other strong female characters, but there appear to be no other women in this universe besides Hermione Granger, Felicity Lateris, and a minor original character named Amy. Ginny is often described as tagging along with the Trio, or spending time with her year mates Colin Creevey and Amy. The author reassures us that "Amy [Colin's girlfriend] didn't mind that Colin was going [to the kitchens] with Ginny. She knew that they were very good friends and that Ginny wasn't interested in him that way" (chapter 36). This moment in the text motions to another narrative trope consistent with traditional gender roles: women competing for male attention. The traditional story line would be a love triangle or, at the very least, one female character being driven by envy of the other. Luckyduddy7 avoids the use of such a trope, but still reminds us that it could happen.

[10] Ginny is isolated, placed in a completely masculine world, though the reasoning behind this decision seems ambivalent. On the basis of other models in literature, having other women in the protagonist's circle would strengthen her position in the text and create a feminine world for her to navigate, thus really overturning J. K. Rowling's universe. Even her mother, Molly Weasley, is absent from this story. In fact, in the last chapter, when Ginny is reunited with her family, there is not a single mention of her mother. Mother-daughter bonds are often central to empowering female narratives, and the author's decision to eliminate the mother figure removes the possibility for empowerment through that means and thereby reaffirms traditional ideologies.

[11] The only other prominent female character in *The Source* is a villain, Felicity Lateris. Although there is already a greater (male) villain, Felicity plays the role of a jealous, scorned woman. Felicity has been evil her whole life, so it is not solely envy that motivates her. However, that motivation cannot be entirely ignored, as can be seen in the scene wherein Ginny taunts Felicity by bragging about Draco choosing her. This angers Felicity to the point where she attacks Ginny (chapter 42). The decision to pit two women against each other by placing a man between them seems like a cheap trick, and yet reviewers of this chapter are fond of this moment.
[12] The Source sets up a world where Harry has no active role; this allows Ginny to take on the role of hero. Voldemort has been defeated, with no action on Ginny's part, so Harry has already fulfilled his role as the Boy Who Lived and can take a passive role in this story. The reader is told early on that Harry has feelings for Hermione; this not only eliminates any romantic claim he may have on Ginny as the canonical romantic interest, but also vastly reduces any jealousy that Draco might express over Harry and Ginny's friendship (chapter 8). Harry is still there, but his role is secondary. In fact, at one point in the novel, he is attacked by the villain and Ginny comes to his rescue (chapter 22). Luckyducky7's choice to restrict the original text's hero seems intended to allow a heroine to take his place. A deeper analysis of Ginny-centric fan fiction would need to take place to determine if Harry typically has to be removed as the hero in order for Ginny to step into the role. But in the case of The Source, that is the decision that Luckyducky7 made.

[13] In The Source, Luckyducky7 makes an attempt to push back against the canon story and the roles that characters play within it, focusing on Ginny. Unfortunately, the sexualization of female characters, the persistence of the fairy tale narrative, stereotypical female relationships and characterizations, and, finally, the potential need for the exclusion of the hero in order to allow a space for the heroine keep this fan fiction work from becoming a totally subversive piece of writing. The biggest takeaway, in my opinion, has to do with the reader—why are readers so drawn to stories that continue to follow gendered ideologies?
Symposium

Introducing Sport Rivalry Man, protector of positive fan behavior

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[0.1] Abstract—Meet Sport Rivalry Man, a character created to help sport fans learn about the rivalry phenomenon and to illustrate appropriate treatment of rival fans.

[0.2] Keywords—Cartoons; Comic strips; Fan/group member behavior; Superhero genre


1. Introduction

[1.1] Jill and her parents are fans of the Boston Red Sox baseball team. Her friends at school, Josh and Larry, are both fans of the New York Yankees. In September, when the Red Sox and Yankees are playing each other, Jill decides she wants to wear a Red Sox shirt to school. Josh and Larry pick on Jill in the lunchroom for wearing the shirt. They proclaim that the New York Yankees are the best team, and that Jill should not be wearing a shirt that shows she is a fan of the Boston Red Sox.

[1.2] After school, the three kids go home to watch the rivalry game with their parents. Josh sits on the couch with his parents to watch the Yankees defeat the Red Sox, and he listens as his mom and dad proclaim that New York is a much better team and that Boston never had a chance in the game. Later that night, Josh and Larry decide to pick on Jill using their favorite online chat service, which makes Jill sad. She talks to her mom about the incident because she is confused: why would her friends pick on her because the Red Sox lost? Enter Sport Rivalry Man! The next day at school, Sport Rivalry Man talks to Josh about picking on Jill because she likes the Red Sox, and he explains to him about why that was not a nice thing to do. Josh agrees and apologizes to Jill. The story is wrapped with Sport Rivalry Man explaining that friendships are based on things stronger than a favorite team affiliation, and that no one should treat others differently simply because of the sport team they follow.

[1.3] This is the plot of one of the fourteen Adventures with Sport Rivalry Man comic strips, which were created to teach the public, with a particular focus on school-age children, about the rivalry phenomenon and to illustrate and serve as a reminder to practice appropriate fan behavior. The fourteen stories are joined by about twenty comic strips that describe historical rivalries in college athletics, professional baseball, and professional football. They can be found online at SportRivalry.com (http://www.sportrivalry.com/), which was created to teach the
general public about the sport rivalry phenomenon. Each comic strip found on the website was later animated to produce short cartoons that could be distributed more efficiently.

[1.4] I next turn to the origin of the Sport Rivalry Man comic strips and cartoons, the evolution of Sport Rivalry Man, the future of the comics and cartoons, and how Sport Rivalry Man can be used to teach children about group interaction and appropriate behavior outside of the sport setting. An evolving curriculum has been built around Sport Rivalry Man to help teach schoolchildren and online participants about the phenomenon and positive fan behavior. Please join me as we take a trip with Sport Rivalry Man!

2. Origin of Sport Rivalry Man

[2.1] Sport rivalry may be defined as "a fluctuating adversarial relationship existing between two teams, players, or groups of fans, gaining significance through on-field competition, on-field or off-field incidences, proximity, demographic makeup, and/or historical occurrence(s)" (Havard et al. 2013, 51). It also is created or characterized by factors such as historical competition, parity, proximity, perceived fairness and unfairness, star power, and cultural similarities and differences (Kilduff, Elfenbein, and Staw 2010; Tyler and Cobb 2015). The rivalry phenomenon can influence fan consumption of the sport product (Havard, Shapiro, and Ridinger 2016; Mahony and Moorman 1999; Tyler et al. 2017), consumption of sponsored products (Dalakas and Levin 2005; Park and Lee 2015), behavior (Wann and Grieve 2005), fan deviance (Havard, Wann, and Ryan 2013, 2017; Wann et al. 1999, 2003; Wann and Waddill 2013), and reactions to rival team failure (Cikara, Botvinick, and Fiske 2011; Dalakas, Melancon, and Sreboth 2015; Havard 2014; Havard and Hutchinson 2017; Leach and Spears 2009).

[2.2] For example, sport fans believe rival fans behave worse than fans of their favorite team (Wann and Grieve 2005), and they describe actions of favorite and rival team fans differently (Maass et al. 1989). Additionally, fans are more willing to help people if they are a fan of their favorite team rather than their rival team (Levine et al. 2005). A small but consistent subset of fans are willing to consider anonymously hurting or even murdering participants, coaches, and fans of rival teams (Havard, Wann, and Ryan 2013, 2017; Wann et al. 1999, 2003; Wann and Waddill 2013). Finally, fan rival perceptions can be influenced by the way organizations acknowledge rivalry (Berendt and Uhrich 2018) as well as the types of promotional materials they are exposed to (Havard, Wann, and Grieve 2018).

[2.3] In an attempt to decrease the amount of negativity between rival fans, the popular mediums of comic strips and cartoons were developed to teach children about the rivalry phenomenon and to illustrate appropriate fan behavior. In particular, comic strips and cartoons of historical rivalries were created at SportRivalry.com (http://www.sportrivalry.com/comicstripsandpodcasts/comic-strips/) that detail well-known rivalries in college and professional sport. For example, through reading the comic strips or watching the cartoons, visitors can learn that the Red River rivalry between the Texas Longhorns and the Oklahoma Sooners got its name from an actual dispute between the two states regarding land rights in the early 1900s; fans of the Arizona Wildcats and Arizona State Sun Devils annually attempt to denigrate the opposing school's "A" Mountains; and the rivalry between the Missouri Tigers and the Kansas Jayhawks dates back to land raids during the Civil War. At the
end of each comic strip and cartoon, Sport Rivalry Man discusses a psychology theory or phenomenon that helps to scientifically explain what causes the sport rivalry phenomenon.

[2.4] Another set of comic strips and cartoons presented on SportRivalry.com are the *Adventures with Sport Rivalry Man* stories. Currently, the fourteen stories available on the website present tales about online bullying, school bullying, showing sportsmanship at a game, helping a school friend after a rivalry game, assisting a rival fan to change a flat tire, and other situations facing fans and readers. Stories feature protagonists placed in situations that require them to decide how to treat a fan or participant of the rival team. Sport Rivalry Man was created as a moral representative of appropriate fan behavior. Each story is narrated by Sport Rivalry Man, and it ends with the protagonist, sometimes with the help of Sport Rivalry Man, deciding to treat the rival fan with compassion. The use of comic strips or cartoons is not new to education; they have been used to assist with literacy (Norton 2003) and recall (Liu 2004), as well as to encourage collaborative learning (van Wyk 2011).

3. Evolution of Sport Rivalry Man

[3.1] The evolution of Sport Rivalry Man began with Jeff and Jeffrey (figure 1). These two rudimentary figures were created to help teach students taking my fan behavior/rivalry class that psychologically, most differences between rival fans are simply perceptual (note 1). Jeff and Jeffrey are fans of rival teams; however, for all intents and purposes, they are basically the same person. At the conclusion of the class, I discuss the idea of developing comic strips and cartoons to tell the stories of historical rivalries, and thereby introduce Sport Rivalry Man, a version of Jeff with a cape (figure 2) (note 2).
Figure 1. Sport Rivalry Man as Jeff and Jeffrey.
Figure 2. Sport Rivalry Man, a version of Jeff with a cape.

[3.2] Next, as more comic strips and cartoons were produced, the need for a more cartoonish Sport Rivalry Man increased in importance. With the help of an independent artist, numerous drafts of Sport Rivalry Man were produced, including superheroes (figure 3) and explorers (figures 4 and 5). After reviewing and discussing desired changes from the drafts, the Sport Rivalry Man currently featured in the comic strips and cartoons was born (figure 6).
Figure 3. Early version of Sport Rivalry Man as a superhero.

Figure 4. Early version of Sport Rivalry Man as a whip-wielding Indiana Jones–type explorer.
Figure 5. Early version of Sport Rivalry Man as a pugilistic explorer.
[3.3] The next step in the process was to test the use of the comic strips and cartoons to teach about the sport rivalry phenomenon and model appropriate fan behavior. College students were split into two groups, with one group learning about rivalry using the comic strips and cartoons, and the other group not (Havard and Workman 2018). Students were then asked to report their perceptions of their rival team and their likelihood to react to rival fans in specific situations (e.g., helping a rival fan pick up dropped items, laughing with others at a rival fan's expense, stopping others from picking on a rival fan). Results showed that students who learned about rivalry using the comic strips and cartoons reported significantly different perceptions of their rival team and were more likely to attempt to stop someone trying to steal a rival fan's belongings.

4. Future of Sport Rivalry Man

[4.1] A curriculum to use the comic strips and cartoons, along with activities surrounding Sport Rivalry Man, is currently being developed and tested in public schools. Lessons include bullying, decision making, and teamwork. The activities include stickers of Sport Rivalry Man, a coloring page where students color Sport Rivalry Man the colors of their favorite and rival teams, and Take Sport Rivalry Man with You!, which resembles the popular Flat Stanley, where students can take a two-dimensional picture of Sport Rivalry Man to sporting events and share pictures exhibiting appropriate fan behavior.

[4.2] Members of the research team have several questions regarding the comic strips and cartoons, along with the future of Sport Rivalry Man. In particular, are the comic strips and cartoons appropriate for the age level? Will students understand the content, and are the comics and animation sophisticated enough to catch student's attention? Additionally, how appropriate is Sport Rivalry Man to a school audience? Should he be changed to another ethnicity, age, or gender? On the basis of the feedback of schoolchildren and testing, the comic strips and cartoons, along with Sport Rivalry Man himself, may see changes. Additionally, a curriculum is also being planned to use the comic strips and cartoons to teach sport fans about rivalry and fan behavior in an online setting.

5. What can Sport Rivalry Man teach us?

[5.1] From the beginning of the comic strips and cartoons, as well as the creation of Sport Rivalry Man, the purpose has been to teach the general public, with a particular focus on school-age children, about the sport rivalry phenomenon and to illustrate appropriate fan behavior. By using a popular topic such as sport and the popular mediums of comic strips and cartoons, the hope is that people will be able to learn more about group and individual behavior and ultimately come to the conclusion that people in other groups are not that different. The hope is that if fans can learn that they should not treat someone that identifies with another sports team negatively, then they can generalize that lesson to other areas and groups in their lives, like politics and religion. Understanding the dynamics of group and individual behavior as well as the psychological issues that cause people to feel different and better than someone else can improve interpersonal and intergroup relationships.
While we are in the midst of a deepening divide in national and international relations, the use of the comic strips and cartoons as well as the introduction of Sport Rivalry Man are attempts to counteract some of the negative behavior currently being exhibited both online and off. It is more important than ever that people learn about and respect group and individual differences, and treat others with compassion. Sport Rivalry Man is one of many attempts to teach people about differences and appropriate behavior, and the use of sport and the popular mediums of comic strips and cartoons will enhance these efforts. Just as Josh realized that he should not treat Jill badly just because of her favorite team, people in sport and nonsport settings can utilize the online lessons presented by Sport Rivalry Man.

6. Notes

1. In future classes, I will replace the Jeff and Jeffrey stick figures with pictures of myself in rival team shirts to illustrate that rivalry causes similar people to believe they are different.

2. Early versions of the historical comics and Adventures with Sport Rivalry Man featured the first version of Sport Rivalry Man.

7. References


Keywords—*Avengers: Infinity War*; Fan reaction


1. *Avengers: Infinity War*: Only for fans

*[1.1]* *Avengers: Infinity War* was released on April 27, 2018. According to Marvel, it was the biggest box office opening weekend at that time, earning $640.9 million internationally (Goldman 2018). It was the movie created for fans who already knew the characters. "It's all been leading to this," announced one of Marvel's slogans (https://twitter.com/MarvelStudios/status/992490036166774784). Without knowledge of the previous movies set in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), it was impossible to fully understand what was going on and who was who. Twenty-two characters were deemed important (or popular) enough to have their own character poster promoting this movie (Dinh 2018a), and presenting them all would take a lot of screen time.

*[1.2]* The movie was also different because of its ending. With Hollywood movies in general, and superhero movies in particular, we expect them to have "a happy end—good guys win and bad guys lose, so the heroes can walk into sunshine and live happily ever after" (Rogalski 2016, 19). Not in this movie. Thanos, the villain, who like the heroes had already appeared in the MCU, has won, destroying half the universe—and half the heroes who were fighting against him. With a snap of Thanos's fingers, the characters literally turned into dust, including characters that fans were convinced would be spared this fate. It was shocking. It was unexpected. Was it believable? Not for me.

*[1.3]* I was curious whether my response was unique. I therefore prepared an informal Google survey and asked a few popular shipping blogs on Tumblr to post a link to it, asking their readers to participate. The survey's title suggested that it was for fans and that its purpose was to find out their reactions after seeing the movie. The only obligatory responses were age, gender, and country, but its design permitted participants to write their own responses, which made it possible to refuse giving an answer. Informed consent was
provided implicitly by the respondents by their completing the survey, and participant data were anonymous. The participants could refuse to answer any of the questions, either explicitly or implicitly.

[1.4] I gathered 173 responses from all over the world, but mainly from Europe and the United States. The survey was written in English, but language wasn't a barrier; one of the respondents answered in German. Most of the respondents were women in their twenties. Most had seen the movie only once, but some fans had seen it multiple times—up to seven times. Respondents indicated the length of time since their last viewing of the film. This was usually between a week and a month ago, which, taking into account the date the questionnaire was released, indicated that they saw the film in May, within a month of its premiere.

[1.5] To survey participants about their favorite characters, I asked them to tick boxes with character names. On average, they chose seven characters. I also asked about their favorite pairing, for which they wrote their own responses. Most responses indicated a single romantic pairing, but answers also included BrOTPs (referring to pairings of best friends), teams, and families. Unexpectedly, favorite pairings didn't always include favorite characters. I also asked respondents their opinions about the movie, character deaths before Thanos collected all the Infinity Stones representing aspects of existence (note 1), and the collective death caused by Thanos's finger snap, wiping out half of life in the universe—and a number of Avengers. I also asked whether they thought it was possible for any of the characters to come back, which of them, and why.

[1.6] The question about the possibility of coming back had three possible answers: yes, maybe, and no. No one chose the last possibility, seventeen decided that perhaps someone might come back eventually, and the rest believed that some characters will come back in the next Avengers movie. The reason why participants thought characters would come back were similar for the "maybe" and "yes" groups, so I will not distinguish between them. Additionally, because the answers were similar, I will discuss together the answers as to why it is possible for the character to come back in general and the answers regarding the heroes chosen by the respondents.

2. Death in Marvel

[2.1] The main reason why fans did not believe in the permanence of character deaths is Marvel's film-release schedule. Fans mentioned planned sequels to *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), *Black Panther* (2018), and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017) (note 2), which clearly indicate that the deaths of title characters are only temporary. These answers were usually based on official information from Marvel and from the films' actors (note 3). Fans also created theories based on unofficial photos from the set of the still-untitled film known as *Avengers 4* (planned release 2019), notably one suggesting reshoots, which for some signified that time travel will be a part of a plan to defeat Thanos.

[2.2] Some fans cited economic reasons for their belief that character deaths are temporary: it is not profitable, and it does not allow Marvel to build the MCU's future. Fans noted that
some characters are too new to be killed off. Black Panther and Spider-Man had their first solo movies in, respectively, 2018 and 2017, and both appeared for the first time in Captain America: Civil War in 2016. One fan interpreted this as heralding the death of the original Avengers, who will sacrifice themselves in order to bring back the dead characters. For other fans, it meant that either Winter Soldier or Falcon might come back, as these characters have taken the role of Captain America in the comics. However, contracts with some of the actors are coming to an end, notably Chris Evans, who plays Captain America and who has repeatedly spoken about not prolonging his contract with Marvel (Ugwu 2018). These characters were perceived as unlikely to come back.

[2.3] In contrast to these practical reasons why character deaths might be permanent, some fans invoked their knowledge of genre, the comics on which the MCU is based, or just the fact that bringing characters back from death is a popular technique in this medium. They pointed out that characters returning from the dead has already happened in the MCU a few times: Loki appeared to die in both Thor (2011) and Thor: The Dark World (2013), only for the trickster character to appear at the end of the movie, and Bucky Barnes died in Captain America: The First Avenger (2011) and came back as the Winter Soldier in Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014). Reversal of a character death also happened in a spin-off: Phil Coulson, whose death was an important plot point in The Avengers (2012), came back in the TV series Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. (2013–).

[2.4] However, the most interesting answers included explanations within the story arc of how character death reversals will be accomplished. One main theory was time travel, which would erase the deaths presented in Infinity War, and which has already been established as a possible solution in the MCU; it was used as a means to repair the world destroyed by the villain in Doctor Strange (2016) and was also used by Thanos in Avengers: Infinity War. Another popular theory included the power of one of the Infinity Stones, the Soul Stone. Some fans decided that the characters who were turned into dust are actually being held within the Soul Stone, so it is possible to bring them back.

[2.5] Respondents also pointed out the identity of characters who would be the most important in a future fight with Thanos. This included Doctor Strange (for fourteen participants, it is all part of his plan; one fan proposed that it all happened in the mirror dimension and therefore isn't real), Iron Man (mentioned ten times), Thor, Captain Marvel, and Loki with Valkyrie, who did not appear in Avengers: Infinity War at all (each mentioned once).

3. Death and emotion

[3.1] Fan opinions regarding character deaths were interesting. Most of the answers for the characters—Loki, Vision, Gamora, and Heimdall—who died before Thanos's destructive finger snap were the same. Fans rated characters' deaths in various ways: unexpected versus predictable, well done versus badly done, true to the character versus poor characterization, highly emotional death versus indifferent. However, the responses had a few telling differences.
Loki was the only character whose death was for some (as one participant termed it) "fake news," as this was his third on-screen death. Despite Thanos's assurance that this time it was final, fans remained skeptical. What for some was bad writing (different variations of "How could Loki have been stupid enough to attack Thanos with only a knife when he knew the extent of his powers?" appeared a few times) was for others proof that it was just another of Loki's elaborate schemes. Other fans, remembering Loki's Jotun heritage (which appeared on screen only in Thor), pointed out that he should revert to that form when dying. This did not happen, so his death was considered fake. For unpopular character Vision, however, fans thought that his death should have happened sooner to make sure that Thanos would not be able to collect all the Infinity Stones.

While the answers and reactions to character deaths were very different, one commonality was the emotional reaction fans felt. After all, "superhero texts rely on narratives of emotion" (Yockey 2012, ¶ 2.11), and indeed that was the main way they were received by my survey respondents. It is also worth noting that emotions were an important factor in fans' overall opinions about the movie. One survey question asked about which death was the most important, along with the reason for choosing it. Emotional reasoning was the most common, but it wasn't always an emotional response experienced by a fan related to a favorite character dying. For some, it was instead the anticipation of an emotional reaction (including a future one) of a favorite character who was close to the character who died. For example, Spider-Man's death, which was indicated as the most important for the majority of participants, was significant because of Iron Man's anticipated reaction.

4. Conclusion

Responses to my survey indicated that although everyone thinks some characters will return in the next Avengers movie, this did not lessen their emotional response to the deaths in Avengers: Infinity War. Although a few fans noted that the fact they know that some deaths are not permanent lessened the pain, for others it did not influence it at all—and no wonder, because most of the respondents saw the movie for the characters. They were mainly interested to see how the characters would interact with each other, and how they would join together to deal with the villain.

5. Notes

1. While I did not include Heimdall, his death was chosen as the most important by three participants.

2. When I wrote the survey, the conflict between James Gunn, director of the two Guardians of the Galaxy movies, and the studio that resulted in postponing the third movie's production (Kroll 2018) was not known, so it was not mentioned by any of the respondents.

3. Marvel is deliberately vague regarding future films and timelines, although their site published information about lead actor Tom Holland accidentally revealing the possible title
to *Spider-Man: Homecoming*'s sequel (Dinh 2018b). However, fans have enough information from other equally credible sources to be certain about some of these movies, like Marvel producer Kevin Feige noting of a *Black Panther* sequel that Marvel "will absolutely do that" (Breznican 2018).

6. References


Abstract—Researchers can use the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) to link their research to build a defined line of study. The MCU can teach researchers about authorship and the review process, as well as how to link individual studies together to build a defined research line, all while learning about the publishing process.

Keywords—Authorship; MCU; Publishing; Research; Scholarship

1. Introduction

The success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)—the interconnected network of movies, television, comic book, gaming, and internet content that began with Iron Man in 2008, and owned by the Walt Disney Company since 2009—has taken popular culture by storm. Much like the grand battle scenes prominently displayed in the movies, Marvel and the MCU have attracted people from different backgrounds with varying interests to consume the movies, comics, books, and related merchandise. For evidence of the MCU's success, look no further than the opening weekend box office numbers for Avengers: Endgame (2019), which brought in more than $1 billion globally, or the fact that it recently became the highest-grossing movie of all time (not controlling for inflation).
offers many positive outcomes to people and society, along with people working in education, business, and other areas, as outlined in recent edited volumes (Chambliss, Svitavsky, and Fandino 2018; McSweeney 2018). These qualities make the MCU a good exemplar text to illustrate how researchers can and should conduct research that fits into a clear line of analysis that allows for further understanding of a phenomenon, field, or area of inquiry. We use the stand-alone, team-up, and event movies from the MCU to discuss the different lines of research team members might pursue. We also discuss the review process by comparing it to the hero's peril, as well as the importance of future research directions (compared to the MCU’s famous end credits scenes) in forming a defined research line before providing concluding remarks.

[1.3] A final introductory point is in order. From time to time, we will use Cody T. Havard's research on rivalry for illustrative purposes. This is done to provide consistent examples and because we all have worked in this area and therefore have been able to see the connections between studies and findings over the last decade. However, our strategies, which use a fannish understanding of canonical texts, are meant to help people from any discipline.

2. MCU’s stand-alone or origin movies

[2.1] Many of the characters in the MCU have been introduced in stand-alone or origin movies. Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, Captain America, Ant Man, and Captain Marvel were introduced in stand-alone movies before interacting with other MCU characters. In addition, Black Panther and Spider-Man, who were introduced in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), received longer introductions to the MCU audience in separate stand-alone movies.

[2.2] Just as many of the MCU characters were introduced one at a time, researchers should maintain their own primary lines of research. For example, Havard researches the phenomenon of rivalry, and Rhema D. Fuller primarily focuses on intercollegiate athletics and the intersection of race and sport. Timothy D. Ryan investigates role conflict as his primary line of inquiry, and Frederick G. Grieve primarily investigates the impact of sport on participants, student athletes, and fans.

3. MCU's team-up movies

[3.1] In the MCU, team-up movies are used to both introduce new characters and story lines, and to show beloved characters working together to save the day. For instance, Black Widow was first introduced in *Iron Man 2* (2010), Bucky Barnes as the Winter Soldier in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), and viewers saw Hope van Dyne become the Wasp in *Ant Man and the Wasp* (2018). Characters such as Thor and the Hulk worked together to save Asgardians in *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), and both Nebula and Yondu teamed up with the beloved misfits of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017). Even within movies and teams, characters have had to rely on others with diverse backgrounds and skill sets to complete missions. After all, Peter Quill needed Drax, Gamora, and Rocket Raccoon—Groot had already sacrificed for the team—to hold onto the power stone in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014). (Also, the team of raccoon/trash panda/rabbit and tree is pretty diverse, but it
definitely works.)

[3.2] Within academia, team-up movies are those projects in which a small group of researchers work together to investigate a topic that intersects their respective lines of research. For example, Fuller and Havard teamed up to produce a case study for college students (Havard and Fuller 2018) and are currently working on a project to measure how African American fans relate to their rival teams. Havard has teamed up with Ryan on a number of projects in which they studied how variables such as gender and conference realignment influence rivalry (Havard, Eddy, and Ryan 2016; Havard, Wann, and Ryan 2013, 2017). Grieve and Havard teamed up to test how promotional messaging influences rival perceptions (Havard, Wann, and Grieve 2018), and are now working on a project investigating how fandom and rivalry differ between sport and Disney theme parks. Finally, when researchers team up to investigate a topic, the result is often a product that is not only of higher quality but also an enjoyable collaboration. After all, who can forget Thor's encounter with the Guardians in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018)?

4. MCU's event movies

[4.1] Event movies are typically the movies that avid and casual fans alike look forward to, leading fans to discuss, debate, and attempt to predict character story lines and battle outcomes. The first event movie was *The Avengers* (2012), when the original six Avengers (Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, Hulk, Black Widow, and Hawkeye) teamed up to defeat Loki's attack on Manhattan. Fans have also enjoyed seeing MCU characters team up (or battle each other) in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Captain America: Civil War*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame*.

[4.2] In academia, event movies provide a metaphor for the major investigations that require multiple researchers to lend their collective expertise, or the all-hands-on-deck projects. For example, the importance of this piece—teaching and encouraging young researchers to clearly develop a research line and to enjoy the research process—required that the four authors come together to discuss, debate, and produce a clear message. Another example is a large external grant that requires multiple researchers to work together to pursue funding.

5. The heroes' peril

[5.1] Throughout the MCU, our beloved characters have had to pick themselves up, make lemonade from lemons, and look for silver linings. In other words, the characters of the MCU have repeatedly had to deal with adversity. After all, Thor lost his eye while saving his fellow Asgardians in *Thor: Ragnarok*, Stephen Strange had to come to grips with no longer being able to conduct surgery in *Doctor Strange* (2016), Iron Man had to both learn to live with a heart condition and handle the aftermath of a Chitauri attack, and Captain America continually had to live in a world past his time throughout his story arc. (To avoid any potential spoilers, we will stop here.)

[5.2] For researchers, the heroes' peril represents the review process. When researchers finish
and submit a paper, they typically believe it is the next gem in academic research that will fundamentally move forward understanding in the academy and beyond. Then, after a few months, the reviews are returned and reality sets in. Sometimes it almost feels like Thanos has snapped his fingers and half the paper has been dusted. However, just as our MCU heroes overcome adversity, we researchers, typically after a period of self-pity, take a look at the paper and begin the revision. If or when a paper is accepted, we sigh in relief, then rejoice. Not only is the paper usually substantially improved because of peer review, but also we as researchers feel a greater sense of accomplishment for successfully navigating through the process.

6. The end credit scenes

[6.1] As MCU fans well know, a major reason why viewers typically do not leave the theater when the credits of an MCU run is that no one wants to potentially miss the all-important end credit scenes. MCU launched this tradition with the first-ever end credit scene, in which Nick Fury informed Tony Stark he was part of something larger than himself and wanted to discuss the Avenger initiative. Throughout the first eleven years of the MCU, end credit and mid credit scenes have played important roles in introducing characters (e.g., Thanos in The Avengers, the Collector in Thor: The Dark World [2013], and Captain Marvel in Avengers: Infinity War) extending story lines (e.g., Thor and Loki staring at Thanos's ship in Thor: Ragnarok), and tying single stories into the broader universe (e.g., Hank Pym, Hope, and Janet van Dyne being dusted and leaving Scott Lang in the quantum realm in Ant Man and the Wasp, and Spider-Man's true identity being revealed in Spider-Man: Homecoming [2019]). Even as some end credit scenes seek to convey the fun nature of movies through light-hearted material, the MCU has effectively used these scenes to promote future projects, characters, and story lines.

[6.2] As we are sure most reading this have surmised, the end credit scenes represent the directions for future study presented at the end of academic papers. If handled correctly, researchers can make great use of these sections to discuss and derive new ideas for future investigations. On this matter, it should also be noted that many ideas for future research come from the peer review process. Additionally, a well-thought-out and well-presented "future directions" section helps to illustrate a research line. The "future directions" section is thus as important to a researcher as the end credits scenes are to the MCU.

7. Learning from the MCU

[7.1] The MCU, through its popularity and exemplary storytelling, as well as its fan base of both dedicated and casual fans, making most North Americans at least casually acquainted with the franchise, may be used to teach researchers of various disciplines important lessons. Our main point here is that just as we have watched the MCU develop over the last eleven years and can see where story lines and characters connect, researchers should likewise be able to draw a clear path through their research line and discuss how a single project further informs their knowledge, leads to other projects, or leads to significant findings. Whether under stand-alone, team-up, or event conditions, researchers should be able to show how one
study is linked to the rest of their research line.

[7.2] Another important application from the MCU to the academy: even as Marvel wraps up story lines in the MCU, the overall connected story will continue to move forward in new and interesting directions, as hinted at in the announcements Marvel made at the 2019 San Diego Comic-Con regarding upcoming MCU movies and Disney+ content. Similarly, researchers who seek to identify potential answers and outcomes never really reach an end; instead, they seek to continuously discover and investigate new questions and areas. Disney's acquisition of Fox brings a slew of new characters like the Fantastic Four and X-Men back into the MCU; likewise, researchers' lines of inquiry may mature and move into potentially new areas. For instance, we are beginning to apply the principles and findings from our research on rivalry to investigate the phenomenon and group behavior outside of the sport setting.

[7.3] We hope that this essay not only informs people on how the MCU can be used as a metaphor to build a clear research line, but also alleviates some of the stress associated with research and the publishing process while encouraging people to better enjoy the research they conduct. To that end, we believe that this piece will help those who either follow the MCU or like to view the research process from a unique perspective. We encourage researchers everywhere to find ways to enjoy the research process—possibly by adopting individual and group aliases. Therefore, please refer to us—Rivalry Man (Havard), Renegade (Fuller), Hawkeye (Ryan), and Captain Research (Grieve)—as the Researchers!

8. References


Framing fan fiction: Literary and social practices in fan fiction communities, by Kristina Busse

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[0.1] Keywords—Acafan; Fan practice; Fan works


[1] For better or worse, fan fiction is seen as the emblematic fan practice. It is a symbol of either the extreme strangeness of fans or their admirable creativity, something to be mocked or something to be celebrated. Fan fiction and its communities were at the heart of the first wave of fan studies, with understanding what fans wrote and why centered as an important way of understanding media fandom. As fan studies expanded, the focus on fan fiction and its practitioners fell away somewhat. After all, those who write fan fiction are only one kind of fan, and fan fiction is only one practice, so why should it maintain its central position?

[2] Kristina Busse's Framing Fan Fiction: Literary and Social Practices in Fan Fiction Communities makes the case for fan fiction—and the study of fan fiction—playing a central role in contemporary fan studies. Bringing together both new work and older material from her decades spent studying the subject, it creates a strong case for the importance of not only analyzing fan fiction itself but also for the particular kind of fan studies that Busse espouses. Busse emphasizes a subcultural understanding of fandom and fan practice (in a cultural studies sense), with a focus on "the continuous entanglement of fan works and their community" (10). This is front and center of her analysis of fan fiction, a position built out of her own long experience not only writing about fan fiction but also participating in its communities—a stance she makes clear in the first paragraphs of Framing Fan Fiction. While the acafan position is not without its critics, Busse shows the strength of it here, drawing on her deep knowledge of the communities and practices in question in order to explain what fan fiction is and why it (still) matters.

[3] The book is laid out in three sections, each dealing with a different aspect of fan fiction
practice— "Slash as Identificatory Practices," "Canon, Context, and Consensus," "Community and Its Discontents"— and a beginning chapter provocatively entitled "The Return of the Author." This opening chapter lays out Busse's way of looking at fan work as writing, tracing the idea of the author (in a Foucauldian sense of the author function) throughout the decades. It argues that it is in fan works that we see the current state of the author—from ideas of ownership and control over texts (also the focus of chapter 5) to the importance of authorial intent and identity in the contemporary age to the potential of anonymity. It is here that Busse's vision of "why fandom" and "why fan fiction" become clear; these are ways to analyze much bigger issues in contemporary society, and fan fiction is the clearest example of the ways in which texts are internalized, transformed, used, and debated by those who encounter them. This opening chapter shows the book's twofold purpose: to understand fan fiction as a literary and a social form, and to understand how these aspects are intertwined.

[4] This opening chapter also lays the theoretical groundwork for the strongest aspects of Framing Fan Fiction: how literary theory may be applied to analyze fan fiction as literature in its own right. Indeed, Framing Fan Fiction is an excellent exploration of different genres of fan fiction, from genderswap to real person slash to fan fiction that deals with fans themselves, treated with a depth and rigor that makes this book a valuable resource for those interested in fan fiction. Busse draws on deep analysis of specific fan works to make her points about the particular things that fan fiction authors are doing with their writing, such as particular articulations of gender, romance, and fandom itself, or the way in which structure and limits promote rather than restrict fannish creativity. The work on real person slash is of particular interest, as this topic remains relatively unexplored despite the extensive body of work on fan fiction.

[5] This strong literary focus also carries into Framing Fan Fiction's discussions of fan fiction as a form of negotiation between the original text, writers, and readers, and what these negotiations can tell us about how texts are understood and made. The book's second section, "Canon, Consensus, and Context," provides three insightful essays on how fan fiction, as a literary form, is constructed. The way fan fiction writers determine what is actually canon, for example, involves not only how fans draw on the original text but also on community interpretations of a character or relationship. Showing the duality of canon construction strengthens Busse's argument that fan fiction needs to be understood as a literary form that involves the community as much as the individual. Fan fiction is written for the community of other writers and readers, and it is this community that fan fiction is in dialogue with. In showing how fan fiction writers and readers interact, and how this interaction shapes the form and content of fan fiction, Busse makes a strong argument for the subcultural nature of media fandom, situating it as a space unable to be fully absorbed by the media industry. This is echoed in Busse's interest in fan hierarchies, which tend to put fan fiction writers and other female fans at lower levels. Their works are considered stranger than other fan productions, and their identities more extreme. Busse's analysis of these hierarchies suggests that if we do not respect the community-oriented, subcultural aspects of fandom, so well represented by fan fiction and its authors, we run the risk of ceding fandom entirely to a promotional arm of the media industry.
Much of this work, as mentioned, has been previously published over the last two decades and has been collected here, but that does not limit its interest or utility for those interested in fan fiction as a form or its relevance to media fandom. Busse's analysis of fan fiction texts and fan fiction practice seems justly foundational, and it will continue to be relevant for scholars. Indeed, it makes the case for fan fiction to continue as an integral part of fan studies. However, and perhaps ironically considering Busse's insistence on the necessity of understanding fan fiction as part of its community, it is in looking at this community that *Framing Fan Fiction* could use an update. As Busse herself points out, her perspective on fan fiction, while established over the long term, is highly specific: Western media fandom as developed on mailing lists and blogging sites like LiveJournal. It is this space that *Framing Fan Fiction* represents, and it is here that its limits (and perhaps the limits of the acafan concept) are potentially an issue.

While Busse generally examines her fan fiction community with the same care as she does their works, there is a universalizing tendency to her work that is acknowledged but unexamined. The dynamics of these particular groups are generally treated as the whole of fan fiction communities, leading to a necessarily incomplete understanding of the practice. This is particularly glaring in her decision to not update her earlier works on fan fiction communities themselves, which operated under different conditions and customs than the ones of a decade later. While this has a great deal of value to fan scholars as a record of this time and its practices, Busse's decision not to revise or update her previously published essays means that some of her observations seem dated or inaccurate, particularly in regard to the language and habits of fan fiction writers (such as in chapter 8). While I understand why Busse might not have wanted to significantly change the essays in order to address newer scholarship, not addressing these shifts at all is somewhat jarring. I would have appreciated further contextualization of these aspects of the book, and the better situating of some of these pieces as belonging to a particular time and place rather than presented as the way that fan fiction authors operate. We might also question whether these times were as unified in their interpretations and understanding as Busse depicts. She is understandably unwilling to go into the "dark underbelly of the personal" (11), for valid reasons, but it is worth considering what is being left out in presenting fan interpretation as (relatively) uniform.

However, this does present a clear opportunity for future research to build on Busse's work here. While fan fiction itself, as a literary form, might be similar to how it was ten or fifteen years ago, its context has changed greatly. Providing an understanding of particular practices from a previous era is a useful resource for scholars wishing to look at how things have changed and how they have stayed the same, and what might be left out (as Busse herself acknowledges in the afterword).

*Framing Fan Fiction* is an important work in the study of fan fiction, drawing together key threads about the practice and presenting important arguments about what fan fiction is and why it matters in a fragmented fandom landscape. There is a compelling argument in Busse's depiction of media fandom as a particularly valuable practice—not just for scholars but also for people who encounter media and texts. Busse depicts media fandom as a space of deep engagement with popular media, one that encourages its participants to think about
the texts they encounter. Studying the works that come out of it demonstrates this aspect of fandom to scholars, while for audiences, fan fiction and its community provide one of the few remaining noncommercial spaces for this kind of textual exploration and experimentation. While there are certainly question marks over how universal the kind of fandom she depicts is—or ever was, for that matter—*Framing Fan Fiction* makes the point that fan fiction itself is an integral part of understanding the potential of fandom. Perhaps fan fiction is emblematic for a reason.
Book review

*Chinese stardom in participatory cyberculture*, by Dorothy Wai Sim Lau

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[0.1] Keywords—Blog; Celebrity; Chineseness; Ethnicity; Fan forum; Flickr; Martial arts; Participatory culture; Social media; Transnational cinema; YouTube


[1] For scholars interested in East Asian cinema, stardom, and its relationship to film fans, this book is a much-needed work that links these areas together. Published as part of the Edinburgh University Press's International Film Stars series, *Chinese Stardom in Participatory Cyberculture* particularly focuses on the way participatory culture—or what Lau refers to as participatory cyberculture—can be used to expand existing discourses on Chinese film stardom. Lau specifically grounds her work in the context of Chinese martial arts cinema, linking martial arts stardom and the notion of Chineseness. Her emphasis on identity and ethnicity connects this book with existing writings on Chinese film stars, including those revisited by Lau, such as Donnie Yen, Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Zhang Ziyi. However, while the book emphasizes how Chineseness has been constructed and problematized in relation to martial arts stars, Lau focuses on the ways in which nationalism and ethnicities are negotiated by fans across different platforms rather than focusing solely on cinematic texts. This emphasis works to illuminate the importance of online culture in "decentering the production of star discourses" shaped by the long-established star system (McDonald quoted in Lau 2018, 4). The process of decentering industry discourses resonates with fan studies' focus on the power dynamic between fan and industry. While the book primarily focuses on star subjectivities instead of fan subjectivities, it highlights how fan practices can be drawn on to expand related fields, such as star studies and East Asian cinema, in productive ways.

[2] The first three chapters focus on martial arts cinema, which is, as Lau argues, a key genre of internationally successful Chinese cinema apart from the Fifth Generation's movies and
related auteurs. The first chapter, a case study on Donnie Yen, offers ample background on martial arts stardom and the persistent question of stars' ethnicities in Hollywood. Yen's role as Chirrut Îmwe, a blind warrior-monk who assists the Rebels in a battle to steal the plan of the Death Star in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016), acts as an entry point connecting the Chinese film star with an object of fandom well known to Western media scholars. Lau focuses on discourses relating to Yen generated by fans in five selected blogs. These fans elaborate on Yen's specific mode of martial arts practice, linking Wing Chun to the MMA style of fighting, which highlights the actor's unique on-screen martial arts traits. Fans also link martial arts to hip-hop through their cultural association of hip-hop with ethnic resistance to American cultural hegemony. In addition, fans frame Yen as a family man, discussing the occasion when he shared an image on Instagram of his son dressed up as Chirrut Îmwe and his daughter as a stormtrooper for Halloween. The image shared by fans highlights how Yen is a loving and caring father. This fatherly quality fits well with Chinese Confucian values, which emphasize the importance of family connections. The harmonious on- and off-screen star discourses highlighted by fans make Yen stand out from Jackie Chan, discussed in the following chapter, whose mediated private life has been marked with stories of love affairs.

[3] Chapter 2 explores fans' use of Flickr to construct Jackie Chan's public personas. This case study reveals different discourses about the star shaped by fans from various geographies. In the US, fans' reenactments of kung fu fighting on the Hollywood Walk of Fame revives the idea of ethnic Chineseness but also reduces Chan's body into a kind of spectacle used for fans' social relations. The absence of Chan's martial arts body is also evident in Australia, where fans wore Jackie Chan masks to participate in the Adelaide Flash Mob to celebrate the actor's martial arts prowess in 2010. Lau continues by exploring the way the actor's publicity team uses Flickr to promote Chan's charity work and various patriotic social functions. The Flickr publicity album has limited fan emotional engagement, which contrasts with Jet Li's philanthropist project, set up after the actor personally experienced a tsunami disaster while holidaying in the Maldives in 2004. Chapter 3 explores Li's active role in communicating with fans through the Facebook page entitled 李连杰 Jet Li, in which the majority of posts highlight Li's charity projects in different countries. The use of personal address and affective tone of voice in the posts work to create Li's authentic "charitable persona" (Lau 2018, 102). The focus on his philanthropic pursuits also shifts focus from Li's ethnic stardom and martial arts prowess to a new spiritual and cosmopolitan persona.

[4] As the first three chapters focused on the interconnected discourses of male martial arts actors, chapters 4 and 5 instead shift to the stardom of actors Zhang Ziyi and Takeshi Kaneshiro. Lau's case study of Zhang highlights the different pressures female stars face as compared to male stars. Zhang's fans highlight off-screen stories of her English language skills and news of her relationships with different male public figures on YouTube, while criticisms of Zhang, posted on YouTube in response to a video clip featuring paparazzi beach photos, illuminate conflicts between the star's public image and the "cultural integrity and national honor" (Lau 2018, 119) expected of a Chinese actress. While these online criticisms place Zhang in a marginal position—as an actress who can perform martial arts but cannot fulfill the cultural expectations held for a Chinese female star—Zhang's supporters negotiate
her star position by emphasizing her hard work to improve her English language skills.

[5] Chapter 5 highlights how fan discourses are also important to the construction of Kaneshiro as a pan-Asian star. Instead of focusing on Kaneshiro's inauthentic accents when speaking in different languages and dialects, fans in internet forums emphasize the visual appeal of the half-Taiwanese, half-Japanese actor. Kaneshiro's complicated appeals are revealed through fans' attention to his attractive appearance instead of his acting ability, particularly when he is compared to stars like Keanu Reeves and Johnny Depp, whose good looks have caused their acting abilities to be undermined. Influenced by the fans' own identities and cultural associations, and resonating with other case studies where fans perceive their favorite star's ethnicity to be fluid, fans emphasize Kaneshiro's connection with Japan despite the actor's limited discussion of his Japanese roots.

[6] Overall, Lau smoothly sews together the case studies to develop interconnected inquiries into the ethnicities of film stars and related discourses on age and gender politics. However, while the focus of the book on Chinese film stars is well argued and nicely concluded in the final chapter, I also hoped to read about the writer's reflections on the development of the field of East Asian star studies and broader contexts on stars' cross-media presence and transmedia constructions. A related book is Leung Wing-Fai's (2014) monograph *Multimedia Stardom in Hong Kong: Image, Performance, and Identity*, which uses the term "multimedia" to emphasize the connections between popular culture and different media industries that shape Hong Kong actors' stardom. Nevertheless, Lau's employment of fan-generated content to explore stars' public personas emphasizes fan-star relations, a perspective missing from previous works on East Asian film stardom. Future works on the crossing of different media industries by the new generation of pan-Asian stars and fans, as well as reflections on fan studies' approaches to stardom as opposed to those of transmedia stardom studies, would be welcome additions to both fields.

[7] Lau points to works on postcinema and postcinematic conditions in her introductory chapter. Her use of the term "cyberculture" instead of "online cultures" or "transmedia cultures" suggests that the idea of the cyber, perhaps in relation to cybernetics, could be expanded further to discuss the bodies and figures of stars whose public images and reputations are shaped through multiple electronic personas. This could perhaps develop the idea of stardom beyond individual ethnicities and bodies to the interconnectivity between icons, figures, spaces, and human/nonhuman connections.

[8] On the whole, *Chinese Stardom in Participatory Cyberculture*, which links studies of Chinese stardom with those of participatory culture, should certainly be added to scholars' reading lists for its contribution. The book is timely given that fan studies scholars have been increasingly engaging with related fields, including celebrity studies, and aiming to focus more research outside Anglo-American and European contexts. For media and fan studies scholars, the study of fan-generated content may not be a novel approach; nevertheless, the case studies provided support fan studies' interest in exploring fans' power in negotiating and problematizing industry discourses. This is particularly crucial in contemporary East Asian cinema contexts, in which ethnic stars are still dependent on dominant film industries for their breakthroughs and global exposure.
Reference