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Editorial

Toward some fanons of fan studies

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[0.2] Keywords—Acafan; Interdisciplinary; Methodology


1. Introduction

[1.1] Fan studies is an incredibly multi-inter-para-disciplinary field. We come from fields ranging from cultural studies to law, sociology to library science. We each bring unique perspectives, theories, theorists, methods, methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies. We are theoretically and methodologically eclectic. Sometimes, this leads to magic. We have the flexibility to address a huge range of research questions—about fans, about texts, about practices, about the spaces where fans congregate, about structures and institutions that affect fandom, and about the ways fans and fandoms leave their mark on the world. Other times, this multi-inter-para-disciplinary eclecticism brings challenges. We have different ideas about rigor, objectivity, research ethics, and our own positionality. Sometimes it feels like someone else is trying, yet again, to reinvent the wheel—possibly even a wheel we ourselves (re)invented some time ago. And sometimes we find ourselves in a fandom field of one, because our approach is so unique that we cannot even get our work peer reviewed. All of this is exacerbated by the fact that, like at least some of our originary disciplines, we are
reluctant to openly talk about methodology (Evans and Stasi 2014).

[1.2] So what we set out to do in this special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* is start conversations on how we do fan studies. We want this conversation to recognize the strengths, diversity, and potential of our field. At the same time, we want it to start grappling with some of the challenges we face: the citational elisions, the affect and embodiedness of our work, our at times conflicting/conflicted dual positionality as fans and scholars, the sometimes failed dialogue with fans who can and do talk back. We hope that this special issue will give you ideas for new approaches (and new collaborators!), will help you pinpoint and begin to address some of your own methodological anxieties, and will challenge you to think outside your theoretical and methodological comfort zone. We also very much hope that this is only the start of this conversation. We are not interested in canonizing one particular or even several methodologies. Rather, much like the fans we study, we would like to encourage you to build your own fanons of fan studies.

2. Theory

[2.1] The special issue's Theory section opens with two reflections on feminist influences in fan studies. Briony Hannell discusses fan studies and/as feminist methodology. She traces the links between early fan studies and feminist cultural studies while also drawing our attention to some of the citational silences and elisions when it comes to recognizing those links in the fan studies canon. Nonetheless, she argues, the way we do fan studies is fundamentally shaped by both feminist ethics and feminist epistemology. Also taking a feminist, affect-inflected approach, Sophie Hansal and Marianne Gunderson propose a fannish methodology for fan studies. They argue that engaging with our feelings toward our work is an integral part of our research. They ask us to challenge the feelings/rationality dichotomy; to both actively embrace and critically reflect on our dual positionality as fans and scholars; to pay attention to the social conditions and power structures that give rise to our emotions; and to continue practicing the theoretical and methodological eclecticism that our multi-inter-para-disciplinary field is rooted in.

[2.2] Continuing on the theme of positionality, Milena Popova examines the twin challenges of studying a fandom that lives largely online and that we as researchers are also already members of. They draw on traditional, digital, and autoethnography to propose a "follow the trope" approach, where our scholarly journey mirrors our fannish journey. Similarly, Dennis Jansen takes us on a journey through the archive—in this case, the digital archive created by and for fans. Jansen shows us the importance of our own affect and embodiment in encounters with archives and proposes paying detailed, autoethnographic attention to our archival explorations as a way of understanding the hierarchical and structuring relationships that govern archives and our engagements with them.

[2.3] One of the methodological anxieties many of us face regardless (and because) of our dual positionality as fans and scholars concerns the impact our work may have on the fans and fandoms we study. To grapple with that, Brianna Dym and Casey Fiesler put fans in the center when asking the question, "How should we do fan studies?" Their interview study foregrounds some of the concerns fans have about fan studies scholars using, dissecting,
questioning, and recontextualizing or decontextualizing their work. They explore the
tensions between seeking permission for use and obscuring fannish identities while giving
fair attribution. They remind us of the importance of understanding the fannish spaces we
move in and sharing our work back with fandom.

[2.4] Naomi Jacobs embraces the multi-inter-para-disciplinary character of fan studies and
encourages us to learn from other fields that have coalesced in a similar way, notably design
studies. While acknowledging the institutional challenges that interdisciplinary research
faces, she argues for a bricolage approach to methodology that allows us to pick the right
methods to answer our research questions. She foregrounds participatory action research as
one possible method that would allow us to negotiate the tension between our scholarship
and our fandom in an ethical and productive way. Our next two articles both illustrate the
bricolage approach to methodology and highlight the diversity of research directions in our
field. Christopher Luke Moore proposes a persona-inflected fan studies that would allow us
to interrogate the experience of being—or presenting oneself as—a semipublic or public fan
in a digital world. Such an approach allows us to attend to the way fans negotiate their
identities and presentations with the world they inhabit: with their (micro)publics but also
with nonhuman actors such as media corporations and platforms. At the other end of the fan-
text spectrum, Suzanne R. Black gives us a novel approach to the paratext as a place where
fan fiction readers and writers interact, and where text and work meet. She shows us how
computational methods can help us better understand the work that paratexts do in fan
fiction, and the way fan fiction may be both similar to and different from other types of texts.

[2.5] The last word in our Theory section goes to Rukmini Pande, who shows us that for all
their feminism, queerness, and squee, both fandom and fan studies are fraught with power
relations along other axes of oppression. A true reckoning with issues of race continues to be
one such absence from the fan studies bricolage. Pande highlights the citational silences and
elisions that a focus on the (white) feminist history of fan studies leaves us with. She also
persuasively argues that some of our ethical and methodological anxieties vis-à-vis our
relationship with fans may be oriented in the wrong direction. Applying decolonial critiques
of ethnography to fan studies' engagement with privileged white women fans in spaces
where race continues to be an invisibilized structuring force is one example of such
misplaced anxiety. In the ethics and permission space, Pande also encourages us to consider
whom we are protecting and privileging, and whom we are silencing, in our desire to protect
fannish sources. To counteract the operations of whiteness in both fandom and fan studies,
Pande encourages us to both name invisibilized whiteness and to actively disrupt
whitewashed stories of fandom. Fans of color, after all, have always been here.

3. Praxis

[3.1] The question of the relationship between the "aca" and the "fan" is at the heart of the
two opening essays of our Praxis section. Adrienne E. Raw asks what fan studies scholars
are doing when we disclose our fannish identity in our research. Raw uses rhetorical analysis
of sixty-nine articles published in Transformative Works and Cultures to map out the
rhetorical moves we make when we position ourselves as acafans, and the implications this
practice may have for the power relationships between scholar and fan. In contrast, Abby
Waysdorf uses her personal experiences to explore how we might apply acafannish approaches to studying fandoms we may not be part of. By using autoethnography and social sciences to help center the research, Waysdorf proposes a modified acafandom and discusses how this approach helped her study film tourism.

[3.2] Showing us some of the practical implications of Brianna Dym and Casey Fiesler's work from our Theory section and continuing to explore fan-researcher dialogues, Daisy Pignetti reflects on what happens when fans don't agree with or appreciate the way their fandom is researched. She uses a personal experience from her own work to reflect on how to best research and present findings without having individuals misinterpret them or her intentions.

[3.3] Fan studies bricoleurs have plenty to choose from in the following three articles. CarrieLynn D. Reinhard applies Brenda Dervin's sense-making methodology (SMM) to fan studies. Using interview protocols for one-on-one interviews and focus groups, Reinhard argues that SMM can help fan scholars make sense of different areas of fan studies not previously investigated, and that it can add a quantifiable slant to phenomenological and interpretive approaches to fan studies. Looking at an issue more frequently debated by fans and legal practitioners than fan studies scholars, Ruth Flaherty shows us how methods from law and legal research allow us to look at different facets of the relationship between copyright and fan fiction. Her work focuses on the UK legal context, but there is a strong case for reapplying Flaherty's methods to other jurisdictions. Lies Lanckman draws on classic Hollywood fans from the 1920s and 1930s to add to an underresearched area of fan studies: fan history. She argues that fan magazines, specifically the fan magazine letter sections, are a productive way to look at historically lost fan populations. Using a combination of content analysis of the magazines and US census records from 1920, 1930, and 1940 to create demographic profiles, Lanckman paints a vivid picture of a fan community of the past.

[3.4] Our Praxis section closes with a vibrant discussion between four scholars on themes of interdisciplinarity, race and whiteness, and transcultural fandom. Erika Ningxin Wang, Brittany Kelley, Ludi Price, and Kristen Schuster build on Naomi Jacobs's work on moving from multidisciplinarity to true interdisciplinarity. The deep conversation the authors have about their experiences across both disciplinary and racial/cultural boundaries points the way to a true interdisciplinary praxis in a transcultural fan studies.

4. Symposium

[4.1] Our Symposium section opens by considering the challenges of being new to our multi-inter-para-disciplinary field. Mandy Rhae Olejnik and Danielle Hart address the issue that many scholars (and many fans who become scholars) often do not receive explicit instruction in fan studies, so we often find ourselves reconstructing foundational concepts from scratch. However, these foundational concepts are shared and are worth naming explicitly. Olejnik and Hart propose three such so-called threshold concepts to ground our discussions and guide our methodological approaches. Sarah Elizabeth Ader adds valuable perspective here by recounting her own first foray into fan studies research and grappling
with the questions it raised about her acafannish positionality. She shows how at different points in our research we may move between different points of a spectrum between fan and academic, and she urges us to embrace (reflexively and self-critically) the complexity of this ever-shifting dual positionality.

[4.2] Our next two articles take the opportunity to showcase particular methodological approaches available to the fan studies bricoleur. Maria Alberto highlights the use of platform studies to fan studies. She notes that many fan studies scholars are already engaging in platform studies, though they often do so without naming it as such. (Arguably both Milena Popova and Dennis Jansen in our Theory section do this.) Alberto argues that fan studies is also uniquely placed to resolve a key challenge of platform studies: its tendency to understate the importance of users to platforms. The recognition of fan labor and its impact on the spaces fans inhabit is, after all, central to fan studies scholarship. Shayla Olsen introduces fictocriticism—a form of critical creative writing—as a method especially appropriate to fan studies scholarship. She positions fictocriticism as an extension of the self-reflexive autoethnographic work that many fan studies scholars already engage in. Since we recognize the ways in which fans can create knowledge and learn about themselves in fan fiction, Olsen argues, fan studies scholars might engage in the same kind of work, thereby tapping into the power of fan fiction as a research method.

[4.3] Our next two authors ask how we bring aspects of ourselves and our fannish impulses into our research. Martine Mussies proposes an autoethnography informed by autism "as a special way of being in the world"—an auti-ethnography. Taking advantage of the rigor of autoethnography, autiethnography allows an even fuller expression of the experience of fandom, one that includes scholarly discourse but that is also informed by personal identities and experiences of fandom. Dawn Walls-Thumma also recognizes that fan studies can be informed by fannish experiences and impulses, arguing that fan scholars can also be inspired to fill gaps in canon, just as fans are. By bringing appropriate new methods into fan studies scholarship, scholars can mend gaps in research.

[4.4] The final two pieces of our Symposium section explore our orientations to fannish material when we remove it from its original context and make it part of our research or teaching practice. Regina Yung Lee traces the challenges (and victories) of teaching not just fan studies but fannish work to students. Transplanting fannish work into the classroom requires forms of evaluation and engagement alien to fandom (such as grading), and this exacerbates imbalances in power and affective labor. Teaching fannish work, then, requires careful planning—and careful placement of boundaries—by the instructor. Milena Popova also explores the challenges and complexities of bringing fannish knowledge into academic institutions. They argue that fannish material is not always merely data for our research but can also be knowledge creation in its own right. But fannish knowledge production has different foundations and knowledge validation procedures than academia. When we use fannish material in our work, we must be mindful of the fact that our orientation to it—as data, as knowledge in its own right, or as something to be critiqued—is a methodological choice that requires careful consideration and justification.

[4.5] All our Symposium articles (and more generally this special issue) share the underlying
argument that our messy field is wondrous, but we must get better at naming our choices and methods explicitly; and that fan studies scholars can bring ourselves into our work, so long as we do so critically and carefully as a method. Echoing—or more accurately presaging, because this interview was conducted in 2018—this, Louisa Ellen Stein reflects on her experiences as both a fan and a scholar trying to navigate the multiple pressures of bringing her whole self into her scholarship. Fannish and academic values do not always align, especially when it comes to the validation of fannish knowledge. In addition, to argue that all fan scholars should always bring every aspect of themselves to bear in their work is unsustainable; to do so is just as limiting as to refuse the self in scholarship entirely. But as both Adrienne E. Raw and Sarah Elizabeth Ader point out in this issue, our choices of which aspects we bring in and which aspects we disclose in themselves do work in our research and our writing. In line with this, Stein calls for "a strategic personal scholarship" (¶ 17) that chooses methods and orientations appropriate to the work and to the context. In short, Stein argues that we need to start naming fannish and felt scholarship as a method we take up, not as an ideology we must always inhabit.

[4.6] This is the argument that has informed our relationship to this special issue; we did not want to call for one method to rule them all. Instead, we want to highlight the wealth of methods we have to choose from. We urge fan studies scholars to be more explicit in naming not only the tools we are using but the orientations we have to our work and our fellow fans, and consider how those orientations might apply power unequally.

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6. Reference

Abstract—Feminist cultural studies and feminist theory in genealogies of fan studies are taken for granted. However, the implications of feminist methodological and epistemological frameworks within discussions of fan studies methodology are more often inferred than directly stated—or cited. Examining the parallel debates taking place around knowledge, power, and reflexivity within feminist theory, feminist cultural studies, and fan studies illustrates how key methodological approaches within fan studies are deeply grounded in feminist epistemology and ontology. Building on theorizations of the dual positionality of the acafan alongside feminist theorizations of self-reflexivity permits an exploration of how acafandom aligns with feminist methodological frameworks regarding researcher fragmentation and reflexivity. Emotion and affect are important concerns for acafan scholarship to address, as they align fan studies with feminist traditions of personal and autobiographical writing that privilege subjectivity as a legitimate source of knowledge. Explicitly reframing fan studies within this theoretical and methodological context augments the understanding of many of the fundamental beliefs and principles underpinning the production of knowledge within fan studies, and helps refine the critical language used to frame and describe scholarly methodologies.

Keywords—Acafan; Affect; Autoethnography; Epistemology; Feminism; Reflexivity


Most of the academic work we see and read is the end product of a long process, but we rarely have any understanding of this process. The representations of knowledge as a final product mask the conditions of its production…If we have done research we all know that it is a difficult, messy, fraught, emotional, tiring, and yet rewarding process; we know all about the elements involved, but how does anyone else get to know? All they usually see is the clean, crisp, neatly presented finished product. Intellectuals may excel in describing other people's implicit assumptions, but they are as implicit as anyone else when it comes to their own.

1. Introduction

[1.1] While the feminist valences of fan culture have been widely explored by fan studies scholars over the past three decades, particularly through examinations of fannish practice as a form of social and cultural critique (e.g., Bury 2005; Busse 2005; Coppa 2008, 2011, 2014; Derecho 2006; Hellekson and Busse 2006, 2014; Jenkins et al. 2016; Lothian 2012; Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007; Ng and Russo 2017; Warner 2015; Wills 2013), the feminist methodological and epistemological underpinnings of the methods used to examine these very cultures and practices are often inferred but not explicitly stated or cited. Many scholars working within fan studies have an antipositivist and antifoundationalist feminist "orientation" (Ang 2006, 175) to their research, and to their broader approach to the politics of the production of knowledge, yet they do not make explicit justifications for using feminist approaches to the production of knowledge or for concentrating primarily on female-identified and/or queer fans in their research. There are, of course, some notable exceptions, such as self-identified feminist fan studies scholars Stein, Scott, and Busse. More broadly, however, the lack of explicit exploration of the connections between feminist and fan studies methodologies may well be in part because, as Evans and Stasi (2014) note in their overview of methodology within fan studies research, in-depth discussion of methodology within fan studies is often lacking. Indeed, it is telling that the first issue of Transformative Works and Cultures dedicated to explicitly theorizing methodologies within fan studies comes over a decade after the journal’s first issue.

[1.2] Throughout this article, when I refer to the term methodology, I am following Harding's (1987) understanding of methodology as a theory and analysis of the research process. I understand the term method, by extension, as the practices and techniques of gathering and analyzing research material. Additionally, I understand the term feminist methodology as a certain intellectual-political orientation to the research process and towards academic practice rather than a fixed or static "paradigm" (Ang 2006, 175). Indeed, as Black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have argued, no singular feminism exists, and, as DeVault (1996) notes, feminist methodologists do not use or prescribe to a unified set of practices and principles or any single research method. It would be misleading to suggest that feminist methodology is a homogenous and cohesive enterprise. Its practitioners often differ both philosophically and politically in a number of ways (Harding 1986, 2004). However, feminist methodologists are more broadly united through their shared commitment to questions of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. Indeed, fan studies is itself characterized by a rather eclectic range of research methods, and yet our scholarship seems to be governed by a common sense understanding of a certain methodological orientation to the research process, often in line with the tradition established in Textual Poachers (Jenkins 1992)—a tradition which, I argue, was built upon feminist methodologies emerging from feminist cultural studies.

[1.3] While scholars such as Louisa Stein (2011b) have in recent years pointed to the crucially interrelated nature of feminist and fan studies scholarship, the interrelated nature of the methodological frameworks underlying this scholarship has not been explicitly mapped in any great detail. As Scott (2018) highlighted in her recent overview of the field, the conception of fan studies as a feminist discipline is "too frequently taken for granted" (73).
Throughout this article, I frame these issues through the lens of the politics of storytelling and citation, and attempt to reverse these gaps and silences in our understandings of the methodological origins of fan studies by making the feminist orientation of the discipline explicitly visible (note 1). Firstly, I examine a number of parallel debates taking place within feminist cultural studies, feminist theory, and fan studies regarding questions of subjectivity, hierarchy, and reflexivity to reveal how fan studies is deeply grounded in feminist methodological frameworks and in feminist epistemology and ontology. Secondly, building upon theorizations of the dual positionality of the acafan alongside feminist theorizations of self-reflexivity, I explore how acafandom aligns with feminist methodological frameworks regarding research reflexivity and the "fragmented" feminist researcher (Brunsdon 1993, 314). I then argue that the central importance of emotion and affect to acafan scholarship aligns fan studies with feminist traditions of personal and autobiographical writing that privileges subjectivity as a legitimate source of knowledge. Finally, I reflect upon the broader implications of the taken for grantedness of feminist methodological frameworks within fan studies through an examination of the ways in which the gaps and silences of white and Western feminist methodologies may have structured the "blind spots" of fan studies (Scott 2019, 228).

[1.4] With this in mind, the problems I identify throughout this article are by no means unique to fan studies. Feminist methodological frameworks are unfortunately elided by many disciplines (see, for example, V. T. Collins 1999; Weatherall 2012; Keddy, Sims, and Stern 1996). Moreover, many feminists of color have written of the structuring force of white and Western epistemologies within the academy more broadly (P. H. Collins 2000; Lugones 2010; Narayan 2004). Nevertheless, to investigate the taken for grantedness of feminist methodologies within fan studies is essential, I argue, not only to improving the academic rigor of the discipline but also to improving the critical language with which we discuss issues of methodology, epistemology, subjectivity, hierarchy, and reflexivity within fan studies.

2. (Re)situating fan studies: On storytelling and the politics of citation

[2.1] In the interests of transparency, it is first worth noting how my approach to this article, as well as my argument more broadly, came to be. My approach emerged, in part, in response to a series of questions I encountered during the beginning of my time as a PhD student about the theoretical and methodological position of my research: "Is this thesis fan studies or feminist cultural studies?" One thing I struggled to grapple with during these conversations was the way in which a dichotomy between fan studies and feminist cultural studies was being established when, to me, the two were intimately intertwined in both theory and practice—for me, it was less a case of fan studies or feminist cultural studies but rather fan studies and feminist cultural studies. This is something that I felt to be true at both an empirical and a methodological level. However, I soon became acutely aware that, despite its feminist underpinnings, the conception of fan studies as a feminist discipline is often taken for granted or overlooked. It remains inferred or implicit. Many of my colleagues working outside of fan studies report a perception of fan studies as a predominantly white, cis, and male field, much in line with Stanfill's (2011) research on the discursive constructions of fandom within contemporary culture. However, this perception of the
discipline is entirely incongruent with my experience as an early career scholar within fan studies. I feel that this predicament has much to do with the stories we tell about fan studies.

[2.2] While fan studies is an interdisciplinary and eclectic field, the tradition of scholarship that emerged from *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992) has undeniably shaped understandings of what we see as fan studies and, by extension, what we see as a certain methodological orientation to the research process within fan studies. Despite an insistence on the position of fan studies as an "undisciplined discipline" (Ford 2014, 54), existing genealogies of fan studies produce a markedly singular and linear narrative of the emergence of the field centered on media and cultural studies and the publication of *Textual Poachers* in 1992 (note 2). This is captured most saliently by the April 2014 issue of the *Journal of Fandom Studies* dedicated to reflecting upon the impact of *Textual Poachers* on the formation and development of the field over the past three decades (Larsen 2014). Indeed, like many scholars working within fan studies, my first interaction with fan studies was through *Textual Poachers*, and it has had a formative influence both on my intellectual development as an early career scholar and on my orientation towards fan studies more broadly. That being said, I am concerned that the canonization of *Textual Poachers* has a number of implications for the stories we tell about the origins of fan studies and the impact these stories have on the ways that we theorize (or, rather, do not theorize) key methodological approaches within fan studies.

[2.3] In a 2014 article exploring the origins of fan studies, Henry Jenkins traces the academic origins of fan studies to, most notably, the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Crucially, he admits that, while fan studies was undoubtedly influenced by the work of Hebdige (1979) and Hall and Jefferson (1976), who examined the resistant practices of subcultures, as well as Hall's (1980) groundbreaking encoding/decoding essay, it was the feminist interventions of scholars such as McRobbie ([1980] 1991) in cultural studies which helped to recenter ideas about resistance and appropriation in the study of fandom (see also Brunsdon 1996). Furthermore, McRobbie's orientation to the production of knowledge was significant in that it adopted a feminist methodological framework to question the positionality of the researcher in relation to these communities. McRobbie strongly advocated for the importance of recognizing the "close links between personal experience and the areas chosen for study" (18), an approach to researcher reflexivity which would come to have much significance for fan studies, as I will discuss in more detail later. More broadly, the early audience research produced during the 1980s by feminist cultural studies scholars such as Brunsdon (1981), Ang (1985), and Hobson (1982), which sought to reclaim soap operas and their audiences from decades of cultural disparagement, operated as a crucial "step towards studying fandom" in the 1990s (Jenkins 2014, 92). The work of these feminist researchers, which "combined the personal, the political, and the methodological" (Hermes 2006, 170), gained feminist cultural studies a strong and enduring reputation for engaged social criticism and theory grounded in actual audience practice (see also Nightingale 1996).

[2.4] In the early 1990s, fan studies emerged out of this tradition of a feminist audience studies that pushed back against the ideological dismissal of women's tastes, consumption practices, and cultural forms. Early fandom studies were an attempt to represent and
rehabilitate images of fans, in Fiske's (1992) words, "associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (30). Fandom, Fiske argues, was typically associated with popular cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates. Early fandom scholars of the "first wave" (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 1) of fan studies subsequently foregrounded predominantly female fandoms (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995; Fiske 1992). The early work of scholars including Bacon-Smith (1986, 1992), Penley (1992, 1997), Jenkins (1988, 1992), Lamb and Veith (1986), and Russ (1985), for example, examined (white) women's engagements with conventionally masculine genres such as science fiction. The emergence of fan studies therefore aligned with feminist efforts to take seriously the study of cultural forms, their pleasures, and their audiences, especially those which were routinely denigrated, devalued, and pathologized in terms of hegemonic values which govern the production of knowledge. As Scott (2019) notes, from the field's inception "fannish pleasures and feminist politics were conceptually intertwined" (28). And yet, despite this, the legacy of feminist cultural studies, its theories, and its methodological frameworks in the origins of fan studies is markedly absent in many of the stories we tell about how fan studies (and, by extension, our methodologies) came to be. Instead, the emergence of the discipline is more often than not attributed to cultural studies more generally rather than feminist cultural studies specifically. Jenkins (2014, 93) himself admits this, noting:

[2.5] The early fandom scholars were reading these [feminist] writers—engaging with their theories, circling around their examples, struggling with their methods…To some degree, we took this context for granted, but these writers were certainly informing our work, whether or not they showed up explicitly in our bibliographies…We cannot understand what fandom studies have become without acknowledging these roots, especially the ways in which feminist interventions in the study of subcultures, audiences and readers pointed researchers towards fandom as an important site for understanding gendered relations within popular media.

[2.6] What is most significant here is Jenkins's admission that, while highly influential, the work of feminist cultural studies scholars produced during the 1980s was often not explicitly cited by early fandom scholars in the 1990s. What impact have these citational silences thus had on the stories we tell about the origins of fan studies and the development of our methodological frameworks? Feminist critical theorist Ahmed (2013 ¶ 4) has described citation as "a rather successful reproductive technology" (¶ 3) which both produces and reproduces disciplines. Citation practices operate, she argues, as "techniques of selection," and as ways of making "certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part" (Ahmed 2013). They are an acknowledgement of "our debt to those who came before" (Ahmed 2017, 15). Citation practices are, in a Foucauldian sense, productive rather than descriptive narratives of the recent past, and, as Hemmings (2011) writes in Why Stories Matter, they "produce consensus" (161). The stories we tell about the emergence of fan studies, which rarely describe or locate fan studies within the context of feminist cultural studies and its methodological frameworks, produce a consensus which severs fan studies from its origins in feminist scholarship and feminist methodologies.
[2.7] What might these gaps and silences within our bibliographies mean for the discussions we have about fan studies methodologies? Starting from attention to silences in the history of fan studies, I suggest several ways of revealing the feminist approaches to methodology that often underpin our discussions of methodology within fan studies. In doing so, I hope to make visible the influence of feminist theorists whose work, words, and broader orientation to the research process have undoubtedly shaped key methodological frameworks used widely within fan studies.

3. Feminist reflexivity and the fragmented acafan

[3.1] Feminist methodology calls attention to the partiality, fluidity, and situatedness of knowledge and seeks new ways to approach the process of producing and interpreting knowledge. Feminist methodologies recognize that the researcher is engaged in a process of interpretation and representation which is intimately bound up in power relations and imbalances, and feminist knowledge production therefore seeks to address and interrogate these power imbalances (P. H. Collins 2000; Cook and Fonow 1986; Maynard 1994; Naples and Gurr 2014; Stanley and Wise 1990, 1993). Attention to the power relations inherent within empirical research has subsequently driven many, if not most, feminist critiques of research methodology over the last four decades.

[3.2] In an effort to recognize the political and social dimensions of the production of knowledge, feminist scholarship has long attempted to challenge masculine conventions of academic practice through opening up spaces for explicit connections to be made between theoretical questions and personal, subjective experience. McRobbie (1991) argues that much academic work exhibits a silencing of the self and a denial of the importance of the personal to the production, selection, and interpretation of knowledge. Feminist researchers, she argues, recognize the close links between personal experience and the areas chosen for study, and as a result, autobiographies and personal experience inform a great deal of what is written. After all, our understandings of, and investments in, the subjects of our research correspond to the "subjective limits" (de Lauretis 1986, 5) produced by our specific histories and personal experiences.

[3.3] Feminist researchers have therefore been at the forefront of discussions about the urgent need to both be reflexive and be open and honest about the research process (Maynard 1994). For many feminist researchers, the need to situate the production of knowledge within "wider social relations of production" (Skeggs 1995a, 3) has not only a political but also an ethical dimension. Oakley (1981), for example, argues that the traditional, masculine, positivist, research model, in which the researcher gives nothing away about themselves—or rather, as McRobbie (1991) describes, in which the researcher "silences the self" (18–19) —objectifies and depersonalizes research participants, which subsequently reinforces the power held by the researcher. Reflexivity provides a way for feminist researchers to account for their personal biases and examine the effects these biases may have on the production and interpretation of knowledge, and on the relationship between the researcher and her research participants. Feminist methodologies are therefore highly compatible with self-reflexivity because their central concern is to address power relations and hierarchies between researchers and their research participants. This concern plays an important role in
critically situating researchers in the contexts they are analyzing and interpreting (Carrington 2008).

[3.4] Within fan studies, the feminist work of self-reflexivity primarily takes place through reflexive representations of the complicated and multiplicitous subject position of the acafan—a term widely used within fan studies to refer to the dual role of the academic-fan researcher. Fan studies is itself prefaced on a close link between personal experience and the area chosen for study, and this is made highly visible by the subject position of the acafan. The dual position of the acafan has been conceptualized by many as an advantageous and unique research position, and Evans and Stasi (2014, 5) argue that the acafan, as a figure who "complicates realist conventions of representation" (Monaco 2010, 102), presupposes "some form of methodological turn." Textual Poachers is often cited as the source of the concept of acafandom through Jenkins's reflexive declaration of his status as both fan and researcher. In an influential passage in his introduction to Textual Poachers, Jenkins (1992, 5) wrote:

[3.5] When I write about fan culture,...I write both as an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community). My account exists in a constant movement between these two levels of understanding which are not necessarily in conflict but are also not necessarily in perfect alignment. If this account is not overtly autobiographical in that it pulls back from recounting my own experiences in favor of speaking within and about a larger community of fans, it is nevertheless deeply personal.

[3.6] While Jenkins (1992) does not position this account as autobiographical, he does emphasize that it is "nevertheless deeply personal" (5). Jenkins's effort to place himself in the same critical plane as his subject matter, as both academic/researcher and as fan/research subject, is deeply feminist in its methodological orientation. Many feminist analyses of methodology, attentive to the innate hierarchy of the research process and the relationship between the researcher and research participants, have proposed a breaking down of this hierarchy through minimizing the researcher's superior or elite status. For example, feminist researchers such as Harding (1987) advocate for positioning researchers in the same critical plane as their participants, rejecting the object/subject binary and calling for more self-reflexive approaches to knowledge production, selection, and interpretation. Similarly, Naples and Gurr (2014) highlight that feminist researchers argue for a self-reflexive approach to theorizing in order to foreground how relations of power and status between researchers and their research participants may shape the production, selection, and interpretation of knowledge in different contexts. By making explicit the processes of the production of knowledge, feminist researchers locate and situate their knowledges and themselves, thereby rejecting the object/subject binary and the silencing of the self that permeates traditional positivist research. Knowledge building, therefore, becomes a relational process that demands sustained critical self-reflection, dialogue, and interaction. Jenkins's (1992) rejection of the object/subject binary, his insistence on situating himself within the research process, and his critical self-reflection therefore align Textual Poachers,
as a canonical text within fan studies, with feminist methodological frameworks regarding researcher reflexivity.

[3.7] The feminist orientation to self-reflexivity within fan studies is something that Evans and Stasi (2014) highlight in their overview of methodology within fan studies. Like fan studies scholars, who exist "in a constant movement between...two levels of understanding which are not necessarily in conflict but are also not necessarily in perfect alignment" (Jenkins 1992, 5), feminist researchers also reject the assumption that maintaining a strict separation between researcher and research subject produces a more valid, objective account (Cook and Fonow 1986). Through the figure of the acafan, Evans and Stasi (2014) argue, fan studies has therefore been doing the ontological work of the crisis of representation since its conception in the early 1990s. Moreover, the field's early embrace of personal accounts aligns fan studies with longstanding feminist methodological traditions that privilege "subjectivity, personal voice, and emotional experience" (Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, and Ellis 2016, 35).

[3.8] Indeed, feminist researchers have long been at the forefront of establishing methodological frameworks to examine the process of "dipping in and out of identifications" (Brunsdon 2000, 215) as a researcher, as a feminist, and as a reader, viewer, or fan, and these frameworks have undoubtedly influenced fan studies' highly contested relationship with the concept of acafandom. In many ways, the self-reflexivity of fan studies arguably offers a corrective to earlier feminist audience research, which neglected to engage fully with a range of epistemological and ontological debates about feminist reflexivity. Brunsdon (2000), for example, notes that early audience research within feminist cultural studies constructed a notion of the critical feminist researcher in opposition to imagined others, ordinary women, be they readers, viewers, or fans. Brunsdon and Spigel (2008) write that the relationship between the feminist researcher and women in general has been a central problem for feminist audience research throughout its history. Radway's (1984) *Reading the Romance*, for example—a text which Henry Jenkins (2014) notes was, at the time of publication, "the logical next step towards studying fandom" (92)—created a false dichotomy between feminist readers and other readers that does not account for the possibility that feminists, even academic feminists, may derive pleasure from popular culture. Underlying Radway's project is what McRobbie (1982) describes, in an early essay about the politics of feminist research and knowledge production, as a "recruitist" research objective (52). In a review of *Reading the Romance*, Ang (1988) critiques the pedagogic "feminist desire" motivating *Reading the Romance*: "its aim is directed at raising the consciousness of romance reading women" (184). Ang subsequently critiques the separation between subject and object in Radway's work. She argues that Radway's failure to reflexively examine the way in which her and her participants are positioned towards each other mistakenly confines her analysis to the relationship between two parties with fixed identities: that of a researcher/feminist and that of interviewees/fans. Admittedly, reflecting on her writing process for *Reading the Romance*, Radway (1991, 5) highlighted that she ought to have made greater effort to situate and interrogate her position as a feminist researcher and her relationship with her research subject(s). As Hermes (2006) notes, feminist researchers have not always had a particularly good track record of combining analyses of texts with audiences' interpretations of and uses for them. Nor, she writes, have feminists always given due care and consideration to their
text-based work; feminists have not always made it explicitly clear that we cannot speak on behalf of audiences without directly interacting with them. The reason for this, Hermes (2006) argues, is that work with popular media "has too often kept to a modernist frame of reference in which popular texts are always dangers and possibly damaging for the less-tutored" (166).

[3.9] Fan studies emerged from an intellectual context in which these methodological debates and dilemmas regarding the position of the researcher and the role of appropriate critical distance/closeness took center stage (note 3). Fan studies inherited a foundation of core insights into these dilemmas and a rich vocabulary of methodological approaches to working through them from the earlier work of feminist audience researchers. The discipline is therefore deeply indebted to "the self-reflexivity of feminist scholarship" (Scott 2018, 72), and it is possible to establish a number of thematic links and connections between the concept of acafandom and feminist approaches to self-reflexivity. For instance, the concept of acafandom, and the complicated positionality of the acafan, mirrors Brunsdon's (1993) notion of fragmented feminist researchers who must negotiate the significance of their identities as feminist researchers with a whole range of other formative identity categories, social locations, and subject positions. Like fragmented and multiplicitous acafans, feminist researchers are constantly moving between involvement and analysis, between closeness and distance. They, too, like Tompkins's (1987, 169) "two voices" or Radway's (1997, 12) "divided subject," are able to at once claim the (sub)cultural capital of familiarity with the popular and the symbolic capital of academics' ability to critically analyze these forms (Ng 2010). They are at once distanced yet engaged, "living on both sides of the us/them divide" (Kuhn 1995, 100) and "wandering on both sides of the boundary that separates fan from critic" (Brown 1994, 15). The concept of acafandom, I argue, is therefore deeply underpinned by feminist methodological frameworks regarding self-reflexivity, and the figure of the acafan exists in dialogue with that of the fragmented feminist researcher.

4. Up close and personal: Affect, autoethnography, and acafandom

[4.1] Numerous fan studies scholars have expressed ambivalence about both the figure of the acafan and the broader incorporation of the personal into academic writing within fan studies. Hills (2002), for example, suggests that while there is some scope for personal accounts within the discipline, some critical distance must be maintained so as to adhere to the "regulative ideal of the rational academic subject" (28). Scholars must take care not to present too much of their fannish enthusiasm or investment within their academic writing. Respect, he argues, is aligned with the imagined subjectivity of the good and rational academic who is expected to remain detached. Further, he adds, respect is not given to those who deviate from the academic norms of so-called rational and objective academic writing or performance (11–12). What is admittedly absent from Hills's account of the cultural practices and norms regulating academic work is that these norms and practices are, in their elevation of the rational and distanced academic researcher, deeply masculine (Jaggar 1997).

[4.2] Despite the growth of autoethnographic approaches and the wider challenges levied by many feminist scholars at the fallacy of academic objectivity, the intellectual use of the personal, as S. Holmes, Ralph, and Redmond (2015) note, presents particular risks for
women scholars, and especially early career scholars (note 4). This, they note, is in part due to the regulatory norms Hills identifies, which pose a threat to the cultural legitimacy of certain disciplines. The academic disdain for personal, emotional, and autobiographical accounts, Tompkins (1987) argues, reflects historically gendered divisions between public and private, splits that assign women the task of dealing with affect and emotions and men the task of dealing with abstract ideas. Scott (2019) notably highlights that debates within fan studies about the theory and practice of acafandom have notably fallen along "gendered lines" (42), wherein men have derided acafandom as a scholarly position (Bogost 2010) or questioned the overall utility of the concept (Gray in Stein 2011c), while women have staged defenses of its connection to the politics of identity and feminist modes of knowledge production (Stein 2011a, 2011b; Coker and Benefiel 2010).

[4.3] More recently, the status and meaning of the concept of acafandom, and what it means to be an acafan within the academy, has been undergoing a period of reassessment, particularly through recent self-reflexive and autoethnographic work from scholars including Driessen and Jones (2016), Garner (2018), Hellekson and Busse (2006), Monaco (2010), and Phillips (2013, 2010). Approaches to autoethnography are relatively diverse but are largely characterized by the use of personal experience to explore the relationship between the personal and the social. Autoethnography emerged from a context in which a range of theoretical and disciplinary voices—including feminism—were contesting issues of truth, power, voice, subjectivity, and representation. Crawley (2012) argues that autoethnography largely emerged out of feminist standpoint epistemologies (note 5). Indeed, feminist researchers have long emphasized that researchers are always implicated in the research process, and that their personal histories inevitably become part of the process through which the selection, interpretation, and understanding of the research subject is reached and through which knowledge is produced (P. H. Collins 2000; McRobbie 1982; Skeggs 1997; Stanley and Wise 1990, 1993; Thornham 2000).

[4.4] Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, and Ellis (2016) argue that autoethnography can be distinguished from other kinds of personal work in four distinct ways. These include (1) purposefully commenting on and/or critiquing culture and/or cultural practices, (2) making contributions to existing research, (3) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and (4) creating a reciprocal relationship with readers in order to compel a response. Conducting self-reflexive autoethnographic research requires researchers to write about themselves both as researchers and as the subject of their research, disclosing aspects of their personal experiences and identities in order to theorize them. Like many forms of feminist enquiry, contemporary fan studies often hovers between autobiographical and ethnographic modes of inquiry, subjecting the self (autos) to the procedures more commonly reserved for the collective (ethnos) (Brunsdon 2000). Fan studies therefore follows an epistemologically and ontologically feminist framework in its rejections of the object/subject and auto/ethnos binaries (Monaco 2010).

[4.5] Phillips (2010), for example, interrogates Hills's early assertion that the acafan must conform to the regulative masculine ideal of the rational academic subject. Instead, he argues that embracing a personal, even "overly confessional," approach to academic writing is integral to the fidelity of his research. He suggests that such "a lean towards openness and
individuality can in fact lend greater academic authority because of the personal attachment and investment to the subject." For Phillips, a reflexive, confessional approach to the research process can add to a researcher's academic authority. Phillips reflects upon his experiences as a researcher, as an academic, and as a fan to destabilize the normative value judgments academics are prone to making about an explicitly personal approach to the production of knowledge. His insistence on positioning himself as "an intentionally vulnerable subject" (Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, and Ellis 2016, 24) aligns him with feminist and autoethnographic methodological traditions.

[4.6] Feminist researcher Wilkins (1993) has similarly argued that a personal approach to one's research "can foster a sophisticated sensibility in the research setting" (93). Feminist methodology often encourages researchers to use their physical, emotional, professional, and embodied selves as a research tool to attend to and analyze emotion, interpret and select data, and build rapport with research participants (P. H. Collins 2000; Lee 1993; Oakley 1981; Sampson, Bloor, and Fincham 2008). As Carroll (2013) notes, this is an interactive process that may involve the type of self-disclosure described by Phillips (2010) alongside other acts of reciprocity and caring, such as engaging in active listening and showing emotion and empathy (Sampson, Bloor, and Fincham 2008; Wilkins 1993). For example, a common technique used by feminist researchers to improve rapport is, like Phillips (2010) and other fan studies scholars working with self-reflexive and autoethnographic traditions, to disclose narratives about one's own personal life experiences (Oakley 1981). Therefore, doing feminist research clearly requires researchers to be reflexive and emotionally attuned to their own emotions and experiences as well as to the needs of their research participants (M. Holmes 2010).

[4.7] Walkerdine (1997) has examined the issue of emotion and subjectivity in the research process, arguing that researchers' responses to empirical materials are likely to arise out of their own autobiographies. Rather than seeing that as an obstacle to be overcome, however, she argues that we should think more carefully about how to integrate and utilize our subjectivity as an integral part of the research process. For Walkerdine, it is through researchers' examinations of their own motivations and emotions that a fuller and richer understanding of the research process and materials can be reached. As both Walkerdine (1997) and Phillips (2010) note, this confessional and personal mode of research can be a painful and at times personally embarrassing process that can open researchers up to charges of emotionality, bias, or even pathologization (Hills 2002). This is especially salient given the ways in which emotions and affect in general are disavowed or silenced within mainstream academic research and within Western epistemology more broadly. For both Jaggar (1997) and Tompkins (1987), the disavowal of emotions, subjectivity, and affect within the process of the production of knowledge is a distinctly feminist issue as it risks undercutting women's epistemic authority. Western epistemology, Tompkins (1987) argues, is shaped by the belief that emotion should be excluded from the process of attaining, selecting, interpreting, and producing knowledge. Because women are culturally required to be the bearers of emotion, she argues, an epistemology that excludes emotions from the process of producing knowledge, instead favoring a masculine standard of rationality, undermines the recognition of women as "culturally legitimate sources of knowledge" (171). There epistemological problems are compounded when one accounts for the intersection of
gender with other salient identity markers, such as race (Nadar 2014; P. H. Collins 2000).

[4.8] Feminists have therefore long rejected the polarity between emotion and reason within Western epistemology (P. H. Collins 2000; Holland 2007; M. Holmes 2010; C. McLaughlin 2003), and Jaggar (1997) argues that normative academic frameworks tend to obscure the vital role of emotion and affect in the production of knowledge. As Lawler (2000) asks, "Who is really producing value-free research? Who is researching without any engagement of their politics, their beliefs, or their emotions?" (11) All researchers are undeniably situated in their research, although in many accounts, their situatedness is silenced (Skeggs 1995a; McRobbie 1991), or rather, it is not confessed (Phillips 2010). As Skeggs (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1997) notes, to obscure researchers' locatedness, as well as their subjectivity, emotions, and motivations, is to produce less rigorous research, rather than, as commonly thought within normative academic frameworks, more rigorous research. Feminist methodologies, as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) highlights, trouble the binary which "separates emotion from intellect" (282; see also Tate 1983). As Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc (2002) argue in Hop on Pop, even theory in its most abstracted forms cannot "allow us to fully escape our own subjectivity, the play of our emotions, the tug of our lived experiences" (9).

[4.9] Fan studies' reflexive elevation of the personal, the emotional, and the subjective is, I subsequently argue, shaped by the long and specific history of the use of the personal and autobiographical voice in feminist writing (Freedman, Frey, and Zauhar 1993; Wilkins 1993). This epistemological approach to the production of knowledge within fan studies, which recognizes—embraces, even—the close, subjective, and affective dimensions of scholarship, disrupts the regulatory conceptual norms of so-called rational, distanced, and objective knowledge production. The methodological frameworks used widely within fan studies are formulated on the basis of intense affects—investments and attachments, frustrations and resentments—which similarly circulate around feminist cultural studies (Stacey 2016). Fan studies, therefore, makes explicit "the ways in which locations of identity and emotional registers inform research choices and processes" (Monaco 2010, 102). Both Busse (2018) and Stein (2011b) subsequently frame fan studies' challenge to normative academic objectivity and rationality as distinctly feminist. Stein (2011a), for example, frames fan studies' affective and self-reflexive mode of scholarship, in its blend of "affect and academia," as fundamentally feminist in its methodology and epistemology, and its ontological destabilization of the object/subject binary within academic research:

[4.10] We cannot afford to retreat to an objective academic position because acafandom threatens to be too subjective or affective. A seemingly objective position is only subjectivity rendered invisible but still implicated...Acafandom demands (or should demand) an integration of personal and professional that is, to me at least, fundamentally feminist...Acafans model the (feminist) value of affective scholarship and self-reflexive insight. (Stein 2011b)

[4.11] Fan studies, including the position of the acafan, is inherently feminist to Stein. This is not necessarily due to its focus on gender, sexuality, and other intersecting identity categories but rather to its methodological merging of the professional and the personal, the rational
and the emotional, in ways that remain largely taboo within academia (Stein 2011a). Stein notes that the acafan occupies a position that crosses boundaries but unites self-reflexive scholars willing to engage with, rather than silence or render invisible (Stein 2011b), the affective dimension of scholarship. In this sense, fan studies grants us insight into the complex overlap between objective and subjective knowledge that feminist methodology has sought to examine for decades.

5. Whose feminism is this anyway? Intersectional feminism(s), whiteness, and fan studies

[5.1] Throughout this article, I have argued that explicitly situating fan studies within the context of feminist methodological and epistemological frameworks, particularly those emerging from feminist cultural studies, can augment our understandings of fan studies' orientations toward the production of knowledge, the research process, and academic practice more broadly. To do so is an important step towards unpacking what is taken for granted in the implicit assumption that fan studies operates as a feminist discipline. However, I also believe that to explicitly situate fan studies within this methodological tradition may help us to expose and explore other gaps and silences within the field. If feminist frameworks and orientations are indeed taken for granted within fan studies, what specific understanding of feminism is in turn taken for granted? What gaps and silences may we have inherited, and thus reproduced, from feminist cultural studies? Moreover, what might the relationship between these methodological frameworks and fan studies' blind spots be?

[5.2] While many feminists have emphasized that no singular feminism exists (note 6), feminists of color have long argued that feminist methodologies which privilege the experiences of white women from North America and Western Europe remain dominant (P. H. Collins 2000; hooks 2014). These methodologies have been criticized for neglecting to examine intersecting forms of oppression beyond gender (Crenshaw 1991) and for failing to explore the structuring force of both whiteness and Westernness to the production of knowledge (Davis 2014; Frankenberg 1993; Narayan 2004). While modes of critical intersectional inquiry (P. H. Collins and Bilge 2016), which center an intersectional understanding of power "as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (2), have begun to displace these methodologies, it nevertheless remains crucial that we examine the failings and inadequacies of dominant methodologies and critically reflect on how our own work might reproduce them.

[5.3] Within the context of fan studies, then, it is important to consider how the methodological frameworks established within feminist cultural studies may have informed fan studies' tendency to privilege the identities of white, Western, middle-class women. Woo (2018), for instance, notes that because fan studies was informed by feminist cultural studies' desire to push back "against the dismissal of women audiences and their tastes" (247), the (white) feminist project sensitized fan studies researchers to questions regarding gender and sexuality. These questions, he argues, soon became much more salient to the emerging field of fan studies than other identity markers such as race, nationality, class, ability, or age,
therefore producing a number of gaps and silences within the field which very much reflect the failings of the white and Western feminist methodologies detailed above. As scholars including Pande (2018a), Wanzo (2015), Warner (2018, 2015), and Woo (2018) have highlighted, within both fan studies and fandom itself, whiteness often operates as an unmarked and unnamed norm (Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997). Similarly, scholars such as Chin and Morimoto (2017, 2015) have interrogated the Westerness of fan studies through their examinations of transcultural and transnational fandoms (see also Morimoto 2018). Pande (2018b) notes that the privileging of certain identity markers within fan studies has undeniably "shaped the development of the field" (319):

[5.4] A crucial intersection of identity…continues to be erased and elided. That is, within this dominant paradigm, there has so far been no space to discuss…the operations of racial/ethnic/cultural identity…What remains unacknowledged in most papers, keynotes, or edited collections on media fan communities is that when "the fandom" or "fangirls" are discussed, the referents of these terms remains US- or UK-centric popular media texts and white, cisgender, middle-class women. (320)

[5.5] The consequences of the taken for grantedness of feminist methodologies within fan studies, in which feminist frameworks are often interred rather than made explicit, are subsequently twofold: not only do we fail to account for the ways in which fan studies' orientation to the research process marks a continuation of feminist epistemological and methodological frameworks, and the implications of this for our research in turn, we also fail to account for how the gaps and silences within fan studies mark a continuation of the gaps and silences within dominant white and Western feminist methodologies. Exposing these gaps and silences may well produce feelings of discomfort, particularly given Wanzo's (2015) claim that this process may trouble some of the implicit claims "at the heart of fan studies scholars and their scholarship" (¶ 1.4), yet I would recommend that we endeavor to use this discomfort productively (Boler 1999; DiAngelo 2018) to critically examine the field, to produce self-reflexive scholarship, and to engage with more intersectional forms of critical feminist inquiry. As Scott (2019, 229) highlights in her case for an intersectional fan studies:

[5.6] I wish to recognize the frequent failure of fan scholars (myself included) to critically examine our privileging of the identities of a few at the expense of developing a more intersectional conception of fan identity…Developing a more intersectional fan studies means checking our own privilege and confronting the issues of whose stories are told or obscured within cultural narratives of progress, who is telling them, and how they are told.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] I contend that fan studies should not only be understood in relation to feminist methodology, it should be discussed and/as feminist methodology. While the field's origins in feminist cultural studies are often taken for granted, our orientations toward the research process, particularly through the fragmented subject position of the acafan, reflect the powerful influence of feminist theory on the ways in which we conceptualize ourselves as
researchers and as fans. Moreover, fan studies' self-reflexive politics proposes a corrective to a number of methodological dilemmas regarding reflexivity and critical distance within early feminist audience research, yet it at the same time marks a continuation of many of epistemological and ontological principles underpinning feminist methodology and knowledge production through its sustained emphasis on power relations, the role of the researcher, and the researcher's relationship with the object, or rather subject, of study. Fan studies' engagement with the personal, the subjective, and the emotional marks a continuation of feminist epistemological and methodological frameworks that we should seek to make more explicit in our work. In highlighting the position of fan studies and/as feminist methodology, I hope to challenge the taken for grantedness of feminist methodology and epistemology with fan studies, and instead make the feminist underpinnings of the discipline explicit.

[6.2] Explicitly reframing fan studies within this theoretical and methodological context can augment our understandings of many of the fundamental beliefs and principles underpinning fan studies' orientation towards the research process and academic practice more broadly, and it can help us to refine the critical language we use to frame and describe our methodologies. It is increasingly important to unpack what is obscured by our lack of methodological discussion within fan studies, as well as the stories we tell about its origins, and the impact this has on our understandings of fan studies' methodologies. If feminist scholarship is taken for granted within fan studies and, as Jenkins (2014) admits, is not explicitly referenced in our bibliographies, can we truly claim to be acknowledging these feminist roots? Which ontological and epistemological positions are naturalized by these silences, and what might this mean for our methodological frameworks within fan studies? Does the severing of fan studies from its feminist intellectual grounding lessen the ability of fan studies to speak to what Berlant (2011) has called the "desire for the political" (224)? To what extent do our methodological discussions reproduce Scott's (2019) notion of a "potential 'disarticulatio'n of fan studies and feminist media studies" (45)? And what implications might this have for our work on contemporary fandom in this post-truth, antifeminist, and anti-intellectual cultural moment characterized, as Banet-Weiser (2018) notes, as much by popular misogyny as it is popular feminism?

[6.3] Furthermore, with the rapid diversification of fan studies over the past decade as we move even further away from the discipline's feminist origins, which practices, subject positions, and identities may subsequently be remarginalized? Or rather, more urgently still, which practices, subject positions, and identities remain marginal? To explicitly unpack common sense assumptions about the origins of the field may offer further insight into other gaps and silences in our theorizations (or, rather, lack of theorizations) of methodology within fan studies. Explicitly positioning our approaches to the production of knowledge within the context of white and Western feminist methodologies may help us to shed brighter light on how the gaps and silences within these dominant feminist methodologies may have structured the gaps and silences within fan studies, helping us to expose the "whiteness of both cultural studies and feminism" (Stacey 2016, 173) as a structuring force within fan studies.

[6.4] These are all urgent matters to attend to, and yet I am mindful that it would be near
impossible for me to do this work alone. Furthermore, I am also cognizant of the fact that fans themselves have many competing understandings of the meanings, practices, and discourses of feminism and its relationship to their identities, lives, and practices. Fans, like feminist researchers, are deeply concerned by questions of knowledge, power, emotion, and reflexivity, captured most saliently, perhaps, by the proliferation of fannish meta-analysis outside of the academy (Booth 2015). Fans routinely engage in alternative modes of feminist knowledge production and theorizing that in many ways merge Thomas McLaughlin's (1996) notion of "vernacular theory" (24) and Matt Hills's (2002) figure of the "fan-scholar" (32) with Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) emphasis on the production of feminist theory outside of academia. While the production of feminist knowledge within fan communities unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this article's specific focus on research methodologies within the structures of the academy, this is something that I am currently investigating in further detail in my doctoral research. More broadly, the process of answering the questions I have raised throughout this article should undoubtedly be a collective endeavor, and I therefore invite scholars working within fan studies to continue the project of refining and defining the critical language we use to discuss the relationship between feminist methodologies and epistemologies, fan studies, and fandom itself—to which this special issue is an integral first step.

7. Acknowledgments

[7.1] I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Feminist Media Studies Research Group at the University of East Anglia for their feedback on an early draft of this article.

8. Notes

1. However, I am aware that in my attempt to reframe these histories within the context of feminist methodologies, I may inadvertently generate or reproduce particular gaps and silences myself. This is something that I examine in further detail later in this article with regards to intersectionality, whiteness, and fan studies.

2. With the notable exception of Rebecca Wanzo's (2015) genealogy of African American acafandom, which details a wide range of primary and secondary texts that have explored Black fans.

3. See Brunsdon's (2000) interviews with Geraghty, Hobson, Ang, and Seiter in The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera for more information on the approaches taken by feminist audience researchers during this period.

4. Similarly, in Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) highlights how these regulatory norms constrain women of color, for whom "expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (282).

5. However, as McDonald (2013) notes, autoethnographic methods share a similar
ontological positioning with not only feminist theory but also queer theory. Both queer
theory and autoethnography conceive of identities and experiences as "uncertain, fluid, open
to interpretation, and able to be revised" (T. E. Adams and Holman Jones 2011, 110).

6. See, for example, C. J. Adams and Gruen's (2014) Ecofeminism; Alaimo and Hekman's
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Praxis

Toward a fannish methodology: Affect as an asset

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[0.1] Abstract—Fan studies is a multifaceted discipline that developed from widely different fields of research, resulting in a great variety of methodological approaches. A recurring issue in discussions on methodology in fan studies is the tension between the researchers' attachment to the phenomenon they are studying and the more detached, critical role of a researcher. The double position as both a participant in and observer of the communities that they are researching has led to valuable discussions about reflexivity and positionality in fan studies methodologies. Indeed, the double position of fan and researcher can inform and enrich research by bringing fannish practices and sensibilities to research projects. This tension between attachment to and detachment from the field influences the research process, leading to ethical challenges that acafans must face as a result of their dual positionality. Drawing on affect theory, and reflecting on our own research experiences from an autoethnographic perspective, we show how fannish attachment to the subject-object of study can be a driving force—a resource rather than an impediment to good research. An affective turn in methodology could improve knowledge not only within the field of fan studies but in the social sciences in general.

[0.2] Keywords—Affect theory; Autoethnography; Fan studies research; Feminist theory


1. Introduction

[1.1] What is the use of fannish feelings in research? How can fannish attachments to our research subjects be used, productively and critically, in our work? The tension between fan studies scholars' (emotional) attachment to the phenomenon they are studying and the supposedly detached, critical role of a researcher is a recurring issue in discussions on methodology. Emotional attachment to the field of study seems to contribute to this tension,
Fan studies are a multifaceted (sub)discipline that developed from widely different fields of research, resulting in a great variety of methodological approaches (Coppa 2006; Hellekson and Busse 2014; Evans and Stasi 2014). The double position as both a participant in and an observer of the communities that they are researching has led to valuable discussions about reflexivity and positionality in fan studies methodologies. We seek to go beyond the acafan discussion and explore how fannish feelings and attachments to our research subjects can be put to work for the production of knowledge, both in fan studies and beyond.

To illustrate our point, we make use of a collaborative autoethnography (Lapadat 2017), where we both reflect upon our personal experiences with researching fan cultures and discuss how our respective emotional attachments and reactions played into research. Our thoughts here have their origins in the Fan Studies Network Conference (FSNC) in 2016, where we met over breakfast on the first day and discovered that we were both master's students in a gender studies program, writing about fanfiction, and attending our first academic conference. Sophie Hansal was there to present the results of her master's thesis on the meaning of fem-/slash fanfiction for LGBTQ+ fans, and Marianne Gunderson was just embarking on her thesis on the construction of sex and gender in omegaverse fanfiction. We soon bonded over similar research interests, but also our similar methodological anxieties. Two years later we returned to copresent what would be a prelude to this article at FSNC 2018, where we talked about the methodological relevance and use of fannish feelings in our research.

The reflections we made in preparation for our presentation form the basis for the empirical part of this article, in which we contrast two different personal accounts from our research experience to allow for a multivocal approach to (auto)ethnographic inquiry (Denzin 2014). Matt Hills (2002) has underlined the importance of self-reflexivity in autoethnographic fan research. We would like to extend that by calling for an approach that includes reflections on the researchers' emotions throughout the research process. For this purpose we are drawing on the works of Carolyn Ellis (1999, 2004), who coined the term "heartful autoethnography," meaning an ethnography that views researchers' emotions as a crucial part of self-reflexivity. With our methodological choices we aim to demonstrate how the use of autoethnographic accounts can facilitate a productive reflection upon researchers' own emotional attachments to the field. By choosing this specific method, we also want to acknowledge what Sara Ahmed (2014) calls the "sociality of emotions" (218) and connect our individual experiences as researchers to a structural level.

By presenting two accounts of our own research experience, reflecting on them from an autoethnographic perspective, and analyzing them through the lens of Sara Ahmed and other theorists' work on feelings and affect, we want to show how feelings can work not only (1) as motivation and fuel for research, (2) and as a basis for analysis, but also (3) as a starting point for critique of social and academic norms and values. We want to shift the perspective to how fannish attachment to the subject(s)-object(s) of study can, in fact, be a driving force, and a resource rather than an impediment to good research.

We also suggest that fan studies scholars might have a specific attachment to their
objects of study—a fannish sensibility, if we may call it that. When addressed in a self-reflective way, the double position as both a fan and researcher can be a resource, rather than a drawback. Actively drawing on (fan) researchers' emotional entanglement in the field ultimately has the potential to enrich and deepen our academic engagements. Most importantly, this approach questions the academic devaluation of emotion and can be a basis from which to critique existing norms and develop new methodologies within the humanities and social sciences.

2. Fan studies as an emotional field of research

[2.1] The emotional investment of fans in their fandom has been a recurring topic in fan studies from their inception (Russ 1985; Grossberg 1992; Hellekson and Busse 2014). Henry Jenkins's now classic book on fanfiction, *Textual Poachers* (1992), opens with an account of how fans are characterized as obsessive, hysterical, or dangerous, and their behavior is seen as an expression of excessive enthusiasm and inappropriate attachment to cultural objects. The rebuttal of this pathologization by Jenkins and other early fan researchers such as Joanna Russ (1985) and Constance Penley (1991), and their insistence on taking the interests of fans seriously, paved the way for a new understanding of (media) fan practices and communities, one that tried to "map out fans' intricate and thoughtful engagements with popular culture texts, and with each other" (Busse and Gray 2011, 425).

[2.2] Yet fans' emotional attachments remain at the core of many fan researchers' analyses of fan(dom)s. Most famously, Henry Jenkins (2006) stated that fanfiction is born out of "fascination and frustration" (247). Abigail de Kosnik, drawing on Ann Cvetkovich's work on queer archives, has argued that fanfiction collections are archives documenting fans' sentiments and emotions (2016, 152). Cornel Sandvoss (2005) described "fandom as the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text" (8, emphasis ours), and Matt Hills (2001) called (online) fandoms "affective spaces." Finally, Mark Duffet (2013) argued that, however difficult it is to define fan(dom)s, "a positive emotional engagement with popular culture" lies at the base of fan practices and identities (17).

[2.3] The emotions and attachments of fan studies researchers have also become an object of scrutiny. Because many fan studies scholars are also active in fandom communities, the tension between the researchers' attachment to the phenomenon they are studying and the more detached, critical role of a researcher has been a recurring issue in discussions in fan studies. Following discussions around *Textual Poachers* (1992), Henry Jenkins coined the term "aca-fan" to describe his own position as co-currently both academic and fan. Although this definition has been criticized for drawing a hierarchical line between fan scholars and fans (Stein 2011) and manifesting academic hegemony of knowledge, it has been undeniably influential. By highlighting and acknowledging the double position of researchers as both participant in, and observer of, the communities that they are researching, the term has contributed to valuable discussions about (self-)reflexivity and positionality in fan studies (see, e.g., Evans and Stasi 2014; Ford 2014).

[2.4] Acknowledging this double position meant having to take the researchers' emotional involvement and attachment as fans into consideration. Even though the double positionality
of so-called acafans has been described as useful (and sometimes necessary) for gaining access to fan communities (e.g., Jenkins 2006; Philipps 2010; Roach 2014), the resulting affective involvement of fan researchers in fan communities has mainly been addressed as detrimental to the research process. Even when fan scholars explicitly position themselves as fans, their emotions are often brought up in regards to whether and/or how affective involvement might pose an ethical challenge (Busse and Hellekson 2012). For example, Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stacy (2014) have argued that the researchers' individual feelings may inhibit potential for politically engaged research in fan studies, pointing out that "it can be hard to criticize your own tribe—or indeed yourself" (16). And in Fan Cultures (2002) Matt Hills explains that "academic practice…typically transforms fandom into an absolute Other" (5). He sees this as the reason for the difficult and (at least) ambivalent relationship between fans and fan studies scholars. Hills has a performative understanding of fandom, framing both fandom and academia as performative acts rather than fixed entities. He points out that scholar fans "must still conform to the regulative ideal of the rational academic subject, being careful not to present too much of their enthusiasm while tailoring their accounts of fan interest and investment to the norms of 'confessional' (but not overly confessional) academic writing" (11–12). In his distinction between fan practices and academic ones, Hills reproduces the existing cultural bias that associates fans with emotions and academics with rationality. That way the fannish emotions of researchers remain largely disregarded—and even more so, they are viewed as detrimental to the research process.

[2.5] But fannish emotions and attachments are not portrayed as exclusively negative. It is not uncommon to see fan studies scholars acknowledge the productive force of fannish emotions in their scholarship. For example, Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (2012) recognize that fannish passion is often what motivates fan studies research. And Rebecca Wanzo (2015) explicitly counters the claim that fannish "love obstructs good knowledge production" with the assertion that "it is also the love—and at times disappointment—that can produce scholarship that really articulates the intellectual stakes of a work" (¶ 4.1). However, these mentions usually remain fleeting, and the ways in which fannish emotions feed into the research remains obscure. Consequently, while fans' emotions have been understood and examined as a process of meaning making, the productive potential of fan researchers' emotions and attachments remains largely undertheorized.

[2.6] However, fannish emotions are not unmediated and are not experienced the same by all fans. Rukmini Pande makes an excellent point of this in Squee from the Margins (2019). She uses Sara Ahmed's concept of the feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2010) to illustrate how fannish engagement with media work is structured around axes of race. Pande builds on the work of Wanzo in her critique of the "continued and glaring absence of race as an aspect of analysis in fan studies" (2019, xii). In doing so, she questions the idea of fan practices as resistant to societal norms. Pande shows how fan studies' focus on fannish enthusiasm is a racialized concept, as it does not take into account how fans of color experience media and fandom. Finally, she points out that "it is vital to stop the practice of using universalizing labels such as 'transgressive' or 'transformative' pleasure without explicitly identifying whom these definitions exclude" (195). Approaching fandom from the position of undiluted joy is not achievable for everyone, and fannish attachments must be understood against the backdrop
of societal power structures.

3. Affect in/and methodology

[3.1] Although affect seems to play an important role in research on fandoms, fan communities, and fannish behavior, it still remains undertheorized. We argue that affect theory can be a valuable resource for methodological questions in fan studies because it offers a deeper understanding of what a fruitful academic engagement with affect could look like.

[3.2] Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014) can be considered as one of the central works in current affect theory. In it, she argues that emotions must not be seen as apolitical or ahistorical. She describes how in Western thought emotions are commonly constructed as separate from, and "beneath, the faculties of thought and reason" (6) because "to be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous" (3). Emotions are seen as interfering with one's ability to make judgments; to conform to the standards of objectivity and impartiality, emotions must be separated from the process of thinking and perceiving. This separation of researchers from their emotions goes hand in hand with the separation of researchers from their research objects; if researchers become too involved in the topic (or worse, the people) they are researching, their work becomes suspect. The entanglement between researcher and research object may lead researchers to form emotional attachments to the objects, people, groups, or phenomena they are studying, thus undermining their ability to comply with the norms of unbiased and objective knowledge production. Contrary to these assumptions, Ahmed suggests that emotions and affect are valuable for academic research because she is convinced that "theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin" (10).

[3.3] The concept of objectivity as value neutrality has been questioned and critiqued by researchers from several disciplines, many of whom have drawn on or been based in feminist theory. For example, Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason* (1984) provides an in-depth analysis of how deeply gendered the concepts of emotionality and rationality are in Western philosophy. In her article "Situated Knowledges," Donna Haraway (1988) called the notion of objectivity as a seemingly all-knowing perspective a "god trick" (582), and she proposed the concepts of situated knowledges and partial perspectives as alternatives. Much in the same vein Sandra Harding (1986) promoted feminist standpoint theory as a way to address researchers' bias and guarantee what she calls "strong objectivity," arguing that people in marginalized social positions are better placed to develop new and socially useful knowledge. Feminist criticism of scientific concepts of objectivity such as these have had a strong influence on a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, perhaps especially so on the interdisciplinary and highly qualitative field of fan studies (Jenkins 2013). As Busse and Hellekson (2012) have pointed out, the ideal of the objective and disinterested researcher is no longer a given.

[3.4] Despite the increasing influence of what has come to be called the affective turn, texts that explicitly discuss the role of emotions in research methodology are still scarce, but they are slowly accumulating. For instance, Alison Jaggar (1989) points out how emotions are
intrinsically linked to the process of evaluation and observation, in that they both arise from that which is observed and also shape and color our perceptions. As a result, emotions are instrumental in defining the values and norms of both individuals and society. She further argues that emotions that align with these values and norms are seen as acceptable, while emotions that do not align with these norms are outlawed. Jaggar remarks that these outlaw emotions "are necessary to develop a critical perspective on the world" (1989, 167) by not only working as motivation but also granting the ability to perceive the world differently from conventional descriptions. Furthermore, in "The Feeling of Finding Out," Colleen McLaughlin (2005) argues that "emotion and thinking are inextricably linked in the research process" (65) and that the imperative to ignore and separate oneself from emotions in the research process is detrimental to scientific knowledge production. She goes on to emphasize that the researcher's ability to "hold and endure" feelings of discomfort, ambiguity, and insecurity are essential to the research process (70). McLaughlin points out that "emotional blindness will not enhance the research process: It will only drive underground the examination of assumptions and processes in individuals and groups that hinder fruitful exploration" (76). Similarly, in her article "Emotions and Research," Janet Holland (2006) states that "emotions are important in the production of knowledge and add power in understanding, analysis and interpretation" (195). It is not enough to simply accept that research can be an emotional process; we also have to ask how emotional processes can be integrated in academic work, and how they can be mobilized in an academic context.

[3.5] Even when they are not explicitly framed as methodological texts or directly address the topic of research methods, recent theoretical works on affect and emotion offer the potential for insight into the role of emotions in the production of knowledge. Sara Ahmed's interest in the work that emotions do in the world, how they orient bodies toward certain objects, and how they shape the way these objects appear made her work especially salient for the development of our analysis of the methodological role of emotions. Rather than asking what emotions are, Ahmed asks what they do (2014, 4). Challenging the idea that emotions are only interior, she makes the "sociality of emotion" (9) the focal point of her work. Ahmed views emotions as "social and cultural practices [that] should not be regarded as psychological states" (9); in other words, she treats emotions as a social, not an individual phenomenon. Ahmed goes on to argue that emotions are never unmediated, that they always involve particular readings of both the world and of the emotions themselves. This means that emotions become part of the social webs that structure our existence, that frame how we see and interact with each other, including in our work as researchers. Our emotional investments are not entirely under our control because, as Ahmed points out, "emotions are 'sticky,' and even when we challenge our investments, we might get stuck" (16). This means that to simply be aware of one's emotional attachments—or even to attempt to fight or counteract them—would not in itself be productive.

[3.6] Ahmed explores how emotions such as pain, anger, love, joy, wonder, and hope are instrumental in producing a feminist understanding of the world (Ahmed 2014, 168ff). She argues that feminism involves an emotional response to society, a response that has the power to reorient one's relation to social norms. For instance, feminist anger involves a reading of pain—an interpretation of that pain as wrong, unjustified, and something that should be undone. By reading the relation between affect and structure, emotions can
reorient people's relations to social norms and help produce new understandings of the world. This means that, for emotions to be a starting point for social critique, they need to be translated from the individual to the structural level (Ahmed 2014, 173–74). It is in this process of translation that we locate the productive potential of emotions in the research process. As researchers, we should cease to think of our emotions as individual experiences to be overcome (or embraced, or endured) and instead approach them as opportunities to trace our entanglements with social structures and actors, in order to unlock the potential for valuable insight.

[3.7] Ahmed explains that the hierarchy between emotion and rationality functions to hide emotional aspects of rationality (2014, 670). In Living a Feminist Life (2017, 27), she elaborates that even gut feelings should be taken seriously in the research process as sources of information. We believe that including Ahmed's approach to methodological discussions has the potential to provide a productive intervention in some of the recurring ethical debates within fan studies about research positionality. Applying Ahmed's ideas to empirical research on fan(dom)s and fan communities requires researchers to engage with the notion that emotions are part of how we experience the world and that they are carriers of information. Following Sara Ahmed, we build on a tradition of feminist thinking that deliberately puts an emphasis on emotions, regarding them as just as valuable and potentially informative as affect.

[3.8] Even though emotions have always been a part of the research process, that doesn't mean that all research is emotional in the same way. It is easy to imagine that different affective orientations to the same project could lead to vastly different research outcomes. In "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" (2002), Eve Sedgwick argues that a great deal of contemporary research and theory is written from what she calls the paranoid position. Driven by anxiety, the paranoid position is characterized by a need to be alert to, and ward off, possible dangers to avoid experiencing negative affect. Sedgwick further posits that this position privileges the production of "knowledge in the form of exposure" (138), producing research that draws on a hermeneutics of suspicion that seeks to expose hidden violence and reveal complicity with oppressive systems. In opposition to the paranoid position, Sedgwick proposes the concept of "reparative reading," an approach arising out of what she terms the depressive position. Driven by love and care, and characterized by the pursuit of pleasure, this approach seeks to repair the flaws of and add to the work upon which it builds.

[3.9] It is possible to trace these two positions and resulting approaches in both fandom communities and fan studies scholarship. It could, for instance, be argued that the practice of writing fanfiction itself is a form of reparative reading of the source works, while ship wars and some critical fan discourses that seek to expose problematic aspects of the source works or fandom itself may be seen to arise from a paranoid position. However, although we agree that the concepts of paranoid and reparative readings point to something significant about how different emotional positions lead us to different readings (and writings) of our research subjects, the distinction between the two seems a bit too simple. For instance, love for a thing might work as a powerful motivator for the kind of critique that Sedgwick would characterize as paranoid.
[3.10] One illustrative example of this may be found in Alexis Lothian's 2018 article "From Transformative Works to #TransformDH," in which she analyses the academic field of digital humanities as a fandom, based on the observation that "the fervor and intensity with which digital humanities nerds and geeks appreciate their objects of study" (371) parallels those of fan communities. She posits that the humanities as a whole may be said to operate like a fandom, asking, "How could one devote a life to study without an intense affective connection to an object of fascination—whether it begins in love or as anger, discomfort, a critical itch?" (376–77). To account for the situations in which love for a thing gets channeled into transformative critiques of that thing, Lothian introduces the term "critical fandom," an affectively intense relationship in combination with a critical stance, referring specifically to situations where the critique targets "dominant raced and gendered power structures" (377). People who find themselves marginalized, sidelined, or misrepresented may channel their emotional investment into critical fandom practices, though this often comes at the price of pushback from those who do not share their experiences. Drawing on discussions of race in fandom, she shows the critical potential of those who find their fannish pleasures spoiled by alienating and violent structures of exclusion embedded within the communities and objects into which they have invested their time and love—be it in fandom or academia.

[3.11] Whether or not we can claim the methodology of critical fandom for ourselves in this article, given that we as (albeit queer) white women can hardly insist to have a marginalized position within the field of fan studies, we very much subscribe to Lothian's argument that structures of fannish engagement are reproduced in academic communities, and that critical approaches and insights of fan communities could be used to inform and illuminate our academic work.

4. Working with fannish emotions: Two autoethnographic accounts

[4.1] In the following, we present two different accounts of affective responses to the field and research process. We deliberately chose one account that shows how an emotion that is generally perceived as negative can be of motivation for the research process; the second account will illustrate how a sense of belonging to the field and a positive emotional attachment to it can lead to what we might call a (fan) researcher's fannish sensitivity. By choosing two seemingly opposing experiences, we want to challenge hierarchical concepts of affective attachment and superficial distinctions between good and bad feelings that disregard the underlying sociocultural norms that shape our emotions.

[4.2] When we met at the Fan Studies Network Conference in 2016, we were both writing our master theses on fanfiction. Although the topics of our work differed, we instantly connected over our similar interests in fan studies methodologies. We discussed how our own emotional attachment to the field motivated us but also led to methodological and methodical insecurities. This insecurity certainly was a result of the lack of discourse on fan studies methodology to refer to (Evans and Stasi 2014). Over the last two years, we have continued to reflect upon our (emotional) experiences and their connection to methodological questions in regards to fan studies. The following accounts are a result of this ongoing discussion.
5. Autoethnographic account of Sophie Hansal

[5.1] When I interviewed self-identified LGBTQ+ fanfiction readers for my master's thesis, I was convinced that they would share my belief that fem-/slash fanfiction is always (also) a political tool and that it comments on societal norms regarding gender and sexuality. However, I could not find empirical evidence for this hypothesis in my interviews. It soon turned out that for the vast majority of my interview partners, politics wasn't a relevant topic at all in the context of fanfiction. Some of them even seemed to be annoyed by the fact that I addressed politics at all in the interview. I found this result immensely frustrating. After all, I did not want my thesis to state that LGBTQ+ fanfiction readers are simply consumers whose main objective is to gain pleasure through this kind of media use. I felt defensive and threatened, and I reached a point where I felt tempted to "distort the material that does not fit, and so ignore data that counteracts hypotheses or challenges values" (McLaughlin 2003, 72). I started to view my interview partners as others, and wanted to distance myself from them. My own feelings of frustration, disappointment, and hurt formed a barrier between the experiences of my interview partners and my own.

[5.2] It was only when a friend with whom I had shared my concerns confronted me about this that I started reflecting on why I felt so strongly and negatively about my interview partners' accounts. I slowly began to realize how much it had to do with my own history. For me, discovering fem-/slash fanfiction was closely connected to my coming out as a lesbian. Additionally, it happened during a time when I had become more and more politically conscious and active, and more sensitive toward feminist topics. Actively engaging with my negative emotions finally helped me realize that, in fact, I mostly associated fanfiction with politics because I discovered it for myself at around the same time.

[5.3] At the time, I didn't read fan fiction because I wanted to make a political statement. I read it for comfort, for distraction, and as a sort of escape from my then mostly heteronormative surroundings. There has been a lot of controversy regarding the question whether fanfiction can and should be viewed as a commentary on societal norms on a textual level (e.g., Russ 1985; Jones 2002; Flegel and Roth 2010). When I started writing my thesis, I wanted to write about how the process of reading fanfiction can be an act of resistance that challenges societal norms. While I still believe that this is a topic worth further investigation, I could not find empirical proof for it in my own research. But engaging with my own emotional attachment to the field completely altered my perspective as a researcher.

[5.4] Confronting myself with my emotional entanglement in the field allowed me to be more open for the individual accounts of my interview partners. In the end I discovered that my own frustration was connected to the anger I felt toward structural homophobia I encountered in aspects of my everyday life. Engaging with fanfiction helped me escape from these experiences. For a long time I understood my own use of fanfiction as a political statement. I now believe that, in fact, it offered (and still offers) me an escape from my otherwise very politically conscious life.

[5.5] My emotions defined which narratives of my interview partners I was (un)able to hear. Only after I had actively engaged with the source of my frustration was I able to recognize
that for the fans I interviewed reading fanfiction provided a safe space, not an act of active resistance. Comparing and contrasting my own experiences with those of my interview partners added a new layer of understanding for my own experiences not only as a lesbian fan, but also in regards to my expectations for the field. In the end, the feeling of frustration was a productive force in the research process that also led to methodical changes: a reflection on my own positionality as a lesbian fan and researcher became a key element of my thesis. Ultimately, the feeling of frustration became a starting point for the engagement with my affective attachment to the field and thus a valuable source of information.

6. Autoethnographic account of Marianne Gunderson

[6.1] When I was deciding on the topic of my master's thesis in gender studies, I was initially oscillating between two ideas. One concerned immigration policies, family reunification, and gender. I had a connection with this topic from working in a nongovernmental organization (NGO) dealing with these issues, where I had daily contact with the people whose lives were affected by these policies. My other idea was, more vaguely, to write something about fanfiction. This impulse came to me from a longtime proximity to and appreciation for fannish online spaces. Although I was not much of an active participant in fandoms in terms of content creation, much of my digital reading habits and online social life was infused with transformative fan culture. The first idea seemed to me like the more serious, respectable, and politically salient issue, while writing about fandom felt like the less legitimate, less tactical choice. There was also a sense of moral obligation connected to the immigration policy thesis idea—here I was strategically placed to try to make a difference, politically, with my work—but I could not make myself embrace it. I was also hesitant to embrace the fanfiction idea, as a master's student with academic ambitions, I was concerned that this choice would preclude any future for me as an academic.

[6.2] These emotions did not become easier after I started looking at omegaverse fanfiction, a trope that, among other things, builds on wolf/human hybridities. These stories both fascinated and, initially, slightly repelled me. I was wary of doing my master's thesis on something that weird and academically obscure. Yet the discomfort I experienced at the thought of embracing this choice was different from the aversion I had toward researching immigration policies. I realized that my discomfort stemmed from becoming attached to the kinds of feelings and states that are commonly associated with fanfiction: frivolous, trivial, childish, lewd, too emotional, unserious, obsessed. Sara Ahmed (2014) talks about how emotions can be attached to certain objects, which then cause the emotions to circulate around those who become attached to them. "Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (11). This was the effect I was wary of: that I would be associated with the emotions and judgments that are attached to fanfiction communities, with devaluation and disregard by fellow students and academics that these labels could be used to justify. Conversely, with regard to the first topic idea, I was seeking to attach myself to the respectability, seriousness, and importance I considered it to hold.

[6.3] Tracing the origins of these notions was difficult. I cannot point to any one situation or interaction that planted them in my mind; rather, they seemed to have crystallized out of often unstated notions of academic respectability and rigueur diffused throughout my university
education. However, retrospectively looking at the composition of the center for gender studies where I did my master's degree, the majority of the senior academic positions were held by people in the social sciences who were researching the kinds of politically salient social issues among which the topic of family reunification and immigration would be an easy fit.

[6.4] Sara Ahmed doesn't only talk about negative emotions; she also talks about the productive potential of responding to the world with wonder, joy, and care—paying attention to the ways in which the world may surprise you (2014, 178–88). She specifically highlights wonder as a driving force, as something that makes you look at the world with fresh eyes. Paying attention to my wonder, curiosity, and joy was what ultimately tipped the scale. My wonder and curiosity were sparked by the narratives about gender and sexualities I found in these stories that were unlike any I had seen elsewhere, and I found joy in the enthusiasm that permeates fan practices and communities. These affective states became the basis of my attachment to the thesis topic, their stickiness pulling me in. While I was considering the other topic, there was no such joyful attachment; it was instead connected to a sense of frustration and ire over what I perceived as an inhumane political system. At one point I realized that these emotions would never be enough to carry me through a year-long thesis writing process. This realization was aided by the support and encouragement of faculty members whose research interests in weird, monstrous, or uncanny texts and topics mirrored my own, and two of them would become my thesis advisors.

[6.5] In working with my thesis, I found that the affective modes that seem common in fan communities—the intensity, the enthusiasm, the desire to reach out to others, the fascination and frustration—were reflected in how I felt about my project. It seemed to me that the affective modes of fandom were indeed sticky, but not in the way I had feared. Instead, I found that fan practices and fannish emotions were feeding my research, giving me confidence and drive. This was further supported by Sedgwick's concept of reparative reading (2002), which gave me the theoretical underpinnings to let go of the rails consisting of other people's thoughts and to begin to formulate my own. The irreverence with which fans appropriate media works affected my approach to theoretical perspectives, giving me the confidence to draw on theory from multiple disciplines both within and beyond my academic background, to own my interpretations, and to patch them together according to my own vision, eventually explaining my approach to theory as "textual poaching" in my thesis defence. Furthermore, in a manner that echoes Lothian's (2018) use of fan discourses to analyze the critical issues in the digital humanities, the critical discourses and analyses I observed among fans challenged me to sharpen my own perspectives.

[6.6] Connecting with other fan studies researchers, I began to notice what seemed like a common thread among fans, researchers, and my own approach to the fanfiction I was studying: a certain vein of enthusiasm, emotional involvement, and attachment to rather than distance from the material. There was a desire to engage and produce works that are meaningful to other researchers but also to an extended community of nonacademics fans. Whether this is a product of the dual position as fan and researcher, or the affective contagion from the communities we study, or a bit of both, is unclear. Certainly, it is not only limited to fan studies researchers because both the cosupervisors on my thesis met my ideas
with a very similar infectious enthusiasm.

[6.7] It took me longer to recognize that my enthusiasm for and easy attachment to both fandom and fan studies was buoyed by my whiteness. Rukmini Pande's 2019 critique of the treatment of race in fandom and fan studies as well as Samira Nardakrni's characterization of fan studies as a field "structured by whiteness" (2019), prompted my awareness of the ways in which being white allowed my enjoyment of fandom to remain a relatively uncomplicated and unambiguous source of motivation. Retrospectively, I can see how my reading of omegaverse fanfiction operated from a position in which whiteness was taken for granted, allowing me to overlook how these narratives were reproducing the marginalization of people of color. This realization, of course, came with its own bundle of feelings, signalling the task that lies ahead.

7. Affect as an asset in (fan studies) research

[7.1] Contrasting these two accounts shows that while we both had different approaches to and experiences during the research process, we still had a shared experience—namely fannish emotions that troubled but ultimately informed and aided our research. Our respective emotional attachment to fannish communities not only was part of what motivated our research but also was instrumental in identifying what perspectives and ideas were worth pursuing. It informed our theoretical and methodical choices. Our affective responses to the field were connected to our own involvement in the fandoms we were studying, but in a broader sense they also reflected our position in societal structures. The way we engage with fandoms and research was influenced by many factors, such as our position as graduate students, our theoretical background in gender studies, but also our individual socialization as white, queer women.

[7.2] But to speak with Sara Ahmed, to make visible how these circumstances influenced our research, we needed to translate our emotions (our fascinations as well as our frustrations) into something we could work with. We had to actively reflect upon our emotions in the context of our relationships with fandom and our research projects. In Living a Feminist Life Ahmed states that "we have been taught to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere" (2017, 13). Treating emotions as carriers of information requires a move in the opposite direction: researchers need to pay a lot of attention to these exact struggles during the research process. In order to use affective attachment to the field as a resource for self-reflection, it is not enough to simply accept that the research process is emotional. It is important to view the engagement with emotional aspects as a part of research work. If emotions are seen as antithetical to research, information may be lost. You have to put effort into understanding the emotions that come up during research and the context in which they appear.

[7.3] Questioning the dichotomy of good versus bad feelings (Ahmed 2014, 227) can be useful for challenging your own presuppositions both as a researcher and a fan. Applying Ahmed's affect theory to fan studies and reflecting upon one's own emotional involvement in fan communities might also be of special use when it comes to analyzing hierarchical structures and discriminatory practices within fan communities (such as racism, ableism,
homophobia, transphobia...). In *Knowing Otherwise* (2011), Alexis Shotwell argues that feelings of discomfort and shame can be instrumental in making white people reflect upon racism (229). Shame, according to Shotwell, "signals the need for a change in the world" (254), a need that challenges us to meet it with action. Actively listening to the experiences of black fans and fans of color, disabled fans, and LGBTQ+ fans, including their affective attachments and experiences in the discussions on fandom, and engaging with the cultural politics of emotion can thus make visible the processes of othering within fan communities.

[7.4] Addressing problematic issues can be especially challenging for researchers who are involved in the fan communities they are researching. If taken seriously, engaging with emotional aspects in research can be a difficult process that needs to be considered in time and resource administration accordingly. Affective involvement in the field of research can undoubtedly pose ethical challenges to researchers. Being emotionally attached to the field and subjects you are studying oftentimes comes with a sense of responsibility and might result in blind spots. Drawing on affect theory does not solve these problems, but addressing our affective relation to the field can add transparency to the research process. An affective approach to the field—one that translates emotions from an individual to a structural level—can add depth to academic work when done in a reflective, self-critical, and transparent way. Providing an account of the ways in which feelings play into research should be regarded as a part of the work of explicitly situating oneself in relation to one's research and as a way of showing and accepting the partiality of all research (Haraway 1988).

[7.5] Additionally, it reformulates the question of what and how we, as fan studies researchers, want to research. Engaging with methodological questions in fan studies research means reflecting on what we as fans and researchers want to know about fan communities. We suggest that the rejection of emotion as a productive resource within media studies in general has to do with the wish to comply with academic norms that label emotions and attachment as improper. For a fairly young field of research such as fan studies, it might be even more important to comply with these standards in order to be established as an academic subdiscipline. Although this desire is understandable, it refutes the very nature of fan studies, which have always been trans- and interdisciplinary and therefore impossible to condense into one fixed set of academic rules. Seen through Lothian's analysis of digital humanities as a fandom, it becomes obvious that we think these fannish modes of engagement are an enrichment to the academic environment, and that they can be mobilized to engage cooperatively across disciplines and possibly also across the fan/researcher divide.

8. Conclusion: Toward a fannish methodology

[8.1] Against the background of Ahmed's work on the cultural politics of emotion, our respective accounts serve as examples of why and how Ahmed's theoretical framework can be especially suited for methodological discussions in fan studies. To sum up some of our main arguments, we propose the following characteristics for what we would like to call a "fannish methodology."

[8.2] A fannish methodology critically reflects upon and questions the dichotomous and
oppositional conceptualization of emotion and rationality and its hegemony in academic thought. Drawing on "the affective technologies of fannish love" (Lothian 2017, 238) the researcher's emotional attachment to the material is considered as a resource, and affective responses and emotional aspects of the research process are seen as useful sources of information and insight. A fannish methodology generally understands emotions as beneficial to the research process and views affective responses as clues for research questions, issues, and problems.

[8.3] A fannish methodology accepts that fan studies scholars write from a specific position, where they oftentimes are both researchers and fans, both participants and observers. Rather than denying existing emotional entanglements, the dual position as fan and researcher is both actively embraced and critically reflected upon. It challenges emotional hierarchies and acknowledges the critical potential of negatively connotated feelings. In its research output, a fannish methodology actively articulates the emotional aspects of the research process, using them to trace the entanglements among researchers, fan(work)s, and social structures.

[8.4] A fannish methodology is collectivist and community-based. Research is conducted based on the premises of cooperation and reciprocity, seeking to provide value both to the field of fan studies and to the fan communities it draws upon. It challenges existing academic practices that focus on competition between researchers and make a clear distinction between the subject-objects of study and the researcher. In so doing, it acknowledges and addresses what Ahmed describes as "academic walls" (2017, 148) that serve as a mark of distinction. A fannish methodology involves a commitment to remain sensitive toward hierarchical structures within academia and fan studies, among fan studies scholars, and between different fan communities. By examining the social conditions in which both positive and negative feelings arise, it does not overlook existing power imbalances and discriminatory practices.

[8.5] Fannish methodologies are irreverent toward authority and canons, as fan studies cannot be confined in one distinct definition and/or discipline. Fan studies have to be seen as "a truly interdisciplinary field, one that has adopted and adapted ideas from various other disciplines, particularly audience and cultural studies" (Hellekson and Busse 2014, 1). Consequently, a fannish methodology encourages academic textual poaching—drawing on different traditions, disciplines, and fields, bringing them together in potentially new and unexpected ways. Rather than adhering to a specific theoretical approach, it accommodates the scavenging of theory and ideas from different research traditions as it serves the purpose of the researcher. Instead of lamenting the fact that "fan studies remain an undisciplined discipline" (Ford 2014, 54), this diversity of methodical and theoretical approaches in the field should be viewed as a strength.

[8.6] We do not want to present this as a definitive list of characteristics but rather as a starting point for further discussion. Given the growing variety of scholars from different disciplines who engage with audience and fan studies, it is questionable that identifying one methodological approach to the field is either achievable or relevant. However, focusing on fan researchers' shared (emotional) experiences—their fannish sensitivity—offers one possible answer to the question of how we can grow a sense of community among fan
studies researchers (Ford 2014). With our article we have illustrated how an application of Sarah Ahmed's approach to affect could add new perspectives and depth to a much-needed broader discussion on fan studies methodology. We argue that an affective turn in methodology will improve knowledge within the field of fan studies research, and that it can help fan studies scholars in finding a common ground despite different backgrounds.

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Follow the trope: A digital (auto)ethnography for fan studies

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Abstract—In this paper I investigate the methodological challenges posed by the intersection of two factors commonly found in some types of fan studies research: studying a community one is already a member of and that community existing in a digital setting. I propose an approach shaped by traditional ethnography, digital ethnography, and autoethnography that is theoretically grounded, takes into account both practical and theoretical issues, and seeks to leverage the strengths of the digital environment and the ethnographer's knowledge of the community they are researching. I pay particular attention to the role and positionality of the ethnographer in this environment, as well as the process of field site construction, which I conceptualize as a journey. To illustrate this follow-the-trope approach in action, I present a case study based on my research on sexual consent in fan fiction.

Keywords—Community membership; Digital field sites; Digital field site construction; Fan fiction; Field site construction; Online ethnography


1. Introduction

In their 2014 paper "Desperately Seeking Methodology: New Directions in Fan Studies Research", Evans and Stasi argue that the field of fan studies has been remarkably resistant to discussions of methodology. As an interdisciplinary field, fan studies attracts scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including media and cultural studies, literature, literacy studies, digital humanities, library and information science, and many more (Jenkins 1992; Byrne and Fleming 2018; R. W. Black 2006; S. Black 2018; Price and Robinson 2017). Fans, too, are far from a homogenous group, and so fan studies may cover groups as diverse as sports fans, popular music fans, media fans, fans of theatre, musicals, or the news; practices ranging from attending commercial events and fan-run conventions, cosplay, or creating transformative works; and research settings as different as wrestling venues and social media platforms (Esmonde, Cooky, and Andrews 2015; Garde-Hansen 2010; Gray,
Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007; Lamerichs 2015; Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007; Phillips 2018; Morimoto and Stein 2018). By definition, there cannot be a single method that would allow us to address all the research questions we may ask about fans. Yet there are also some distinct traditions and trends within the field that make discussions about methodology both necessary and useful. Fan studies has a long tradition of the use of ethnography in multiple senses: two foundational texts in the field are ethnographies of fandom(s) in the classical anthropological sense (Bacon-Smith 1992, Jenkins 1992), but a much broader range of research relies on the use of ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviews, without necessarily producing ethnographies. For the subset of fan studies researchers using ethnographic methods to study media fandom—and fans who create transformative works in particular—the transition from the kind of zine- and convention-based communities documented by Bacon-Smith (1992) and Jenkins (1992) to a largely online-based community (Tosenberger 2014; Bennett 2014; Bury 2005) poses a number of methodological challenges to ethnographic approaches. The tendency of fan studies scholars to also be fans themselves is another such commonality, and has received some attention over the years (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002; Coppa 2014). Taking Evans and Stasi's (2014) provocation as a starting point, my interest lies in the methodological challenges to the use of ethnographic methods posed by the intersection of these two factors: the theoretical and practical challenges of studying a community one is already a member of, in a digital setting. While Evans and Stasi note that "digital ethnography and reflexive autoethnography is already being done" (19), their focus is on showing the necessity of a discussion of methodology, and they only briefly sketch out what digital ethnography and reflexive autoethnography may look like in a fan studies context. In this paper, I relate this kind of work in fan studies to its roots in traditional ethnography based in anthropology and more recent work developing digital and autoethnographic methods across a range of fields. I examine methodological debates in ethnography and their relevance to the particular research setting of one type of fan studies research: the online community that we ourselves, as researchers and as fans, are also members of. I highlight two key challenges: the ethnographer's positionality in this type of setting, and the construction of the ethnographic field site, better conceptualized as a journey. Finally, using the case study of my own research into sexual consent in fan fiction on platforms such as Tumblr and Archive of Our Own (AO3), I apply the frameworks of digital and autoethnography to offer one possible methodologically robust approach to the ethnographic study of online communities that the researcher is a member of.

2. The role of the ethnographer in online settings

[2.1] Evans and Stasi (2014) rightly identify representation and the hierarchical power relations often constructed between researcher and researched as a key methodological issue in fan studies. Yet their answer to this challenge largely lies in the merging of the fan and the researcher into the single person of the acafan: "Fan studies is already doing the ontological work of the crisis of representation, in which the object of study (the fan) and the researcher merge. Fan studies therefore already has the critical capacity to implode subject/object binaries as a practice of research, which has long been a concern for feminist methodologists" (14). But fan studies, and ethnography more broadly, encounters issues of
positionality well before the representation stage of research. Researchers' positionality vis-à-vis the communities we study shapes everything from the research questions we can ask to how we go about getting answers, and how we analyze and interpret those answers. Representation is only one step of many in this process, albeit an important one, and while for many fan studies scholars the fan and the researcher may be one, the fan is still one among many diverse fans rather than part of a homogenous whole. Ethnography has a long history in fan studies, starting with some of the field's foundational texts (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992). It is in these foundational texts that we already see some of the challenges ethnography poses for researchers throughout the research process, whether they choose to openly identify as members of the community they are studying or not. Jenkins's unequivocal embrace of fandom stands in stark contrast to Bacon-Smith's attempt to distance herself from it and present herself both to her research participants and to her readers as the ethnographer. In this section, I examine questions of the positionality of the ethnographer—particularly the ethnographer who is already a member of the community they are studying, a community that lives primarily in digital and online spaces.

[2.2] Classical ethnography as used in anthropology offers several models of the role the ethnographer plays in the community they are studying, each considering slightly different sets of variables. While these models have been developed and built on over time, they are also still highly influential as reflected by the fact that they continue to be used in anthropology and wider social science methodology discussions and textbooks (e.g., Anderson 2006). Yet they are not unproblematic in and of themselves, and are additionally complicated by the mediated nature of the online setting. Gold (1958) identifies four roles available to the ethnographer, along a continuum from complete participant to complete observer. The complete participant is a covert researcher, fully immersed and taking part in the core activities of the group; the participant-as-observer is known to the group as a researcher but is also immersed in community activity; the observer-as-participant, too, is open about their researcher identity, though their interaction with the community is much less immersive in nature; finally, the complete observer does not interact with the community or make their role as a researcher known to them. While this model is a useful starting point, it elides level of participation on the one hand and level of openness about the ethnographer's identity and objectives on the other. The presentation of the model also appears to imply that covert research is completely unproblematic—something that has been questioned over time as new ethical norms have emerged in anthropology and the wider social sciences. Adler and Adler (1994) propose a different model based predominantly on levels of membership of the group: the peripheral member will "interact closely enough with members to establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership" (380); the active member may participate in the group's central activities and even take on responsibilities within the group but may not be fully committed to the values and goals of the group; and the complete member may be a researcher studying a community they were already a member of, or may be converted to membership, and is fully committed to the values and goals of the group. In this model, covert and overt stances are open to researchers adopting all three of these roles. Introducing yet another component for consideration, Bryman (2012) builds on Bell (1969) to identify four forms of ethnography along two axes: level of openness of the researcher about their identity (which is similar to parts of Gold's model) and level of openness of the setting. Closed settings are often
formalized organizations and tend to be characterized by formal barriers to access; open settings are less formally structured and may be easier to access, though Bryman does caution that neither the distinction between open and closed settings nor the one between overt and covert research are necessarily clear-cut. Bryman's approach is much more recent than Gold's and is part of a social science research methods textbook, and he does acknowledge that there are ethical issues with covert research, but he proceeds to largely gloss over them. These three traditional ethnographic models elide some of the variables that affect the ethnographer's positionality in relation to their research setting, while also considering different variables with some overlap. They also in large part fail to account for the possible ethical issues around covert research. As I show below, mediated settings such as online communities also affect how these variables operate theoretically, practically, and ethically, and it is useful here to dismantle the models into their constituent parts and consider each separately. From this, three key factors emerge that affect how the ethnographer conceptualizes their role and their interaction with the setting: level of openness of the setting, level of openness of the researcher, and level of participation. How, then, is each of these factors affected in an online setting?

[2.3] In traditional ethnographic settings, Bryman (2012) cites the formality of organizational structures as the main factor influencing the level of openness of the setting. In online settings, however, there are additional considerations, as the level of openness is at least partially determined by the technical features of the particular platform in question and the social norms that arise around them. Some social networking sites offer privacy settings that require the ethnographer to make themselves visible to the community they are studying and be actively accepted—for instance, through a Facebook friend request. On other platforms, content is generally public and "lurking" (Baym 1993, 148) or passive reading is the norm for a significant proportion of community participants and therefore, to an extent for the researcher (Hine 2015). Yet the fact that content on social media and other internet sites is publicly accessible in theory does not mean that those posting the content—whether it is fan fiction stories on AO3 or discussion threads on Reddit—necessarily view it as such, and here the ease with which covert research may be conducted may obscure the question of ethics. An online setting may also be closed in less formal ways than the barriers to entry one may find in formal organizations: content created by many online communities may well be public and freely accessible, but only to those who know where and how to find it, which in turn has implications for the researcher's positionality vis-à-vis the community they are researching. Having insider knowledge of the community may help in both finding and accessing research-relevant communities, regardless of levels of openness, but may also raise questions as to the researcher's ethical obligation to identify themselves.

[2.4] The question of levels of participation in group activities (Adler and Adler 1994) is also complicated by the nature of the online setting and the specific platforms the community uses for interaction and conducting their day-to-day activities. In a fan community context, some group members may generate large amounts of varied content—fan fiction stories, images, commentary or meta—but many restrict themselves to only reading content and leaving the occasional kudos (a single-click indication that a user enjoyed a story) on AO3. Intermediate levels of participation are also possible, such as reblogging other users' content on Tumblr, commenting on stories on AO3, or being a very active contributor within a small
and fairly isolated friendship group while passively reading content elsewhere. Which of these, then, count as full participation? While lurkers may not actively contribute to the group, they are arguably familiar with community values, norms, types and genres of content, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and types of interaction (Schneider, von Krogh, and Jäger 2013). In multisited online communities such as those of fan fiction fandom, individuals may choose to participate in very specific and limited ways in only one of the many sites that form the community and still self-identify — and be identified by others — as full, participating members. These different modes of engagement or participation are therefore also available to the ethnographer. Arguably, and perhaps counterintuitively, each of them can be characterized as complete membership in Adler and Adler’s (1994) model, as each of them mirrors the experiences of at least some community members. As I discuss below, in an online landscape characterized by networked individualism (Wellman 2001), the ethnographer’s construction of a field site from multiple fragments is an experience not dissimilar to that of community members constructing and curating their own online spaces. The right level of participation, then, may be driven by the platform and the community being studied, but also by the research question and theoretical considerations. If, for instance, the experiences of lurkers are pertinent to the research being conducted, then being a lurker at least in some contexts may in and of itself be a valuable research tool.

While lurking therefore may still constitute full or close to full membership of the community, the ethnographer’s visibility as a researcher remains a question to be addressed separately from their level of participation, both ethically and practically. From a practical standpoint, Rutter and Smith (2005) reflect on the “presence and absence” (85) of the ethnographer in online communities. Unlike a conventional field site, community members are not constantly reminded of the ethnographer through their physical presence. In communities where passive presence is an accepted form of membership, covert research is easy (though not always ethical) to conduct, while establishing an overt and visible presence may be the right ethical choice but pose a practical challenge. Hine (2015) also comments on the many choices an ethnographer is faced with when establishing their presence in one or more online field sites: what and how much information to share in a profile, how to tap into the communities and networks of interest, and whether and how to participate in community activities. The exact forms of interaction with community participants, and hence the ethnographer’s visibility to participants, also varies with the technical features and social uses of the platform(s) where the ethnography is being conducted, and with the relative openness or otherwise of the setting. From an ethical standpoint, the question of covert ethnographic research in digital settings needs to be weighed carefully, and fan studies as a field has begun to grapple with this. It is important to recognize that a blanket ban on covert research privileges some groups, while potentially silencing others—for instance, in the study of antifans (Jones 2016) or racism in fannish communities (Pande 2018). Online settings, as opposed to physical ones, also offer a different kind of insight into the groups, communities, and people studied, and this also varies with the technical affordances of the specific platform(s) where a study is sited. It is possible, for instance, to gain an aggregate view of large-scale trends on a platform or in a community without infringing on the privacy or dignity of individual users. Analyzing trends in AO3 tags is an example of such ethical, covert, digital ethnographic research. Other factors to consider here are users’ legitimate
expectations of how public any material they post may be, how much privacy control any
given platform allows users, and to what extent any material posted online can be tied back
to an identity that matters to the user—whether that is their real name or another identifier
they commonly go by in communities they are part of. Facebook posts, for instance, can
generally be traced back to the individual's off-line identity, while Tumblr posts cannot. On
the other hand, Tumblr posts can (frequently) be traced back to the identity someone is using
in fannish communities, whereas posts on the popular anonymous LiveJournal/Dreamwidth
community Fail-FandomAnon cannot. The impact on the individuals and communities
posting such material of it being used in covert research will vary. The key ethical question
to ask is who is privileged and who is silenced by choosing (or not) to conduct covert
research. If a covert approach is deemed ethical, risks to group members need nonetheless to
be mitigated—for instance, through quoting practices (Markham 2012, Jones 2016). The
three variables affecting the ethnographer's positionality, then, are interdependent and
complicated by the digital setting. They pose theoretical, practical, and ethical challenges
and warrant careful consideration.

[2.6] The digital setting, however, is not the only factor that complicates the positionality of
the ethnographer in much of contemporary fan studies research. The fact that many fan
studies scholars start out as fans first before developing a scholarly interest in fannish
communities and activities plays a significant role in how we relate to our research settings
as ethnographers: fan studies as a field has a long history of fans researching other fans. Hills
(2002) popularized the word *acafan* for this phenomenon, though both the practice and the
term have a longer history than that. In one of the groundbreaking fandom ethnographies of
the early 1990s, Jenkins (1992) talks of writing both as "an academic (who has access to
certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and
as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community)" (5).
The practice of fans studying fans is a staple of the field, sometimes overtly acknowledged
(Hills 2002; Gatson and Zweerink 2004; Bennett 2014), and other times implied (Jenkins
1992; Bury 2005; Willis 2006; Freund and Fielding 2013). Yet even when this practice is
named as autoethnography, the usages of the term within the field of fan studies vary widely.
Jenkins's approach quoted above suggests the use of knowledges and insights generated
through lived experience as a fan in shedding light on other fans. Hill's (2002) use is much
more limited and centered on the ethnographer themselves, reflecting on one's own life
history and experience of fandoms and putting those into a wider theoretical context. One of
Hill's main methodological concerns is that in asking fans directly about their passions, fan
studies scholars risk provoking a defensive stance in fans, pulling them out of the affective
experience of fandom and into a need to justify themselves and their experiences.
Autoethnography as Hills proposes it ostensibly allows the fan studies scholar to continue
their interrogation of their own experiences beyond that justification impulse, and identify
and question some of the structuring absences in their account of their own fandom. In some
ways, this appears to contradict Hills's own call to "treat self and other identically, using the
same theoretical terms and attributions of agency to describe both" (81). Moreover, Hill's
use of autoethnography appears both rather limited and limiting, focused as it is
predominantly on the question of why fans are fans of the things they are fans of. It is
therefore worth examining traditions and approaches to autoethnography from outside of fan
studies, and considering other kinds of research questions that this approach can be applied
to, particularly in a digital setting, in order to fully grasp the potential and the pitfalls of autoethnographic methods in fan studies.

[2.7] The multiple meanings and usages of autoethnography within fan studies reflect a similar multiplicity in other fields. Reed-Danahay (1997) gives an outline of the history of autoethnography, highlighting the multiple meanings the term has across different disciplinary communities. Authors such as Van Maanen (1995), Strathern (1987), Pratt (1994), and Dyck (2000) focus predominantly on the ethnographic components of autoethnography, broadly defining it as the practice of studying one's own culture. This poses a range of challenges that more traditional ethnography does not. Dyck, for instance, discusses the anxieties and uncertainties that accompany the transition from being a social participant in a setting to "becoming anthropologically attentive to becoming an 'out' researcher" (43). Relationships and activities that have been purely personal acquire a scholarly and professional dimension, and decisions need to be made about how to treat information one may only be privy to because of personal involvement in the field rather than as a researcher, thus circling back to the question of the openness of the setting. Jenkins's (1992) fandom ethnography, for instance, would fall into this category. The second major tradition of autoethnography is that focused on life writing (e.g., Deck 1990, Denzin 1997) and the self and life story of the individual as an object of ethnographic interest. Hills's autoethnography in Fan Cultures (2002) is much closer to this life writing approach.

[2.8] The life writing or evocative turn in autoethnography has been challenged as being too narrow and self-involved, but attempts have also been made to reconcile the two traditions of autoethnography. Anderson (2006), for instance, proposes an analytic approach with five key features: analytic autoethnography is (1) conducted by a complete member researcher but (2) in dialogue with other community participants; it is characterized by (3) analytic reflexivity and (4) a commitment to theoretical analysis; and (5) the researcher's self is visible in the narrative. Voloder (2008) builds on Anderson in her attempt to reconcile the ethnographic and autobiographical traditions in autoethnography by examining the concept of analytical distance between researcher and participant in her study of the Bosnian community in Melbourne. She argues for a separation of the insider/outsider dichotomy on the one hand and the concept of distance on the other, using distance instead as an analytical tool to compare her own and her participants' experiences and therefore the wider social and cultural factors shaping them. Even as an insider to the community one is studying, one may still achieve analytical distance while using insider knowledge as part of one's research. In this way, Voloder casts herself in the roles of both ethnographer and informant without making her own experiences the sole focus of her research.

[2.9] It is this kind of analytical autoethnography, in the sense of studying a community one is already part of but also leveraging one's own insider understanding of that community, that meshes particularly well with the digital setting, allowing digital ethnographers to overcome the challenges and shortcomings of more traditional approaches. Hine (2015) highlights the increasingly individualized experience of the internet, as social media offers tailored content and users curate their own experiences by choosing who to connect with and which links to follow. This makes it impossible for the ethnographer to reconstruct a holistic picture of life online (see also Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair 2009), but at the same time this uncertainty and
ambiguity mirrors participants' own experience of the environment. This mirroring makes a partially autoethnographic approach to online interaction valuable, and Hine argues for "considering how connections present themselves and what choices are available for building meaning out of these diverse influences" (Hine 2015, 83). In this way, the digital and the auto of ethnography complement each other, making this approach well suited to a significant proportion of fan studies research, particularly that taking place in online settings and in the communities where we, the researchers, are also we, the fans. Our understanding of fan communities, their output, and their norms is a strength that allows us to make informed choices at all stages of our research—from finding our research questions to designing our approach, deciding how to interact with our communities as both fans and researchers, and achieving the kinds of insights unavailable to outsiders. In the next section, I examine how this home field advantage (Dyck 2000) allows us to respond to one of the big challenges of online ethnography, that of constructing our field site.

3. From site to journey: Ethnography for the internet

[3.1] Fannish communities such as those of readers and writers of fan fiction do not so much form a single community as a collection of different, loosely connected (and sometimes entirely disconnected) communities with permeable boundaries. They/we produce not only fan fiction works but also an extraordinary amount of discussion, commentary, personal updates, fannish squee (note 1), wank (note 2), and other material. It is impossible—and arguably undesirable—for a single ethnography to capture the range and volume of this material, and even a more narrow thematic focus leaves a potentially unmanageable task. The mediated, digital nature of these communities, dispersed across multiple interconnected platforms, raises further questions about how and where best to collect and select data, or what the boundaries of the community being researched are.

[3.2] The concept of the field site has been problematized by ethnographers from a range of disciplines even before the emergence of ethnography online. The specific approach to finding—or, more recently and accurately, constructing—a field site reflects (and at times obscures) a number of ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as practical methodological considerations. In his classic challenge to traditional, geographically bounded ethnography, Marcus (1995) calls for a multisited approach, which would enable anthropologists to study and compare how phenomena of the world system manifest and are negotiated within a variety of specific, localized settings. He proposes a range of strategies for constructing such a multisited project, including following the movements of people or objects, and centering a study on a more abstract concept, such as a metaphor, a story, or a conflict. While this approach has been lauded as allowing ethnographers to break boundaries and ask questions about wider issues that more traditional approaches were unable to address, it has also been critiqued, both on epistemological and practical grounds. Candea (2007) identifies seamlessness—the idea that the global and the local are inextricably intertwined—as a key assumption of multisited ethnography and a contributor to the idea of holism within the discipline: the assumption that by studying multiple sites we can reconstruct the whole of the world system seen to exist at a level above them, "a strange hope that once we have burst out of our field-sites, we can conquer the seamless world" (174). On a practical level, Candea argues, multisited ethnography pays little attention to the
process of constructing the field site, thereby obscuring key methodological choices through the overreliance on the theoretical whole. Building on this and his challenge to multisited ethnography's particular conception of holism, he suggests that the arbitrarily bounded field site, consciously and reflexively constructed by the ethnographer taking into account the ethical and political implications, is a methodological choice that allows for continued productive engagement with ideas of seamlessness and complexity.

[3.3] Theoretical considerations and the specificity of research questions also play a role in how the ethnographer's field is conceptualized. Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair (2009) build on both Candea's critique of multisited ethnography and on their own insights from the ethnographic study of religion to advocate for a conception of the field as "un-sited" (47). Taking a broadly social constructionist approach, they reject the idea of the whole outright, arguing instead that it is "possible that no such single system exists" (53) and phenomena are "intrinsically interactive,…result from processes of assemblage or arrangement of entities" (55). Instead of the multisited ethnography, they propose that field sites be constructed based on the theoretical underpinnings of research questions: arbitrary in their multivocality and following of networks of people and other phenomena and yet on solid theoretical ground. To achieve this, the authors make a distinction between the concepts of space (abstract, impersonal), place (space imbued with meaning), and field (the object of ethnographic study). The field is decoupled from space and place, constructed across geopolitical and cultural boundaries, enabling the study and comparison of phenomena of theoretical interest. The authors point out that this approach is as applicable to places that occupy physical space as it is to nongeographic imagined communities.

[3.4] The online environment that many fandom scholars find ourselves in further complicates ethnographic field site construction through a number of practical challenges. Hine (2015) posits an internet that is embedded, embodied and everyday, particularly in the Western world. A plethora of apps on mobile devices, a range of social media platforms, and highly individualized engagement patterns give rise to uncertainty, complexity, and the feeling that something is always being missed. Hine argues, however, that this uncertainty is not only a challenge for the ethnographer but an intrinsic part of the experience of internet users themselves, and so "experiencing and embracing that uncertainty becomes an ethnographer's job, and pursuing some form of absolute robust certainty about a singular research object becomes a distraction, and even a threat, to the more significant goal of working out just how life is lived under these conditions" (5).

[3.5] Building on Wellman's (2001) concept of networked individualism—the idea that our experiences are increasingly tailored and individual to us and that the focus of networks has shifted from connecting places to connecting people—Hine argues that ethnography's key strength is its adaptability to new environments and advocates for a certain methodological eclecticism in its conduct. She also makes a case for utilizing the tools of everyday internet use in the construction of the field: search engines, social media platforms' tagging and filtering systems, trending topics, and other similar features shape users' everyday experiences of the internet, and can therefore be productively used by the ethnographer as tools for field site construction. Marres and Weltevrede (2013) go as far as suggesting these features may not simply be part of our research methodology but form part of the object of
study itself. Beaulieu and Simakova (2006) use a similar approach in their study of the temporal dimensions of hyperlinks. Building on multisited approaches to ethnography and previous ethnographic studies of online phenomena, boyd (2008) also foregrounds the network aspect of online environments and proposes a networked ethnography that "involves finding different entry points into a phenomenon, following different relationships between people and practices, and making sense of different types of networks and their relation to one another" (54). Similarly to the unsited field Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair (2009) propose, here the components of the field site are constructed in relation to each other and the research question. Using the everyday tools of internet navigation to construct a networked field site, however, does ultimately reach a limit or boundary, even if only in the practical sense. Hills (2002) notes in his discussion of using cyberspace ethnography in fan studies that the mass of data available online makes it clear that selection and the construction of a boundary is required as "no a priori meaningful or internally coherent corpus can be identified" (174). It is therefore also important to pay close attention to how that boundary is constructed in ways that may be both deliberate and arbitrary at the same time (Candea 2007).

[3.6] Following boyd's (2008) networked ethnography approach of multiple entry points and tracing connections is an experience not dissimilar to that of discovering an online fandom community for the first time, highlighting Hine's (2015) argument that the experiences of the ethnographer mirror those of participants in online spaces. An internet search may lead to a fan fiction archive; users of the archive may include hyperlinks in the paratexts of their stories, pointing to their presence on more interactive social networking sites; social networking sites in turn may be structured in a way that aids discovery of other users with similar interests; finally, as those other users' interests are unlikely to be limited to the one fandom or piece of content originally used to find them, they may lead to other fandoms, groups or discussions. Any node in this network may be an entry point in its own right, as participation on social networking sites may lead to the discovery of fan fiction, or a trusted online or off-line friend may bring someone into the community by sharing fannish content with them. The fan and the ethnographer move through networked fannish spaces in remarkably similar ways. While networks are by no means static, the concept of network does not foreground either movement, or a temporal dimension. Yet fans frequently express a sense of their own fannish history, which involves moving both through time and through different networked fannish spaces. Additionally, both the network itself and the fans moving through it change over time: platforms and accounts are abandoned, groups drift out of touch or split due to conflict, new trends and tropes emerge. For that reason, digital (auto)ethnographies of fannish spaces are not so much ethnographies of networks as they are journeys. For the ethnographer, this journey, underpinned by the theoretical foundations of their research questions, becomes the field site.

4. Follow the trope

[4.1] For a fan studies scholar who is also already a fan, the familiar activity of navigating their way around the digital fannish landscape becomes a key tool for field site construction, and for managing their own participation in and interaction with the community they are researching. In this section, I will use the case study of my own research into the treatment of issues of sexual consent in erotic fan fiction to suggest how some of the challenges raised
by the digital research environment and a scholar's prior involvement with the community they are studying may be addressed in a way that is both productive and theoretically robust.

[4.2] While online ethnography complicates the three key factors commonly identified as shaping the role of the ethnographer within the research setting in a number of ways, the autoethnographic aspect of many fan studies scholars' work provides ways of mitigating those complications. My approach to studying online fan fiction fandom was shaped significantly by the fact that I was already a member of the community before I began my research, giving me home field advantage (Dyck 2000) and access to what is only a semiopen research setting. It was also shaped by different traditions of autoethnography: the insider ethnography (Jenkins 1992) and to a lesser extent life writing approaches (Hills 2002) of fan studies, the reflexive autoethnography mirroring participants' experiences of the internet environment (Hine 2015), and the uncomfortable but productive tension between my roles as researcher, fan, informant, and analyst (Voloder 2008; Anderson 2006). My work was autoethnographic in the sense that my field was also my home and I was studying a community I was also a member of. It was also partially autoethnographic in the sense that I adopted the role of informant and used my own experiences of online fan fiction fandom to inform my data selection, collection, and analysis while situating these experiences firmly "within a story of the social context in which [they occur]" (Reed-Danahay 1997, 9). My level of participation (Gold 1958) or membership (Adler and Adler 1994) in online fan fiction fandom did not change as I became a researcher, though the modes of engagement did. One key challenge was becoming visible as a researcher in an environment where I had previously been a fan, and where presence and interactions (particularly on Tumblr) were largely ephemeral (Rutter and Smith 2005; Cho 2015). My choices about the level of openness about my research were driven by the nature of my participation in the community. My main forms of engagement were through posting content on AO3 and interacting with other members through a Tumblr blog. Neither of these offer a stable presence from the point of view of individuals seeing my occasional posts on their Tumblr dashboard or browsing AO3 for stories about a particular pairing or character. Here, my community membership and familiarity with community norms allowed me to identify ways to out myself as a researcher—for instance, through posting occasional reminders about my work in contexts where they were appropriate by community standards, such as in response to memes asking about work and personal information.

[4.3] My membership of the fan fiction community was also a key asset in constructing my field site. To collect and select material for analysis, I supplemented boyd's (2008) networked ethnography approach with my own experience, in-depth community knowledge, and cultural competence (Hine 2000) as a fan and the theoretical underpinnings of my research questions (Cook, Laidlaw, and Mair 2009). This led to what I call a follow-the-trope approach to my data collection and analysis. To understand this approach, it is first necessary to consider some of the tools and practices available to fan fiction community members in their day-to-day interaction with and navigation of the vast amounts of fan fiction and other community output available in online spaces. This will shed light on "how connections present themselves and what choices are available for building meaning" (Hine 2015, 83) within this particular community context.
The preservation of fannish history and output is a central concern to many fan fiction communities (Versaphile 2011). Archiving fan works and making them easily accessible and searchable plays a key role in such preservation efforts, and was a central motivation in the creation of AO3 (astolat 2007), which was one of the central sites for my research. AO3 has a range of features intended to make fan works easily discoverable and filterable on a range of criteria. Community members make use of these features on a day-to-day basis to navigate AO3 and choose works to read. The creation, management, and use of metadata is particularly important for this purpose. Figure 1 shows how a fan fiction story is presented on AO3. The story is preceded by a block of metadata, progressing from the generic to the specific. These are the kinds of technical features of AO3 that fans use to organize and search for fan fiction stories and navigate fannish spaces, and they can be used just as effectively as an entry point to constructing a networked field site (Wellman 2001; Hine 2015; boyd 2008). My theoretical interest in issues of power and sexual consent, my familiarity with trends and tropes in fan fiction, and my competence in navigating spaces such as AO3 were key in allowing me to identify the parts of fannish metadata that would most easily lend themselves to finding and narrowing down the kinds of content that would be suitable for my research. Archive warnings such as "rape/non-con" and "underage" are specifically designed to highlight consent issues to readers, and this feature became part of my analysis of fannish spaces as structured around consent. Ratings such as "Mature" and "Explicit" allowed for a narrowing down of works under consideration to those with at least some sexual content. And my immersion in fan fiction allowed me to identify freeform tags for tropes such as "dub con," "consent issues," or "fuck or die" as the kinds of spaces where issues of power and consent might be explored—hence, follow the trope. The sheer volume of material, however, continued to present a challenge. Here, too, fannish practices of
filtering, sorting and selecting stories to read proved helpful. Sorting search results by the number of comments or kudos, for instance, allowed me to easily identify stories within a certain trope or pairing that were widely read and therefore considered influential by the community.

[4.5] My journey through this fannish landscape was guided by my theoretical interest in issues of sexual consent in fan fiction. I was particularly struck by the discrepancy between early fan studies approaches to slash as a genre of gender equality (Lamb and Veith 1986; Russ 1985; Jenkins 1992; Kustritz 2003) and my own observations of the emergence of tropes and subgenres within slash that seemed to deliberately explore unequal relationships (note 3). This also chimed with my theoretical focus on the operations of power in sexual relationships and the impact of power on individuals' ability to meaningfully negotiate consent. Immersion in several fandoms, awareness of trends and popular tropes, exploration of the relevant metadata identified above, and cultural competence within the community allowed me to choose two popular and sometimes controversial tropes or subgenres within slash fan fiction— omegaverse and arranged marriage, both characterized by significant power disparities between the characters—to explore further. To find specific fan fiction stories for my analysis, I retraced the steps a fan would use to find and select works featuring specific types of content. I used AO3's tagging functionality to search for works containing the relevant tags. I narrowed this search by focusing on a single, well-represented fandom and pairing within each trope. I then proceeded to read a wide selection of popular and impactful—as indicated by the AO3 kudos functionality—stories featuring the pairing and trope in question to understand common features and approaches. Acknowledging the networked nature of the community I was studying (boyd 2008), I also followed links and connections to and from additional material, such as fannish commentaries (meta), introductions to popular tropes or pairings (primers), fan-curated recommendation lists (recs), and histories to help me situate the material within a wider cultural context.

[4.6] The ethnographic follow-the-trope approach cannot, by definition, present a holistic or universal picture of the fandom community: different community members have different entry points, different interests, different networks, and different experiences (boyd 2008; Hine 2015). While the stories I chose for analysis are popular and impactful within the communities in which they circulate, there are hundreds of other stories—some similar to these, some different—I could have chosen, and my analysis of them would potentially have yielded results that were similar in some ways and different in others. Like Candea's (2007) both deliberately and arbitrarily bounded field site, the follow-the-trope approach does, however, present one possible, specific, and situated view of how some parts of the fan fiction community engage with issues of sexual consent. These parts of the community, and these engagements, may and do coexist with others, as well as with an absence of engagement in many cases—the community is far from homogenous. Importantly, however, the engagements I was able to demonstrate in my research are found in some of the community's most popular and celebrated contemporary output and can therefore be said to have an impact on the wider fan fiction community; and these insights could not have been generated without being a member of the community I was studying, in an online setting.

5. Conclusion
[5.1] For a fan studies scholar interested in particular aspects of fan fiction, follow the trope is a robust ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis in an online setting and in communities the researcher may already be a member of. It allows researchers to use the theoretical considerations of their research questions as a guide in making their journey through interconnected online spaces. In the case of my research, my interest in the operation of power in questions of sexual consent was a key driver in identifying specific fan fiction tropes for closer analysis. It makes visible, rather than obscuring, the choices we as researchers make on that journey in finding and selecting material, as well as in our approach to analyzing it. In my research, it allowed me to select a small number of fan fiction works for in-depth analysis while keeping that choice, along with its advantages and limitations, front and center in my analysis. By blending elements of analytic, reflexive autoethnography with insights from digital ethnographic methods, the researcher is able to leverage their own insider knowledge of both the communities they are researching and the online spaces where those communities live throughout the research process, from the identification of research questions, through data collection and analysis, to questions of representation and power imbalances between researcher and researched in any outputs. It was my in-depth immersion in fannish spaces and resulting understanding of fan fiction tropes and trends that allowed me to identify the tropes most relevant to the theoretical considerations of my research questions. The emphasis on the researcher’s own experiences alongside those of community members encourages reflection on positionality and enables the researcher to consider key aspects of their role as an (auto)ethnographer in light of the practical and theoretical challenges of the online setting. My understanding of fannish spaces and norms allowed me to make ethical and practical choices in how I presented myself in fannish communities, what material I selected for analysis, and how I presented that material in the outputs of my research (note 4). While acknowledging the challenges of conducting ethnographic research in digital spaces and communities we are already members of, follow the trope ultimately seeks to leverage those factors as strengths in our research.

6. Notes

1. The fandom wiki Fanlore defines squee as "an onomatopoeic expression of enthusiasm and joy" (https://fanlore.org/wiki/Squee).

2. Fanlore gives several definitions of fannish usages of wank, including "a loud and public online argument," and "a catchall term for objectionable or contemptible fannish behavior" (https://fanlore.org/wiki/Wank).

3. While there has been some exploration of these trends more recently, such as Ashton Spacey's collection The Darker Side of Slash Fan Fiction (2018), this was not the case when I embarked on this research project.

4. Detailed accounts of my research can be found in my published papers (Popova 2018a, 2018b) and in my book on fan fiction as a form of cultural activism on sexual consent, forthcoming from MIT Press in 2021.

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Theory

Thoughts on an ethical approach to archives in fan studies

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[0.1] Abstract—Much of fan studies research is concerned with archives, especially online archives created by and for fans. Across the discipline, however, methodologies still lack an element of self-reflection when it comes to the affective, embodied aspects of doing research in those archives. Such a methodology becomes especially crucial when we consider these archives as power structures. In a critique of the way fan studies has dealt with archives as a cultural phenomenon thus far, I work through a theoretical framework that allows for an awareness and consideration of one's embodied experience of digital archives by way of bodily affect and materiality. Analyzed is an autoethnographic account of the difference in materiality (and thus in affect) between two fan-made archives for Bethesda Game Studios' video game franchise The Elder Scrolls (1994–), with suggestions proposed for future efforts in crafting a general fan studies methodology for archival research.

[0.2] Keywords—Affect; Autoethnography; Ethics; Materiality; Methodology


1. Something she called an archive

[1.1] The line of inquiry that I wish to pursue here can be summarized by a passage from Helen Freshwater's brilliant article "The Allure of the Archive" (2003) wherein she states, "If we must enter the archive, then the deployment of a methodology of ethical self-awareness, as well as the adoption of an alternative approach to the archive, may allay anxieties about its use in research" (754).

[1.2] Following Freshwater's advice, I here address the relatively small amount of methodological reflection in fan studies (cf. Evans and Stasi 2014; Ford 2014), specifically concerning the researching of digital fan-made archives like Archive of Our Own (AO3) and FanFiction.net. What happens to us, as researchers, as scholar-fans, when we enter these archives, and what does it matter? Before I delve into the why and how of scholarly ethics in the context of fan-made archives, some remarks on archive as a concept are in order.

[1.3] The archive is fraught with contradiction and mystique, paradox and fantasy. It promises the very truth of history. Those who are allowed to enter are confronted with such...
an impossible wealth of knowledge and information that, especially to the first-time visitor, the archive seems to contain nothing short of every imaginable piece of writing on its topic of choice. This confrontation with the archive's apparent totality can prompt a number of responses: random, sometimes frenzied browsing through whatever appears of interest; directed, goal-oriented scavenging; or acquiring a more overhead perspective by skimming categories, collections, and tags rather than contents. Each gives the visitor a different view of the archive, each allows the archive to present and open itself to the visitor—and to deceive them—in different ways. From the initial moment of entry to the time of departure, the archive wraps around its visitor and squeezes tight, enveloping them in its fragmented version of history and (naïvely? sinisterly?) proclaiming that version to be the only version. The archive is both a physical place and a metaphorical entity at the same time; it is "a place of storage" where documents are stored and subjected to categorization by authoritative agents, and "a system that creates the need for, and meaning of, that space and all it contains" (Henton 2012, 71).

[1.4] The archive is both an expression of and a means to reinforce the hierarchical relationship between the archive's guardians and its users, but also between the archive itself and its envisioned corpus. The creation and maintenance of an archive is thus bound up with the structuring of power dynamics. Which texts and materials are easy to find? Which are prominently displayed and which are relegated to the dark corners at the back of the shelf? How does the archive's artificial creation of history silence or destroy apocryphal accounts of past (or present or future) events? Questions like these have become increasingly prominent over the past decades, most significantly through writings like Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 1972) and Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995), and with the canonization of those texts in Western academia comes, one would hope, at least a healthy and widespread suspicion of the archive's openness and its claims to truth. From a historian's perspective, for instance, Carolyn Steedman (2001) has made it clear that archives "hold no origins, and origins are not what historians search for in them. Rather, they hold everything in medias res, the account caught halfway through, most of it missing, with no end ever in sight. Nothing starts in the Archive, nothing, ever at all, although things certainly end up there" (1175).

[1.5] Despite this awareness, it is of course still in many scholars' continued interests to conduct research in and on archives. They are expected to approach their archive of choice and its contents with a keen and critical eye, or even to study the archive in itself—a conceptual development that Ann Stoler has identified as the shift "from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject" (2002, 93). This insight reaches far beyond historiography: for example, the recent "archival turn" in media studies (De Kosnik 2016, 273) presents us with questions both old and new in regards to what digital media do to the closely related concepts of archive and memory (e.g., Ernst 2013). Is it correct to term the internet an archive? Is it productive for scholars to understand the internet as an archive, or as not-archive? If the internet is a form of archive, where do we find those structures of power and discourses that twentieth-century continental philosophers have pointed to? What do questions like these mean for the nondigital phenomena and institutions we have given the name "archive" so far?
2. (A critique of) fan studies in the archive

[2.1] Strongly related to these issues is the topic of my current endeavor: the ethics of engaging with digital, fannish/fan-made archives for research purposes. As a discipline, fan studies is obviously somewhat familiar with ethical quandaries and critical reflections on issues such as scholar-fandom (e.g., Hills 2012; Stein and Busse 2011) and fan privacy and vulnerability (e.g., Busse and Hellekson 2012; Freund and Fielding 2013). It is also no stranger to archival research: aside from Abigail de Kosnik's recent opus on digital cultural memory, Rogue Archives (2016), a variety of texts by authors such as Paul Booth (2016), Matt Hills (2015), Erin Hollis (2012), Timothy Jerome Johnson and Cheryll Lynne Fong (2017), Maria Lindgren Leavenworth (2015, 2016), Alexis Lothian (2011, 2013), Jason Mittell (2009), and Versaphile (2011) have engaged with notions of archive within the discipline. It was in fact De Kosnik who first brought the archival, or better yet archontic, qualities of fan fiction and fandom to our attention (Derecho 2006). However, ethical reflections on this engagement with fannish/fan-made archives and with the archival tendencies of fandom in general remain strikingly lacking. Rogue Archives, for example, has its most explicit—and rather brief—discussion of research ethics in its appendix, and the focus there is solely on considerations of privacy and the required anonymity of some of its research subjects (cf. De Kosnik 2016, 351–54). More significantly, the position of the researcher herself as a scholar is left out almost entirely in this section, as well as in the rest of the book.

[2.2] It seems to me, then, that there are two interconnected gaps to address in our thinking about archives and ethics in fan studies. The first concerns the ideological and power-laden aspects of archives as I have partially outlined them in the previous section. To my mind, Derrida's assertion that "there is no political power without control of the archive" (1995, 11) holds not only in the realm of the State, but also in the realm of fandom. Hills has already noted the relative silence in fan studies on the subject of power relations within fan communities and has argued that the tendency of "wishing away the cultural power of discourses of expertise...fails to illuminate how media fandom iterates forms of expert knowledge" (2015, 361). He proceeds to show how this fan expertise is recorded, reaffirmed, and even anticipated by fan-made encyclopedic databases/wikis like the TARDIS Data Core. Somewhat implicitly, he demonstrates that the archive structures power relations between its guardians and its users.

[2.3] Taking a more institutional approach and focusing more explicitly on the Derridean critique of archive, Lothian addresses the "contradictions and contestations around what fannish and scholarly archives are and should be: what's trivial, what's significant, what legally belongs to whom, and what deserves to be preserved" (2013, 543). In a way, she performs exactly the type of analysis that I am aiming for and is therefore the exception to the observation made by Hills. Lothian investigates what kind of power the archive itself—in this case AO3—has within fandom, what its strategies of inclusion and exclusion are, and in which ways it fails to do justice to the breadth of digital expressions of fandom. In her conclusion, she states forcefully, "The easily archivable and comfortably representable are not the only online practices, fannish or nonfannish, that can work transformatively—they are just the easiest ones to fit within prior structures of activism and scholarship" (Lothian..."
2013, 553).

[2.4] Even more exceptionally, Lothian offers a brief and tentative glimpse at how we should fill the second gap, the ethics of engaging with fan-made archives. Drawing on Jack Halberstam's comments about subcultural and queer scholarship, she argues, "This position—the scholar as archivist whose work contributes to the subcultural community to which she belongs—is the one that most scholarship on subcultural fandom occupies, although among fandom's often comparatively privileged participants, the shared exclusion from dominant cultural norms Halberstam discusses cannot be assumed. And that commonly held position shapes the archives on which scholars are able and willing to draw" (2013, 549).

[2.5] This talk of positions echoes the well-trodden discussion about scholar-fandom, especially Hills's remarks that scholar-fans often risk explicitly or implicitly speaking for "their own situated fan agency, or indeed…their [own] academic, disciplinary position" instead of for the fandom they are studying (2012, 32). Every scholar relates differently to their object of study, and that relation must be made more explicit more often according to Hills, so that the "limits of academic and fan knowledge" become clearer to both the discipline and its audience (33). For a moment, Lothian (2013) breaks away from these problems by bringing the body of the scholar/fan/archivist into her scope: "If we can assume that bodies do not get left behind when we participate in cultural practices online, we can approach the digital with attention to the sensations communicated in ephemeral moments, the affective elements that exceed even the most diligently recorded archive" (550).

[2.6] However, the moment remains just that—ironically, she leaves bodies behind almost immediately—and already within this small passage there is an implication I find troublesome. While she is surely correct in her assertion that there is a certain affective ephemerality to many fannish practices that digital/online archives cannot capture, to suggest that those archives cannot capture or contain affect and bodily sensations at all is a bridge too far, which is discussed further later in this essay. For instance, one of the recurring themes throughout Rogue Archives is the intertwinement of archive and "repertoire"—that is, "physical, bodily acts of repetition, of human performance" (De Kosnik 2016, 6)—and a variety of examples in the book demonstrate that the body retains its importance in every aspect of digital cultural memory, including the archive.

[2.7] As stated before, the same limitation that Lothian eventually runs into continues to plague De Kosnik; for all of her examples of and claims about the bodies of the fans and her interviewees, and their entanglements within (primarily) the fan fiction archives she studies, no attention is paid to her own body. No reflection is offered on what entering and studying online archives means for her specifically, not only for her as a scholar with a particular theoretical background or as a fan of particular media intellectual properties, but also for her as someone who experiences those archives in a bodily fashion—someone who can see and touch, who can read and write, who can think and feel emotions like fear or excitement or comfort or disgust. As long as we do not try to make explicit how these things affect us as researchers and how the archives themselves evoke certain responses or feelings in our bodies, which may well have an impact on how we perform research in the first place, it is
difficult to think of any ethical approach to our objects of study as comprehensive.

[2.8] What I propose, then, is that discussions of archives and ethics in fan studies should move beyond predominantly reflecting on issues of privacy, vulnerability, and personal fandom, and start to take into account the affective, embodied relationships that we as scholars form with the digital archives we research. I am aware that adopting this particular strand of autoethnography, like autoethnography in general, has the potential of "focusing too much on the individual feelings, and risk[s] oversight of the larger cultural structures that are interacting with those feelings" (Evans and Stasi 2014, 16). However, it also has precisely the opposite potential, namely of elucidating how those individual feelings arise from and interact with structures that are fraught with ideology and dynamics of power. I choose to be optimistic in this regard, and see autoethnography as especially suitable for uncovering a researcher's biases toward and affective relationships with their object of research. A willingness to remain self-critical and self-aware in every stage of the research process, perhaps with insights from the present work in mind, should at least prevent us from falling into the trap of navel-gazing too often. What is potentially gained is worth the risk: a more conscientious approach to the archives we study; a better understanding of how online fandom works; perhaps even some knowledge about how digital media shape our daily lives.

[2.9] Here I offer a provisional framework through which it becomes possible to become aware of and consider one's embodied experience of digital archives by way of bodily affect and materiality. I take an autoethnographic approach in the last two sections, as I also attempt to make explicit how my own position and my own experience of digital archives impact the way I research and understand them.

3. The power of the archive

[3.1] Freshwater's text prompts us to wonder beyond what the archive does, to also question what it does to us. The passage cited at the beginning of this essay is not solely the result of the concerns about archival power relations I outlined in the introduction: Freshwater calls for ethical self-awareness in the archival researcher because the archive's impossible promise of a return to origins and historical totality leaves traces of near-mythological reverence that even the most critical scholar will find difficult to erase. She argues that "the archive can be a dangerously seductive place. Instead of becoming lost in its dusty, forbidding, textual corridors, it is all too easy to become enchanted" (2003, 734). What makes the archive's spell so effective, says Freshwater, is the allure of "the text's unselfconsciousness and ignorance of its future position as source of investigation"; there is a certain voyeuristic, for some even sexual pleasure in "invading the private realm of the writer" of the archived text (735–36). Moreover, a part of this pleasure derives from an all-familiar impulse, a desire, a "mal d'archive: [we are] in need of archives" (Derrida 1995, 57). That is, when we researchers enter an archive, it is, in a properly Freudian sense, to find the origin of the matter at hand, "to make the past live and suppressed voices speak" (Freshwater 2003, 737).

[3.2] The parallels to research practices and attitudes within fan studies are perhaps more striking than some would care to admit. A key difference is, of course, that most of the voices we extract from fannish archives are not really past in the sense that they are usually
still very much alive, a fact which in itself has all kinds of ethical implications. We are not simply delving into a wealth of material that was unwittingly waiting to be found: the creators of those materials are still around, able to actually speak to us, to respond to our work (cf. Booth 2013). Some might even object, because they "would prefer not to be legitimated into a scholarly archive, not to be a source for articles like this one, perhaps not to be archived at all" (Lothian 2013, 549). Quite often, we ourselves are also part of the archives in some way, either as frequent readers, contributors, or as members or co-owners of sites like AO3 (Lothian 2013) and Lostpedia (Mittell 2009). Furthermore, as Lothian also highlights, we are to an extent placing ourselves into the role of archon (Derrida 1995, 10): we give ourselves "the power to interpret the archives," but also the power to include those archives' contents in a different archive, namely our body of scholarly work.

[3.3] We are motivated in this effort by various causes, all of them equally valid, but also equally full of implications for how we conduct our research. We may believe in the importance of fandom for understanding digital media cultures in general (e.g., De Kosnik 2016; Jenkins 2014). We may wish to legitimize fan fiction and other fannish practices in the eyes of the mainstream or of academia (e.g., Lindgren Leavenworth 2015; Price and Robinson 2017). We may very well simply be interested in ensuring that these forms of creative expression are not lost to the void by censure, whim, or bit rot (e.g., Swalwell, Stuckey, and Ndalianis 2017). The people whose works are being uploaded to the internet and preserved in the archives we study often have deeply personal connections to the source material (and to their own materials, too), and they are frequently unwilling to share those passions with the world. No wonder, then, that Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson identify the unmasking of a fan's identity to be the "worst fannish sin" (2012, 38). Traversing and publishing the archive requires an attitude of care and attentiveness. It invites and incites a particular kind of affection for the material—which is usually already present in those of us who would fit the description of scholar-fan.

[3.4] In both the process and the output of our work we should therefore naturally try to do these fans, these suppressed voices, justice and situate them in their proper context (whatever that may be). Freshwater, speaking specifically of an archive related to theatrical production, does issue a word of caution: "Indeed, all archivization of live performance is problematized by its subject's time-based nature. No amount of video, documentary recording, or personal testimony can capture the ephemerality of performance. Something will always be lost in translation" (2003, 754). The same holds for archives of fannish performances. The archived outputs of fan practices, usually texts, images, and videos, are not necessarily time-based, but each work still emerges in a specific time and place, and this holds doubly for those more ephemeral and difficult to archive practices that Lothian speaks of. At the same time, we should not ignore the context in which we find the work—that is, the archival structure itself.

[3.5] It is surely also important here to recognize the role that the fans themselves play in the creation of this structure: the archivists are generally fans, and the archive is often made to reflect certain hierarchies and power dynamics between community members with different levels of fannish prestige or expert knowledge (cf. Hills 2015). These interpersonal relations fall beyond the current scope of this essay, but elsewhere I have written more extensively about how they can come to be reflected in the structure of fan-made archives and may serve
to marginalize certain fannish voices (cf. Jansen 2018; forthcoming).

[3.6] Returning to the relevance of archival structure to academic research, the paratextual elements with which the archive tends to surround its corpus are especially of note, as Lindgren Leavenworth argues: "An increased awareness of how fan fictions are archived and made searchable, how categorisations, labelling and descriptions frame individual texts, and how the paratextual communication operates, illuminates new forms of authorship and allows different ways of conducting digital research around this" (2016, 68).

[3.7] This form of presentation in an archive may make it difficult to discern the original context of any fan-produced material, which in turn might cause the researcher to forget that there even is a story to the work's genesis to begin with, or that this story may not be accurately represented by the archive. This might, for example, occur if an archive has moved to a different domain: the content that was already present before the move is now dated as having been added to the archive on the day of the move (or even later), making it troublesome to trace the original time it was uploaded to the website. Even to the inquisitive-minded, it is much easier to see the archive as authoritative and infallible, or simply to not be bothered with looking up the original date. After all, the expectation when entering an archive is that this work of gathering metadata has already been done for us, and much of the time we only stumble upon such mistakes by accident anyway. It could even be argued that the archive is an invisible infrastructure until it noticeably breaks down or we become aware of its malfunctioning (cf. Bowker and Star 1999, 35).

4. Archive, affect, ethics

[4.1] I highlight these issues to further demonstrate the ethical imperative for thinking about how we physically interact with digital archives, and how those archives themselves affect the way we interact with them. Researchers with archival experience in other fields, like Susan Yee (2007) and Tina Campt (2012), will gladly admit to a deeply affective and intimate relationship with the archive and the materials they have worked with. Campt, who writes about an archive of photographs of Black folks, addresses that archive as "an ensemble of photographic practices that help us understand the cultural and affective work of certain sets of images" (Campt 2012, 136). She notes that what drew her to studying these images was not just what she was seeing but also what she was hearing while she went through the photographs: "a playful yet insistent hum that I found difficult, and, frankly, a mistake to ignore" (134). The archive can address all of our senses, it seems. Yee, studying the works of world-renowned architect Le Corbusier, describes her affection for archival materials especially lovingly:

[4.2] All I could think about was that this was Le Corbusier's original drawing. It was meticulously hand-drawn, but the drawing was dirty. There were marks on it, smudges, fingerprints, the marks of other hands, and now I added mine. I felt close to Le Corbusier as I walked around and around the drawing, looking at the parts that I wanted to replicate to bring home with me, touching the drawing as I walked. The paper was very thin. (2007, 33)
Much of this relationship is built up as one spends more and more time in the archive, by means of parsing through its contents, experiencing the texture of its materials by moving one's hands across the paper and one's eyes across the text, and gradually coming to a sense of knowing the people whose words have been selected for preservation and presentation. A theorist of affect and emotion like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would draw attention to "a particular intimacy...between textures and emotions" (2003, 17)—that is, between haptic sense (meaning: active, exploratory touch) and affective response. These haptic and embodied elements, though almost unnoticeably self-evident in libraries and other classical archives (cf. Robinson 2010), may become somewhat difficult to envision when the archive in question is experienced on a computer screen, its contents traversed with one hand on a mouse or trackpad. Somewhat difficult, but not impossible.

Those of us who enter digital archives are simply not living the same kinds of textures and situations. We are not surrounded by books, nor are we breathing the fever-inducing dust of old manuscripts (cf. Steedman 2001); at most, we have a notebook at hand next to our keyboards. We do not—generally, at least—have to leave our homes or countries to gain access to these archives, unless we are already traveling for an unrelated reason and are willing to connect to public Wi-Fi in the name of scholarly inquiry. Our fingers feel familiar plastic instead of foreign paper; our eyes regard texts and images on a flat, backlit screen. We can manipulate what we see by copying and pasting content into word processors, or even by directly altering and erasing content if the archive in question allows it. We can move from one place within the archive to another instantly, at the same lightning speed as we can move from one archive to a different one altogether—if the Wi-Fi is fast enough, that is. It is worth asking, What do these sensations and experiences do to the way we research and subsequently report on that research?

To be clear, this is no longer solely about the textual-semiotic contents of the archive; instead, I am shifting the emphasis to the materiality and texture of the archive as such. In theories of affect and the body, materiality will generally simply refer to the "being material" of an object or entity, such as the "lived materiality" of the human body (Leys 2011, 440). It is often invoked as a resistance against the tendency in cultural analysis to focus exclusively on the linguistic and semiotic aspects of the human experience, which also applies to much of fan studies, and to combat the supposed disconnection of signs from matter brought about by (post)modernism and (post)structuralism.

This systematic ignorance of bodies, whether human or nonhuman, analogue or digital, has had lasting consequences throughout all fields of media studies. Anna Munster (2006), for example, highlights and critiques the notion that we leave our bodies behind when we engage with digital/virtual technologies. Similar arguments come up in critical race scholarship on digital media, where people like Wendy Chun (2012) and Lisa Nakamura (2008) have shown that the utopia of an internet where no one is constrained by their bodily features—and the cultural attitudes around those—was an impossible fiction from the very beginning. The body was always already there, and we are finally paying attention to it again.

And it is not just our human bodies that are there; the digital objects we engage with
and research are bodies, too. They are as material as we are, although certainly in different ways. Katherine Hayles (2004), speaking of electronic hypertexts, argues that "a view that insists that texts are immaterial...impedes the development of theoretical frameworks capable of understanding electronic literature as media-specific practices that require new modes of analysis and criticism" (71). In response to this view, she reconceptualizes materiality as "the interplay between a text's physical characteristics and its signifying strategies" (72). She elaborates further:

[4.8] In this view of materiality, it is not merely an inert collection of physical properties but a dynamic quality that emerges from the interplay between the text as a physical artifact, its conceptual content, and the interpretive activities of readers and writers. Materiality thus cannot be specified in advance; rather, it occupies a borderland—or better, performs as connective tissue—joining the physical and mental, the artifact and the user. (72, emphasis in original)

[4.9] The question I asked a few paragraphs ago may be rephrased: How does the archive's materiality, in its interaction with the researcher's lived materiality, affect researchers and their research? The explicit connection between affect theory and archive studies is a fairly recent one, as the aforementioned ignorance of bodies, quite often rooted in a "modernist construction" of objective science and "gendered notions of knowledge production" (Cifor 2016, 11–12), has been predominant in many humanistic discourses for decades now. Feminist and queer cultural scholars generally understand affect as "a force that creates a relationship (conscious or otherwise) between a body (individual or collective) and the world" (Cifor 2016, 10). Affect thus precedes and shapes one's subjective, embodied experience of the world, and theorizing this pre-experiential force in such terms opens up a space to think critically about the sensible links between bodies and discourses. Oftentimes, the concept is explicitly connected to feelings of love, affection, and, of course, to fandom (cf. Chin and Morimoto 2013). After all, one of the primary goals of the research done in fan studies is to understand the affective relations fans build up with their (media) object of choice and how they express that affection through fan fiction, fan art, and cosplay. Such relations are clearly visible in what Paul Long and colleagues call "affective archives" (2017, 61). Their examples are public archives of popular music, but similarly overt affective relations can be found in Camp's (2012) study of a black photographer's archive and in Marika Cifor's "affective archival encounter" (2015, 645) with a trans activist's hair in a trans archive. Each of these cases elucidates how deeply personal, embodied encounters relate to broader social discourses.

[4.10] As I have hopefully sufficiently demonstrated, affect and hierarchy are inseparable, and both feature heavily in the archives we visit as researchers. However, in the past, prominent scholars of affect such as Brian Massumi have disconnected ideology and affect entirely (cf. Leys 2011), which raises skepticism on my part—and, naturally, also on the part of the feminist and queer scholars who emphasize that "affects are key to the ways in which power is constituted, circulated and mobilized" (Cifor 2016, 10). We see that the impossible promise of the archive is never far, even (or especially?) in online archives. This goes well beyond, although it still includes, the rhetoric of preservation and conservation that pervades their discourse (cf. Lothian 2013). The archival ideology is deeply and inevitably embedded
in the structure itself and therefore in its materiality. In this sense, affect cannot entirely precede ideology because that which facilitates and creates affect is already ideology laden. When we are in the archive, we cannot escape our being affected by it—we can only become aware and accept our responsibility.

5. How archives affect (the researcher)

[5.1] In this last section, I want to turn to autoethnography and describe my own experience with research in online fan-made archives, which I conducted in late 2017 and early 2018, to illustrate one way that the theories and insights put forward in the preceding paragraphs may be put to use. I presumably have provided enough clarification as to why (the researcher's) bodily affect is an important part of discussions about ethics and methodology in fan studies archival research, but how these considerations should be put into practice may remain somewhat vague. I do not provide any definitive strategies for application—my intention is mostly to provoke further thought and critical self-reflection about how the materiality of online fan-made archives shapes our affective, embodied experience of/in it, and how we can negotiate this personal experience in an ethically responsible manner.

[5.2] I am using examples closely related to my own research interest in what I call "fan-made paratextual archives" (Jansen 2018, 2) for Bethesda Game Studios franchise The Elder Scrolls (1994–), a series of epic fantasy role-playing video games set in the Tolkienesque realm of Tamriel. The archives in question are most prominently "narrative databases" where instead of "representing [the] 'plot' [of The Elder Scrolls] through causality, fans represent it spatially, using the inherent hypertextuality of the web to create connections between narrative elements" (Booth 2016, 85). They also host a variety of texts and materials from the game worlds themselves, most prominently in-game books and transcribed dialogues from nonplayer characters in addition to active fan forums and sections explicitly dedicated to a type of fan-scholarly narrative fan fiction—hence the emphasis on their paratextuality. I have termed the fannish practices of gathering, categorization, and interpretation, which collectively lead to the establishment and maintenance of these paratextual archives, "archontic fandom" (Jansen 2018, 2). In this context, the explicit connection to Derrida's "archontic principle" (1995, 10) serves to highlight the establishment and reinforcement of power relations that come with the construction of any archive, fannish or otherwise.

[5.3] The specific websites I have analyzed in the past are the Imperial Library (https://www.imperial-library.info/) and the Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages (UESP; https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Main_Page); the former runs on the Drupal content management system (CMS), and the latter is found on MediaWiki. Already in their choice of CMS can we clearly see the roots of fundamental differences in how these websites operate as archives and in what ways their users are able to engage with them, but there are many other choices made by the websites' administrators that have equally significant effects. Thus, these different materialities provide a useful way to demonstrate the role affect plays in my personal experience and interpretation of each archive.

[5.4] Generally speaking, the archive—or rather, the user interface of that archive—appears on a screen and immediately confronts me with a broad scope of possible entries. Within one
or two clicks, I can make all the subcategories of the archive's corpus reveal themselves to me; the online archive opens easily and somewhat overwhelmingly at first. Especially on UESP (figure 1), which follows the wiki format, I find my eyes shooting rapidly between hyperlinks (highlighted as blue text) instead of reading the text itself, implicitly aware of the wealth of knowledge hidden behind each one. A single blue-tinted word contains, in theory, hundreds more within it, and each of those words can potentially contain equally as many. As a consequence, I am never fully present on the current page but always already considering my next move, fully prepared to interrupt and dismiss the text in favor of another at the blink of an eye and the click of a mouse button.

Figure 1. The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages' home page.

[5.5] Occasionally, I will hover my cursor over an interesting-looking link to see if the page it refers to matches the word(s) it is embedded in—another distraction from the text itself, but one that does provide insight into how the archive has been structured. This tendency toward distraction has been noted to be a rather common feature in "web reading," which often includes practices such as "hyperlinks that draw attention away from the linear flow of an article, very short forms such as tweets that encourage distracted forms of reading, small habitual actions such as clicking and navigating that increase the cognitive load, and, most pervasively, the enormous amount of material to be read, leading to the desire to skim everything because there is far too much material to pay close attention to anything for very long" (Hayles 2012, 63).

[5.6] We might also say that the hyperlinked structure of UESP encourages "hyper reading" (Hayles 2012, 61), whereas the Imperial Library (figure 2) facilitates more traditional close reading. That is, the Library provides far fewer distractions of this nature through its sparse use of hyperlinks and more subdued red-and-gray color scheme, and thus allows for a more intimate engagement with its individual texts on their own terms. Within the text itself, there is nothing else to draw my thoughts to future actions. Somehow, the Library is quiet. Far more often than on UESP, I find my right hand moving from my mouse to the arrow keys on my keyboard when I need to scroll down the page. The Library encourages no other action than reading. This difference is quite significant: when I read texts on UESP, I am seemingly broadening my knowledge, whereas the same act in the Library feels more like deepening my knowledge.
[5.7] Let me take one particular text as an example to demonstrate even more concretely what the effects of these different materialities might be: an in-universe book archived on these websites by fans of the *Elder Scrolls* game series known as "Where Were You When the Dragon Broke?" In the Imperial Library (figure 3), the book is presented without any additions to the text itself: I am reading this work in relative isolation from the rest of the archive, although the archive is always available to me as a toolbar in the left part of my screen. I can consider the words carefully, there is space to pause, to think, and continue reading—especially if I choose to activate the "printer-friendly version," which displays the book as plain text on a white background and leaves behind any visible connection to the archive itself. The text stands as a unique work, it claims authority over its subject matter, and any further information regarding its contents I will have to search for myself. That is, if I even know where to look: paratextual elements like tags and prefaces can help guide my reading experience, but they might also not align with my interests at all and leave me lost in the archival maze.

[5.8] The same book on UESP is crowded with blue words and phrases (figure 4); almost every single sentence contains one or more hyperlinks. The archive makes itself visible and tangible to me not only by surrounding the text but also by invading it, imposing itself upon me, tempting me with an opportunity to journey on through its digital corridors at every possible turn. Rather than a single text, "Where Were You…?" becomes a collection of portals, more valuable to me for the amount of potential avenues of travel than for the power of its prose or the mythological implications of its contents. When I am on UESP, I am frequently reminded of a teacher who keeps interrupting my autonomous workflow to explain concepts that I did not even know I needed. One-tenth of those interruptions are
potentially useful to me; the rest are just interruptions.

Figure 4. "Where Were You…?" as found on the Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages (https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Lore:Where_Were_You..._Dragon_Broke).

[5.9] Another consequence of the difference in CMS is that the Imperial Library features far less "registrational interactivity" (Lister et al. 2009, 23) on the part of its users. Most significantly, there is no opportunity for users to edit articles freely as there would be on a wiki like UESP. The Library partially sacrifices interactivity and the radical "forever in flux" nature of other online paratextual archives (De Kosnik 2016, 275) for a more robust system that rather seems to approach the Derridean archival structure as "a 'house' whose contents are under 'arrest'" (274), governed by reasonable and knowledgeable individual fans. De Kosnik states that digital media objects such as online archives in general "contain multiple affordances for archive building" and that "many online archives...are explicitly dedicated to the preservation of...the manifold variants that proliferate in the wake of the releases of source texts" (276).

[5.10] Of course, those same affordances—especially registrational interactivity—also allow for more fleeting content by facilitating the continuous revision and deletion of such fan-written texts, both by their authors and by others. Not only that, but the conversation around this process is kept much closer to the text on UESP than in the Library: on any given page, I can access the history tab and then the discussion tab, which will sometimes contain dozens of entries about what should or should not be on the page. Quite often, these discussions concern segments of the page that are now gone entirely or have been assimilated into different sections. Not infrequently will such visits to the discussion tab lead me to look for the mentioned passages within the text—they suddenly seem more interesting for the sheer fact that someone else mentioned them.

[5.11] In the Library, comments can be left on certain pages, but this is a rare occurrence and never happens on pages that only contain transcribed in-game materials. The conversation is in the forums, in a thread specifically created for pointing out errors and lacunae to the website's administrators, the Librarians. Usually, these interactions are short and civil, and generally unexciting. Never does the Library's structure allow for anything as (mildly) sensational as the debate about racism found on the UESP's discussion page for "Oblivion:Redguard," which in itself also forms a record of an incident of racist trolling on the page that occurred in November 2009 (https://en.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion_talk:Redguard).

[5.12] In contrast to the Library, navigating UESP feels like much more of a fleeting and
hasty nature. Paradoxically, as an archive UESP gives off an air of ephemerality. Indeed, it has been suggested that we cannot consider "encyclopedic projects such as Wikis to be archives, since they mostly offer factual information and commentary about cultural texts, and not the texts themselves" (De Kosnik 2016, 76). However—and this is perhaps somewhat controversial—my work includes wikis like UESP into the scope of the notion of archive because I consider the factual write-ups and commentary about the cultural texts they are concerned with part of the narrative universe that is being archived. Those fan-made paratexts are subjected to the archontic principle as much as, if not more than, the official texts (Jansen 2018, 7), which qualifies wikis as archives even regardless of the aforementioned.

Moreover, as is often the case with wikis about fictional media franchises (especially video games), UESP also offers the cultural texts themselves just like the more traditionally archive-like Library does, even if it does so in a slightly different form. The Library, for its part, is not an open-source archive, which makes it more like a classical archive than some of its peers: just as a public library would not allow its visitors to spontaneously add books to its collection, or just as a national archival institute would not accept any amateur historian to make a contribution, neither does the Library facilitate unmoderated input from its users. This aforementioned robustness makes for a notably different relationship with the archive. As a visitor and researcher, I can browse as freely and anonymously as I can on UESP, but I cannot interact directly with the material to the extent that I can on UESP. To speak in generalizing terms, if UESP is reflective of an archival paradigm shift toward "participatory archiving" (Cook 2013, 113–16), the Imperial Library shows that the older paradigms of authoritative evidence-based and memory-based archiving (106–9) can still flourish in digital media. If UESP is ephemeral, the Library is intimidating.

Although there is still a power structure in place within the UESP community, this hierarchy is much subtler (and much flatter) than in the Library, where my status as a mere visitor is clear at every point. In combination with my own knowledge about the websites' histories—UESP is older, but the Library has a more direct relationship with the developers of The Elder Scrolls—browsing the Library acquires a slight element of reverence. I cannot help but feel that the Library's materiality affects my disposition toward it. I find myself considering the Imperial Library of a higher prestige, in some way more reliable than the Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages despite the fact that there is a very high amount of overlap between the two in terms of textual content. Perhaps most telling of this bias is the sheer fact that I am inclined to write about being in the Library but on UESP.

6. Situated (in) archives

Although some of my observations are surely generalizable across the Elder Scrolls fan community, my experience of these fan-made archives is not universal. No single experience ever is, and that is precisely the point. When we conduct the kind of (auto)ethnographic research that is prevalent in fan studies, we should not attempt to play what Donna Haraway calls a "god-trick" (1991, 189) and conveniently forget our own situatedness within fandom and culture at large (cf. Hills 2012). Conversely, in accounting for our position we should also take care to not reduce that account to an "I-trick" either, which Gloria Wekker
describes as "a rhetorical gesture in which personal announcements about a hegemonic self are made within an identity-political context, without making any attempts to break out of that context" (1996, 64, translation mine).

[6.2] While these critiques were originally aimed at white feminist scholars who wrote about their own positioning at the intersections of gender and race, they are evidently applicable in our current context, too. That is, simply calling attention to our double membership of academia and fandom does not suffice; we should demonstrate what these qualifications mean for our practice and our own approach to our research object of choice, not only recognizing our limitations but also actively working to move beyond them. For instance,

[6.3] I should state that my interest in these matters is mostly driven by my preference for the Elder Scrolls games and their lore, not by any previous deep engagement with the communities on-site or the archives themselves. This position initially posed some problems regarding the accurate portrayal of this fandom: while I personally ascribe certain meanings to the archival structures within which users express their fandom, it is important that these ascriptions should at least be informed by the views of the community itself and do proper justice to the culture they have collectively created. (Jansen 2018, 6)

[6.4] While this balancing of emic and etic interpretations is already one of the most generally familiar concerns underlying ethnographic endeavors in many fields, the specific self-reflexive angle that I have argued for throughout this article would be a valuable addition to any scholar-fan's methodological tool kit when it comes to archival research. At the same time, it is also important to keep in mind that we cannot know ourselves entirely, just as any account of the affects of the archive is necessarily going to be incomplete. The thing about both affect and bias is that they are by definition unconscious and difficult to grasp until attention is called to their existence—and they often remain so after they have been exposed. The example I have provided only accounts for the potential affects and biases that I was aware of at the time of writing, while many different ones may still be unknown and likely unknowable to me. We should not let this inevitable incompleteness discourage us from trying, of course. A partial, situated, yet responsible account of fannish archives is better than one that presents itself as completely objective and impartial, or than none at all.

7. Acknowledgments

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8. References


Theory

Ethical and privacy considerations for research using online fandom data

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[0.1] Abstract—As online fandom continues to grow, so do the public data created by fan creations and interactions. With researchers and journalists regularly engaging with those data (and not always asking permission), many fans are concerned that their content might end up in front of the wrong audience, which could lead to privacy violations or even harassment from within or outside of fandom. To better understand fan perspectives on the collection and analysis of public data as a methodology, we conducted both an interview study and a survey to solicit responses that would help provide a broader understanding of fandom's privacy norms as they relate to the ethical use of data. We use these findings to revisit and recommend best practices for working with public data within fandom.

[0.2] Keywords—Data privacy; Ethics; LGBTQ; Online communities; Public data; Social norms


1. Introduction

[1.1] Transformative fandom has long occupied the grey spaces online. Because fandom is both entirely open to the public and living in the cracks of obscurity, accessing its communities sometimes feels like knowing the secret knock to get into the speakeasy tucked away in the back alley. People come inside. They order their favorite special at the bar ("I'll have a 'And They Were Roommates,' please"). They make idle conversation with other patrons as they wait for the next performer or their favorite bartender to come along. At the end of the night, these visitors return home, friends and family often none the wiser to where they were or the specific transactions of their nightlife, though any of them could have easily come to the speakeasy if they had only known where to look.

[1.2] The metaphor neatly encapsulates online fandom life—though in the digital world those interactions also leave data traces, and knowing who has seen them is not as easy as looking around the room to see who else is there. The transactions of their nightlife have
been broadcasted the entire time, leaving a trail of public data that is accessible, identifiable, and valuable.

[1.3] Even outside the context of fandom, many people are unsure at best as to whether or not their data are publicly viewable and how they might be accessed by third parties (Proferes 2017). Journalists, for example, might include a public tweet in an article to represent public opinion on a news-relevant issue. Meanwhile, internet researchers are increasingly collecting public data that may seem ephemeral to social media users but in fact lingers, and many of those users are entirely unaware that their data can legally be collected for research purposes (Fiesler and Proferes 2018).

[1.4] The disconnect between people, their data, and how others use them is complicated by the fact that researchers disagree over norms for studying public data as well as a definition for what public even means (Vitak, Shilton, and Asktorab 2016). For example, while some researchers might argue that public data are freely accessible and therefore usable (Zimmer 2010), fan studies scholars often argue that scholars ought to inform or ask people about using their data, regardless of whether or not they are accessible (Nielsen 2016). While not all disciplines are in agreement, scholarship on the ethics of studying fandom has emphasized the need to preserve fan privacy (Busse and Hellekson 2012), prioritize transparency in research (Bennett 2018), and gain permission from fans before referencing their work in academic research (Busse and Hellekson 2012). These principles often sit in contrast to how many disciplines approach the ethics of using public data in their own work.

[1.5] Fan studies cover a wide variety of domains and methods. For example, fan scholars have provided literary analysis of fan works (Coppa 2017), analysis of human behavior (Guerrero-Pico, Establés, and Ventura 2018), and an understanding of different learning that occurs within fan communities (Black 2005; Evans et al. 2017). Bethan Jones (2016) has identified two primary traditions of approaching fan studies research: (1) literary analysis, when the content creator is assumed inaccessible and a fan work is the subject of study, and (2) human subjects research, in which the creator is the subject of study—whether with consent (e.g., interviews or surveys) or without consent (e.g., collecting public trace data).

[1.6] Traditional human subjects research, where consent must be established for data collection, often falls under the purview of ethical review bodies such as institutional review boards (IRBs) at US universities. However, many IRBs consider the collection of public data to not constitute human subjects research because it typically does not involve direct interaction with humans or collection of personally identifiable information (Vitak et al. 2017). Perhaps in part because of this line drawn by IRBs, a common perception among researchers is that the most important question for using data is whether they are public, regardless of other relevant factors such as users' expectations of privacy (Zimmer 2010). Our goal with the work here is to bridge discussions in fan studies with broader conversations about use of public data in research across all disciplines.

[1.7] Fan studies are an interesting context for examining the intersection of research ethics and privacy, in part because of the long-standing social norms that dictate sharing and privacy behavior (Dym and Fiesler 2018a). We also think that it is important that fans have a
voice in determining best practices for researchers. To that end, we conducted an interview study and a large-scale survey in which we asked about privacy and ethical concerns in relation to fandom and public data. By fandom, we mean transformative fandom, or an online fan community that both creates and shares fan works that are transformative of source material through writing fan fiction, creating fan art, or other creative practices.

[1.8] Our findings further illustrate the concerns that fandom communities have about privacy, safety, and the integrity of their content. This includes (1) special concern for fans from marginalized backgrounds (especially LGBTQ fans) who may face serious consequences from privacy violations; (2) fear of harassment within fandom; and (3) the importance of positionality within and understanding of fandom for researchers. Our findings contribute to specific recommendations for working with public data generated within fandom, including special care to avoid amplifying fan content and ways that researchers can care for the trust they receive. These findings stand to inform broader discussions on what constitutes the ethical use of public data within other types of research as well, particularly for vulnerable populations.

2. Background

[2.1] Determining the risks and benefits of using public data is a complex process, especially when those data may incorporate vulnerable communities or privacy-sensitive contexts. Fandom falls into these categories due to not only the large number of LGBTQ participants (Dym and Fiesler, 2018b) but also different stigmas associated with fandom. Fan data also have a history of negatively affecting their owners when unearthed to the broader world (Busse and Hellekson 2012). We informed our study with prior literature that connects work about research using public data, the current status of privacy and data within fandom, and the contextual nature of online privacy.

[2.2] Though using public data, particularly from social media, without consent is common practice—whether by researchers, journalists, or marketers—social media users are often confused about the nature of those data, whether they are public, and what the rules are surrounding their use and how far those data might spread (Proferes 2017). With respect to research specifically, most people are unaware that researchers collect data from platforms such as Twitter (Fiesler and Proferes 2018).

[2.3] Even when anonymized by not including usernames, content from social media collected and shared in research articles can be easily traced back to its creator. Ayers and colleagues (2018) reported that 72 percent of research articles from a corpus of medical research quoted a tweet that could be traced back to that Twitter user 84 percent of the time. Nonresearchers have taken note of this issue as well, with at least one journalist contacting people whose tweets appeared in a study only to find out they had no idea their posts had been quoted (Fiesler and Proferes 2018). Research has also shown that Twitter users prefer that journalists not quote their tweets directly and instead make inferences from large, anonymous data sets (Dubois, Gruzd, and Jacobson 2018).

[2.4] Even when data are not public, social media data might still be available to researchers
without the users' knowledge; for example, we have seen negative public reactions to being studied without explicit consent by companies such as Facebook and Dropbox (boyd 2016; Dreyfuss 2018). Controversies surrounding unexpected uses of data (e.g., Cambridge Analytica) are increasingly commonplace as a result of a gap in understanding between users, their data, and entities that make secondary uses of those data (Fiesler and Hallinan 2018). Though prior work has shown that people are generally more comfortable with their data being used for university research as compared with governmental or commercial uses (Williams, Burnap, and Sloan 2017), their level of comfort varies greatly depending on contextual factors such as what content is being used, who the researchers are, or how the data are being analyzed and for what purpose—far beyond just whether data are public or not (Fiesler and Proferes 2018). However, consideration for these factors may not be commonplace among internet researchers, who lack guidance from traditional ethics review bodies such as IRBs (Vitak et al. 2017) and do not have agreement for best practices within their own communities (Vitak, Shilton, and Ashktorab 2016).

[2.5] Fan studies occupies a somewhat unique position in this regard, with Transformativeworksand Cultures recommending that researchers gain permission from content creators before using fan works or blog posts in a journal article (Hellekson and Busse 2009). Fan studies, however, became a subdivision of internet research when fandoms moved online, with fan studies' history rooted in ethnographic and participant-observer studies of communities (Jenkins 1988). While some researchers approach fandom as participant observers, others come to fandom as literary scholars. In this case, researchers draw from public data that were generated by a person, and as such may contain information that the person might not consent to having analyzed outside of its intended community (Reid 2016). Unlike traditional texts, fan works are personal and tied to the people and communities they are created in as living data, so they carry consequences with their use and analysis (Jensen 2016).

[2.6] Fans expect that their content will stay within fandom (Busse and Hellekson 2012), and fan studies scholars often enforce their own expectations of obtaining a fan's permission before discussing or researching their fan works (Fathallah 2016; Reid 2016; Zubernis and Davis 2016). Newer investigations into fan studies have touched on large, quantitative data gained through surveys, noting the importance of online surveys and a researcher's responsibility to communicate information back to participants (Bennett 2018), and qualitative researchers advocate for a goodwill approach to ethically study fan communities using ethnographic methods (Kelley 2016).

[2.7] Recent discussions on ethical fan studies have aligned with Brittany Kelley's perspective, following a participant-observer model of research (Busse 2018, 9). However, there are also moments in fandom when the fans first approach does not always make for the best scholarship. Natasha Whiteman (2016) has highlighted the "localised nature of ethical decision-making in qualitative research" (309), encouraging researchers to make case-by-case ethical judgments rather than universal rules regarding human subjects research. Covert research might be necessary when an online community's expectation of privacy contrasts with an ethical obligation to research the community (Whiteman 2012), or when a community might be actively hostile toward the researcher (Chess and Shaw 2015;
The duality of fandom data as both a private and public object can be framed within the concept of contextual integrity (Nissenbaum 2004), meaning that a user's expectation to privacy and the sensitivity of their data are contextual, always, and are dependent on different motivating factors. For example, a person in fandom who identifies as transgender online but presents as cisgender outside of fandom might have more significant privacy concerns than a cisgender, heterosexual person who presents as such, both within and outside of fandom. Someone who must maintain a public image separate from adult themes might be more protective of their erotic fan works than someone who professionally writes erotic romance novels.

Helen Nissenbaum summarizes these concerns: "Almost everything—things that we do, events that occur, transactions that take place—happens in a context not only of place but of politics, convention, and cultural expectation" (2004, 137). This concept has found its way into some ethical best practices. For example, the Association of Internet Researchers recommends, "The greater the vulnerability of the community / author / participant, the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect [them]" (Markham and Buchanan 2012, 4). This key guideline posits that context matters in research.

For example, Bethan Jones (2016) has explored considerations a researcher must take into account when studying antifandom, or fandom content that is negative toward a particular topic. Jones highlighted that drawing attention to antifans, especially those who make disparaging or problematic statements, increases the risk that they could suffer more harassment than they might otherwise encounter.

Jones's article identifies one of the many contexts in which public data gathered from fandom might make someone more vulnerable than they initially considered. Previous research has also highlighted how LGBTQ members of fandom are particularly vulnerable to privacy risks, especially if they are still in the closet (Dym and Fiesler 2018b). To better understand how public data are contextual within fandom and the steps researchers can take to minimize their impact, we explored people's thoughts on privacy, safety, and ethics within their fan communities. Our findings explore the risks of research amplifying public data from vulnerable communities.

3. Methods

For the first stage of our research, we recruited participants for an interview study, posting a recruitment ad on social media sites that are gathering places for fans (including Twitter and Tumblr) and seeking fandom participants at least eighteen years old who were willing to talk to us about privacy, ethics, and fandom. In particular, we asked participants about their perceptions of researchers and journalists interacting with fandom, considering that these two groups often repurpose public data for secondary use.

In our recruitment material, we specified that interviews would take place remotely over a participant's preferred communication service (e.g., Skype, phone, instant message)
and could be voice or text based. Our interview protocol, designed to discuss themes in fandom that might come up in otherwise everyday conversation about fan communities, was approved by our university's IRB as low risk.

[3.3] The participants were given a consent form before the scheduled interview, which we then verbally walked them through, emphasizing that the participant could stop the interview at any time, reschedule, or request to have some or all of their interview data removed from the study at any time. Responding to interview volunteers on a first-come-first-served basis, we conducted twenty-five interviews in total. Of our participants, twenty-one identified as part of the LGBTQ community. In addition, our participants identified in the majority as female, and in large surveys we found that more of our participants identified as nonbinary and transgender than as cisgender men. Participants also identified as majority white and US residents. These demographics are similar to other studies about fandom (Fiesler and Bruckman 2014; Fiesler, Morrison, and Bruckman 2016; Nielsen 2016).

[3.4] We conducted semistructured interviews (Seidman 2013) via voice or instant message depending on the interviewees' preferences. The interviews lasted between twenty-five minutes and ninety minutes, with most averaging sixty minutes in length. After transcribing the interviews, we conducted a thematic analysis of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006), with the authors discussing and converging on emergent themes.

[3.5] From this analysis, we focused on themes central to privacy expectations and etiquette that participants requested of researchers in order to inform the survey questions in which we asked thousands of fan community members about their thoughts on their data, its use, and overall concerns surrounding data privacy. We thus conducted a broader survey targeting multiple aspects of transformative fandom, including privacy and safety concerns. We recruited respondents from Tumblr and Twitter, obtaining 4,117 respondents who identified as fan fiction writers or readers. The participants were required to be at least eighteen years old and had to click through a consent form. The respondent demographics were similar overall to our interviews and to previous fandom studies. In neither study were the participants compensated monetarily, but we provided the option to leave their email address if they wanted to be informed about our results.

[3.6] The respondents answered a number of multiple choice and Likert scale questions, as well as open-answer questions about research ethics and privacy related to online fandom data. We analyzed the open-answer responses qualitatively based on the themes we had already identified from interviews. The quotations included in our findings come from both interview and survey responses, and the participants' identities are anonymized using participant numbers, with PI denoting an interview participant and PS denoting a survey participant.

4. Findings

[4.1] Based on our analysis of the data collected, we found that people within fandom have nuanced and protective views regarding their data and their use by both researchers and journalists. The participants highlighted the ways their data are contextual and might carry
unintended consequences when shared outside of fandom, or even when shared within other parts of fandom. However, the fans also felt trust toward researchers, emphasizing the responsibility that researchers take on to present fan data ethically.

[4.2] These findings identify a risk that research and journalism around fandom carry with them for fan communities—the risk of amplifying fan content to an audience it was never intended for. Amplification can be a problem for other types of online content as well (for example, in a medical context; Ayers et al. 2018), but our findings reveal that the large number of LGBTQ people within fandom generates a unique set of risks. Our participants, whether identifying as LGBTQ themselves or simply thinking about their friends, worried that exposing fandom content to a broader audience could lead to fans being accidentally outed.

[4.3] Whether or not a fan harbored specific fears for how their data might be used against them, a majority of fans worried about the privacy of their data. Out of 4,066 survey participants, fewer than 10 percent reported using their real name in online fandom. The vast majority prefer to use pseudonyms or other methods for obscuring their identity. This practice sits in contrast to social media sites that encourage users to provide real identities when online (Cho 2018), explaining in part why platforms like Facebook are not commonly used in transformative fandom (Dym and Fiesler 2018b). Pseudonyms represent a norm strongly anchored within fan communities, which also benefits young, vulnerable LGBTQ people existing within fandom circles or the digital platforms fandom cohabitates (Cho 2018).

[4.4] Based on our interview data, which revealed common patterns of privacy concerns among fandom participants, we examined the prevalence of these at scale with the survey by providing multiple choice options to the question "Which of these concerns about privacy in fandom do you share?" Only 6.7 percent of participants responded that they did not have privacy concerns at all. Meanwhile, 34.5 percent of participants were concerned about "people in my real life finding out about specific types of content I consume, create, or share," 22 percent about "my real name/identity being 'outed' to other people in fandom," 18 percent about "being outed as a fandom participant to people in real life," and 14 percent about "being outed with respect to another identity (e.g., sexual orientation or gender identity)." Fewer than 5 percent of participants listed "other" privacy concerns; the most common involved how private companies might use their data.

[4.5] Despite these common concerns, only 5.9 percent of participants (235 out of 3,985) stated that they had personally experienced a privacy violation in fandom. The fact still remains that a majority of people in fandom have fears about their privacy being violated. Outsiders coming into fandom, such as researchers and journalists, are susceptible to violating fan privacy if they are unaware of those specific concerns and norms that work to keep fans and their data safe. To unpack these concerns further, next we explore key concepts related to fan communities, public data, and how researchers can continue to engage responsibly with this space.

[4.6] Despite the common ethical heuristic that publicness is the most important factor in
determining whether online data can be part of research (Vitak, Shilton, and Ashktorab 2016), prior work has shown that other contextual factors are also important, such as how the data are analyzed, what kind of data they are, and how they are used (Fiesler and Proferes 2018). Drawing from this prior work as well as topics that came up in interviews, we asked survey participants about different contexts of data use. On a Likert scale of "very uncomfortable" to "very comfortable," participants rated their level of comfort for different uses of both public fan works and public fan discussion. We found that fans are more comfortable with academic research than they are with journalism, and more comfortable with quantitative over qualitative research. Based on open response answers and interviews, these differences seem to track in part to fear of amplification: media articles have more reach than academic articles, and reports of quantitative research are less likely to include identifiable data than reports of qualitative research. Participants also brought up other contextual factors, such as how the article portrays fandom or whether the data themselves are sensitive.

[4.7] However, even for researchers determining what public data may or may not be sensitive, how someone feels about their own data being used might vary depending on their identity or other factors invisible to the researcher. Nissenbaum's (2004) framework of contextual integrity encapsulates this problem—data generated in fandom will be contextual to the owner and their specific privacy needs. For example, someone living alone or with a supportive partner might be less worried about their privacy than someone still living with their parents or someone in a career that requires a certain public image. Again, LGBTQ identity emerged as a strong factor in privacy concerns. When talking about the importance of their privacy in fandom, our interview participants often recounted past and current experiences where fandom functioned as a safe space to explore their LGBTQ identity:

[4.8] I think that fandom for me was such an outlet… I grew up in a small island, a very small community and to talk about homosexuality was the kind of thing that would get you put in the cupboard…And I think that for a baby LGBTQ person…. fandom is a fantastic arena for learning about the world. (PI-17)

[4.9] When you have younger individuals, privacy and anonymity of sexuality is huge. People who are out online…are not out to their friends and family, but present themselves as who they identify as online. Which this brings in an extra layer of problems, because if they're identified, this outs them to their network. (PI-10)

[4.10] When PI-17 was first involved in fandom, it was their one outlet to explore LGBTQ identity. Fandom continues to represent a safe space for LGBTQ people, though fear of being outed as LGBTQ is still a major concern among users, as PI-10 described. And this fear is not unfounded. It is easy for researchers and journalists to release sensitive data that, despite being anonymized, can still reidentify study participants (Ayers et al. 2018). In our own findings, several participants had stories of online content being amplified beyond fandom and leading to unintended consequences:

[4.11] I have a friend who was outed by being featured in a local newspaper
kissing her girlfriend when the paper did not get the permission of my friend nor her girlfriend. It was disastrous to say the least. Having worked for a newspaper, I know that isn't protocol, but it's still a risk run when you exist in a space where others have no regard for the ethical standards or basic consent agreements.

(PI-15)

[4.12] Though these anecdotes or fears often related to journalism, their concerns about personal information being shared outside fandom can apply to academic research as well (Fiesler and Proferes 2018). However, the type of content a fan produces and interacts with, beyond personal details, can cause problems as well. Certain portrayals of fandom might cause harm to a fan simply by association with it, and our participants were wary of having their content presented outside of its intended context and of potentially amplifying that content to the wrong audience.

[4.13] Prior work in fan studies about research ethics has focused on respecting a person's preference for attributing their pseudonym to the referenced fan work (Busse and Hellekson 2012; Busse and Farley 2013). This issue highlights competing values: preserving a fan's privacy versus giving someone credit where they might desire it. Privacy and anonymity are important, but fandom also has a strong social norm toward attribution (Tushnet 2007; Fiesler and Bruckman 2014). However, this ethical tension is not unique to fandom; in all human subjects research there are cases when, despite traditional norms to always anonymize participants, it may be appropriate to give participants credit for their work and commentary (Bruckman, Luther, and Fiesler 2015; Fiesler, Morrison, and Bruckman 2016). The norm within fan studies has been to leave this decision up to the fan creator. However, there are also cases of research using public data where either the data set is too large to make asking for consent for every data point feasible, or where it may be impossible to track down the content creators.

[4.14] To explore fan perspectives on this research practice, we asked survey participants if they would want their pseudonym attributed if their fan works or fan discussion posts were used in different contexts, including research, journalism, and use by other fans (e.g., reposting or remixing). Participants could answer yes, no, or "it depends" with the request to explain why. For both fan discussion and fan works, about one-third of respondents chose "it depends," again emphasizing the contextual nature of these decisions.

[4.15] Unsurprisingly, given the existing fandom norms around attribution (Tushnet 2007), 90 percent of participants insisted on attribution when other fans use their content, either resharied or remixed. However, it was also slightly more common for fans to want attribution (by fannish pseudonym) when their work is used for research (60 percent) as well as for journalism (51 percent). Despite the majority of participants indicating a desire for attribution, a third of all answers indicated qualifying statements for when this practice would be acceptable.

[4.16] Open-answer responses around attribution as well as other ethics and privacy-related questions also emphasized important contexts for when using data at all may or may not be acceptable. In the sample of responses that we analyzed qualitatively, we found that
participants cared deeply about whether their work was being used in research that would benefit fandom. While many responses contained an altruistic sense of preserving a positive image of fandom, responses also focused on the dangers that accompany amplification—in particular that negative studies toward fandom could bring negative attention to fans. If their data were going to be used in a research study or a news article they did not agree with (that was harsh toward them or extremely negative about fandom overall) the participants were far more reluctant to allow their data to be used, let alone be attributed to the associated work.

[4.17] If the news article were negative or sneering in tone, as many have been in the past, I don't want to deal with its readership finding my fandom accounts. (PS-4009)

[4.18] What [is] the publication that published an article about fanfiction? Is it fan-friendly, honestly interested in fan culture? Or is it written to mock fanfic? In the latter case, I wouldn't want my writing in it at all, and definitely not with my name attached to it. (PS-4032)

[4.19] Though letting the participants dictate the type of findings that come from research could be a threat to scientific integrity, for many participants the concern comes from a fear of harm as a result of the research, regardless of a researcher's intentions. These are consequences that can be mitigated regardless of the argument of any particular article.

[4.20] Interview participants also explained the nuanced reasons behind keeping certain online activities separated. Many participants expressed concern about not wanting people in their real lives to know about their fandom life, because of the stigma associated with fandom, certain types of content, or a different type of identity they present online. Others noted that presenting a certain persona within fandom might also rely on keeping their fandom identity separated from other professional contexts.

[4.21] I want to be seen as approachable by fandom and approachable by professional entities in their respective spheres. I don't necessarily want my employers…to know that I dedicated well over a year to a 400,000 word queer fanfiction for Overwatch. It might seem like I'm "wasting" my spare time…But in that same mindset, I don't want my academia and professionalism to make the fandoms I'm involved with view me as a snob. (PI-15)

[4.22] Being viewed as a snob, as PI-15 put it, was one of the milder concerns participants expressed, but this highlights a key concern among participants. Certain fandom activities are intended for certain audiences, just as activities outside of fandom are intended for nonfandom audiences. Overwhelmingly the participants stated that they did not necessarily fear what a research study or journalistic article might do with their data, but they did fear how other members of fandom might treat them in response. People writing about or engaging with sensitive and troubling topics often reported experiencing anti or anonymous hate in addition to threats to their physical safety, often through their personal identifying information being doxxed (publicly published) to broader fan communities.

[4.23] Though many parts of transformative fandom can be much more positive than other
online communities (Campbell et al. 2016), there are still toxic fandom spaces. Sometimes, that toxic behavior can be self-regulated by strong community norms within a fan space (Guerrero-Pico, Establés, and Ventura 2018), but those negative behaviors still find their way in. When discussing fear of amplification, many participants expressed concern over harassment within fandom. Many survey participants shared the perception that they might be harassed if the wrong corner of fandom found their social posts. Some interview participants even asked that in the course of this research that we take care to protect their identities (e.g., by not listing the fandoms they are involved with) to avoid backlash from the community, even if their data were anonymized.

[4.24] Have you been in fandom lately? I don't want to be stalked or lectured online for accidentally having a "wrong" opinion. (PS-4075)

[4.25] Fandom has become even more hostile in recent years, so with increased visibility comes increased likelihood of brigading over perceived threats, whether or not it's warranted. If the wrong person talks about your work on Twitter or Tumblr, you're in for hell. (PS-3976)

[4.26] Interview participants described concern over anti culture in fandom, where certain fan groups would maliciously target other fans who were participating in ways they did not approve of. For example, one person stated that they refused to talk about a certain pairing they like on Tumblr because ants had a history of harassing and doxxing people who enjoyed the pairing. Anti behavior introduces a new set of concerns for researchers to be aware of. If crediting a person's pseudonym, directly quoting their posts, or identifying specific fandoms as part of a contentious topic might draw negative attention, then what precautions are appropriate to take?

[4.27] In traditional human subjects research we only gather and publish information a participant is willing to disclose, but this protection is only in place when a researcher is engaging with participants directly. When using public data instead, these protections are absent. However, we found that overwhelmingly participants placed their trust in individual researchers to make the right, ethical choices regarding their data.

[4.28] People in fandom are generally protective of their privacy. However, participants from both our surveys and interviews expressed a certain amount of trust in researchers that was absent from their views on other types of outsiders (e.g., journalists) engaging with their data.

[4.29] I personally don't trust news media to use quotes in context or to take the subject at all seriously. In academic settings, if there is a good peer and ethics review, I'm much more comfortable. (PS-2762)

[4.30] I'm pro researchers coming into fandom and asking questions. I'm against journalists coming in and stealing things. If a journalist wants to ask things, I suppose that's okay. But, again, their questions tend to be more invasive and try to catch people out on things that I find offensive. (PI-2)
These statements highlight the perception our survey participants shared toward researchers—they are perceived as not looking for the "gotcha" statements that the participants associated with many journalists. And while the participants acknowledged that there are journalists who come from within fandom and do good work, they generally trusted researchers more broadly. This trust can complicate the responsibility a researcher has with participant data. As participant PS-2762 stated, fans might be more comfortable with an academic setting, specifically with a peer-reviewed study, than they would be with a reporter.

Another reason for this comfort was the perception that media articles reach a broader audience than academic work, making the risks accompanying amplification more severe. As PS-1091 stated, unlike academic research, journalism reaches a "public audience."

Given our findings about the importance of individual context in making ethical decisions about fandom data, a fundamental issue with collecting data without consent is that the researcher might have no idea what this context might be. Accordingly, many participants expressed that using their data from fandom without permission was unacceptable.

Journalists and scientists need to ask [people in fandom] before popularizing, publicizing, or publishing other people's tweets or tumblr posts. Anything else is unethical. (PS-2230)

However, other participants recognized that there were ways for researchers or journalists to have a better understanding of context, insisting that anyone making use of fan data should spend time within a fan community before collecting from it. Not only would this help them recognize what kind of content is acceptable for sharing, but it might also help outsiders represent fandom more fairly. The participants had more trust for researchers and journalists who come from within fandom.

I prefer it when [researchers] have a sense of what's going on. That sort of notion of like, I'm not a voyeur. I do think an insider perspective is important...I think your positionally, with regards to the community that you're studying, is important to consider. I prefer it when people are one of us. (PI-21)

I think it's helpful if whoever is coming in to research or write about fandom has a bit of a fandom background. [Fandoms] can be completely different from each other too, so that's sometimes a little hard to say. I'm thinking of that class about fan fiction at the university...where some fic got on the syllabus and the writers weren't told and they were not happy about that, because the people commenting were not observing the same community norms as in the fic writers' fandoms. (PI-9)

As PI-9 pointed out, even those with the best intentions might not understand the norms of a community—norms that are often established to help protect the fans who are sharing their content. However, all of the concerns that our findings revealed could potentially be mitigated with some thoughtful best practices for using fan data—or public data in any context.
5. Best practices for using online fandom data

[5.1] In recommending best practices for public data use, we discuss the importance of obtaining permission to use public data and obscuring that public data to prevent reidentification. We also discuss when properly attributing public data back to someone might be appropriate, as well as ways of giving back to a community after collecting data. We close with recommendations for learning a community’s norms around data and a reflection on how the lessons learned from fan communities can be applied to other online spaces. While fandom is a rich and unique case study, it also serves as an example for how we might consider the consequences of collecting public data elsewhere online.

[5.2] The consequences that fans could face if their data are improperly disclosed elsewhere can be severe. Fans fear harassment from fellow fans, doxxing, or potentially beingouted as who they are in fandom to people in their off-line lives. Furthermore, determining which data might be innocuous or not is challenging due to individual contexts, even for researchers with the best of intentions. Even seemingly harmless information, like a person's preference for LGBTQ characters or content, could cause problems.

[5.3] I don't think being outed as a fan or that sort of thing has impacted anyone that I know about, unless they're a fan of something horrific. But, I definitely know that being outed to what you are and how you act in the fandoms in particular, has caused problem. (PI-12)

[5.4] From our findings based on fan perspectives on these issues, we recommend best practices for researchers looking to work with public data created through transformative fandom. It is evident that these data, despite being publicly available, carry enough risk that ethical considerations beyond considering its publicness are necessary.

[5.5] Across our recommendations, we urge researchers to consider the weight and context of a fan's data, and the consequences of elevating them beyond their intended audience. Our findings reveal layers of publicness to user data that people are sensitive to. A majority of fan content is created and shared within highly contextual, semipublic spaces that have a specific audience in mind. When a researcher or journalist lifts these data from their original context and places them within a new one, there are certain considerations they should undertake to minimize the impact of recontextualizing those data to a new, potentially broader audience.

[5.6] The fan studies community has discussed the pros and cons of requiring permission to study fans' content. Our participants expressed feelings of vulnerability and even fear about their content being used in unexpected ways. These fears are in part related to the increased scale of fandom, which thanks to entirely public platforms like Tumblr, is also more accessible from the outside (Dym and Fiesler 2018a). This expanded connectivity has challenged traditional norms; as one participant stated:

[5.7] There used to be a certain type of etiquette [in fandom], and now that type of etiquette is shit. (PI-12)
Fandom at a larger scale and with an increasing number of newcomers who might not understand existing norms has also led to more conflict within fandom. Additionally, other types of concerns around privacy may be highly contextual to the individual and not apparent to the researcher without asking. Therefore, we recommend that when it is possible and appropriate to the situation, researchers should attempt to gain permission from fans whose content is being quoted or used in research.

However, while it is true we should respect fan privacy, some cultural phenomena deserve to be discussed, and obtaining permission without exception might be prohibitive. For example, the data might be too large, or it might be difficult to contact the creators. Moreover, obtaining permission can be challenging or even dangerous when researching groups who might be hostile to the researcher or broader online communities (Chess and Shaw 2015; Massanari 2017). Prior work has highlighted the ethical conundrums of working with antifans (Jones 2016), specifically when it comes to asking permission to share their anti opinions, and our research points to a very real concern among fan communities that they might become a target for this harassment. Therefore, when asking permission would be impossible, or when there is very low risk with the data involved, there are other ways to protect fan privacy. These heuristics make for a good starting point in untangling the potential risks associated with using any public data for research.

One way we can protect fans' privacy is by obscuring specific text posts, particularly those that could link to identifiable information (particularly a real identity) or to contentious events within a fan community. If verbatim quotes from public content are not obfuscated before being presented as part of research, these posts can often be traced back to their source even when usernames are not included (Ayers et al. 2018). We recommend taking steps to obscure public data by rewriting sentences to paraphrase and other methods of ethical fabrication (Markham 2012). Obscuring data can allow researchers to delve into contentious or sensitive subjects in fandom without potentially putting community members at risk. Even for low-risk data, such as commonly phrased statements or tags (e.g., from Tumblr or Archive of Our Own) where obfuscation may not be as important, we recommend collecting only the data required for the analysis. For example, even though data such as usernames might be available, they may not be relevant to the analysis.

One concern with obscuring data is that it adds to the tension between credit and privacy in fandom. Though there are no perfect solutions for this tension, our findings identify considerations researchers should take into account when deciding whether to attribute fans when their content is quoted or referenced. When permission can be sought, we encourage researchers to abide by a person's wishes in regards to whether they want their work attributed back to them. However, when researchers cannot seek permission (perhaps because they cannot identify or contact the content creator), we recommend erring on the side of caution and not attributing that person's name to the content. Because many of the fears around privacy violations affect fandom's most vulnerable members (e.g., LGBTQ fans), we contend that the risk-benefit assessment of attribution should weigh more strongly in favor of protecting those who might suffer from unwanted attention.

As part of caring for the trust that fandom places in researchers, we think it is
important to share research findings back to the community. Even outside of fandom, prior work has revealed that users whose social media data are part of a research project want to be told about that research and would be interested in reading research papers (Fiesler and Proferes 2018). Though we have focused a great deal on the potential harm of research in considering ethics, the benefits of research are important as well. It is important to note that neither our findings nor prior work on research ethics for public data (Fiesler and Proferes 2018) have suggested that this is a methodology that should be abolished altogether, despite some risk—many of our participants were excited about the idea of research shining a light on the practices and communities of fandom. Therefore, it should be a best practice to share this research with them. When conducting human subjects research, it is not difficult to optionally collect contact information for participants who want to be directly informed of the results of the study (as we did with our interviews and surveys here); in the case of using public data, this might mean sharing the results on social media where the studied population might see it.

[5.13] Many of our participants discussed the different ways that rules within fandom at large can differ among smaller fandom groups. Learning the etiquette of a fan space takes work, and until people know that etiquette they might behave in ways that the fan community does not expect or accept. Spending time within a fan community before researching or writing about it allows someone to better judge what public data might be safe to uplift from fandom to a broader audience.

[5.14] Though our participants shared the general perception that people do not write about fandom unless they started out within fandom (which may be true), online fandom is an important phenomenon that raises many interesting research questions in fields outside of fan studies (Dym et al. 2018). We recommend that anyone coming from the outside to write about fandom (whether a researcher or journalist) should spend time there and take the time to talk to fans and to understand and learn their norms. However, even for researchers who are part of fandom, they may not know the norms of a specific fan community, so the same applies when delving into unfamiliar fandom spaces. It is critical that we are mindful of each user's reasonable expectations to privacy, which may be dependent on the community or platform.

[5.15] Fan studies scholars acknowledge that data created in fan communities are usually created with a certain understanding that those spaces are closed off to the public to some degree (Busse and Hellekson 2012). Although their data are certainly public, community norms determine what is and is not acceptable to do with that data. As one participant said,

[5.16] There are things that should not be spoken of outside fandom. It's kind of like fight club. First rule of fandom. (PI-17)

[5.17] This first rule of fandom is a norm broadly understood by most people in fan communities. The very nature of research violates this rule, however, considering that our goal is to lift artifacts of fandom from their original space and bring them to a new audience. Ethnographic work can lend itself well to researchers observing other social media spaces, potentially saving someone a misstep before it happens. While learning the norms of a
community has been a long-held value of ethnographers, this research illustrates the expectation that fan community members hold that researchers abide by this practice regardless of their discipline or methods.

[5.18] The five practices we detailed—obtaining permission, obscuring data, attribution, giving back, and learning community norms—are not just a useful heuristic for ethical research in fan communities but are also valuable considerations to keep in mind when working with all forms of public data, especially when those data come from people with particularly sensitive privacy concerns (Cho 2018; Dym and Fiesler 2018b). Our findings emphasize the importance of moving beyond the notion of publicness as a one-size-fits-all ethical heuristic for data collection, and instead considering important factors such as who the data belong to, what kind content it is, and what the researcher intends to do with it.

[5.19] Even for public data sets in which individual participants might number in the tens of thousands to the millions, it might be possible to talk to some members of the target population in order to better understand what values and concerns people might hold that would deter them from consenting to their data being used. Better understanding of the community can also highlight instances when attribution is desirable and beneficial for a person or community, or when and how ethical fabrication might be more appropriate. Spending time with the community a researcher intends to study permits learning important norms and better understanding how to safely use public data, thus reducing the risk of harm.

[5.20] We also argue that researchers should, when possible, give back to the communities they research, sharing their results in accessible ways. However, most importantly, we stress the importance of making all these decisions contextually—for the specific subjects of study, the specific community, and the specific methods for analysis and reporting, with an emphasis on understanding the risks of amplifying content beyond its intended audience.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] Fan studies are uniquely positioned within internet research because of their long history of engaging with research ethics concerning human subjects. However, along with fandom's move online we have seen more large-scale data explorations. As different types of data integrate into fan studies and beyond, we must pause and ask ourselves to what ethical standards we will hold our researchers and how we might better take care and hold space for the complex and contextual data generated through online transactions.

[6.2] The different layers of publicness inherent to online communities contribute to unspoken norms concerning what kinds of data people share, and where they share them. Within fandom, where a person's audience might be limited to a close-knit group of a hundred people, someone might be more than comfortable sharing a highly personal or contentious post or fan work. When a researcher or journalist relocates that same content—even when it is public—to a different space, they are changing the audience, potentially amplifying it to a much broader audience than ever originally intended and thus exposing the data’s owner to more privacy risks. By incorporating a mindfulness of these shifting concerns in privacy, context, and audience, we can better ensure the continued ethical use
and study of data generated within fandom and beyond.

7. Acknowledgments

[7.1] As always, we would like to thank our participants for sharing their stories. We also would like to thank the members of the Internet Rules Lab (IRL) for their support throughout the research process. This work was funded by NSF award IIS-1704369 as part of the PERVADE (Pervasive Data Ethics for Computational Research) project.

8. References


Theory

Interdisciplinary methodologies for the fan studies bricoleur

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[0.1] Abstract—As a relatively young field, which brings together scholars from a wide variety of different home disciplines, fan studies faces questions of disciplinary cohesion and methodological practice. Moving from a multidisciplinary space to an interdisciplinary field that creates new synergistic knowledge is facilitated by cross-discipline communication and collaboration. However, this is impeded by many barriers. Examining the history of design research provides useful parallels that may help us learn from the experiences of researchers who faced similar concerns. A bricolage approach will allow scholars in new fields of knowledge to benefit from an interdisciplinary landscape that provides methodological breadth. By using such an approach, fan studies researchers can borrow or synthesize the tools most appropriate to their research questions; for example, participatory action research is a methodology that fan studies researchers may find useful. Participatory approaches may cut through issues of fan/academic positioning and contribute to research with positive social value.

[0.2] Keywords—Bricolage; Collaboration; Participatory action research


1. Introduction

[1.1] As fan studies becomes more established as a field of study, attention has focused not only on key topics within this field but also the nature and composition of fan studies research itself, and how and why it is undertaken (Gray, Sandvos, and Harrington 2017). This includes methodological interrogation and attempts to identify what methodologies and methods might be used by fan studies researchers. The goal of exploring these questions is to develop more considered and rigorous scholarship (Evans and Stasi, 2014).

[1.2] Fan studies is increasingly spoken of as a new discipline, but is still in the process of defining itself as such. Fan studies is also in the process of bringing multidisciplinary work together under an umbrella of shared interest and goals (Turk 2018). There is plausibly a link
between these two aspects. If disciplines are structures within which we group knowledge, and a goal of academia is the creation of new knowledge, then it seems to follow that in some cases, new disciplinary groupings will be required to encompass this expanded knowledge base. These new knowledge areas are often likely to develop at the edges between existing disciplines, combining previously isolated areas of scholarship in new ways (Siedlok and Hibbert 2009). Such novel combinations of ideas, people, and disciplines are productive areas, thought to increase creativity and generate breakthrough research results. (Carayol and Nguyen Thi 2005).

[1.3] The realization of such combinatory research areas has practical difficulties that can be challenging to overcome (Jacobs and Amos 2012). There are many barriers that can make it difficult to move beyond existing structures, impeding the spread of knowledge between researchers who originate in different areas. In addition to logistical issues, combining work with different origins can and has led to methodological conflict or confusion (Evans and Stasi 2014). Fan studies is not unique in this regard, and other disciplines have in the past faced similar challenges. In considering how to approach the development of methodological structures in this new space, we might therefore look to lessons learned by other youthful disciplines that have faced related challenges during a relatively short history. In this case, I would like to use design research as such a comparison.

[1.4] In this paper, I begin by giving a short introduction to the history of fan studies as a young, multidisciplinary field. I then provide a short history of design research, a young discipline with comparably multidisciplinary origins, highlighting similarities in trajectory and opportunity. I outline a range of barriers that can impede interdisciplinary collaboration and suggest potential solutions in overcoming them, following which I provide questions that fan studies should ask in its progression to becoming a distinct discipline with its own methodological approaches. The paper concludes by recommending that fan studies researchers take a bricolage approach to methodologies, describing how underused existing methodologies such as participatory action research might be embraced to enrich fan studies research. With such methodological poaching, and the development of novel approaches unique to fan studies, we can thus equip a broad interdisciplinary fan studies methodological toolbox.

2. The origins and composition of fan studies

[2.1] Fan studies is relatively new as a discrete area of research. The first cohesive wave of scholarly work in this area is generally agreed to have originated in the early 1990s, including authors such as Henry Jenkins (1992), Camille Bacon-Smith (1992), John Fiske (1992), and Nancy Baym (1993). Research published during this period was the first to move from description of fan behavior in terms of deviation, aberration, and pathology characteristic of earlier work (Jenson 1992) toward a picture of mutually supportive communities placing themselves in opposition to the cultural mainstream and creating active counter content. This set the context for later waves of study that were able to consider specific tensions and consumption models within fan cultures, and fandom as a manifestation of wider social and cultural hierarchies and subcultures (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2017). If we take the early 1990s texts as the seed point for the formation of an academic
field, this gives us a short history to examine—no more than thirty years. Dedicated journals and academic conferences in this space are even more recent. For example, the publication of the first issue of the *Journal of Fandom Studies* and the first Fan Studies Network conference both took place in 2013. In the timescales of academic evolution, this is no time at all. It is no wonder then that we are still in the early stages of discussion about what exactly fan studies research looks like, and how it should be carried out.

[2.2] Fan studies is also notable for having arisen at the boundary of several different existing disciplines. It is not, for example, simply a subspecialization of media and cultural studies, though this is the originating discipline of much early work. This cross-disciplinary space is a useful territory in which to develop new scholarship: Crane (1972) notes that the effective creation of knowledge often occurs via the "cross-fertilization of fields." For an indication of the available disciplinary breadth, an examination of Fan Studies Network conference contributors reveals researchers with home disciplines including, among others, film studies, theater, digital humanities, library and information science, modern languages, media and cultural studies, law, English, history, design, computer science, anthropology, and sociology. By virtue of these broad origins, fan studies research is therefore also often methodologically eclectic, with published work using diverse approaches and a wide range of methods: traditional and autoethnographies, textual analysis and criticism, quantitative data analysis, and feminist approaches, among many others.

[2.3] Tisha Turk, writing on the disciplinary diversity of fan studies research, makes an important point regarding how we think about a field or discipline that includes contributions from a variety of others. Although often assumed to be interdisciplinary, a more accurate term to use for the current state of fan studies research might be multidisciplinary (Turk 2018). Research is being carried out that originates in a range of disciplines, but there is still limited cross-disciplinary collaborative work, and exchange of knowledge happens slowly. This also complicates discussions of methodology. There are currently very few university departments that offer dedicated training in fan studies research and its processes; therefore, research on fan studies topics is likely to be undertaken from different ontological and epistemological starting points, with researchers using different methods and methodologies based on the discipline in which they were taught. Current scholarly discussions have only relatively recently begun to address overarching methodological questions (Evans and Stasi 2014), with new work, including this special issue, seeking to examine these concerns and potentially identify common frameworks within which diverse methodologies can be structured. In order to develop fan studies into a discipline that is truly interdisciplinary in its research practice, we must facilitate scholarship that is able to synthesize diverse areas of knowledge that are being brought together.

3. Where others have gone before: Lessons from design

[3.1] The challenges to fan studies as a young, multidisciplinary field wishing to integrate and synthesize knowledge from its multiple contributing disciplines are not insignificant. However, fan studies is not alone in facing such challenges, and rather than reinvent processes that have already been explored by others, we might look to some of these prior learnings as examples of how to proceed (or, in some cases, how not to). As an example of
how we might productively approach the question of methodological coherence, we can look for comparison to a similarly constructed discipline: that of design research.

[3.2] Design research as a distinct field originated in the 1960s. In contrast to fan studies, which saw seminal texts draw a coalescence of related research that only later provoked intense methodological discussion, the study of design as a significant process and field of study itself developed from design methods literature and discussion. While design as a practice was a key component of several fields, such as architecture and engineering, this new field undertook for the first time rigorous analysis of the systems and theory of design, and the role of the designer in society (Bayazit 2004). Design research is the study of both design and designers' practices, and is itself a form of knowledge production enabled through the act of design. As such, it is closely interlinked with design practice, and includes abductive reasoning alongside the more traditional approaches of inductive or deductive reasoning (Faste and Faste 2012). Design research creates knowledge-based as well as applied outcomes in physical and digital products, spaces, communications, services, organizations, and policies, and many design researchers will also be practitioners and designers themselves.

[3.3] The defining moment for modern design research is generally held to be the Design Methods Conference held at Imperial College London in 1962 (Cross 1993). It was not until some time later that dedicated journals were founded, primarily Design Studies in 1979, Design Issues appearing in 1984, and Research in Engineering Design in 1989. Methodological construction was ongoing, though: published in 1970, Design Methods: Seeds of Human Futures by John Chris Jones introduced a range of methods that could be used by designers, most of which were adapted from other fields (Margolin 2010). Jones was among a number of "second wave" design researchers who pushed back against early formalization, with Horst Rittel categorizing many design problems as "wicked," with ill-formulated questions and complex solutions. He proposed new methods that introduced user involvement in design decisions to address perceived flaws in earlier methods and approaches (Bayazit 2004).

[3.4] The editorial introduction to Bruce Archer's contributions in the first issue of Design Studies makes the following statement regarding intention of the new journal—that questions that may strike a chord with fan studies scholars attempting to define the boundaries and definitions of their new discipline, and which we will return to later:

[3.5] The questions or issues that these papers are expected to address include: Can design be a discipline in its own right? If so, what are its distinguishing features? (What are the kind of features that distinguish any discipline?) To what questions should the discipline address itself—in both research and teaching? What methodology does it use? What results—what applications—should it be trying to achieve? (Archer 1979, 17)

[3.6] As with fan studies, methodological questions in design persist, and this is again linked closely with multidisciplinary origins. Nigel Cross (1999) highlighted the wide range of fields that contribute to design research, but also cited an RCA report by Archer et al. (1979)
emphasizing that it is necessary to recognize that design has its own "things to know, ways of knowing them, and ways of finding out about them" (Cross 1999, 7).

[3.7] A history-based journal such as Journal of Design History clearly draws upon paradigms of scholarship in the arts and humanities, and an engineering-based journal such as Research in Engineering Design leans heavily on the research paradigm of the natural sciences. But the important thing is that collectively we have the possibility of adding to these other paradigms and of developing our own design research culture. (Cross 1999, 5)

[3.8] Many methods adopted by design researchers are borrowed from related fields that have contributed to design research. Examples include participatory methods, action research, and ethnography. The ability to borrow, create, and combine methodologies has been described as methodological bricolage, and this is increasingly being used in design research (Yee and Bremner 2011). In coining the term in 1966, Levi-Strauss describes a bricoleur as a "Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person" (Levi-Strauss 1966, 17). Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, applying this to the methodology of cultural studies, note that "Its methodology, ambiguous from the beginning, could best be seen as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, pragmatic, strategic and self-reflective" (Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 1992, 2). They suggest that no methodologies should be privileged as infallible, nor dismissed out of hand as useless, but that the historical origins should also be critically considered when they are being employed. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) develop these ideas of bricolage further, describing various categories of bricoleur qualitative researcher: interpretive, narrative, theoretical, and political. In each case, diversity, interaction, and a breadth of approach is key.

[3.9] In using such a bricolage approach, and creating a space in which to specifically focus on research about design as a specific field of inquiry, design researchers have had the opportunity not only to gather poached or scavenged methodologies from diverse fields such as anthropology, architecture, and marketing, but also to create brand-new methodological approaches that are uniquely suited to design, and can address the complex challenges posed. An example of one of these new methodologies is design fiction, which draws on a longer history of critical and speculative design. Design fiction, a term coined by science fiction author Bruce Sterling (2005), was popularized by Julian Bleecker's 2009 essay in which he described how "design can be a way of creating material objects that help tell a story" (Bleecker 2009, 6). A key feature of speculative design is that it enables thinking about the future and critiquing of current design practice. Both speculative design and design fiction are used "not to show how things will be but to open up a space for discussion" (Dunne and Raby 2014). While a precise definition of design fiction is still elusive (Lindley and Coulton 2015), Sterling's updated description is a good starting point: "Design Fiction is the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change" (Bosch 2012). A key aspect is that these prototypes are physical manifestations of a fictional shift in the world, which may reflect alternate pasts or presents, or speculated futures.

[3.10] Parallels are apparent between the first part of the sixty-year history of design research, and the thirty-year history to date of fan studies research. This is particularly
notable regarding the interdisciplinarity of researchers and associated diversity of methodologies in each. At the fiftieth anniversary conference of the Design Research Society, Atkinson and Oppenheimer suggested the discipline of design is at the dawn of a new era of rigorous interdisciplinary collaboration. "This stretches to include practice methods, research, writing and diverse collaborations across academic colleagues for various disciplinary enclaves" (Atkinson and Oppenheimer 2016, 1). This would also seem a positive goal for fan studies. However, interdisciplinary collaboration is challenging, and many barriers must be overcome to carry it out successfully.

4. Overcoming challenges to interdisciplinary collaboration

[4.1] In both fan studies and design research, existing diversity of research is being brought together, and through synthesis, is also creating new knowledge structures. This can be challenging. Disciplines exist in order to demarcate areas of interest, fostering the development of unique worldviews by concentrating researcher experience, perceptions, and ways of framing knowledge (Lattuca 2002). This increases efficiency of communication and interaction within disciplines (Bruce et al. 2004) but can often create arbitrary boundaries that act as a barrier to those who wish to cross between them. Encouraging multidisciplinary journals and conferences where knowledge can pass from scholar to scholar is critical to overcome this. Another solution, which Turk (2018) encourages, is the facilitation of cross-disciplinary collaboration, where scholars work together to create new knowledge that is jointly within two disciplines, or at the boundary space between them, rather than moving from one into others. There are, however, significant barriers to undertaking such collaborative work.

[4.2] Building the wheel is difficult enough when one person builds the wheel; now try to have three to five people working on the wheel with different tools and different ideas about what kind of bike it will go on. (Morse et al. 2007, 9)

[4.3] Barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration function at different levels. Some are due to cultural differences between the disciplines themselves, which manifest in terms of language and understanding. Over time, disciplines necessarily gather specific terminologies and language uses. These facilitate communication within the discipline, providing new specific meanings that act as a shorthand for complex concepts and ideas (Frost and Jean 2003). When others from outside the discipline are exposed to these same terms, however, they can be perceived as jargon and impede communication, as well as the reach and cross-disciplinary accessibility of research.Disciplinary differences in language use may also be more subtle, with similar terms being used to describe very different phenomena, or different languages and contexts describing what might actually be similar areas of interest. As an example, we might look to the historically limited communication between research on popular culture fans and sports fans, fields which have evolved along different trajectories. While often examining similar phenomena and fan behaviors, work in these fields originates in different home disciplines and may therefore use different terminology, or conceptualize key concepts differently (Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby 2007).

[4.4] Disconnects of language can also apply to theoretical approaches themselves. The
concept of a "model" means very different things in biology (a sketch describing key
concepts and ideas in a qualitative illustration) and engineering (complex mappings that
include mathematical descriptions and can be used to construct simulations and make
predictions) (Tadmor and Tidor 2005). Bridging such linguistic and conceptual divides can
be challenging, but overcoming apparent differences to find similarities can lead to valuable
insights. For example, Evan Hayles Gledhill (2018) uses the concept of bricolage to situate
commonalities between uses of nineteenth-century commonplace books and Tumblr.

[4.5] Disciplines are also situated within specific research paradigms and associated
ontological and epistemological values. Differing epistemologies can have practical impacts
on research and analysis methods, as this anecdote from Aragón et al. (2012) demonstrates:

[4.6] A sociologist and a computer scientist are brainstorming about a new
research project to study an online social network.

The sociologist expresses concerns regarding the size of the sample, wanting to
have at least a couple of hundred users included in the study.

The computer scientist responds, "Either we study the whole network of 10
million users, or it doesn't make sense to study it at all!" (Aragón et al. 2012, 1)

[4.7] These kinds of data analysis questions and other practical differences, such as variance
in norms when considering the ethics of how to cite fan-created material (Busse 2012), could
act as barriers to collaborative fan studies research. However, there are also barriers that do
not just make the research itself more complex, but prevent collaborations from arising in the
first place. It is worth noting that the practice of collaboration itself may vary in frequency
between disciplines. For example, it is much more common in STEM subjects to undertake
collaborative work than in the humanities, where collaborative writing is undervalued and
sole-authored works are often given more weight (Turk 2018). These norms and practices
can influence individual choices on whether to seek out collaboration.

[4.8] Structures that surround the research process can also prevent the initiation of
collaborations, and make their progress more difficult. Sung et al. (2003) describe how tribal
loyalties to disciplinary norms can be strong. This is exacerbated by the view that time taken
to explore a second field of knowledge is time taken away from mastery of one's own
discipline. This can give rise to prejudice against interdisciplinary scholars—an assumption
that their studies are superficial, and that they are less competent overall than those who have
remained specialists and focused on a single discipline (Siedlock and Hibbert 2014; Lyall
2019). Fan studies also faces a particular challenge in that the field itself can be perceived as
superficial and lacking in scholarly relevance, and thus introducing interdisciplinarity may
compound this perception.

[4.9] In order to overcome these barriers of understanding and expectation, we must ensure
that fan studies, like design, is built upon awareness of value that can come from
multidisciplinary origins. Prejudices against interdisciplinary work should be understood as
such, and efforts made to overcome them. Kincheloe notes that the question of
disciplinarity/interdisciplinarity is fundamental to the deployment of bricolage, and describes
it as a process of disrupting and destroying disciplinary segmentation, where "research bricoleurs pick up the pieces of what's left and paste them together as best they can." (Kincheloe 2001, 681). He suggests that the methodological bricoleur should thoroughly interrogate their own discipline, understanding its systems of power, arbitrary boundaries, and processes of knowledge production. Examining both restrictive and positive properties, they can then move outwards to ask questions of other disciplines, facilitating understanding of power relationships within and between disciplines, and an underlying understanding of how one might achieve rigorous work in an interdisciplinary space that does not diminish disciplinary strengths but is also not restricted by regulated knowledge processes. Turk's analysis of foregrounding interdisciplinary methodological discussion in fan studies echoes this:

[4.10] Being more overtly interdisciplinary would allow us to better understand each other and, further to borrow from each other, to recognize the affordances and limitations of different approaches and combine our own training and habits of mind with the tools of other disciplines when appropriate. (Turk 2018, 545)

[4.11] The above solutions invite individual researchers to examine their research practices and be open to communication and breaking down preconceptions. However, in order to achieve this, structural change may also be necessary. Skills to overcome prejudices and facilitate collaborative working must be included early in the research training process, which requires input from established academics and institutional support. Many aspects of the university system are structurally predicated on disciplines being distinct. Most academic institutions are organized into schools or departments, often geographically separated on different floors, different buildings, or even different campuses of the same institution. This makes it difficult to meet potential collaborators. But more fundamentally, reporting and reward structures are often also disciplinarily based (Lyall 2019). For example, although cross-disciplinary work is encouraged in the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) evaluation process, it is still necessary to report based on thirty-four units of assessment that fall under traditional disciplinary identifications such as chemistry, law, or art and design. Similarly, funding structures are often not set up for interdisciplinary research, and if researchers wish to undertake research that falls outside these parameters it may be necessary to undertake this in addition to normal research (Siedlok and Hibbert 2009).

[4.12] Individual evaluation and validation mechanisms too are often disciplinarily bounded. Interdisciplinary journals are less likely to have high impact factors or be highly regarded (often due to their relative youth) and publication in these is less likely to contribute favorably to promotion for academics. The peer-review system, too, may be less favorable to interdisciplinary research, as it is more difficult to find appropriately qualified reviewers, and reviews may be poor if the research is not easily understood by someone without broad expertise. Independent researchers who are not beholden to these systems of formal advancement will experience their own challenges of recognition and support.

[4.13] These challenges of support and recognition are magnified in the specific case of fan studies, because existing power relationships between fan studies and other disciplines are unbalanced, with much research already being conducted peripherally by researchers bound
within traditional institutional structures. The introduction of interdisciplinary collaboration must be carefully managed to avoid reinforcing existing perceptions of superficiality. Early support may assist with this; while traditionally doctoral programs have often been hostile to interdisciplinary research (Golde and Gallagher 1999), some programs are encouraging new forms of doctoral training (Sung et al. 2003; Murphy and Jacobs 2014) that emphasize interdisciplinarity and even collaborative production.

[4.14] In order to develop fan studies as a discipline that is inclusive of interdisciplinary research paradigms, and avoid the tensions that design research has faced, measures must be taken to overcome these structural challenges. This will not be easy, and requires concerted effort at all institutional levels. Practical solutions for facilitation can include providing opportunities for physical colocation, including shared spaces and opportunities for serendipitous meeting, or encouraging problem-based exploration. Adequate support structures must be put in place to reassure researchers that such endeavors will be appropriately rewarded. These types of solutions require institutional change and support at the highest levels of management.

5. Developing fan studies as an interdisciplinary discipline

[5.1] Having identified potential barriers and solutions, I will now return to Archer’s questions, asked of design research at an early stage of its development. Answering these questions for fan studies is not within the scope of this article, nor should the questions be considered as having definitive answers rather than being a tool in the process of discovery. However, by asking these questions of fan studies, we can begin to understand where we currently sit as a field or discipline, and what might still be required in order to gain cohesive methodological and disciplinary structure, if indeed this is something to be regarded as a goal.

[5.2] The first question asks whether fan studies can be a discipline in its own right, and if so, what are the distinguishing features, or the features of any discipline. As noted, fan studies does not sit neatly within any existing discipline. As a field, it encompasses knowledge bases from a wide variety of origins to examine a particular set of behaviors and phenomena that constitute being a fan. What constitutes a discipline, as distinct from a field? Archer suggests that formalization as a discipline requires distinguishing features. Bitzer and Wilkinson (2009) discuss six criteria based on Dressel and Mayhew (1974), the first two of which appear to be met by fan studies in its current state: an existing specialized vocabulary and generally accepted basic literature, as described above, and a logical taxonomy of knowledge so that knowledge gaps can be identified. This latter is demonstrated by journal special issues focusing on distinct themes of fan studies research. Other criteria listed, such as the development of a generally agreed set of methodologies, and a defined space in relation to other disciplines, form a significant part of current theoretical discussion in the field. The fifth criterion suggests that in a mature discipline, considerable energy is devoted to solving basic or theoretical questions as well as theory building. This criterion may be still to some extent unmet, as is that of there being recognized sequences of experiences for the training of researchers. These will develop as dedicated fan studies education becomes more common. Based on this, it seems fair to consider fan studies a nascent discipline that, while
not fully formed, is proceeding toward its own distinct identity.

[5.3] We must also recognize that discussion of disciplinary boundaries encompasses not just what can exist within a discipline, but what might stay outside it. Design is now generally considered as a true discipline, with formal academic structuralization and design departments at many universities. It has spread and expanded into a wide-ranging field with many subspecializations and subdisciplines: sustainable design, inclusive design, design innovation management, and human–computer interaction, among many others. However, questions of definition and methodological structure remain, and the process of disciplinary cohesion has not been untroubled. Bremner and Rodgers (2013) speak of design going through a "crisis of identity" in terms of disciplinary development at several points through its history. They question Donald Norman's claim that "we are all designers" (Norman 2004), expressing concern over this broad application and whether the idea that "everything is design" is leading to a devaluing of the term. This is of particular note in relation to current debates in fan studies around the similar question of whether "everyone is a fan," and the mainstreaming of fan cultures.

[5.4] Archer then asks, what are key questions that the discipline should address in research and teaching? Current fan studies scholarship is wide-ranging, and inclusive of multiple interlinking topics, such as the nature of what it means to be a fan; what pressures, internal and external, positive and negative, act upon fans; examining the objects of fandom, spaces of fandom, and how fandom is generated; and fan practice. As with design, the questions being asked by fan studies researchers are complex and may lead to a multitude of responses rather than fixed conclusions. As design asks "what is a designer?" we ask "what is a fan?"; and while these questions deserve to be asked, they should not distract from the validity of the practice, nor of the validity of the discipline.

[5.5] What methodology does fan studies use? If we are attempting to find a single all-encompassing definition of what fan studies methodologies look like, this could be considered a challenge, and counter to the methodological fluidity that is a strength of related fields such as cultural studies (Evans and Stasi 2014). An opportunity that comes with the construction of a new disciplinary space is that it does not need to replicate the structures and restrictions of disciplines that preceded it. Embracing a methodological bricolage allows us to utilize all the best parts of what other disciplines have to offer, and add in unique processes and approaches that are being developed in this particular field.

[5.6] As Turk refers to the tools of other disciplines, this approach can be considered through the metaphor of constructing a toolbox. The craftsperson with their toolbox is not limited to using one tool for every circumstance, but rather has available a range of tools that they are familiar with, with which they can tackle the variety of tasks encountered. Sometimes multiple tools might be used at once to address a particularly intractable problem. Some tools are multifunctional, ubiquitous; for example, a hammer can be used for a multiplicity of tasks. However, we should not limit ourselves to using a hammer for tasks for which a more specialist tool might be better suited, or discard a tool because we cannot immediately see its purpose. By opening ourselves to the inclusion of more diverse tools, new possibilities can be presented and new routes to solving a problem may be seen. Some more
unusual tasks may not have an existing tool that properly addresses them, and in that case we should consider developing singular tools, unique for this circumstance, to be carried only by the specialist, as design has developed specific tools such as design fiction. It is possible that some new fan studies methodologies are already in the process of emerging, but have not yet been formalized and codified. Rather than forge a single methodological tool for fan studies, we should instead create a methodological toolbox that can be used by our discipline. At the center of this proposition is the multidisciplinary space in which fan studies is, as we have described, already positioned.

[5.7] Archer's final question invites us to consider, as a field, what results and applications we are trying to achieve. This, above all, is an open question that needs further consideration both as individuals and as a discipline, and may have bearing on the topics of research that are considered critical, and which methodologies we choose to use. In the final section of this paper, one possible approach is described, with examples of how both borrowed and novel methodologies might benefit fan studies.

6. Toward new fan studies methodologies

[6.1] In developing our toolbox through a bricolage approach, we should be open to drawing on methodological approaches from other disciplines that to date have had limited employment in this field. An example of a potentially useful methodology of this type is participatory action research (PAR). This methodological approach, which originated in the social sciences, is being increasingly used by design researchers (e.g., Bilandzic and Venable 2011; Broadley and Smith 2018) and has features of relevance to fan studies.

[6.2] Action research first came into common usage in the 1940s. The term, introduced by Kurt Lewin (1946), describes a way of generating knowledge of a social system that also attempts to change it. Lewin was interested in reintroducing an experimental model to social science fieldwork; that theory could suggest interventions, and the results of those interventions would lead back into further theory (Gustavsen 2001). Action research rejects the traditional notion of value free research inquiry characterized by the objective, dispassionate researcher, and allows for the identification of problems and development of actions to both develop new forms of practical knowledge and to create change that has positive social value (Reason and Bradbury 2008). Action research has itself been compared to a bricolage, requiring the researcher to be flexible and willing to use a variety of methods to suit the circumstances (Hase 2014).

[6.3] PAR emerged from this background in the 1970s, as a convergence of work by many scholars worldwide who were concerned with inequality, oppression, and disempowerment, as well as critique of traditional social science approaches (Fals-Borda 2006). PAR is concerned with attempting to rebalance power dynamics through research that concerns traditionally marginalized and underprivileged groups. A key aspect is that research questions must be developed and defined in conjunction with those for whom the questions are significant; and those who are impacted by the research and its outcomes must be involved continually through the research process. This means participating fully as co-researchers, and having influence on all phases of the inquiry, including dissemination and
[6.4] Participatory research assumes that knowledge generated by ordinary members of the research context has value and validity, and does not privilege the position of the researcher. Fals-Borda (1995) described four key guidelines for research within PAR:

- [6.5] Do not monopolize your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. That is, fill in the distance between subject and object;
- Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them;
- Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organizations; and
- Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals. (Fals-Borda 1995)

[6.6] This methodology has several features that might make it of particular interest to fan studies scholars. Dissemination of results and findings outside of the academy and back to fan communities is increasingly seen as responsible research practice. Since the early development of the field, there has been examination of how power dynamics are a factor in how fans relate to their object of fandom and are perceived by others. Thus, counter narratives are an important feature. Much current fan studies research is concerned with how marginalization and oppression function within and around fandom, and interactions of factors such as gender, race, sexuality, and age. In addition, identification of problems requiring solutions is not outside the scope of fan studies; for example, questions surrounding toxic fandom and wider political implications suggest that action might be desirable. Fan activism is a well-studied area, where fans themselves are undertaking action to implement positive social change. Despite this, we must also be cautious when importing methodologies to be aware of their limitations as well as opportunities offered. Genuine PAR can take considerable time and effort in order to effect change and learning, and may be context-specific, with findings that are not necessarily generalizable or transferable (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000).

[6.7] Bringing a PAR approach to fan studies would also provide a new lens to examine what have often been difficult questions surrounding ethics and consent in studying fan works and fan communities. Undertaking research in conjunction with the fans in question, giving status and participatory control as co-researchers, might resolve some of these issues, and strengthen research findings. Opening research to be inclusive of the "fan-scholar" (Hills 2012), who may be undertaking rigorous work outside of the boundaries of academia, seems a positive undertaking.

[6.8] Another aspect of PAR that may be of particular value to fan studies scholars is as a route to begin resolving still-present anxieties around questions of subjectivity that can arise...
where there is less distance between the researcher and the researched; that is, the question of how fan studies researchers approach research in fandoms with which they may themselves be closely associated. It is common for fan studies researchers to themselves be fans of something, and to count themselves as past or present members of the fan community on which their scholarship is focused. It is therefore not uncommon for researchers to be active participants in the cultures being studied; the so-called acafan or scholar-fan. A PAR perspective puts on equal footing the expertise of researcher and participant, and is not incompatible with these being within the same person. Like design, there is a close relationship between being a practitioner (in this case participating in fan practice) and being a researcher developing new knowledge and modes of practice.

[6.9] This positionality of a fan studies researcher who is themselves a fan is a longstanding debate. In 2002, Henry Jenkins (the originator of the acafan term) suggested that it might be no longer problematic for people who are fans and academics to combine these identities (Hills and Jenkins 2002). However, when describing this and the "obligation of defensiveness" that might henceforth be unnecessary, he appears to be speaking primarily regarding the defense of fan communities as worthy of study. The methodological question of research subjectivity and legitimacy when one is both a fan and a scholar is distinct (Hills 2012, Cristofari and Guitton 2017), and continues. For example, discussion on this topic emerged in a question session following a panel I contributed to at the 2018 Fan Studies Conference. Later the same year, at the 2018 Fan Studies North America Conference, Lori Morimoto spoke about how acafans occupy a space distinct from their fellow fans and nonfan academics, relating it to the experience of "third-culture" subjectivity and liminality (2018).

[6.10] While many researchers have understandably focused their attention on fandoms in which they have a vested interest, often using self-reflective techniques such as participant-observer involvement or autoethnographic examination, there still appears to be some anxiety over whether it is necessary for objective researchers to separate themselves from the affective investment naturally present if one is a fan. There is often an urge to declare our own fannish tendencies and affect, as if they constitute a conflict of interest rather than a contributing factor to the research focus and ability to conduct in-depth research—a source of expertise. Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby (2007) note in comparing sports fan researchers to media fan researchers that this tendency to position themselves as fans is considerably less common in the former, despite them more often being self-declared fans when asked. Evans and Stasi (2014) highlight the historical tension in ethnographic work between academic objectivity perceived as a component of rigor, and the concern of exploitation and misrepresentation that has caused mistrust of academic studies that might objectify the fan, while Cristofari and Guitton (2017) highlight the practical and ethical considerations of studying fan communities as an acafan.

[6.11] A potential avenue for creation of a new methodology specific to fan studies might be to explore the development of a methodological approach formalizing the acafan position and incorporating the fan practitioner as a mode of scholarship. In this context, our personal fan affiliations can be considered as a starting point and crucial factor, rather than something that must be excused or explained. A novel methodology in this area may even incorporate
aspects of PAR methods, allowing us to actively use our political stances as researchers to work with communities and seek positive change. Elden and Chisolm (1993, 128) note that "insiders as significant partners in a research team can enhance scientific validity." What are acafans if not insiders?

7. Conclusions

[7.1] Like design research, fan studies can be considered as a liminal disciplinary space, between and among other disciplines but also transcending them to create something new. The recommendations of this paper are that fan studies researchers approach their work with an awareness of the breadth of methodological approaches available, and a willingness to look across to work originating in what could be traditionally considered a different discipline, to capitalize on the available fan studies knowledge base. We can in this way borrow and combine the best bits of methodological approaches from various disciplines, and also create unique approaches that specifically respond to the opportunities and challenges of the field. Speaking of why interdisciplinary bricolage can be valuable, Kincheloe (2001) suggests that "researchers employing multiple research methods are often not chained to the same assumptions as individuals operating within a particular discipline." We have the opportunity, at this stage in the development of our discipline, to be flexible and proactive in shaping work that meets the needs of the context rather than being restrained by what has come before. However, this requires similar flexibility from the structures of academic scholarship and also from individuals—skills that must be accepted and developed in early career researchers, including as part of graduate study and doctoral programs. Overcoming structural barriers to building an interdisciplinary discipline will not be easy or straightforward, and requires fundamental changes to academic systems. Identifying these issues is a key first step to finding solutions.

[7.2] Being open to a diversity of knowledge sources also includes the acceptance of new forms of knowledge creation; as design includes practitioner-scholars, we must be open to the scholar-fan. Kincheloe talks of the importance of intermediaries, able to "build bridges between various territories" (Kincheloe 2001, 690). This applies not just to academics from different disciplinary backgrounds but also of the relationship between fans and academics, and those who may span both worlds. Participatory action research is highlighted as a methodology that foregrounds the value of knowledge coming from the communities we study, and the importance of ensuring that dissemination of knowledge created includes it going back into those communities. We do not have to reject our values and stand as objective researchers, but can work together to develop positive social outcomes.

[7.3] The methodological suggestions of this paper are not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive, but simply representative of the kinds of innovation that can be possible. Embracing the interdisciplinary nature of fan studies and the bricolage approach allows us to fully utilize the varied expertise that we have access to, creating a meeting place for scholars from multiple arenas, including those beyond the academy.

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An approach to online fan persona

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[0.1] Abstract — One application of the emerging field of persona studies is to the analysis of online fan persona. Indeed, there already exists a deep tradition of attention to fan persona within fan studies. A persona-inflected fan studies involves attention to the shift from representational media to a presentational media paradigm and invites questions about the contemporary experience of the public presentation of the online self as a fan. In combining the object and persona lens, an approach emerges that takes into account the agency of the individual in its negotiation with various collectives as well as human and nonhuman actors in the networks of online identity performances. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are useful in exploring the fan persona as it registers indexically and intercommunicatively in the constitution of public activity in digitally networked environments.

[0.2] Keywords — Agency; Collective; Intercommunication; Mediatization; Micropublic; Performative; Persona studies; Public


1. Introduction to persona studies

[1.1] Persona studies are a new domain of inquiry that provides fan studies with a set of theoretical and methodological tools, including qualitative and quantitative approaches designed to examine the conditions under which we engage in the curation of the public self online. Persona studies have acknowledged the importance of celebrity studies and the anthropological and critical traditions of cultural studies and the broader contributions of communication and media studies and their many subfields (Marshal 2010; Barbour, Marshall, and Moore 2014). Until recently, however, there has been little recognition in persona studies of the work done in the scholarship of fandom with particular implications for how we understand the performance of the fan/self in public.

[1.2] As an emerging field, persona studies have coalesced in recent years around the journal Persona Studies, which began publication in 2015. The inaugural International Persona Studies Conference, held at Newcastle University in June 2019, built on the work of P.
David Marshall (2010, 2013, 2015, 2016) and other early contributors (Barbour 2015; Marshall and Barbour 2015; Marshall, Moore, and Barbour 2015; Moore and Barbour 2016; Moore, Barbour, and Lee 2017; Marshall, Barbour and Moore 2018). It is a new, global, and thoroughly interdisciplinary field that brings together the theoretical influences of structuralist and poststructuralist thinking with established foundations in cultural studies, media and communication, and internet studies to ask new questions about the signifying practices, power relations, and structural inequalities of the presentation of the public self and its political, social, and economic implications. The many questions of what a persona is, both ontologically and epistemologically, and what the limits of persona are as well as what persona might be in the future (or has been in the past) are far from settled, but we have begun to map the theoretical and methodological terrain for developing answers in both the journal and a new book on this topic, *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (Marshall, Moore, and Barbour 2020).

[1.3] In my call for a persona-inflected fan studies, first I present a brief introduction to the concepts and methods of persona studies. Then I look to the types of questions and answers that emerge from a persona-inflected fan studies. In the third section, I examine the implications of a combined object and persona lens, and in the fourth section I consider the performativity of fan persona. Next I will consider two relevant methods useful for a persona-inflected fan studies, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and network visualization. Finally, I conclude with recent examples of how the inclusive methodology of persona studies can be useful for fan scholars. My aim is to consider the questions and answers that become possible by shifting our perspective to an inquiry led by the view of the fan/self as a critical negotiation strategy and constitution of public activity in the digitally networked media and communication landscape.

[1.4] The definition of *persona* is intentionally broad because the term has been used in design, marketing and advertising, performance, history and politics, and many other fields and industries that are being actively explored by the contributors to *Persona Studies*. However, objects are a useful concept to begin to consider what a persona is. The Latin precursor to persona, the Etruscan word *prosopon*, which referred to the costume used in ancient Greek theater, highlights the idea of persona as a material interface between the person and others. Prosopon were ceramic, cloth, and wooden masks (*pers*) that depicted a character’s emotional state. The mask featured mouth holes that allowed the sound (*sona*) of the actor’s voice to pass through it to the audience. The mediatization of persona is, therefore, an ancient practice, described by Carl Jung as "a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual" (1967, 190). Just as physical masks can play an essential role in providing a ready-made identity, fan personas are a type of mask with increased complexities and implications in the digital environment. The masks of fan personas can be entirely situational and often transparent, but for others and at other times they are intentionally opaque. The mask of a fan persona is sometimes a literal mask in the case of cosplay, but for the most part the contemporary fan persona is a mask formed by a collection of physical and digital objects that operate indexically as paratexts in our identity formations.
[1.5] Gérard Genette (1997) described paratexts as liminal devices or conventions that form a threshold of meaning between text and audience. Paratexts often have a temporal dimension, mediating fan personas cumulatively over time and contributing to personas as heterogeneous assemblages. Historically this has meant practices such as plastering bedroom walls with band posters, collecting signatures or photographs of celebrities, and building collections of physical objects. These paratextual practices are continued across digital platforms and serve as important indexical objects pointing to a range of relationships between fans, texts, and their creators, such as images, memes, statements, and associations such as likes, favorites, follows and retweets, subscriptions, and other social networking paraphernalia. Michel Serres (1995) described the quasiobject as having relations between elements in a system that stabilize our social contracts between each other and between the human and nonhuman; these online personas have quasishortive and objective properties that are simultaneously individual and collective. Personas can therefore be thought of as digital paratexts making up virtual prosopon that help to stabilize our public selves in the move between the singular and the group.

[1.6] Persona studies have emerged from media and cultural studies by building on accounts of subjectivity, the psychology of the self, and philosophies of identity, but it is not an identity theory. Rather, an online persona as a collection of digital objects is a public performance of individuality that is projected toward a collective (Marshall, Moore, and Barbour 2020). A persona may be a thing, such as a brand, an object, a character, a location, or a space. A persona may be a name, described by David Peyron (2018, ¶ 4.3), as both a "rallying cry and birth certificate" of a fan community, a subcultural collective, which he describes as leaving "digital traces of its existence." A persona may be operated and contributed to by many humans and nonhumans, or it may be isolated to a single operator and a single instance: "Persona in its appeal to a collective formation embeds in its fibre the indexical signs of the collective itself. Persona then is essentially a way to negotiate one's self into various collectives" (Marshall, Moore, and Barbour 2020, 3). A persona's indexicality, to borrow from Paul Messaris (1997, 130), is caused by its objects, which serve as a digital trail pointing to both the objects' and the personas' existence. A persona's indexicality is a virtual fingerprint spread across multiple networks, platforms, and instances by the "intercommunication" practices of fandom (Marshall, Moore, and Barbour 2020, 47).

[1.7] The concept of intercommunication (Marshall 2014) refers to the movement of mediated digital objects between instances of interpersonal communication, which involves both human and nonhuman actors. The idea of intercommunication emphasizes the movement between previously independent domains of communication, which occurs through networked technologies and digital media practices. This activity generates a background data pool of clicks, views, user information, and other metadata that is harvested algorithmically and used to service advertising and marketing strategies, shape recommendation engines, inform machine learning, and influence content development plans. This concept of intercommunication is distinct from Henry Jenkins’s (2006) account of convergence because it highlights the hybridity of presentational media practices that the convergence of digital technologies has enabled. A fan studies methodology exploring intercommunication would map the flow and intensity of presentational media practices to identify and examine the blending of media with interpersonal communication and the
public sphere (Marshall 2010, 42). For example, studies involving the use of the Pepe the Frog meme (Merrin 2019; Zannettou et al. 2018; Nagle 2017; Pelletier-Gagnon and Trujillo Diniz 2018) reveal the complex intercommunication of memes in the presentation of the public self as a political fan (as discussed in the conclusion of this article) and the role of these digital objects operating as a performative interface between the individual and the collective.

[1.8] Other already-established ideas such as agency and what Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013) have described as the intentional "spread" of media and the processes of collective intelligence (Lévy 1997) are also useful for a persona-inflected fans studies. Chris Comerford (2018), for example, found the collective intelligence of wiki users works to bridge the gap between the collective output of individual fan contributors and the official content production of "industry practitioners" (293) in a mutually advantageous relationship. Similarly, David Peyron (2018) has explored the role of fan collectives in the presentation of the individual self online and provided a detailed examination of the importance of names in a distinctly persona-inflected approach to the study of fan communities.

[1.9] The vitality and spreadability of digital objects, especially hashtags and memes, is grounded in consolidated appeal and action, which makes them highly intercommunicative, moving within, between, and across different forms of media as they become paratexts in the expression of public identity online. While digital objects move according to the whims of interpersonal interaction on a microbasis, according to Limor Shifman (2014, 18), the impact at the macrolevel contributes to the public sphere by shaping patterns of behavior and challenging or reinforcing shared mindsets, as with political groups, professional organizations, and various fandoms. Persona studies offers a range of important concepts that may be relevant to fan scholars interested in pursuing a persona-inflected fan studies, including the move from representational media (print, film, radio, and television) to presentational media (the internet, social media, and streaming platforms, among many others) (Marshall 2013, 2015), and the notion of micropublics, which describes the way that collectives intercommunicate between multiple media platforms and social networks (Marshall, Moore, and Barbour 2020, 87).

2. Persona-inflected fan studies

[2.1] The fan studies methodological perspective is built on a dynamic interdisciplinary fusion and has adopted qualitative research tools from anthropology, cultural studies, English literature, media and communication studies, sociology, psychology, and gender, celebrity, and film studies (Evans and Stasi 2014, 4–5). The history of fan studies, Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi have argued (2014, 9), is methodologically grounded in ethnography, textual analysis, and on the psychoanalytic tradition of film studies, suggesting the self-reflexive autoethnography of the acafan is a more recent addition. Interest in the persona of the fan has been present from the outset of fan studies, as Sue Brower (1992, 163), building on Dick Hebdige (1979), observed: fans are crucial in contributing to social and aesthetic opinion by appropriating media texts and star performances as expressive materials in their lives, refining and enhancing these objects as symbolic parts of their identity.
Jenkins initially noted that fan cultural creations are material traces of personal identity interpreted in the move between individual and collective identity (1992a, 209). Jenkins mapped the discursive territory and popular mythology from which more contemporary fannish identity has been fashioned (1992b, 11). However, fan persona is no longer purely a "subordinate identity within the cultural hierarchy" (1992b, 23) although it does remain a socially contested figure, even with its current economic and cultural power. Most recently Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito, and danah boyd (2016, 19) noted the irony that fan identity has become part of the exclusionary forms of social and cultural capital that are often more important than traditional institutional status within participatory communities.

The contribution of fan studies to persona studies includes the increased attention to the changed level of comfort expressed by fans in signaling their self-identification as fans online. Kristina Busse's (2006, 2017) work on the visibility of queer fan fiction writers helps us understand the move from virtual spaces of total anonymity to networks of semipublic communities and fully public social media platforms in which fandom is often one part of a complex assemblage of a curated presentation of the self. The focus by Busse (2017) on LiveJournal as a platform that brings together "the fannish, political and personal in ways previously separated in fannish discourses" (160–61) is an important example of persona-inflected fan studies because it moves to flatten the ontological distinctions between online and offline, real, and unreal, subjective and objective, and to focus on the agency expressed in the public presentation of the self as a persona: "All subjects perform a variety of roles when interacting, and any real person one might meet is similarly an extrapolation of the information she discloses, a creation of their (fictionally 'real') persona" (173).

Busse (2017) also highlights the inherent danger in the assumption that the effects of the performativity of persona are empowering without consequence. This is an important distinction for any fan scholarship that considers political and social performances of the public self, as many fandoms and communities that engage in fanlike behaviors can be considered as deeply problematic, such as anti-vaxxers, GamerGaters, and alt-right communities. These collectives involve elaborate individual public performances that should not merely be dismissed as toxic and require closer examination using a methodology that brings together fan studies and persona studies to better understand the processes, meanings, power relations, and structural inequalities embedded in the everyday media and communication technologies and practices that contribute to these groups' ability to command participants (Green and Singleton 2013, 34).

A persona-inflected fan studies resembles Natasha Whiteman's approach, which draws on Matt Hills's (2002) view of fan agency as rational and intellectual engagement as opposed to purely sentimental affiliation in order to focus on how the fan presents their activities and influence, and how this presentation "serves to establish conceptualizations of their identities as fans" (2009, 395). A persona-inflected fan studies would therefore include attention to the situations under which specific individual public performances of the self online may occur with attention to the broader collective environment that must be negotiated without "causal implications" (395). In this case, the focus includes "fannish discourse" (Busse 2017, 165) as one part among the many structures, choices, objects, and outputs of the persona assemblage.
Francesca Coppa's (2008) work on early female fan vidding is an example of fan scholarship that reveals how fan texts, objects, and practices function as part of the negotiation of the self from individual identity to collective participation and broader public presentation of the self online. Coppa describes female fan vidding as the process of taking control of the camera, which can be understood in persona studies terminology as the agency demonstrated in the use of representational media for presentational purposes of public identity.

The publicness of persona has significant consequences for the study of fans and fandoms, which requires both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and in-depth case studies and analysis to unpack. The public dimension of persona invites us to approach fans and fandoms in terms of the subjective and objective properties of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. One way fan studies has moved in this direction is Bertha Chin and Lori Morimoto's model of transcultural fandom studies (2013) that looks to the complexity of the relationship between fan objects and fans from different geographical political, cultural, sexual, gender, and economic contexts. This approach suggests a synthesis of both an object-lens and persona-lens for a fan studies that considers objects as indexical agents in the mesh of public self-presentation that can provide insights into the collective participation of differently motivated and empowered human and nonhuman actors.

Fans are part of the personal audiences and micropublics (Marshall 2015; Barbour et al. 2014) that enable microcelebrities (Senft 2008, 2013; Marwick 2013, 2015a, 2015b) to act in the role of social media influencer (Abidin 2016). Microcelebrities and their fans occupy a two-way relationship that is part of the presentational media paradigm and fundamental to all forms of social media by definition (boyd and Ellison 2007). Microcelebrities are not micro because they have a small number of followers but rather because they are at the center of a personal public microcosm of being with followers spread across multiple social media networks and online media platforms.

The concepts of micropublics and microcelebrity function in a persona-inflected fan research to invert the typical understanding of celebrity as the primary text and fandom as a secondary product. The celebrification of fan persona as microcelebrity helps us to understand the transformation of the relation between public and private in the new articulations of public displays of the self. For example, Hojin Song (2018) observes that livestreaming "broadcast jockeys" on AfreecaTV are popular South Korean microcelebrities because they often construct their exaggerated personas around being fans themselves (4). This is also the case in the livestreaming of video games via YouTube, Twitch, and Mixer where the microcelebrities of this genre attain popularity through their fannish qualities and their high levels of familiarity with and authority within fannish discourse.

3. Fandom objects and persona

Applying both an object-lens and a persona-lens to the fan studies approach assists us in understanding different insights. For example, Coppa's (2008) case study highlights how early vidders shared scientific interest, careers, and expertise, suggesting that these women were practiced in the public presentation of the professional self as a distinct persona that
was connected to an established micropublic; they were able to transpose those personal, technical, and social skills to that of their public fan identity. Coppa's example of pioneer vidder Kandy Fong demonstrates the agency involved in the presentation of the self; it appropriates the representational power of the fan text, through the screening of the fan vid at fan conventions, as a presentational expression of her public self. This performance did not overcome the tensions inhabiting the texts but diversified them and even created new ones around copyright, community, and reception among others. As the "founder of the form" (Coppa 2008, ¶ 3.11), Fong's persona as a vidder became part of her microcelebrity status as much as the technology of the VCR and the fan vids' public screening.

[3.2] Similarly, the vidder subgroup Sterling Eidolan and the Odd Woman Out and its fanvid *Pressure* described by Coppa (2008, ¶ 4.8) is evidence of the representational text being subverted and used to transform the presentational media of fan vidding as a text itself. Pilar Lacasa and colleagues (2017) describe this kind of fan work in terms of Bakhtin's dialogue of the identity construction processes, which move between personal and social contexts and scenarios. This persona-inflected reading provides a means for understanding the ways in which representational media technology become presentational media content and the broader implications of the personal and social politics involved in that process. Just as VCR vidders are bricoleurs, as Coppa has argued, fans are bricoleurs in the presentation of the public self through the assemblage of persona employing everything from memes and merchandise to selfies and hashtags. The difference is that the presentational media performance of fandom is now anticipated and used in marketing and advertising to draw on fans' economic, cultural, and social capital and may even be a way for intellectual property stakeholders and platform owners to manage and manipulate the associated affective interest (Grossberg 1992).

[3.3] Online fans are frequently perceived as being disruptive, challenging productions for taking on new directions, or straying too from an imagined canon. These fan personas are often performed by those with the loudest voices and the most active micropublics. Fandom can involve performative recurrence as micropublics are crystalized around particular sides and teams in a tribalistic fashion. Fandom can also suffer from the danger of replicating and reinforcing traditional commercial discourses and industrial modes of consumption: "Fans today are being taught how to be a particular type of fan, dividing fandom into deliberate silos rather than enhancing the commonalities between them" (Booth 2015). Real critical fandom, argues Paul Booth, involves interacting with other fans thoughtfully, demonstrating listening skills, and sustaining civility even in disagreement. Authentic critical fandom involves performing a broad range of intercommunication skills across multiple instances of conversation and discussion, in which fan personas can occupy many different positions and perspectives. A persona-inflected fan studies can bring new perspectives to light in order to better understand the personal, political, economic, and social dynamics of the differences between tribalistic and civically engaged fandoms, through attention to everyday fan participants, fan microcelebrities, and the micropublics of both.

4. Performativity and fan persona

[4.1] The performativity of doing fandom, argues Booth (2015), when organized around
demonstrating critical fandom, works to counter the neoliberal impulse of consumerism to accept rather than question. Critical fandom means to consider resistance over complicity and question dominant discourses within fan texts and celebrity performances. This, of course, goes both ways, because fans who occupy different political spectrums perform this critical activity in different ways. Persona-inflected fan studies has the potential to investigate critical fandom as it is normalized and/or disarmed by the performance of fan persona used to further political agendas. For example, fan texts can become paratexts in larger enactments of familiar ideological tensions and differences, such as the reproduction of entrenched practices versus the inclusion of more progressive and diverse representation.

[4.2] Examining these tensions through a persona-inflected fan research will increase our understanding of the metafan persona and the economies devoted to this kind of performativity, which use fan texts as a way to construct a politicized fan persona that operates via micropublics sustained by controversy and antagonism. These personas effectively game the system of platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit that reward both negative and positive interactions as evidence of engagement for advertising purposes without distinguishing between them.

[4.3] Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) is well known in fan studies and has been deployed in persona studies to expand on the understanding of persona as something fans do, rather than what fans are. Nicholle Lamerichs (2011) provides an example of this persona-inflected fan studies by drawing on Butler to unpack the performativity of cosplay, arguing that fans do not necessarily perform the characters whose costumes they inhabit but instead express a dynamic relationship to these characters and to their stories that is deeply personal. During cosplay, argues Lamerichs, a fan performs an attachment to a character, narrative, or storyworld, thereby gaining status and attention but also bringing their uniqueness and self-expression to the material exchange between character and player. This is an important example of the persona of the fan repurposing the representational elements of the character and fan text as paratexts in the public presentation of the self.

[4.4] A persona-inflected approach to fan behavior builds on the textual reading of the character to study the way in which the fan transforms the character into a persona through the mediatization of the performance of the cosplay intercommunicatively. They use selfies and other images as well as updates, hashtags, and other digital objects and paratexts to share the fan persona performance online. This performance points indexically to both the individualized and collective activity, which is evident in Dawn Opel's (2015) example of female literary fans' online sharing of images of women reading, describing the practice as a communal act of identity construction. This practice, argues Opel, is a postfeminist cultural performance of a genre's visual representation of the literate self that circulates between social media communities, which in persona studies terms is considered as the political power and agency of presentational media practices: "The performative visual of the young woman reading in an analog space is a particularly postfeminist ideation, given that women fans in the space are both in fact reading and producing texts in digital format and that they are not all necessarily young" (Opel 2015, ¶ 4.8). Opel sees Butler's theory as a useful guide to explain the double movement of "reenactment and retrenchment of regressive,
heteronormative gender roles" in women's literary fan persona that can also be observed in cosplay, to which the focus on persona adds a range of dimensions to explore including the publicness, collectivity, mediatization, and value of the presentational performance of persona (see Moore, Barbour, and Lee 2017).

[4.5] The benefit of adding these new dimensions to the repertoire of fan studies theories can be observed in Coppa's (2018) arguments that fans are experts in the assembly and performance of fan identities as a kind of theater: "Gay men have been drawn to the behavior of glamor queens, divas, and women who are actively performing their gender. Similarly, slash fans tend to be drawn to characters who can be seen to be actively performing their masculinity, and so have behaviors, roles, lines, and props that can be easily redeployed" (Coppa 2018, 194). Coppa considers slash and drag to be a performative intervention of a proxy identity, but they also provide an essential counterpoint to the publicness of persona that should be considered so that a persona-inflected approach does not become reductive.

[4.6] Like Busse (2017), Coppa argues that representational media are not always positive, which we can expand to suggest that not all presentational media are empowering. Just as there are "limitations to visual representation as a political goal," there are distinct limitations to the value of presentational media as a political or liberating practice (Busse). That is not to deny the agency of curating a public self, but to be reminded that just as "it is not easy to escape the traditional politics of visibility" (Coppa 2018, 200) there are new dimensions of politics that are particular to the domain of presentationality. Fans, of course, live this reality, and many still consider it necessary to separate their fandoms from their identifiable public selves. This is why there is still an everyday use of semipseudonymous personas and online identities that are deliberately distanced, such as player tags in online games and fans' use of obscure profile names on social media sites, apps, and platforms.

5. Methods for a persona-inflected fan studies

[5.1] Publicness is the primary focus of persona studies, so a persona-inflected fan studies attends to the industrialized public self, which involves individuals' means to curate a persona and manage their micropublics. Fans, however, inadvertently contribute to a corporate surveillance culture that does not algorithmically care if a click, a view, a retweet, or a repost is done in support or in anger, with dispassion or with energetic criticism —because all engagement is commodifiable. As Booth (2015) has argued, the media industries have empowered fans, simultaneously seeking to authenticate legitimate forms of consumption while attempting to limit the effectiveness of more critical voices. The industry does not always silence them, but it does channel them into platforms and services that benefit from the massification of their activity through the transformation of engagement into revenue. A persona-centric approach would then focus on better understanding the transformations of the relations between public and private and shed light on their new interconnections that can result in radical shifts in power. Persona studies have incorporated a range of methods that build on the innovations emerging from ethnography and social network analysis, which can be used in isolation or combination to examine the effects of these changes.
The following section will consider two methods featured among others in *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (Marshall, Moore, and Barbour, 2020): interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and network visualization. These are two useful approaches for analyzing the presentation of the fan/self publicly online. It is, however, essential to recognize and respect that not all fans present themselves publicly (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007). As Booth (2015) has observed, there are as many ways of being a fan as there are fans in the world, and it is crucial to "celebrate this fannish variety." A persona-inflected fan studies must then distinguish between unpublic fans (whose fan objects are known only to themselves), semipublic fandom, and fully public fan personas, which are considered to be a volunteered presentation of the self. Celebrities have taught fans that public presentation of the self has significant agency attached to it but also connections to networks of operations that function outside of the individual's control, regardless of claims to rights over personal information or even intellectual property. For all fans, this agency moves between the three performative layers proposed by Barbour (2015) as registers of public persona: professional, private, and intimate.

Drawing on IPA, Barbour (2015) develops a method for understanding the experience of persona by its participants through interviews and digital ethnography, including historical analysis of persona stereotypes, myths, and tropes; online listening techniques (Crawford 2009); and deep analysis and in-depth unstructured interviews. Interpretation of the data occurs via attention to the three distinct registers of persona performance associated with the public presentation of the online self: "Just as a single human voice can move between different vocal registers, so can a single online persona move between different performance registers" (Barbour 2015).

The professional register is typically formulated around the presentation of work: such as the fan-scholar deploying familiar academic approaches to studying texts, audiences, and media production (Hills 2002). Professionalism is synonymous with occupation, expertise, and other normative models of quality and ethics, but as Barbour (2015) notes what counts as a professional in unregulated work environments such as the arts and creative industries is highly contested. Greater attention to fan microcelebrities whose persona is framed in the professional register and whose performance commands networks of micropublics and niche audiences will help to provide a rich understanding of the potential economic, cultural, and political role of the fan in the contemporary media landscape.

The personal register of persona resonates between the professional and intimate, moving between the public practices of fandom and the private feelings about them. The interpersonal relations of fan micropublics are often framed within discourses of established systems, such as the canonization of fan texts. A persona-inflected fan studies examining the personal register would draw on the ethnographic methods of IPA to examine the presentational performance of adherence to or rebellion against the norms of the fandom through the expressive system of the presentational use of representational texts. The negotiation of experience of individual fans participating in the collective fandom has implications for and resonance with the performance of the self outside that fandom. Through attention to this experience, we can see how the personal relationship to that fandom is managed and regarded.
The intimate register of a public persona involves the performance of emotional sensitivity and displays of affect often with a wide range of intensity. Once confined to private interactions, the intimate register has been normalized through the public disclosure of personal information across a wide range of technologies, platforms, and processes (Lambert 2013). Although there are concerns over the loss of privacy and potential threats to personal security, the intimate now reflects a common practice of fandom, which is to celebrate and share very personal commitments to aspects of popular culture. A persona-inflected fan studies approach that focuses on the intimate register might consider the degree to which personal information, stories, and performances contribute to the increased comfort that fans have in the disclosure of personal information. These registers are not mutually exclusive, and a persona-inflected approach might also consider the movement between these registers and the effect this has on the experience of fandom and the public presentation of the self as a fan. Attention to ways individuals engage with social media platforms and the operation of collectives across them will enable new ways of theorizing online fan persona.

IPA offers a useful approach for engaging with a persona-inflected fan studies at an individual level, while network visualization—drawing on tools of social network analysis—is effective for exploring persona as connections between individuals and collectives on specific platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter. Network visualization provides researchers with a means to get closer to the data generated by participatory processes of intercommunication and to better understand the micropublics of persona formations. For example, fandom and individual public fan persona can be observed in action by visualizing digital objects such as hashtags. Figure 1 is a sociogram of Twitter users posting tweets that include the hashtag #spiderverse, which refers to the animated movie Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, which premiered on December 14, 2018. The data for the graph was captured on December 24, 2018 and includes the previous 24 to 48 hours of Twitter activity.

Figure 1. A visualization of the use of the Twitter hashtag #spiderverse, created on December 24, 2018, with NodeXL.

The network exploration and overview tool NodeXL was used to create the graph from a small data set (less than 2,000 tweets). Each of the individual nodes on the graph represent a Twitter user by their profile image, and each line, or edge, between the nodes indicates a
relationship between the two users, such as a directed tweet, a like, a retweet, or a mention, which can be used to analyze patterns of activity and identify key participants and their roles in the network. Analysis of visualization and exploration of the network enables fan researchers to discover new trends and activities involved in the presentation of the fan/self that moves from the individual to the collective and back again. The intercommunication of fan micropublics can be explored and the relationships between fans and other actors on the social media platform can be discerned with detailed granularity (note 1).

[5.9] Examining figure 1, we can visually identify fan personas by their indexical designation from the digital object of the hashtag and the use of avatar images related to Marvel and Spider-Man, which are taken directly from the user's Twitter profiles. By sorting and clustering the layout of the graph using social network algorithms, we can position patterns of similar activity in close proximity to reveal key micropublics and specific fan activity. For example, in the top left side of the graph, we see a sizeable micropublic formed around @carrot_boi, a visual artist, whose #spiderverse tagged artwork attracted 10,000 retweets and 32,000 likes. Dedicated Spider-Man fans can be observed among those in @carrot_boi's micropublic and are identified by their profile images that feature different versions of characters from that universe. Detailed analysis of the individual tweets can be made, and the micropublics of those participants rendered in further graphs to study similarities and differences in their activities.

[5.10] Looking at the accompanying data analytics for the graph shown in figure 1 can provide fan researchers with new types of information and ways of understanding the interconnections between fans, and between fans and nonfans. Their overlapping micropublics can then be explored and critically analyzed in detail. For example, the Twitter feeds for the Top Mentioned contributors in the graph reveal trends in fan art, conversations about the soundtrack, and discussions about the protagonist, Miles Morales, and the fan-favorite character Spider-Gwen. The top URL mentioned in the graph refers to a tweet by Humberto Rosa (@hf_rosa), a lead animator on the film, in which he shares a piece of his own fan art. Rosa's status as a fan is called into question by responses to his tweet, but Rosa defends his status as a fan by tweeting, "haha fair enough. But it's not like it was used for the movie or anything like that either, it's just me geeking out about Miles in my spare time" (Rosa 2018).

[5.11] By following the data, we reveal a potential avenue of investigation in which the performance of fan persona and fan microcelebrity are brought into question by others doubting the legitimacy and authenticity of the persona as a fan, due to the proximity of the fan to the texts' creation and the authorial status of the fan over the text. IPA and network visualization are not entirely new methods, but together and separately they offer ways to examine the public performance of fan persona and the connections between the individual and the collective. A persona-inflected fan studies approach would seek to understand the dynamics of social roles and cultural participation of fan persona by sampling, rendering, and exploring activity that operates across privately owned and collectively regulated spaces.

6. Conclusion
[6.1] It is useful to highlight two recent persona-inflected fan studies contributions. Jocelyn Smith's (2017) analysis of Hillary Clinton fans and their use of Clinton's political persona to construct their own personal register of persona explores the anthologizing and demonizing of fan activity in the representational media's recasting of presentational expression of persona as "emotional fangirling." Smith examines the way in which television and print media separated "serious political supporters" from fans by their obsessive affective investment in the use of memes and identification with girl power tropes. Similarly, Lacasa et al. (2017) examined the way teenage fans of One Direction, Justin Bieber, and MAGCON perform their online selves in the movement between collective and individual identity by drawing on celebrity persona.

[6.2] Persona is both an interface and a network assemblage. Clinton's and Bieber's online personas are more than an amalgam of their political or creative work and representations of them; they are an intercommunication of those textual resources expressed as individual public engagement with a collective. The fan collective then utilizes the representational media as part of their own textual resources for self-expression presentationally and communally in the pursuit of political activity. This is done overtly in the case of Clinton fans and indirectly in the case of Bieber fans, whose participation is fundamental to the development of civic imagination, which Jenkins, Ito, and boyd (2015) link to "the origins of political consciousness" (Lacasa et al. 2017, 52).

[6.3] Persona-inflected fan scholarship, as demonstrated by Smith (2017) and Lacasa et al. (2017), offers fan scholars an expanded approach that embraces the celebrity practice of all individuals, which Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) identified as a continuum of self-branding practices. This integrated approach shifts the focus from the representational media paradigm to a presentational one. Smith's analysis draws on David Marshall and Neil Henderson's (2016) work on political persona to understand the way that affect is used against the agency of fan persona through the representation of Clinton fans as overly emotional, delusional, and obsessive. Smith argues this is a deliberate attempt to delegitimize and undermine the political power of presentational strategies of persona construction that challenge the status quo.

[6.4] A persona-inflected fan studies provides a methodology for investigating the processes of negotiation between individual and collective in terms of how a fan draws on representational resources and contributes to communities of practice in order to perform persona presentationally. Lacasa and colleagues (2017, 55) argue that fans construct their online identities through the address of a celebrity persona; but by expanding the scope of celebrity through its attention to microcelebrity, we can consider all types of texts, objects, and practices that have micropublics of attention that become part of the fan persona. Lacasa et al. (2017) demonstrate how images and hashtags circulate within fan communities and are transformed by the network as they become individualized expressions of fan identity on social media: "These images show how people participating in fan communities have shared feelings and values, and participate in specific practices created around the celebrity's persona mediated by digital tools. These shared endeavors generate a collective consciousness and are a point of support for the construction of personal identities" (58).
However, it is essential to remember that the platforms where this activity occurs are not neutral and have a vested interest in surveilling and converting activity into data for advertising and marketing purposes through algorithmic processes, which have implications for command and control operations. Persona-inflected fan scholarship must be equally attentive to the role of the platform and its owners, operating software and hardware as the agents and actors in the mesh of persona performance.

6. Note

1. Sources for learning how to analyze these graphs include Marc Smith and colleagues (2014) and Derek Hansen, Ben Schneiderman, and Marc Smith (2010), and details on how this approach has been used in persona studies are available in the work of Marshall, Moore, and Barbour (2015, 2020) and Susan Turnbull and Christopher Moore (2017).

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Theory

Adding a digital dimension to fan studies methodologies

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[0.1] Abstract—Digital fan fiction challenges the sovereignty of the literary object and necessitates a reevaluation of textuality. Fan fiction may be taken as a form of networked digital narrative that exists electronically and shares features with the printed book. With a focus on the paratext as a site of transaction between fan fiction writers and readers, it is possible to attend to a negotiation between work and text. By using computational methods—word frequency analysis, topic modeling, and decision trees—to analyze fan fiction paratexts as they are used on the online fan fiction repository Archive of Our Own, it is possible to reevaluate the fan fiction paratext and the notion of the fan fiction text.

[0.2] Keywords—Captain America; Digital humanities; Fan fiction; Fan studies; Intertextuality; Methodology; Paratext; Quantitative analysis; Topic modeling


1. Introduction

[1.1] Digital fan fiction challenges the sovereignty of the literary object and necessitates a reevaluation of textuality. This process of reevaluation is evident in fan studies with critics such as Abigail De Kosnik writing that "[a] fan fiction story cannot be viewed as a wholly self-contained object, a text delimited by the first and last words that appear on the screen, the way that readers of novels and other genres of print culture conventionally read books as bounded by their covers" (2016, 254). De Kosnik's distinction between a text on a screen and a novel evokes Gérard Genette's description of a literary work as comprising both a text and supplementary elements, collectively known as the paratext (1997, 1). Digital Humanities scholarship has similarly grappled with the distinction between texts and works with Katherine Bode (2018) and Martin Paul Eve (2019) criticizing the discipline for focusing on literary texts and ignoring the ways in which literary works record the activities of transmission that are required to fully understand and contextualize the text.

[1.2] I take fan fiction as a form of networked digital narrative that both exists electronically and shares features with the printed book. Focusing on the paratext as a site of transaction
between fan fiction writers and readers, I draw upon Bode's (2018) and Eve's (2019) suggested methods for attending to the negotiation between work and text. Using computational methods—word frequency analysis, topic modeling, and decision trees—to analyze fan fiction paratexts as they are used on the online fan fiction repository Archive of Our Own (hereafter AO3), I reevaluate the fan fiction paratext and the notion of the fan fiction text.

2. Digital methods and the fan fiction text

[2.1] Fan fiction, defined as amateur works of fiction created in response to and depicting the same characters and/or setting of a published media work or works, is predominantly located in massive digital archives, each hosting millions of works. Fan fiction and fan fiction communities are enmeshed in many different conversations—about literariness, digital media, popular media, psychology, politics, and sociocultural activities—and scholars working within these fields and more all bring their disciplinary expertise to bear on fan fiction from many different angles. Arising from these many disciplines, there are two identifiable approaches to fan fiction: the ethnographic and the literary critical, as identified by Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson, who write that "[m]edia fandom studies has historically been the realm of ethnographic research on the one hand and literary textual analysis on the other" (2012, 49). Ethnographic and literary critical approaches can emphasize either the fan or the fan fiction at the expense of the other so that, in the estimation of Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi, "[w]here ethnography risks 'othering' the fan, textual analysis risks making them merely a subject created through textual functions" with the result that "textual analysis risks losing the fan altogether" (2014, 12). Without sacrificing their literary status, it is important to understand fan fiction works within the context of their production and reception.

[2.2] Digital methods, which are "defined as techniques for the ongoing research on the affordances of online media" (Venturini et al. 2018, 4200), have incurred similar criticism to literary critical fan studies methods, namely, that they decontextualize and reify the text, removing it from its social and textual context as a work. One particular method is distant reading, which, in the words of Eve (2019), "is concerned with reductive but nonetheless labor-saving methods that use the untiring repeatability of computational tasks to garner statistically informed deductions about novels or other works that one has not read" (2019, 3). As well as allowing the scholar of literature to transcend the limits of their own reading, distant reading has been championed as enabling detailed and panoramic insights while resisting reliance upon a small canon of works. Franco Moretti, who coined the term distant reading, defines it as a method "where distance...is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems" (2013, 48–49, original emphasis). These abilities seem well-suited to the study of fan fiction, a form of literature so prolific that reading the more than six million texts on AO3 is impossible for even a large group of researchers. Additionally, fan fiction exists in an electronic format that, as Maria Lindgren Leavenworth notes, is amenable to data collection and analysis (2016, 51).

[2.3] Distant reading has been criticized for misrepresenting the text and removing it from its
context. Bode accuses distant reading methods of treating literary texts as stable and discrete objects, as "single entities in time and space" (2018, 26) when, in actuality, "literary works do not exist in a single time and place but accrue meaning in the multiple contexts in which they are produced and received" (40). She seeks to redress this by attending to the constructed, contingent, and transactional nature of works and datasets (42). For Bode, digital methods that treat texts as stable objects ignore their contexts, much as literary critical approaches in fan studies treat fan fiction works as isolated objects and ignore the communities that create, share, and interpret them. Eve (2019), in his work applying distant reading methods to a single literary text, locates editorial differences between the US and UK editions of the novel Cloud Atlas. Extrapolating this potential for difference to e-books, which can be altered even after a copy has been purchased and downloaded, emphasizes the mutability of digital texts (2019, 29). Eve reconceives the stable and discrete text as a "collection of always-'corrupt' parallel texts that, in aggregate, constitute the social and historical event of a work" (27).

[2.4] Eve's (2019) model has much in common with fan fiction where multiple, divergent works are created in response to one or more popular media work. Fan fiction has been theorized as "transform[ing] a text into a communal property between source creators and fan creators" to create "a shared, meta-textual property that can be a collaborative, mutable thing constantly evolving rather than remaining a static, closed object" (Coker 2012, 86). It has been also described as a metatext, which is "the mental construct shared within the fan community" (Jenkins 2013, xlc), a useful term for referring to fan fiction works in aggregate. Fan fiction, as an aggregation of linked texts, refuses a model of stable and discrete textuality. The model of textuality put forth by Bode (2018) and Eve—as something contingent, mutable, recording a transmission history of production and reception and comprising multiple parallel texts—finds a real-world example in fan fiction.

[2.5] In further defining fan fiction I would like to make a distinction between printed books and digital narratives. Printed books are often read as being "bounded by their covers" (De Kosnik 2016, 254) although, as is shown in the discussion of Bode (2018) and Eve (2019), textuality is not so simple. Digital narratives are "narrative texts that are created in and for digital media that are, presumably, at least one step further removed from concepts of the work, the author, and the text as object" (Birke and Christ 2013, 79). Fan fiction's existence on AO3 as a multiauthored, networked metatext puts it firmly in the category of digital narrative, which means that features of transmission that have been theorized in relation to the printed book and even the e-book must be rethought and, for an example of this, I turn to the paratext.

3. The fan fiction paratext

[3.1] Genette defines the paratext as being accompaniments to a text, such as the title, preface, or illustrations "to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" (1997, 1, original emphasis). For Genette, the paratext's role cannot be overstated as "a text without a paratext does not exist and never has existed" (3). Paratextual material allows a text to be located and recognized as a work by designating a space within the work that is understood as the text.
The paratext has been understood as framing a central text (Smyth 2014, 330), but more than this, it constructs the text, forming a contact zone between work and world that designates that inside of it as the text and the outside of it as the author and readers.

[3.2] The paratexts of networked digital fan fiction are not identical to the paratexts of printed books, and therefore it is important to describe how the fan fiction paratext functions, specifically on the website AO3. AO3 is a searchable archive of fan fiction texts. The user interface is minimal, and the search functionality is powerful. The landing page offers orienting information and several ways to access the fan fiction works (figure 1). The works can be accessed via a basic search toolbar, a link to advanced search functions, a link to a browse function, and a link to a fandom drop-down menu that taxonomizes works by the media properties to which they relate. The fandom list is also replicated on the landing page.

![Figure 1. AO3 landing page. 'Archive of Our Own.' December 2019.](https://archiveofourown.org/).

[3.3] Clicking on any of the fandom or browse categories leads to a list of works held on the site, each displayed as a regular set of paratextual material that describes the work and its reception (figure 2). For each work, the site lists the work's title, author(s), date of posting or updating, the fandom(s) to which it belongs, any content warnings, characters, romantic and platonic relationships between those characters, summary, language, whether the work is restricted to website members only, and free tags that elaborate on the work's content. There are also icons indicating the work's rating (from General Audiences to Explicit), category (whether it depicts romantic relationships and, if so, whether they are between characters of the same sex, different sex, or a combination), a reiteration of content warnings, and whether the work is complete or in-progress. All of this information is provided by the user who posts the work to the site. In addition, there are metrics revealing the work's word count, number of chapters, number of collections to which it has been added by readers, number of comments, number of kudos (akin to likes), number of bookmarks, and number of hits. This information is generated by AO3; however, authors can opt not to make all of them visible to readers.
[3.4] Once a work has been selected from the list by clicking on its title (figure 3), the reader is taken to a page on the site that replicates the same paratextual material and, in addition, author's notes, the text itself, links to related works and, at the end of the text, a list of readers who gave kudos and finally comments provided by readers.

[3.5] There are elements of the fan fiction paratext on AO3 that closely resemble the paratextual conventions of the printed book, such as the title and author name(s), and the summary, which is akin to a marketing blurb on a book's back cover. The ability to use hyperlinks in a work's paratext is a major factor in differentiating fan fiction on AO3 from printed books. Not just the author's name, but the fandom, characters, relationships between characters, and free tags each constitute a gateway to a further list of works on AO3 so that "[b]y providing hyperlinks, the e-book [and fan fiction] thus forges connections between texts in ways that are unprecedented in printed books" (Birke and Christ 2013, 77). These hyperlinks not only strengthen associations between the paratexts of different fan fiction texts, creating an intertextual web of connections between individual points in a vast digital narrative, but also help to create a taxonomical organization of the fan fiction works on AO3 that has multiple points of entry. Fan fiction's close connections to other fan fiction texts disincline me from describing each fan fiction text on AO3 as being comparable to a single volume. Rather, selecting and prioritizing various paratextual elements enables the construction of textual objects out of an otherwise undifferentiated networked digital narrative. Constructing a dataset as a contingent but stable textual object for study allows for the application of digital methods.
4. Constructing a dataset

[4.1] In order to interrogate fan fiction paratexts on AO3 in a way that takes into account their multiplicity and connectivity, I constructed the AO3 Dataset from a subset of works on the site. Bode (2018) emphasizes that any conclusions drawn from a dataset will be "shaped profoundly, by the methodological and critical frameworks through which it is approached, and by the selections and amplifications those frameworks produce" (2018, 25). Curating a dataset that enables analysis of the function of paratextual elements in fan fiction requires a series of decisions that I elaborate here. I tried to reduce differences in the content of the texts to amplify the differences between paratextual elements. To construct the AO3 Dataset, I limited the dataset to works with the fandom tag "Captain America (Movies)" due to my familiarity with that fandom. I further limited the dataset to works depicting the relationship pairing "James 'Bucky' Barnes/Steve Rogers" so that a romantic theme and the characters would be constant. I excluded works tagged as crossovers, meaning they belong to more than one fandom, to avoid complicating the dataset. I only included works that can be viewed without a site login, for reasons that I detail in paragraph 4.3. I included only works in English, as this is an English-language study and the computational methods I use require the texts to belong to the same language. I included only works marked as complete as, for a linguistic study of fan fiction texts, the ending of each text may reveal useful data. I included only texts of one thousand words or more as that is the minimum length usually required for the computational method topic modeling. As visitors to AO3 use the paratextual material to choose which fan fiction texts to read, I judged that the more popular fan fiction works would have a better correlation between paratext and textual content. I therefore included works that had been viewed at least five thousand times, meaning that their paratextual material had led to readers frequently selecting that work.

[4.2] These criteria yielded 5,237 works, a number that is large enough to compare different paratextual categories but not so large as to exceed the processing capacity of the digital tools I used. I collected the data from AO3 using a web scraper written in Python initially by Jingyi Li and Sara Sterman (2016) and modified by myself. The AO3 Dataset includes all the paratextual (or metadata) elements of each work as well as the prose narrative that can properly be called the fan fiction text. It does not include reader comments or a list of the readers who left kudos on the work.

[4.3] There is no possibility of constructing a neutral or comprehensive fan fiction dataset even with unlimited time and more processing capacity as every day new works are uploaded to AO3, existing works are updated, and the data regarding hits, kudos, and other categories change. Each of the above choices has an effect on the conclusions I draw but, by detailing the decisions made, I hope to be as transparent as possible in constructing a "stable, historicized, and publicly accessible object for analysis" (Bode 2018, 7). The reproducibility of results is an important and debated issue in the digital humanities; however, using fan fiction data has some specific ethical responsibilities. Due to its nonprofessional and noncommercial status, fan fiction writers are not protected by the same legal strictures as are commercially published authors. With many fan fiction writers using pseudonyms, there is often an attempt to distance fan fiction works from the real-life identities of the authors, and this is not something I wish to undermine. When constructing the AO3 Dataset, I proceeded
in line with Amy Bruckman's "Ethical Guidelines for Research Online." She writes that "you may freely quote and analyze online information without consent" providing it has the following criteria: it is officially, publicly archived; no password is required for archive access; no site policy prohibits it; the topic is not highly sensitive (2002, par. 1). AO3 is a public archive according to Bruckman's definition as it is accessible without a password. Some works on AO3 are only visible to users of the site who have a username and password, and therefore I excluded such works from my dataset. AO3 does not prohibit the scraping of its contents, stating that "[u]sing bots or scraping is not against our Terms of Service unless it relates to our guidelines against spam or other activities" ("Terms"). The themes depicted in some fan fiction works can be highly sensitive, and so, for this study, I predominantly cite aggregate data (frequently used words and statistically important words) with the addition of some individual titles. Considering the ethical sensitivities of fan fiction data, I am unable to share a full dataset. Instead, I have shared the Python code that I used to collect the data (Appendix A: Code to scrape fan fiction text and metadata from AO3) and a list of the urls of the 5,237 works in the dataset (Appendix B: List of AO3 urls).

5. Case study: Titles and most frequent words

[5.1] The title has long been a paratextual element. A title points inward to a specific work and, as Eleanor Shevlin notes, it also "participates in the world outside that text" since being "situated on the border of the text, the title commands a far larger audience than the actual work that it labels" (1999, 43). The title synecdochally stands in for a work, distinguishing it from other works and enabling its discussion. Conveying a boundary around and unity upon the work, the title, along with other paratextual elements on the title page, "transform[s] written works into reified products by standardizing the book as a physical product" (46). The title therefore helps to turn a text into a work, which is a discrete physical object that can be differentiated from other works.

[5.2] In addition to these discursive, differentiating, and locational functions, the title has an interpretive function: it gives the reader clues as to the content of the text to which it refers. Moretti describes this function of the title as being like a coded message "where the novel as language meets the novel as commodity" (2009, 134–35). The title, then, operates to distinguish works as physical objects and texts as differentiated content. Fan fiction, as networked digital narrative, challenges the boundaries of both works and texts. Its dissemination via digital archives opposes the idea of works as discrete physical objects and the way that multiple fan fiction texts all participate in the same metatext opposes the idea of texts as separable entities. While the novel title functions to bring stability to individual works—and texts—the fan fiction title likely fulfils another role.

[5.3] In order to compare the functions of the fan fiction title to that of commercially published fiction, I assembled two comparative datasets. The Fan Fiction Titles Dataset (Appendix C) contains the 5,237 titles of the fan fiction works in the AO3 Dataset. The Romance Fiction Titles Dataset (Appendix D) contains 637 titles of romance novel e-books published by Harlequin in their Harlequin Romance category from 2004 to 2013. The Romance Fiction Titles are drawn from a similar genre and a similar timeframe to the Fan Fiction Titles, reducing as many variables as possible. They differ in that the titles in the Fan
Fiction Titles Dataset are attached to works of fan fiction disseminated freely on AO3 and those in the Romance Fiction Titles Dataset are attached to novels sold individually on Harlequin.com and other e-book retail sites. Any differences that arise are likely due to both their format—as fan fiction works in a metatext or individual novels—and their commercial status.

[5.4] To gain an overview of the titles, I assembled a list of the most frequent words used in both datasets using the concordancing software AntConc (Anthony 2018) to ascertain differences in their semantic content and paratextual functions. The results are very different (Appendix E: Fan Fiction Titles Word Frequency Results and Appendix F: Romance Fiction Titles Word Frequency Results). The Romance Fiction Titles Word Frequency Results contain 2,743 word tokens and 691 word types, meaning that each word is used 4.43 times. The Fan Fiction Titles Word Frequency Results contain 24,426 word tokens and 4,648 word types, meaning that each word is used 5.25 times, indicating that both datasets are similarly diverse in their word use. However, the Romance Fiction Titles far more frequently use content words than the Fan Fiction Titles, which favor function words.

[5.5] The twenty most frequent words in the Romance Fiction Titles (Table 1) feature nine content words and eleven function words. The content words (bride, baby, boss, christmas, marriage, proposal, wife, secret, family) are descriptive of the novels' contents and display a narrow range of themes, with Christmas, marriage, babies, and the male authority figure of the boss recurring. The fifty most frequent words in the Romance Fiction Titles contain thirty-five content words and only fifteen function words that further reinforce these themes. These words give a good indication of the characters, settings, and themes that are depicted in the novels. Harlequin.com labels its novels as belonging to subcategories within the Harlequin Romance category. For the titles in the dataset, these subcategories are Contemporary Romance, Romance, Contemporary Women's Fiction, Family Life Fiction, Holiday Romance, Holiday, Western Romance, Wholesome Romance, Multicultural and Interracial Romance, Contemporary Fantasy, and Regency Romance (Harlequin.com). There is a large crossover between the themes indicated by the Romance Fiction Titles and by these subcategories, indicating that the titles are reflective of the novels' contents. These Romance Fiction Titles enact an interpretive function by relaying clues about the content of the novel to the potential reader.

Table 1. Top 20 Most Frequent Words in the Romance Fiction Titles Dataset

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[5.6] The twenty most frequent words in the Fan Fiction Titles (table 2) feature nineteen function words and only one content word. The content word (love) seems redundant as it repeats information already present in the fact that the titles refer to romance narratives only. The fifty most frequent words contain only nine content words and forty-one function words. These content words give character names (bucky, steve, rogers), reinforce a romantic theme, as in love (for example, "This love") and heart ("Wear Your Heart On Your Skin"), or are minimally descriptive, as in home ("Coming Home"), time ("This Time Around"), like
("Just Like Soulmates Should"), and day ("A Day In The Past"). Compared to the Romance Fiction Titles, there is very little cohesion in these content words. The Fan Fiction Titles do not give a summary of the works' themes and therefore do not fulfill an interpretive function.

Table 2. Top 20 Most Frequent Words in the Fan Fiction Titles Dataset

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[5.7] Where the Fan Fiction Titles contain function words relating to characters, this information is already conveyed in the relevant tags of the AO3 paratext: the character and relationship tags. The character and relationship tags can be easily searched and sorted to locate the reader's desired character(s) or relationship(s) while the title can only be organized by means of a less-thorough free text search. If the information about characters in the titles is intended to be used for searching and categorizing, it would be more effective to place that information in the tags. The Fan Fiction Titles, therefore, do not carry the same semantic burden as the Romance Fiction Titles. But do they function to locate, differentiate, and reify fan fiction works as is claimed of novel titles?

[5.8] The Romance Fiction Titles, in their differences, do allow each novel to be differentiated and discussed. However, the similarities between the titles and their repetition of certain words and themes does point toward a similarity in content. Titles like *A Bride for the Maverick Millionaire, Millionaire's Baby Bombshell, The Baby Proposal, The Tycoon's Christmas Proposal, Christmas Angel for the Billionaire*, and *The Bride's Baby* cycle around the same narrow range of themes. It is easy to imagine a romance novel reader struggling to remember whether they have already read *The Tycoon's Proposal, The Tycoon's Christmas Proposal, or A Surprise Christmas Proposal*, or indeed *The Sheriff's Doorstep Baby, The Rancher's Doorstep Baby, or Firefighter's Doorstep Baby*. The Romance Fiction Titles Dataset, drawn from a specialized and narrow subset of novels, already shows a slippage between discrete works in terms of subject matter that challenges the very idea of works as distinct objects. The Fan Fiction Titles, with their lack of descriptive words, are even less helpful in distinguishing fan fiction texts. The title by itself holds less potential meaning than the other categorizing information: the fandom it relates to, the characters and relationships depicted, the relationship to canon, the genre, the inclusion of explicit sexual content, or the number of words. The titles on AO3 do point toward individual texts by functioning as hyperlinks, but the paratext as a whole, with its abundance of hyperlinks to other works, authors, and fandoms, opens outward to a multitude of linked works.

6. Case study: Texts, author's notes, summaries, and topic modeling

[6.1] My analysis of the most frequent words used in the AO3 Dataset indicates that the title does not act alone to convey information but rather replicates information conveyed in other parts of the paratext, a fact that strengthens the argument that fan fiction is inherently intertextual and also highlights the importance of approaching fan fiction in terms of its organization in online archives. In this section, I use a distant reading technique to gain an overview of the content of the texts, summaries, and author's notes in the AO3 Dataset before conducting a comparison between them. For this I use another computational method
in order to offer a different perspective on the data, since one of the benefits of digital methods is the variety of approaches that can be combined and the ability to switch between interpretive lenses and distances, oscillating between close reading and distant reading to traverse "multiple levels of engagement with a corpus of texts" (Templeton 2011, par. 8).

[6.2] Topic modeling is a form of distant reading that provides an overview of a set of texts (or documents) by assuming that the documents have been created using a finite number of themes (or topics) each consisting of semantically related words. For example, a topic containing the words *wand*, *witch*, *wizard*, *spell*, and *potion* might be interpreted as constituting the theme of Magic. A children's fantasy story may be comprised of words relating to magic, school, magical creatures, action, and morality. This central assumption of topic modeling—that texts are made up of groups of words that relate to the same theme—is not a huge leap, as Ted Underwood reminds us that "[t]he notion that documents are produced by discourses rather than authors is alien to common sense, but not alien to literary theory" (2012, par. 4). More formally, topic modeling "is an unsupervised statistical classification method for identifying patterns in the use of words within documents and across a corpus" (Bode 2018, 160) and is an effective tool for identifying the "aboutness" of that corpus (Murakami et al. 2017, 244) and hence for identifying the aboutness of fan fiction texts and paratexts.

[6.3] MALLET is a topic modeling tool that uses Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), a probabilistic, machine-learning algorithm created by David Blei that proceeds by splitting a corpus into topics at random, then taking one word at a time from the corpus and, while assuming that the topics it has created are correct, sorting this word into the most likely topic (McCallum 2002; Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003). It repeats this for every word many, many times over, and as it progresses the topics become stable. The model does not understand the meaning of each word but forms topics from the words that are most frequently associated with each other in the documents and so, after many iterations of the algorithm, remarkably coherent topics emerge. By using topic modeling, one can quickly get a sense of the themes represented in a group of texts and their relative frequencies. LDA "draws structure out of a corpus" with "minimal critical presuppositions" (Templeton 2011, par. 1) and "without reliance on prior hypotheses" (Murakami et al. 2017, 254). The presuppositions it does require relate to practical choices, such as the texts that make up the corpus, the number of topics requested, and the preparation of the texts by removing extraneous words.

[6.4] I extracted from the AO3 Dataset three sets of documents, to form the AO3 Texts Dataset (Appendix G) (5,237 documents), AO3 Summaries Dataset (Appendix H) (5,233 documents), and AO3 Author's Notes Dataset (Appendix I) (4,149 documents). There are fewer documents of summaries and author's notes as not every paratextual element accompanies each work on AO3. As topic modeling identifies semantic similarity based on the cooccurrence of meaning-carrying content words, function words can be removed, so I extracted only the verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs from each document and discarded the rest. I further prepared the documents by removing the character names using a stop-words list I generated from the character field of the paratexts in the AO3 Dataset. As well as transforming the fan fiction works in the AO3 Dataset into these document datasets, there are decisions involved in generating a topic model. I asked the model to find twenty-five topics
although "[t]here is no agreed way to automatically decide the number of topics" (Murakami et al. 2017, 250). It should be noted that as LDA is a probabilistic algorithm, the results will vary slightly each time. I generated and used one model for each dataset rather than generating multiple models and cherry picking the one that I preferred. MALLET generates a list of all the topics in a dataset and how prevalent that topic is in the dataset. Words can appear in multiple topics since the words in each topic are not discrete but overlap (Murakami et al., 245) and words can have different connotations (Bode 2018, 160). My discussion below of the three datasets is drawn from these topic lists. MALLET also provides a file with the relative proportion of each topic in each document. These results are important for classifying documents as I do in section 7.

[6.5] Where an analysis of the most frequent words in the Fan Fiction Titles failed to describe the thematic content of the texts in the AO3 Dataset, a topic model succeeds. The twenty-five topics generated from the AO3 Texts Dataset gives an overview of the texts' themes. Of the twenty-five topics identified, some represent setting, plot, and character information sourced from canon, some represent genres and tropes found within fan fiction, and some refer to the texts' style or register, which are more nebulous properties. The model identified canon elements such as the characters of Bucky Barnes (Topic 23: soldier, winter, asset, man, mission) and Steve Rogers (Topic 15: america, shield, avengers, tower, team). There are also topics in common with the Romance Fiction Titles, such as family (Topic 10: baby, kids, dad, mom, boy, love, mother, family, kid, daddy) and weddings (Topic 8: man, husband, room, sir, love, wedding, married, mother, house, family).

[6.6] As well as these easily interpreted topics regarding characters, plot, and settings, there are more ambiguous topics, and these are some of the most prevalent topics in the dataset. Ambiguity is not necessarily a bad thing as Underwood explains: "I want [topic modeling] to point me toward something I don't yet understand, and I almost never find that the results are too ambiguous to be useful. The problematic topics are the intuitive ones—the ones that are clearly about war, or seafaring, or trade. I can't do much with those" (2012, par. 15). The most prevalent topics in the dataset—(Topic 1: time, things, thought, back, good, make, wanted, thing, people, knew), (Topic 11: back, eyes, hand, head, moment, smile, face, lips, door, side), and (Topic 19: time, moment, fact, mind, point, body, words, make, expression, voice)—at first glance appear to be nonspecific though leaning toward descriptions of internal and physical communication. In their analysis of contemporary novels, Jodie Archer and Matthew L. Jockers found that the topics that dominate bestselling novels depicted "people communicating in moments of shared intimacy, shared chemistry, and shared bonds" (2016, 76). These three topics (1, 11, and 19) fit into this category along with topics 24, 6, 13, 14, and 20, which contain similar words and make up 44.97 percent of the dataset. The topics in the AO3 Texts Dataset establish an overview of the texts and so, when looking at the topics in the AO3 Summaries and AO3 Author's Notes Datasets, we can assume that any topics that overlap with the topics in the AO3 Texts Dataset refer to the content of the texts.

[6.7] According to Donata Meneghelli, "in [author's notes] one finds everything, that is, anything: from trivial information about the author's daily life to meta comment on fandom and the functioning of fan fiction; from intertextual hints to references…from disclaimers…to apologies…from autobiographical insights…to pleas for fighting world hunger" (2019,
The topic model generated from the author's notes shows that their function is narrower than "everything." The topics generated from the author's notes form several categories relating to the content of the texts, content warnings (Topic 13: warnings, warning, fic, read, violence), apologies for any errors (Topic 19: mistakes, mine, fic, errors, unbeta), and metafictional discussion about the text's creation (Topic 15: end, work, notes, fic, inspired), (Topic 10: story, fic, writing, time, long), (Topic 20: chapter, end, notes, hope, comments), (Topic 6: prompt, written, story, prompts, tumblr), (Topic 7: chapter, end, notes, tumblr, reading), and (Topic 0: title, view, pgwordcount, characters, thirdprompt). Several of the topics are not distinct groups or words, and this arises from the length of the author's notes. LDA usually requires documents of at least one thousand words to produce meaningful results, and the author's notes in the dataset are mostly far shorter than this, some only a few words long. That MALLET has managed to find so many coherent topics from such minimal data is impressive. In these topics, there is information that can be conveyed in other paratextual elements since there are designated fields for content warnings and plot summaries.

Three of the topics refer to the communal nature of authorship on AO3 where many authors contribute to the metatext. The author's notes refer to cocreators such as betas (like editors) and artists (Topic 23: beta, art, amazing, story, tumblr), to translations of the text into other languages (Topic 14: russian, translations, https, www.youtube.com/watch, http), or link to social media sites where readers can interact with the author (Topic 16: tumblr, feel, free, follow, find, twitter). For Alexandra Herzog, author's notes "give fan authors the chance to demonstrate their power by publishing stories that are the interpretations of individuals, but which are nevertheless firmly grounded in communally held beliefs about metatext, fan text, and fan fiction in general" (2012, ¶5.3). These topics relating to community challenge the idea of single authorship and therefore have a bearing on an understanding of fan fiction texts as discrete, single-authored objects to "actively undermine the notion of the single author working in solitude and with complete authority over the text" (Leavenworth 2015, 50). Leavenworth is here referring to the active role that readers play in shaping a fan fiction work that is in progress, but this undermining capability can be extended to the role that collaborators such as beta readers, artists, and translators play as well as AO3’s interconnected structure itself.

The topics present in the summaries are also diverse, relating to elements of canon and generic tropes but also including metafictional reflection. In two topics (Topic 4: prompt, written, fic, tumblr, based) and (Topic: chapter, story, series, fic, read), the summaries reflected writing about the texts. Leavenworth compares the fan fiction summary to the "please-insert" of a printed paratext, which evolved into the "blurb on the back of a book" (2015, 49). From the inclusion of topics similar to those found in the author's notes, it is clear that the fan fiction summary has a less narrow function. While the text remains the location of the story proper, the author's notes convey information about the circumstances of the creation of the text and descriptions of their content in a way that reinforces the intertextuality of the fan metatext. The summary also conveys information about the content of the text and the circumstances of its creation. This repetition and slippage between paratextual elements signal a situation in which paratextual elements do not have individualized roles. As with the titles, no single element can be isolated as carrying the
weight of meaning regarding the related text. However, it would be useful to ascertain where
the differences lie between summaries and author's notes.

7. Texts, author's notes, summaries, and decision trees

[7.1] Since there is a lot of semantic overlap between the texts, summaries, and author's
notes, a method of differentiation is desirable. For this, I use decision trees together with
topic modeling. I combined the AO3 Text, AO3 Summary, and AO3 Author's Note Datasets
into one larger AO3 Combined Dataset of 14,619 documents and generated a new twenty-
five-topic model (see Appendix J for the code and Appendices K and L for the results).
Taking the information about the proportion of each topic present in each document, I used a
decision tree, which is a supervised learning method, to classify the documents. Starting with
a dataset in which each document is labelled as belonging to the text, summary, or author's
note class, the decision tree algorithm splits the dataset into a training set and a test set, using
the training set to learn which topics are most significant in determining which document
belongs to which dataset and then using the test set to verify the accuracy of that hypothesis
(Galarnyk 2019). While topic modeling generates a useful overview of documents, decision
trees can pinpoint the differences between datasets so that "[d]ecision trees provide a means
of tying the results of topic modeling to literary works and, more particularly, of associating
word patterns with historical categories of documents" (Bode 2018, 159).

[7.2] I generated a decision tree that determines with 92.28 percent accuracy whether a
document in the Combined Dataset belongs to the Summaries, Text, or Author's Notes
Datasets (figure 4). The differentiating topic (Topic 9: chapter, end, notes, story, work, fic,
hope, tumblr, love, comments, writing, reading, write, guys, read, chapters, enjoy, kudos,
post, written) reflects metafictional description of the text and paratextual elements. If a
document in the Combined Dataset contains less than 0.004 percent of Topic 9, it is most
likely to be a text. If it contains more than 0.004 percent but less than 0.254 percent of Topic
9, it is most likely to be a summary. Finally, if it contains more than 0.254 percent of Topic 9
it is most likely to be an author's note. This tells us that texts in the dataset usually do not
contain metafictional description of the text and paratextual elements. Author's notes contain
a comparatively large amount of metafictional description of the text and paratextual
elements and summaries sit somewhere in the middle.
8. Conclusion

[8.1] For Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, the "digital 'object' requires a rethinking of the concept of 'text'" (2014, xxxii). As Genette (1997) writes, there is no text without a paratext, and this is most visible in online digital narrative. On AO3 the reader must engage with paratextual material in order to get to the text. As I have shown through various computational methods, the elements of the fan fiction paratext on AO3 function differently to those of printed novels and even e-books. The titles of fan fiction on AO3 do not work to unify individual texts or provide information about the text's content and only minimally work to differentiate texts and allow access to them by virtue of being a hyperlink. The author's notes and summaries have multiple overlapping functions, conveying information about the content of the related text and metafictional discussion. Moreover, the information conveyed in the titles, author's notes, and summaries can be and often is duplicated in the various tag fields that AO3 employs. This sharing of functions and repetition between paratextual elements in combination with the extensive use of hyperlinks horizontally connecting the paratexts of multiple works leads to a reevaluation of the paratext as it manifests on AO3. Similarly to the interconnectedness of the texts on AO3 as part of a massively networked metatext, the paratextual material on AO3 is interconnected and forms a paratextual zone of transition between the outside of the website and the texts within it. This paratextual zone is not just a barrier but is actively involved in the construction of texts, which are aggregate objects—akin to datasets—constructed using AO3's search capabilities. With this understanding of textuality, a search query on AO3—for example, works that use the character tag "Harry Potter" and the additional tag "Alternate Universe: Vampires"—constructs a work that contains sixty-four texts (as of December 20, 2019). Approaching fan fiction texts as both literary and digital objects constructed by paratexts and metadata prompts a reconsideration of fan fiction as "[b]its of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages" that cannot be "reduced to a problem of sources or influences" (Barthes 1981, 39).

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How (Not) to Talk about Race: A Critique of Methodological Practices in Fan Studies

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Abstract—Fan studies, a thoroughly interdisciplinary field, has drawn on methodological strategies from such fields as anthropology, literary studies, cultural and media studies, and psychoanalysis, resulting in a wide range of analytical frameworks and methodological approaches that highlight the different aspects of the fan communities being considered. Yet a lack of attention to how (unmarked) whiteness underpins these strategies has led to persistent blind spots regarding the operation of race and racism within these spaces. An analysis drawing from cultural and postcolonial studies highlights some of the ways scholars can overcome these gaps. Nonetheless, the logics of white supremacy continue to influence both micro and macro issues around research in fan studies.

Keywords—Cultural studies; Interdisciplinarity; Postcolonialism; Racism

1. Introduction

As a thoroughly interdisciplinary field, fan studies has seen foundational studies use varied methodologies, drawing from anthropology (Bacon-Smith 1992), literary studies (Pugh 2005), cultural and media studies (Jenkins 1992), and psychoanalysis (Penley 1992). This has resulted in a wide range of analytical frameworks and methodological approaches that have highlighted different aspects of the fan communities under scholarly consideration. At the same time, a lack of attention to how (unmarked) whiteness underpins these strategies has led to some persistent blind spots regarding the operation of race/racism within these spaces. This is particularly true for research into Anglocentric fan communities that form around British and American media texts, which continues to operate as the default for the field. As I have argued in previous work, there is crucial research being done on transcultural/transnational fans and fandoms, but this continues to be othered within the discipline and is rarely included within lists of texts that are considered canonical to fan studies (Pande 2018b). Simultaneously, there is a lack of desire to explore whiteness as a racialized identity.
Before moving on to my main argument, I would briefly like to deconstruct a popular methodological choice for fan studies, that of ethnography, though as Evans and Stasi (2014) point out, it has not been specifically identified as such in many accounts (Hills 2005). This hesitation can perhaps be traced to its identification with the operations of colonialism (Said 1978) and its implications for the relationship between the researcher and the fan community. Concerning the latter, fan scholars have argued that ethnography often necessitates taking an outsider perspective on the workings of a community, which simultaneously places the researcher in a position of interpretative power over it (Busse and Hellekson 2012; Freund and Fielding 2013). The relationship between researcher and fan community has been a sometimes fraught one, as the position of so-called unbiased ethnographer can be seen to produce work de-emphasizing the researcher's fan positioning and potentially colonizing the fan. Meanwhile, in fan communities themselves, "academic" positions have often been heavily managed and policed, where fans have reacted with concern about the possibility of being studied from the "outside." (Evans and Stasi 2014, 11)

[1.4] I would like to interrogate the idea of "colonizing the fan" itself from my particular position as a nonwhite scholar and, further, from a specifically postcolonial theoretical positioning. I would argue that the framing of media fan communities as subcultural and powerless vis-á-vis the producers of popular media texts has also allowed for their unproblematic slotting into a vulnerable site/space that can be exploited by a researcher for their own benefit. This usage of specifically decolonial/postcolonial critiques of disciplines like anthropology and practices like ethnography to characterize the workings of communities dominated by white female fans, who continue to hold considerable institutional privilege compared to the nonwhite fans within those same spaces, has had some very troubling effects. For instance, in an examination of American-centered fan activism, I found that fan campaigns that do not keep these intersections of identity in mind often reinscribe neocolonial power differentials in the name of philanthropy (Pande 2018a). This is made possible because the construction of fans-as-marginalized in contemporary fan studies rarely goes beyond considerations of gender and sexuality.

[1.5] My analysis in this paper therefore draws from my particular research background in cultural and postcolonial studies to highlight some of the ways in which scholars who are producing work in Anglocentric fandoms can work to overcome these gaps. I will be drawing from specific instances that have occurred in my research experience to illustrate how the logics of white supremacy continue to influence both micro and macro issues affecting research in fan studies.

2. (In)visibilizing whiteness: Approaching fans, fandom, and fan studies

[2.1] In their review of methodology in the field, Evans and Stasi (2014) note that fan studies has been influenced by cultural and media studies in its suspicion of categorization and definitions, instead "emphasizing flexibility and fluidity with the aim of proceeding as a bricolage collective of methods, theories, ideas and concepts" (8). While this stated aim is
laudable, it is also essential to trace what absences and erasures have persisted across this collective. For one, it is significant that despite the roots of the field being firmly in the work of the Birmingham School and cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall, work by nonwhite scholars is still to find an undisputed place in essential reading lists and indicative bibliographies, particularly when it comes to establishing its core concerns. This erasure is part of the structural whiteness of the field and also ensures that the methodological choices that upcoming scholars are exposed to remain limited.

[2.2] As scholars like Rebecca Wanzo (2015) have pointed out, studies such as Jacqueline Bobo's *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (1995) and Jeffrey A. Brown's *Black Superheroes: Milestone Comics and Their Fans* (2000) are rarely seen as relevant to fan studies papers and research proposals by peer reviewers and research supervisors. I would argue that, in contrast, knowledge of Nancy Baym's (2000) work on (white) women soap fans online is seen as indispensable. I have no wish to argue against the inclusion of Baym's work but rather want to underline that such patterns are not neutral. As Wanzo (2015) points out, this needs to be seen not as a product of ignorance; rather, "one of the reasons race may be neglected is because it troubles some of the claims—and desires—at the heart of fan studies scholars and their scholarship" (¶ 1.4). Another effect of these erasures is that any scholar wishing to engage with race/racism in the field must work considerably harder to find methodological and theoretical frames that are simultaneously productive for analysis as well as broadly recognizable to institutionalized modes of peer review and publication as "real" fan studies work. To give the example of my own experience, I frequently have to spend considerable time explaining my theoretical models, such as my application of postcolonial cybercultural theory and critical race theory to fandom spaces. This is because while knowledge of the ideas of Bourdieu or Foucault is seen as essential to be taken seriously in the discipline, a knowledge of Said or Spivak is not.

[2.3] Indeed, the simultaneous presence and absence of race as an analytical category within fan studies as a discipline is glaring. This has been noted with increasing frequency in contemporary scholarship. Building on Wanzo's (2015) critique, Woo (2017) has called race a "yawning void" (245) in the fan studies canon. In my previous work, I have described whiteness as an "unexamined structuring force" (Pande 2018a, 13) in work on media fandom. In the editorial of the recent special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures*, De Kosnik and carrington (2019) also affirm, "That fan studies was founded, and has been dominated up to this point, by white scholars is indisputable" (¶ 1.1). Henry Jenkins (2019) has called the present stage "a moment of reckoning" for the field as it struggles with these critiques (¶ 1).

[2.4] Despite repeated affirmations, acknowledgement of the gaps and silences around the topics of race and racism is certainly not universal within the field, and there is very little consensus around what concrete efforts the discipline needs to take, if any, towards remedying these elisions. As I will lay out now, the responses to these calls to action have followed three broad trajectories, each of which also run the danger of further reifying white supremacist logic through deferral, disavowal, and deflection. The first impulse has been an increase in the attention to work by scholars already working on issues of race/racism in fandom spaces. This is certainly a necessary and important step, but it can also cause an
impression that, due to the hypervisibility of some scholars, who are still in a minority and whose work is still seen as "new," the problem is now fixed. It is therefore vital to trace in which aspects of scholarship emergent attention to race is being paid most clearly and where it is seen to be less urgent.

[2.5] It is clear that the issue of race is seen to be relevant to an analysis of fandom only when there is either a controversy that entails overt and identifiable racist behaviors, such as Gamergate; that includes the targeting of nonwhite actors such as Kelly Marie Tran or Leslie Jones; or when the fans or fandoms under analysis are explicitly framed as nonwhite, such as Bollywood (Desta 2018; Punathambekar 2005). Crucially, this kind of scholarship is then seen only to be significant to similar studies rather than fan studies more generally. This is not to slight the scholars who have gained canonical status, whose work is indeed critical, but to point out how the logics of whiteness structure the assumptions of both fans and scholars in these spaces. Therefore, while work on nonwhite fans and fandoms has certainly proliferated over the past decade, it is important to recognize the contexts within which such work is being circulated.

[2.6] The second impulse adheres to what Sara Ahmed (2004) has termed a politics of declaration of whiteness. Such a politics may take multiple forms, but here I will discuss two strands. The first is when scholars, usually at the beginning of their presentations or papers, declare an absence, deferral, or footnoting of race in their analysis. As a rhetorical strategy, this implies that race as an analytical category, while important, does not intersect meaningfully with the aspects of identity (usually gender and sexuality) that they do discuss. This is demonstrably inaccurate, as has been established by decades of critical scholarship (Bailey 2012; Barnard 2004; Bérubé 2001; Frankenberg 1997; Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Thomlison 2012). Of course, this continued elision is only possible when the same logics continue to structure publishing practices, with white research supervisors, peer reviewers, and editors both failing to push back against such assumptions and reinforcing hierarchies of citation. This is a strand that I will discuss in more detail further on in this article.

[2.7] This ties into a third impulse, that which Stanfill (2018), amongst others, has called the "unbearable whiteness" of the field, which is maintained by fan scholars' refusal to name it as such. That is, white scholars continue to claim that they are unequipped to talk about race or that it is not their place to engage in these discussions. This has the effect of (re)establishing whiteness as a default and ignoring the fact that whiteness is also a racialized identity, one which has a key effect on their research (Frankenberg 1997; Hill 1997; Dyer 1997). Ironically, this has the effect of placing the burden of making whiteness visible squarely on those scholars who wish to engage with questions of nonwhiteness, especially within the Anglocentric fandoms that have formed the core canons of the field.

[2.8] At the present moment, race is rarely taken into account when discussing aspects of fan identity. While gender and sexuality are often emphasized, the whiteness of participants is neither mentioned nor seen to have an important impact on research findings. In effect, while scholars who talk about nonwhite fans must foreground participants' racial identities, those who discuss survey results or interviews of queer or women fans often position their
research as universally relevant within these identity categories. This problematically reinforces whiteness both as default and as neutral in fandom spaces, a documented effect of the logics of white supremacy (Crenshaw 1997; Shome 2000; Nakayama and Krizek 1995). In this context, the move towards naming whiteness can be a radical choice, as it forces both researchers and respondents to reckon with difficult questions regarding systemic patterns of erasure within fan communities.

[2.9] I will illustrate this by examining a recent case study in which whiteness as a racial identity was foregrounded in a supposedly neutral research environment. In April 2019, Fansplaining, a popular podcast hosted by longtime media fans and researchers Elizabeth Minkel and Flourish Klink (2019), conducted an online survey in which about seventeen thousand fans weighed in on what they felt about the practice of shipping characters in media texts. The survey was not explicitly about fan identity, but the demographic data that was collected (on a voluntary basis) included gender, sexuality, and race. This resulted in a very rich dataset that Klink has discussed in detail on their blog (2019b). I will pick up on one thread of the discussion regarding the relationship of shipping with the representation of marginalized queer identities in media. This is something that has been emphasized repeatedly in fan studies, so it is perhaps not surprising that a lot of survey participants made the same connection (Busse, Lothian, and Reid 2007; Casey 2015; Fathallah 2014). However, in a crucial departure from the trends in the broader literature, Klink and Minkel also made it a point to foreground the (unstated) whiteness mediating the responses. Klink (2019a) noted:

[2.10] Most people who wrote in a free-response follow-up said they were excited to follow canon ships which improved representation of various marginalized groups on TV. Many responses were extended meditations on how representation interacts with individuals' shipping practices. Respondents were mostly concerned with queer representation (other types, such as race, were rarely mentioned, supporting the argument that fandom is preoccupied with white queer issues at the expense of all else).

[2.11] Once this discussion was published online there was an immediate pushback to seeing this whiteness as either relevant or significant to the survey results. One fan argued that since the survey was about shipping and not about racial representation, fans were predisposed to thinking along romantic/sexual orientation. This argument once again reinforces the idea that unless a specific question about (nonwhite) racial identity is asked, whiteness does not play a role in how fandom approaches questions of romantic/sexual orientation. Klink (2019b) pointed out in their response to such arguments that the survey did not link shipping with ideas of representation, queer or otherwise, so this was very much a reflection of what a majority of participants thought was important to their fandom activities. They also stated, "For fans of color, the issue of race in shipping is often very important" (Klink 2019b).

[2.12] This statement, as some fans pointed out, perhaps inadvertently implied that race is not important to queer white fans. However, the dataset demonstrates that at least 76 percent of the respondents self-identified as white and that the majority of the most popular ships, both historically and in the contemporary moment, were made up of white characters
A commentator, brownieth (2019), pointed out on Twitter that this is not a neutral observation, remarking, "White fans only being interested in white pairings only seeing marginalization as far as white queerness is concerned are not neutral choices. Because let's be clear for WHITE fans race in fandom is often very important. That is a true statement that is borne out REPEATEDLY in the choices white fans make in what ships they get behind."

[2.13] The pushback against seeing the survey results as influenced by race contrasted the eager acceptance of the possible correlation of the queerness of survey participants (80 percent) with the fact that a majority of the ships represented (cisgender) m/m or f/f relationships. In a conversation about the reception of the survey, Klink (2019c) made it clear that whiteness is not neutral and that scholars must stop enabling its presentation as such. They observed (2019c):

[2.14] From my perspective...one of the most frustrating things about this survey was writing, talking, and thinking about race and specifically the way that whiteness structures fandom and seeing the way people react to that simply because it made it instantly, unavoidably, and incredibly clear how defensive people are about their own whiteness and how much they don't want it to be a racialized identity.

[2.15] Another aspect of the workings of structural whiteness within the discipline can be seen in the way that its publishing practices and ethical standards operate. I have already discussed the concerns of scholars about exploiting fan communities. There has, in fact, been a longstanding robust discussion around best practices regarding the analysis and presentation of fan work within academic research. Some scholars privilege the rights of individual fans to withhold permission for their fan work to be discussed at all and therefore always ask for permission. Others avoid direct quotations or limit themselves to public posts that have gathered a certain level of visibility. The journal Transformative Works and Cultures itself has the following recommendations for submitting authors (Busse and Hellekson 2009):

[2.16] TWC is trying to protect fans by "strongly recommending" that submitters request permission. Although the editors of TWC are all fans, contributors may not necessarily be—or their fannishness may look very different. That's why we suggest that scholars contact the fan to check on the use of the artwork. We also think that we're protecting fans by discouraging authors from publishing direct hotlinks to sites such as Dreamwidth (DW) and LiveJournal (LJ), instead slightly masking them so that a one-click stop isn't available to the reader.

[2.17] There is certainly merit in aiming to protect fan identity and trying to contextualize content (particularly that of a sexual nature) that may be misinterpreted by unfamiliar readers. The post goes on to say that this is a strong recommendation and not a requirement both because researchers might have to adhere to different disciplinary requirements and because some fans may not be available to give permission. However, the implicit assumption of these guidelines is that fan scholars will largely take a positive view of the fan
work they analyze. But what if one is discussing fan work that is racist or otherwise discriminatory? It is highly unlikely that most fan creators would permit scholars to characterize their work as racist or be willing to have it discussed with that framework.

[2.18] This question has provoked significant difficulty within the course of my own research, which has examined incidents of overt and covert racism in fan communities. How does my position as a researcher, with its ethical responsibilities towards the spaces and participants I study, intersect with my research responsibilities towards highlighting power differentials between them? This is a difficult question, as was illustrated by my experiences while working on a coauthored paper on racial dynamics in fandoms that have accrued around queer female characters (Pande and Moitra 2017). As we had provided specific examples of problematic fan art, which showed clear indications of racist and colonialist underpinnings, my coauthor and I received significant pushback from multiple peer reviewers who were uncomfortable with such specificity. Their contention, which was significant, was that this framing would highlight only certain individuals and perhaps open them up to negative repercussions beyond what was warranted for their production of problematic fan art in an online setting.

[2.19] My coauthor and I ultimately decided to remove those references, as the paper was not concerned primarily with fan art, however this process illustrates how the more troubling instances of recorded prejudice within fandom spaces are rarely discussed. Another implication of the discussion is that the possible discomfort of the fan artists was privileged over and above the ongoing discomfort caused to fans (including fans of color) exposed to the racist material circulating within fan spaces. This is in direct contrast with the established practice of fan scholars, who very often discuss specific pieces of fan work that exemplify fans' ability to subvert mainstream ideas of power and representation (Kustritz 2008; Coppa 2017). In effect, fan work that is seen to adhere to the principles of a progressive, radical, and inclusive politics is highlighted, and therefore, the association between it and transformative fandom activities is further reinforced. In contrast, problematic fan work is described in vague terms and never held up to the same scrutiny, allowing both fandom and fan scholars to dismiss such works as outliers and not representative of fandom.

[2.20] It also must be acknowledged that the establishment of what is and is not ethical best practice in the interest of all fans and the enforcement of those norms through processes such as peer review is neither neutral nor outside the structures of institutional racism. Indeed, the operation of institutional racism in academic publishing is a particularly fraught subject because it troubles foundational principles about its neutrality. As has been established by research in fields such as higher education studies, psychiatry, economics, and STEM disciplines, the logics of white supremacy continue to shape editorial policy and publishing practices in both overt and covert ways (Harper 2012; Leslie 1990; Stanley 2007; Tryer 2005). Such logics may be covert, as when the Oxford Internet Institute published a paper (Nguyen, McGillivray, and Yasseri 2018) claiming to be the "first systemic study of Urban Dictionary" ever done (Oxford Internet Institute 2018, ¶ 1) but which does not include a single mention of Urban Dictionary's commodification of African American Vernacular English (Natalie 2018). As Major G. Coleman (2005) has pointed out in his analysis of white supremacy in academia, the operation of such logics may also be as glaring as when the
journal *Social Science and Medicine* allowed the publication of a blatantly racist paper by J. Philippe Rushton and Anthony F. Bogaert (1989) that linked a greater susceptibility to the AIDS virus to Black populations due to their genetically driven social behavior. Coleman observed that Rushton and Bogaert's paper in essence argued that Black populations' incidence of AIDS was due to their "lower intelligence and larger sex organs" (Coleman 2005, 765). When the journal argued that it had published the paper due to its having passed rigorous peer review, Leslie (1990) wrote a rigorous rebuttal pointing out its numerous flaws and maintaining that Rushton and Bogaert's "errors of fact and theory [are] not a sign of intellectual daring, bold new insights, original observations and new lines of thought. [They are] familiar racist thinking, a part of our popular culture" (103). Leslie (1990) concluded that the peer reviewers failed to recognize this racist thinking because "Rushton [and Bogaert]'s paper may have appealed to the reviewers because it affirmed a commonsense way of thinking about race" (104). The prevalence of institutional racism in "commonsense" ways of thinking combined with a paucity of nonwhite scholars in editorial positions and as peer reviewers enables this continuation of whiteness as default and the perpetuation of both overt racism and the gaps and silences discussed above.

[2.21] In line with this research, I argue that it is crucial to interrogate how knowledge is produced within fan studies and especially whose safe spaces and privacy are privileged by the broadly accepted guidelines implicated in the reinforcement of the status quo. We must ask what patterns of erasure and deferment are encoded into these practices. I include my own research output here, as I have continued to use only carefully generalized descriptions of racist conflicts and fan works without identifying specific events. This has been a compromise between the competing needs of individual privacy and solidarity, but one that I acknowledge continues to elide the specific controversies, actions, and discussions highly inflected with racism and the discrimination faced every day by nonwhite fans. I believe that part of the answer is to more deeply query the acafan identity that so many fan scholars occupy.

3. Aca/fandom as (un)belonging: Locating the self/other

[3.1] In order to query acafandom and its implication in institutionalized racism, I will trace the methodological discussions that have occurred within fan studies regarding the position of the distanced researcher versus that of the insider acafan. The former has been significantly complicated by successive scholars, while the latter is now a commonly used concept. Henry Jenkins uses the term acafan to acknowledge his dual identity and his affective investments when researching. On his blog, he states:

[3.2] The goal of my work has been to bridge the gap between these two worlds. I take it as a personal challenge to find a way to break cultural theory out of the academic bookstore ghetto and open up a larger space to talk about the media that matters to us from a consumer's point of view. (Jenkins n.d.)

[3.3] It must be noted here that the "us" in this construction remains highly generalized: it does not acknowledge the multiple intersections of identity that may fall under the rubric of acafandom. Continuing this trajectory, Hills (2002) questions the ways in which fan accounts
were presented as largely uncontested fact by early fan studies researchers. For Hills, the results of early fan studies scholars' focus on pushing back against negative stereotypes of fans were, ironically, that their activities were framed almost dispassionately and that they did not recognize or acknowledge the biases and attachments informing their work. He observes (Hills 2002, 62):

[3.4] Given the fan's articulate nature, and immersion in the text concerned, the move to ethnography seems strangely unquestionable, as if it is somehow grounded in the fan's (supposedly) pre-existent form of audience knowledge and interpretive skill…Fandom is largely reduced to mental and discursive activity occurring without passion, without feeling, without an experience of (perhaps involuntary) self-transformation.

[3.5] To interrupt this process, Hills proposes that fan accounts be more thoroughly scrutinized in order to interrogate the "moments of failures within narratives of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, and [their] repetitions or privileged narrative constructions which are concerned with communal (or subcultural) justification in the face of 'external' hostility" (66). I would argue that this is precisely what the Fansplaining survey, referenced above, and the conversations it prompted illustrate. In this case, the "moments of failure" do not come in the face of "external hostility" but rather through both recognizing biases within fandom and querying the dataset itself to emphasize its nonneutrality. Further moments of failure and hostility surfaced once the whiteness of the respondents was seen to matter. Framing whiteness as important allowed the largely triumphant and celebratory narratives around queerness and shipping to be opened up for further examination and highlighted nuance. However, this was only possible once whiteness was seen as racialized identity, a step much of fan studies research omits from its methodologies. While this framing certainly caused friction and discomfort within the fandom community that was surveyed, I argue that this is a necessary kind of discomfiture and conflict that exposes both privileges and erasures. This exposure uncovers productive pathways for fan scholars to explore and illuminates new methodologies that they can use in approaching their own research.

[3.6] Hills (2002) also proposed that a self-reflexive autoethnographic exercise be performed through which academic fans' "tastes, values, attachments and investments" (72) could be analyzed under the same rubric as their research subjects. Autoethnographers are asked to leverage methodological tools, research data, and existing literature to analyze their own experiences of cultural events, while also considering how other participants may experience those same incidents. In the autoethnographic paradigm, the use of personal experience and reflection is encouraged. Strategies employed to achieve these ends include the measuring of personal experience with either published research (Ronai 1995), or with interviews of participants (Tillmann-Healy 2001; Foster 2008), or with the analysis of germane cultural objects (Boylorn 2008; Denzin 2006). It is easy to see then why this methodology would be an attractive one for fan scholars, many of whom are committed to blurring the researcher/subject divide.

[3.7] In a slightly different positioning to Hills (2002), Busse and Hellekson (2012) also
encourage an embrace of multiple positionalities by the fan scholar so as to "treat the academic and fannish parts as equally important" (24). There has been some discussion of whether the loyalties of the scholar must be split evenly, as a split positioning might also serve to paper over power differentials within fan communities (Chin 2010). As I have suggested, such a splitting can also serve to de-emphasize historical tensions around race, ethnicity, religion, class, and national identities, amongst others. It also must be noted that there has been disagreement between scholars in the field about the ways in which such implication is read in terms of gender. For example, as Bury (2011) has observed, it has been much less fraught for (white) male scholars to acknowledge their positions as compromised by their investments in popular media texts than it has been for (white) women. Nevertheless, autoethnography has emerged as a particularly popular methodological choice for fan scholars (Couldry 2007; Jenkins 2007; Pearson 2007). Monaco (2010, 1) observes that though this methodological choice has often being termed "self-indulgent,"

[3.8] In drawing attention to the scholar-fan's vulnerabilities that are often silenced in published accounts of fandom, autoethnographic writing complicates realist conventions of representation and the ways in which textual strategies construct the authorial voice in relation to the "other." I argue for autoethnography's advantages by exploring some of the ethical challenges of conducting fan-audience research and by making explicit rather than implicit the ways in which locations of identity and emotional registers inform research choices and processes.

[3.9] Autoethnography is clearly a very powerful tool to chart the complex positionalities that fan researchers must negotiate during their research. It is indeed a methodological tool that I have used myself. However, it also must be acknowledged that its confessional space can, and has, worked towards the disavowal of certain other power differentials between fan and researcher and indeed amongst fans themselves. I refer specifically to the operations of racial identity within fandom and fan research.

[3.10] As I have argued, race, when mentioned at all within fan studies scholarship, is commonly disavowed or deferred in the same breath. The rhetorical strategy of maintaining that race is, of course, an essential axis of identity to be considered yet one that is never considered with the same urgency as sexuality and gender is employed quite frequently in the introductions to anthologies, papers, and conference presentations. There is also sometimes an acknowledgment of the lack of attention paid to racial identity in a particular piece of research, which is then explained away by the researcher's own whiteness and perceived lack of authority to speak on the subject of race. Of course, this is also a repetition of what I have already discussed: the failure to acknowledge racialized whiteness. I draw on Ahmed's (2004, 54) analysis of what she terms to be a "politics of declaration," wherein such declarations of culpability/implication within axes of privilege function as a tactic of deferral:

[3.11] These statements function as claims to performativity rather than as performatives, whereby the declaration of whiteness is assumed to put in place the conditions in which racism can be transcended, or at the very least reduced in
its power. Any presumption that such statements are forms of political action would be an overestimation of the power of saying, and even a performance of the very privilege that such statements claim they undo. The declarative mode, as a way of doing something, involves a fantasy of transcendence in which "what" is transcended is the very thing "admitted to" in the declaration: so, to put it simply, if we admit to being bad, then we show that we are good.

[3.12] This rhetorical strategy of deferment also plays a key role in situating racial identity as a rubric of analysis whose specific effects can be isolated to extraordinary incidents. This has certainly been true in fan studies, in which the few times race/racism have been discussed have usually been in the context of moments of crisis, such as Racefail '09 (note 1), when the operations of white and nonwhite racial identities have been made painfully visible (Klink 2010). I have already outlined one strategy of combating this, that is, by naming whiteness. Another strategy is to rehistoricize the accepted narratives of media fandom so as both to highlight the historical and ongoing presence of nonwhite fans in fandom and to register their participation in the development of widely lauded (and assumed white) fandom infrastructure projects, such as the development of Archive Of Our Own. I have attempted to disrupt whitewashed histories of fandom by highlighting the nonwhite fans' historical participation in fandom in ways that encapsulated not just controversies but also nonwhite fans' material contributions to fandom spaces both online and off-line (Pande 2018a); further work within this decolonizing project would be welcome.

[3.13] A brief autoethnographic reflection, rooted in the writing of my dissertation, seems relevant here, as it is vital to reflect on the ways in which my own awareness of the deep racialization of media fan spaces/fan works formed extremely gradually, even while I engaged with these spaces within a critical academic framework and even while my personal experience had trained me to be alert to structural hierarchies, especially within popular cultural texts. Today, my hesitation to engage with race/racism in fandom and fan studies seems almost incomprehensible, but I recognize that it was rooted in the awareness acknowledging race/racism would require me to definitively give up my claim to belonging unproblematically within fan spaces. Such a lack of belonging would not be due to pretensions of academic elitism but rather the final recognition of fan spaces' structural rejection of all aspects of my acafannish identity. This experience is in stark contrast to the more generalized concern in fan studies scholarship around the split between fan and researcher that I have traced in this section. Unlike those scholars, my discomfort was not produced by an inherent incompatibility between my academic and fannish identities but rather caused by the acknowledgement of my equal alienation from both due to my identity.

[3.14] To expand, online media fandom communities gave me a way of interacting on the internet that, as a young girl from a small town in India in the 2000s, felt almost revolutionary. It was in these spaces that I could geek out with fellow fans and not be judged about my Western popular cultural obsessions. My introduction to fan fiction was similarly eye-opening, as I could interrogate my own notions of gender and sexuality in ways that were not a topic of discussion in my home. For an extremely long time, I didn't feel the need to bring my own, particularly Indian forms of fandom into these spaces, as my engagement with these spaces and the fans therein was on different terms. My racialized identity was
compartmentalized neatly in my head as a topic not suitable for discussion in fan spaces. Fandom also taught me digital skills, such as how to navigate the various byways of the internet even as I struggled to access those byways on painfully slow dialup and then broadband connections.

[3.15] Nonetheless, I can recognize now that my participation in these spaces remained at a remove. I passed as someone fluent in the language of media fandom, both in terms of English and in terms of popular cultural knowledge. There was no reason for me to "other" myself. Of course, this was not how I framed the matter to myself at the time. Instead, I felt there was simply no need for me to identify myself as anyone but a fangirl. It was only very gradually, through the recognition that there were other people within these same spaces who were talking about their identities and how it impacted their experiences of fandom, that I realized that I could stop curating my own identity quite so selectively. It was through flashpoint events like Racefail '09 and the move to dialogic platforms like Twitter and Tumblr that I saw, for the first time, nonwhite fans unapologetically boosting characters and stories that were important to them. I also observed how these activities challenged my own internalized assumptions about which narratives were important and which characters were automatically considered to be the most popular foci of fan works. Therefore, when I maintain that whiteness is a structuring mechanism of fan studies and fan communities, this conclusion has been arrived at through both my research and a self-reflexive questioning of my own unconscious biases.

[3.16] Looking back, it was my interviews with nonwhite fans for my dissertation project that definitively opened up my theoretical horizons, as the interviewees recounted journeys much like mine. Again and again, these narratives registered the surprise of recognizing that others like them existed in fandom, as well as the alienation that came from attempting to talk about issues of erasure and being dismissed. That is not to say any one coherent thread of experience emerged through these interviews. Indeed, considering the diversity of identities within my respondent pool, it was comforting to see a very wide range of responses to my questions. As Ahmed (2010, 1) cogently argues:

[3.17] Writing about whiteness as a non-white person (a "non" that is named differently, or transformed into positive content differently, depending on where I am, who I am with, what I do) is not writing about something that is "outside" the structure of my ordinary experience, even my sense of "life as usual," shaped as it is by the comings and goings of different bodies. And so writing about whiteness is difficult, and I have always been reluctant to do it. The difficulty may come in part from a sense that the project of making whiteness visible only makes sense from the point of view of those for whom it is invisible.

[3.18] I would add to this that that writing about nonwhiteness also places a unique burden on the researcher, because it almost enforces a process of simplification and essentialism in order to be coherent in one's critique. While structuring my interview schedule, I was keen to facilitate an adequately inclusive data-gathering instrument in order to reflect the very many facets of identity that my respondents might wish to record. By making this instrument as open-ended and respondent-led as I could, I managed to get a truly staggering level of
nuance and specificity in identity markers. I also foregrounded the limitations of categories such as "nonwhite," "fan of color," and indeed "racial identity" itself.

[3.19] Nonetheless, while I endeavored to fully reflect the messiness of such engagements by choosing appropriate theoretical structures concerned with these engagements' nonlinearity, at times, the strictures of academic writing and presentation meant that some simplifications were unavoidable. For instance, at one point, I tried to craft a figure that represented the different ways in which my respondents interacted with issues of race in fandom, but it became unreadable when all the twenty-five different self-classifications of identity were included. The process required that I come up with broader categories, such as "Asian-American," which not all my respondents had chosen for themselves, in order to make all the data legible in a representative figure. My struggles are emblematic of the difficulties of such research, but they are, nevertheless, very necessary points of reflection as regards accepted methodologies and modes of expression within fan studies scholarship.

4. Conclusion

[4.1] I hope to have demonstrated some of the ways in which structural whiteness shapes the institutions of fan studies and the ways in which the status quo is maintained. It is thus vital for fan researchers to build robust, varied methodologies that reflect the diversity of fan narratives around supposedly race-neutral issues such as representation, escapism, self- and cross-identification, and the discursive framings of their own and others' experiences as fans. It is also vital for researchers to acknowledge that whiteness is a racialized identity within fan communities, and its effects must be reflected in their research findings. To do otherwise is to actively participate in the reentrenchment of whiteness as default/neutral.

[4.2] In the case of my own research, it was productive to balance Hills's (2002) caution to not take fan talk as direct evidence of fan experience by foregrounding the ways in which fan accounts often clash and disagree with each other while also highlighting where they interrupt more accepted histories of fan cultures. By privileging multivocality over any one singular thread of easily mapped analysis, I have aimed to be adequately reflective regarding the complex operations of race/racism within contemporary fan communities. I hope that the case studies examined in this paper will provide a model for researchers approaching these spaces in the future and that whiteness will no longer be treated as invisible and unmarked but rather as the racial identity marker it is.

5. Notes

1. Racefail '09 refers to a series of events in SF/F fandom triggered by a blog entry by popular author, Elizabeth Bear, on the subject of "writing the other"—she was lauded by her fans and peers for tackling the issue in a sensitive manner (Matociquala 2009). However, one fan, Avalon's Willow, responded slightly differently, discussing Bear's own novel Blood and Iron (2006). Her "Open Letter: To Elizabeth Bear" was a brutal juxtaposition of what Bear advocated in her post and how she had actually chosen to "write the other" in her work (Willow 2009). Bear initially accepted Willow's critique, but soon, some of her other fans
and fellow authors jumped into the debate, implying that it was merely a failure to read correctly on the part of Willow and other critics, a familiar rhetorical tactic used to suppress such critique. The subsequent heated exchanges went on to prompt hundreds of posts by both fans of color and allies, as well as those who were resistant to the ideas put forth by them. The latter group unfortunately also included a discouragingly large number of professional SF/F writers and publishers (Somerville 2009). Racefail '09 is seen as a significant event because it lead to broader discussion of the issues of race/racism in SF/F fandom spaces, which also spilled over into media fandom at large.

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Praxis

Rhetorical moves in disclosing fan identity in fandom scholarship

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[0.1] Abstract—The position of the acafan in fan studies remains under negotiation, and authors must make choices about if and how identities as fans are disclosed within scholarship. An analysis of sixty-nine articles published in Transformative Works and Cultures identified the rhetorical moves made when disclosing fan identities and assessed the trends in these disclosures that are present across a sample of fan studies scholarship. These moves of disclosure facilitate rhetorical identification between author and audience, enable negotiation of overlapping fan and scholar identities, and demonstrate a valuing of fan identities in scholarship. The question of disclosing fannish identity reflects the ongoing evolutions of the role of acafandom and questions about the intersections of identity and scholarship. Making choices and practices explicit and visible will help acafans continue to examine the dual position of fan and scholar and will help better reflect the balance between the two.

[0.2] Keywords—Acafandom; Consubstantiality; Identification; Methodology


1. Introduction

[1.1] I am a participant in online fandom, and I have been since elementary school: I read and write fan fiction, maintain a fannish Tumblr, and frequently reblog meta about my favorite fandoms. But I am also becoming a fan studies scholar, and that has required a rethinking of my relationships with both fandom and scholarship. As part of this process, I asked myself the question that I investigate in this article: How do acafans, as fans and as scholars, negotiate talking about our fan identities in our scholarship about fandom?

[1.2] To form my own practice of disclosing and discussing my fan identity in my scholarship, I turned to the fan studies scholars who had come before me and their approaches to this question of disclosure. This article shares the results of that research. In the first section, I explore the complicated relationship between fandom, fan studies
scholarship, and acafandom that has served as the exigence for my research. Next, I briefly outline my study of fan scholars' practices of disclosure of fan identities and the theoretical framework of my analysis for this project. In my first sections of analysis, I consider in greater depth four rhetorical moves that fan studies scholars make when we explicitly disclose our identities as fans within our research: (1) claiming an identity as a fan, (2) elaborating on particular activity as a fan, (3) delimiting fan identity, and (4) constructing research methods and conclusions. In my final section of analysis, I share some broader trends in the disclosure of fan identity across my sample and speculate on the implications of these trends. Uniting these analyses, I argue that disclosures of fan identity facilitate rhetorical identification, in the Burkean model, between author and audience, which both enables negotiation of fan and scholar identities and functions persuasively within the texts.

[1.3] While I cannot and do not claim to know what individual scholars intend in their choices around disclosing identities as fans, I argue that trends in these disclosures can help us understand the nature and boundaries of identities as academic fans and the ways we value those identities in scholarship. Personally, knowing both the options and trends within this scholarly community helps me determine how I will disclose my own fan identity in my scholarship.

2. Fandom, fan studies, and acafandom

[2.1] The choices scholars make about our disclosures of fan identity are rooted, in part, in the history of fan studies as a field and in the field's relationship with the objects, people, and communities we study. Fandom has a complicated relationship with fan studies, driven in part by several notable and criticized forays into fandom on the part of academia. Despite the open access of many online fan archives, fans continue to see their spaces as private ones inhabited solely by fans. Tensions arise when outsiders, often academics, are seen to infringe on these spaces. A notable example is 2009's SurveyFail when a pair of researchers began a project to study fannish practices around arousal and erotica as a way to discuss the differences between male and female brains (Fanlore 2018b). Fans almost universally condemned the endeavor as intrusive, offensive, and ethically problematic. More recently, in 2015, controversy sparked when a fan fiction author discovered that one of their stories had been put on a class syllabus along with stories from several other authors and that students were required to comment on fic as part of the class. Authors of these stories only learned of the class when they began receiving comments atypical of normal fannish conventions—comments some authors characterized as insulting, upsetting, or trollish (Fanlore 2018c; Kelley 2016). In both cases, fans were troubled by the work of academia opening up what they saw as the closed fan community to outsider critique—what Marwick and boyd (2010) would call "context collapse" wherein a person's work becomes visible to audiences they didn't intend and couldn't imagine.

[2.2] Insider research seems like an apt solution to the problems highlighted in an outsider approach to fandom scholarship, though the insider/outsider binary itself is more complex, interconnected, and fluid than the terms imply (for example, Narayan 1993). However, the academic/scholar fan, often shortened to acafan, is the subject of its own debate within fan studies scholarship (Fanlore 2018a). The term itself is the subject of negotiation (see
approaches by Baym 2000; Hills 2002; Jenkins 2013), though it is generally agreed that acafans have relationships to our texts and fandom communities of study outside of our research, complicating the insider/outsider binary by acknowledging both positions within a single individual. Over the decades, both fans and scholars have negotiated the concept of acafandom. Fans have raised the ever-present specter of misinterpretation and exploitation and have critiqued acafandom for attempting to generalize singular or limited experiences to the broader fandom context or develop a truth that applies to all of fandom (Fanlore 2018a; Ingram-Waters 2010). Scholars have similarly debated the ethics of acafandom, its potential to obscure personal motivations influencing the research, who the label includes and excludes, and the potential homogenizing effects of attaching a label to a spectrum of perspectives and experiences (see Jenkins 2011 blog series "Aca-Fandom and Beyond" for perspectives from over thirty fan studies scholars). Recent scholarship has also considered the ways other identities, such as pregnancy (Ingram-Waters 2010) and race (Wanzo 2015), are implicated in conversations about and practices within acafandom.

As the call for this issue highlights, fan studies remains an interdisciplinary field characterized by scholars and approaches that come from diverse fields, from media studies and library science to law and classical studies. Each of these fields has its own approaches to the role of the researcher and the ethics of researcher positionality, all of which might inflect the work scholars do when we write about fandom. As recent conversations suggest, fan studies has become increasingly interested in the role this interdisciplinarity might play in the "undisciplined" (Ford 2014, 54) nature of our discipline. These recent conversations include discussion of the ethics of researching in fan spaces and the question of disclosure of an identity as a researcher when working with fans (Cristofari and Guitton 2017; Kelley 2016; Musiani 2011). I believe it is equally important to consider the other side of this equation: if and how we disclose our identities as fans when doing scholarship.

The position of the acafan in fan studies remains one under negotiation. As we continue this negotiation as a scholarly community, and as individual scholars negotiate our own approaches to disclosing fan identities within our research, it is necessary to examine current trends around these disclosures and consider what those trends might imply about the role of the acafan in fan studies scholarship. I argue that making explicit our practices around disclosing fan identities will highlight (1) the ways in which these identities are rhetorically leveraged in our scholarship and (2) the ongoing uncertainty around whether and how we negotiate identities as both fans and scholars.

3. Identification and consubstantiality

Kenneth Burke's theory of rhetoric as identification offers useful insight into this confluence of the acafan as an identity (or identities) and its rhetorical expression in fan studies scholarship. The theory, outlined in A Rhetoric of Motives (1969), argues that the success of persuasive appeals requires some degree of consubstantiality between the speaker/writer and the audience: they must be both "joined and separate" (21) in that they share or are persuaded that they share interests, yet remain unique individuals. This consubstantiality facilitates identification between the speaker/writer and their audience, which serves persuasive function by establishing lines of commonality and division. As I
argue in this article, scholars' disclosures of their identities as fans have rhetorical purpose, establishing consubstantial relationships between acafans and readers that identify shared interests as fans and both delineate and bring together identities as fan and scholar. The intertwined nature of identification and division is key to Burke's theory of rhetoric as identification, and in a fan studies context with a history of tension between fandom and academia, this frame helps deconstruct the rhetorical negotiation of acafan disclosures.

4. Methods

[4.1] For this study, I collected sixty-nine articles from eight volumes of *Transformative Works and Cultures* published between 2016 and 2018. To identify places where authors might have made statements about their identities as fans, I searched each article for uses of personal pronouns (I, me, my, mine, us, we, our, ours). In each instance, I examined the sentence where the pronoun occurred to determine whether it constituted a disclosure of fan identity (note 1). For each statement of disclosure, I coded the statement for the rhetorical purpose it seemed to serve within the author's text, using approaches of discourse analysis that attend to both the linguistic features of the text and its social structuring and context (Fairclough 2003). Using an initial pool of coded articles from a single volume of *Transformative Works and Cultures*, I categorized the statements into four rhetorical moves that authors make when disclosing their identity as fans: (1) claiming an identity as a fan, (2) elaborating on particular activity as a fan, (3) delimiting fan identity, and (4) constructing research methods and conclusions. This codebook was the basis for coding articles from an additional seven volumes of the journal; the four rhetorical moves were further refined and defined during this coding process, particularly as statements blurred the boundaries between the categories. When coding such statements that might serve multiple purposes, I coded for the primary purpose of the statement. For example, a statement might elaborate on the author's participation as a fan, but if the purpose of the elaboration was to provide a personal example that supported an author's central argument, I coded that statement as constructing research methods and conclusions rather than specifying particular activity as a fan. Though I have coded for the primary rhetorical move being made with each statement to create the quantitative analysis in section 9, I do acknowledge that many statements might be argued to serve multiple purposes, and I take this as a demonstration that fan identities and disclosures of those identities do not work independently of the article in which they occur or of other statements made within an argument. In selecting quotes to exemplify each rhetorical move, I also acknowledge that some examples blur the boundaries between two categories; their inclusion in one category or another does not imply that they might not also function rhetorically in ways that are not represented in the category in which they are presented as examples.

[4.2] In the following sections I examine each rhetorical move in greater detail and identify the purpose each move might serve within a text through close reading of several examples.

[4.3] Before I do so, I acknowledge here that not all fans will disclose their fan identities in scholarship; indeed, the work of many fan studies scholars implies at least some measure of identity as participants in fandom, even if just as lurkers, through the authors' familiarity with fandom and its conventions. In this article, I focus specifically on explicit identifications
as a fan or member of the fan community in order to consider the rhetorical purposes of such claims to a fan identity (which are more evident in explicit statements) and because I argue that trends in the use or foregoing of such statements is evidence of fan studies scholars' stances toward acafandom. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider the ways in which fan identities might be implied in scholarship or the ways such identities might influence scholarship even though not explicitly stated; however, such a study would, I believe, be a fruitful complement to the work I present here.

5. Move: Claiming identity

[5.1] The first rhetorical move I identify in statements of disclosure is a straightforward claim to an identity as a fan. In these typically short statements, authors disclose their identity as fans or participants within a fan community; statements are often generic and without any other elaboration. The following are three examples of this type of disclosure from three different articles in my sample:

[5.2] *In my time spent playing*, three different players have held the peak score: MJFHMATT, who left the game in October 2015 ([https://www.reddit.com/r/starwarstrader/comments/3pui62/a_hero_has_left/](https://www.reddit.com/r/starwarstrader/comments/3pui62/a_hero_has_left/)); GEBEAU31, who purchased MJFHMATT's account and transferred most of its contents (note 2); and PARMTHEPOM, who emerged as an extraordinarily heavy spender in late 2015 and took over the top score on December 29 ([https://www.reddit.com/r/starwarstrader/comments/3yobbm/a_new_100/](https://www.reddit.com/r/starwarstrader/comments/3yobbm/a_new_100/)). (Groskopf 2016, ¶2.4, emphasis added)

[5.3] *Writing from my position as a fan*, I will identify general trends in how fans are appropriating and queering Monster High, and how Mattel has responded to these fan practices. (Austin 2016, ¶ 2.1, emphasis added)

[5.4] In the spirit of Brittany Kelley's (2016) recent work on cultivating goodwill through online research, I hope to stress *my presence as a participant in the Tumblr community* and not simply a lurker mining data for publications. (Howard 2017, ¶ 3.1, emphasis added)

[5.5] In each of these examples, the authors use short, simple statements to claim identities as fans. Austin's claim—"writing from my position as a fan" (2016, ¶2.1)—and Howard's—"my presence as a participant in the Tumblr community"(2017, ¶3.1)—are more direct, but Groskopf's disclosure—"in my time spent playing" (2016, ¶2.4)—serves a similar function. These statements allow each author to explicitly claim an identity as a fan. The disclosures foster identification between an audience interested in fandom and an author who speaks from a position within the community. The audience is invited to share in the author's fan identity through the explicit recognition of that identity, positioning the author and the audience within a shared group of fandom members. The brevity of such statements may not create a strong identification; however, these disclosures do facilitate a nascent consubstantial relationship, even in articles where the author's fan identity is not heavily leveraged in the work. Establishing these identifications and relationships must thus be
important to the persuasive work of these articles, perhaps because of the necessity to draw together disparate groups within fan studies scholarship and to bridge between fandom and academia.

[5.6] These statements may also function to establish an author's initial authority to be writing in and making arguments about fan spaces. These statements position the author as a member of the fan community about which they are writing and thereby imply that the claim the author makes is afforded additional support because of a fannish insider identity in addition to a scholarly identity. In linking her claim to fan identity with the overview of her argument, Austin's (2016) statement, for example, implies to other scholars that her identifications of trends in the *Monster High* fandom and her conclusions about those trends come from a place of experience and expertise. This expertise might lend additional authority to her arguments among her scholarly audience.

[5.7] Howard's (2017) statement makes a similar move in explicitly claiming an identity as fan, and her statement also speaks to the persuasive potential of the interrelation of identification and authority. Howard invokes Kelley's (2016) call for an ethic of goodwill in doing scholarship in online fan communities, and by claiming an identity as a fan within her community of study, Howard simultaneously signals her support for this call as a scholar and an authority to speak about fandom that comes from an identity as a fan. Her statements thus facilitate identification on the dimensions of scholarly and fan commonalities, drawing together communities that might be otherwise divided.

[5.8] As these statements show, the rhetorical move of claiming an identity as a fan facilitates identification between the author and their audience, establishing a space of shared interest in fandom community membership. By highlighting a fan identity within a scholarly space, these disclosures create consubstantial relationships that acknowledge both the fan and scholarly audiences of the article by explicitly calling out commonalities with both dimensions of acac fandom while acknowledging the divisions that might exist between these identities. This identification may also allow fan studies scholars to claim the ethical space of an insider position within fandom and imply an added level of expertise that that position might grant to our arguments and conclusions. The relationship between an author's claim to identity and their argument can also be made more explicitly, as I discuss in section 8. The claiming of any fan identity, as authors do in these examples and in the examples in the rest of this article, signals that fans and their experiences and voices are valued in scholarship and that, as a scholarly community, we value fans as both community members and scholars.

6. Move: Elaborating on fan activity

[6.1] A second rhetorical move made in statements disclosing fan identity elaborates on that identity with descriptions of the author's participation in a fannish activity. These descriptions offer further, often specific, detail about online activities such as the creation of fan works such as fan fiction or fan vids and offline activities such as attendance at fan conferences. The following are two examples of this type of statement from my sample:

after an accidental Cartoon Network viewing on a family vacation in the late 1990s, American otakudom of this time is where I wrote and read my first slash, or yaoi, fiction, watched untold numbers of anime music videos (AMVs), reclaimed childhood sewing skills for use in cosplay, and met a great number of good friends. (Close 2016, ¶1.5)

[6.3] When trading, I have been exposed to both the good and bad citizens of the game. In my first encounter with a young man who wanted to trade, he purposely exchanged a common card with me for a rare card before I was aware of the meaning of the symbols. He then did the same with another group of new sorcerers. His mother looked on and seemed pleased by his duplicitous behavior; no doubt, fandom is made of people, with "all their imperfections as well as their strengths" (Coppa 2014, 77). (Baker 2016, ¶4.2)

[6.4] In some cases these statements serve as the only disclosure of a fan identity, while in others they serve to establish deeper consubstantial relationships and more nuanced identifications than the simpler claims discussed in section 5. Close's (2016) statement, for example, gives readers details of her fandom experiences—the show she watched, the fiction she wrote, the cosplay she participated in—which both establishes an identity as a participant in fandom and demonstrates her particular expertise with the otakudom that is the subject of her research. Her statement thus establishes a strong identification with not only fandom in general but with the particular fandom of Sailor Moon. The details of Close's fannish activities invite readers into her experiences, enabling both identification with her identity as a fan and the persuasive use of that identity to establish her authority to comment on this fandom.

[6.5] Baker (2016) similarly demonstrates expertise by narrating a specific experience within the trading card fandoms. This experience of not knowing the rules of the fandom—an experience that is common to newcomers in any fandom—enables readers to identify with Baker as a new fan and calls to mind their own experiences as newcomers to fandom. Whether coming to fandom as a fan or as a scholar seeking to study the communities, the experience of learning the rules is a shared one that can be leveraged to enable identification. Both narrations of specific experiences, as Baker does, and more general declarations of activity, as Close (2016) does, are present as moves of elaborating on fan activity within my sample. These statements identify the author as an active participant in fan spaces and, by allowing readers to see inside the authors' fan experiences, thus facilitate a deeper identification than simpler claims to fan identity. Like claims to fan identity, they facilitate consubstantial relationships that highlight commonalities in shared fan identities and experiences, demonstrate knowledge about this particular fan community to enhance the authority of an author's arguments, and establish the necessary scholarly expertise in the space to offer critique and commentary.

7. Move: Delimiting fan identity

[7.1] Disclosing and elaborating on a fan identity can also be done in such a way as to put clear boundaries around authors' experiences—to create the divisions inherent in rhetorical
identification. Such delimiting moves can include, for example, referencing the number of years an author has been a fan, identifying specific fandoms or fan spaces from which their experience is drawn, and defining their fan identity within particular geographic boundaries. Though both elaborating and delimiting moves similarly enable identification, they emphasize different dimensions of this rhetorical function. Where elaborating on fan identity highlights commonalities, delimiting fan identity can establish divisions by more clearly attending to the boundaries between groups based on experience, interest, and authority. This difference is evident in examples of this rhetorical move:

[7.2] Although my own engagement with Hannibal fan blogs on Tumblr involved reblogging the posts of others, which could be viewed as form of participation within a fan community, I did not engage in any conversation or reciprocal posting and reblogging with any other fans. In this, I acted as a lone fan—that is, someone who does not engage in dialogue with other fans in fannish spaces, even though such fans may visit such sites and recirculate content created by others. (Williams 2018, ¶1.4, emphasis added)

[7.3] Personally, I consider myself a novice Sherlockian fan, just a few years into the Game that many play for a lifetime, and I am most familiar with the North American fan community. (Donley 2017, ¶14.2, emphasis added)

[7.4] Much like statements that elaborate on fan activity, these statements enable identification by claiming identities as fans and offering details that deepen the consubstantial relationship between the author and the audience. However, unlike elaborations, these delimiting statements negotiate identification by emphasizing boundaries. Williams (2018), for example, establishes clear boundaries on her fan identity by highlighting a lack of active participation in fan conversation. Her audience can still identify with her as a fan, but their attention is also drawn to the differences that make her distinct from them and from other fans.

[7.5] Statements that delimit fan identity can also serve to productively detract from the author's perceived authority or expertise. Donley (2017), for example, claims a fan identity as a "novice"—itself delimiting identifier—by referencing her limited length of membership in the community ("just a few years into the Game") and her limited geographical context. She marks herself as potentially less of an expert and highlights factors which seem to detract from the authority of her arguments. These moves, then, seem to function as identifications also for acafans' scholarly audiences, highlighting the potential limitations of our arguments and the ways in which our own experiences do not fully encompass what is happening in the community. This identification can then also be a persuasive move in signaling a self-reflexive and critical understanding of our scholarship—an expression of goodwill toward both fan and scholarly identities. By explicitly limiting our claimed authority, authors might be using these statements to facilitate identification with a scholarly community that values acknowledging limitations and an implicit willingness for further discussion.

[7.6] The identification enabled by these statements can thus facilitate negotiation of both fan
and scholarly identities, allowing the establishment of consubstantial relationships from both these perspectives in ways that persuasively advance acafans' arguments. Authors' moves to delimit our fan identities may reinforce our ethos within the fan community (and within an academic community composed of many scholars who are also fans) by signaling to fans that authors acknowledge our inability to speak for all of fandom. We can read this acknowledgement as a recognition of the contentious history of fan/scholar relations and an attempt by scholar fans to avoid the impression that we are attempting to generalize our experience to the entire community. Thus, statements that put boundaries on authors' fan identities facilitate identification of both experience within fandom and respect for the ethical negotiation of fan and scholarly communities.

8. Move: Constructing research methods and conclusions

[8.1] The final rhetorical move I will discuss is the leveraging of a fan identity to construct research methodologies, arguments, and conclusions. In this type of statement, authors explicitly use fan identities as part of their data collection (e.g., reaching out to fan authors they know from a mailing list), as an example in support of a particular argument, and to justify conclusions they make in their scholarship. In this section I discuss each scenario of this rhetorical move.

[8.2] First, scholars leverage our fan identities to justify or facilitate research methods:

[8.3] The recruitment request for participants was shared on my personal fandom (Sherlock) Twitter account and Tumblr. A few participants were in my own personal network and joined to help me out with this study while others saw my call through our shared network. (Petersen 2017, ¶4.2)

[8.4] As an author of homoaffection fic, I reached out to my community for fic that fit within the genre. I selected examples for this paper by sharing a post with the Star Trek fan community on Tumblr, describing the type of fic I was looking for and asking for recommendations. Within a week I had been sent over 30 examples. (Narai 2017, ¶2.2)

[8.5] As Petersen (2017) and Narai (2017) do in the above examples, authors can use existing personal relationships to find research participants and/or use existing fandom-focused accounts to recruit participants. Petersen, for example, shared a request for participants on her fandom-focused Twitter and Tumblr accounts, while Narai used her status as a fan fiction writer to reach out to her community for data to use in her research. These statements often explicitly describe how a fan identity contributed to the researcher's awareness of how to conduct research and where to locate research subjects or research material or helped the researcher gather those subjects or materials for study. Statements that explicitly lay out this connection between an author's fan identity and research methods provide transparency into the author's methods and can also serve to signal the author's commitment to drawing on fan voices for their research.

[8.6] Second, scholars leverage our fan identities as examples to support particular
arguments within our scholarship and as justifications for larger conclusions that we draw. To better illustrate how fan identities can be leveraged in support of arguments, I have included longer excerpts in the below examples to show, where appropriate, the argument being supported by the disclosure of fan identity:

[8.7] Stein uses this idea to explain fan transformative creativity, but it is also applicable to this instance of fan emotional turmoil and mobilization, particularly because her observation—that Tumblr has become a hub of "visual enactment of collective emotion" (2015, 158) because of the use of heavy image usage to represent emotion—is completely accurate. *I encountered numerous posts on my dashboard that used images and GIFs (especially relevant ones from the shows) to express outrage at the cancellation decision in the weeks after.* (Chew 2018, ¶2.5, emphasis added)

[8.8] While it is hard to quantify this assertion through counting meta, as there is no easy way of gathering statistics by meta on Tumblr, especially because of diverse tagging practices, *I speak from my experience as a participant-observer in the Johnlock Tumblr fandom.* (Hofmann 2018, ¶8.2)

[8.9] *I offer my own experience as a trans man and superhero fan as an example of this phenomenon.* While adjusting to new social negotiations as a man (or, that is to say, as someone actively read as a cis man), I relied on my childhood hero, Superman, to guide me in understanding the complexities of masculinity. […] *I hope to render into discourse the affective reverberations and resonances of my lived experience, coupled with striking moments of engagement with the Superman mythos, which have come to inform my reading practice as a trans man and comics fan.* (Vena 2017, ¶1.3)

[8.10] These three examples show various ways authors can leverage our fan identities as examples and justifications for our arguments. Chew's (2018) statement exemplifies the rhetorical move of using fan identity as an example of a specific argument made within an article; here she narrates her own experiences with Tumblr as an example of her argument about the use of the visual to represent emotion. Personal examples like these allow fan identities to serve as the evidence to support an author's assertions both specifically and generally. Chew's statement shows how this evidence can function at the level of the specific point within an argument. Hofmann's (2018) statement from the Notes section of her article similarly shows how a fan identity can operate as evidence to support an assertion in a situation where impersonal evidence is difficult to gather or present.

[8.11] Vena's (2017) statement shows how this leveraging of a personal identity as a fan can function on a larger scale within an article. In his article, Vena uses his experiences as a trans man and fan to consider trans reading practices in comics and present a trans reading of the Superman origin story. Like Chew (2018), Vena leverages his identity as a fan to support specific arguments and insights, but as the above excerpt suggests, Vena also uses that fan identity as a foundation for the overarching argument of the entire article. As academic fans, we have experience with the role our fan identities can have at every stage of our research.
This rhetorical move shows our comfort in making that role explicit in our scholarship.

[8.12] In all of these cases, the leveraging of fan identities in support of specific and overarching arguments suggests a certain expectation of trust and assumption that an author's personal fan identities are acceptable evidence for scholarly argument. We leverage our fan identities to gather our data, we use our personal experiences as evidence, and we rely on those experiences to form the foundations of our arguments. This leveraging of fan identities in these complex and foundational spaces of our research may be a reflection of a valuation within fan studies of the voices and experiences of fans within research that has extended to trusting and valuing the personal, subjective experiences of scholar fans as scholarly evidence. Making fan identities explicit, then, can be read as a rhetorical choice to claim the authority of a fan identity.

[8.13] It can thus also importantly be read as part of the ongoing rhetoric of identification functioning in disclosures of fan identity. Authors' uses of disclosure here facilitate a personal connection with what might otherwise be more distanced scholarship. Explicitness about the use of personal fannish networks in research methodology, for example, reminds readers of the author's identity within the community. Similarly, the leveraging of authors' fan experiences and observations to support their examples and conclusions invites readers to build closer relationships with the authors' arguments by personalizing and humanizing those scholarly insights. Thus, this rhetorical move seems to facilitate identification as an avenue for drawing the audience closer to the authors' scholarship.

9. Some statistics on disclosing a fan identity

[9.1] The rhetorical moves described in the previous sections suggest that acafans explicitly disclose fan identity to facilitate identification and consubstantial relationships between authors and audiences in ways that productively negotiate a multiplicity of identities as fan and scholar. Yet these disclosures are not universal in fan studies scholarship. In this section, I share some broad statistics about the distribution of each rhetorical move across the sample and the breakdown of articles and article types that do and do not include these disclosures. Taken together, these statistics suggest that despite the rhetorical potential of statements of disclosure for facilitating identification, the presence of fan identities is still under negotiation within fan studies scholarship. These statistics also show a spectrum of use, with some articles drawing extensively on statements of disclosure and most using them only minimally. This spectrum suggests that, in addition to the rhetorical function of a single statement, the use of many statements can also serve rhetorical purpose.

[9.2] As I noted, in the majority of articles surveyed, authors do not disclose an identity as a fan. Across sixty-nine articles, only twenty-eight, or 40.6 percent, include statements that explicitly identify the author as a participant in the fandom community that is the subject of the article. Of those articles, the majority were located in the journal's Praxis section: seventeen (47.2 percent) of thirty-six Praxis articles included a disclosure of fan identity, while eleven (33.3 percent) of thirty-three Theory articles did. The infrequency of disclosure suggests that while fan identities are valued in scholarship, it is not a requirement of this discourse community that scholars be fans or, if they are fans, that they disclose identities as
fans for their arguments to have weight; identification can thus be rhetorically productive but is not required. Further, the greater frequency of disclosure in Praxis articles might suggest that fan identities are more valued in scholarship focused on case studies and/or less valued in scholarship focused on theory.

Additionally, though over 40 percent of authors in this sample disclosed some form of fan identity, few leveraged that identity extensively within their work. When authors disclosed identities as fans, they most often included only a single statement. Of the twenty-eight articles that included statements of fan identity, thirteen (46.4 percent) included only a single statement. The greatest number of statements in a single article was fifteen and the average across the twenty-eight articles was 3.3 statements.

Table 1. Total frequency of each rhetorical move in sample, number of articles in which each type of statement occurs, and average frequency per article of that rhetorical move

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical Move</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Average Frequency per Article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claiming identity as fan</td>
<td>27/93 (29%)</td>
<td>19/28 (67.9%)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborating on activity as fan</td>
<td>16/93 (17.2%)</td>
<td>7/28 (25%)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimiting fan identity</td>
<td>5/93 (5.4%)</td>
<td>4/28 (14.3%)</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing research methods and conclusions</td>
<td>45/93 (48.4%)</td>
<td>16/28 (57.1%)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rhetorical move used in the greatest number of articles is claiming an identity as a fan: nineteen (67.9 percent) of twenty-eight articles use this rhetorical move. Though this rhetorical move is present in the greatest number of articles, it is not the most common type of statement in the sample. The most frequently used rhetorical move is leveraging authors' fan identities in the construction of research methods, arguments, and conclusions: forty-five (48.4 percent) of ninety-three statements are coded as this rhetorical move and its average frequency per article is highest at 2.8 statements. This pattern is a reasonable expectation; if authors heavily leverage their fan identities it is most likely to be used in constructing research methods and conclusions, while a claim to an identity as a fan is the simplest way to facilitate a measure of identification with readers. Taken together, these trends suggest that acafans cluster in the extremes of the spectrum of disclosure: we tend toward either a minimal yet encompassing establishment of identification or a deep engagement with the place of our fan identities within our work. This pattern is worth further exploration, as is the rhetorical impact of each end of the spectrum. Why do we tend toward these extremes? How
do these patterns of engagement with our fan identities differently impact our audiences and our own relationships with our work?

[9.5] It is clear from these statistics and the rhetorical moves I have discussed that fan studies scholars employ particular rhetorical patterns in our scholarship with regards to disclosing our identities as fans. It is equally clear that there is no one universally agreed response to the complex question of the role of acafandom in scholarship.

10. Conclusion

[10.1] In the past decades, there have been many calls for acafans to reflect on the balance between our fan and scholarly identities, and the roles each of those identities plays within our scholarship (Cristofari and Guitton 2017; Harrington and Bielby 1995; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Hills 2002). In this article, I have considered the specific practices of explicitly disclosing an identity as a fan and the various rhetorical purposes to which such statements can be put in fan studies scholarship. Interrogating our practices around negotiating fan and scholar identities, such as explicit disclosures of fan identities, helps us take up these calls from fan studies scholars to be "open and thoughtful about our positions (as fans and researchers)" (Kelley 2016, ¶4.1).

[10.2] Statements that explicitly disclose scholars' identities as fans are powerful tools through which acafans can express and negotiate our varying identities in relation to our research, and they are representative of an ethic of goodwill that permeates our scholarly and fannish communities. These statements work to establish and reinforce acafans' identities, particularly our fannish identities, as well as acknowledge the limitations of our fan knowledge and leverage our identities to validate our research. Scholars can use such statements to claim the authority of fan expertise and leverage the trust of insider knowledge, allowing us to establish ourselves and our arguments for both our fan and scholarly audiences. Fans can use these statements to connect with fellow fans and foster personal connections between author, audience, and scholarship. Fundamentally, disclosures of fan identity are a rhetorical move to identification and a fostering of relationships between author and audience that acknowledge a multiplicity of fan, scholar, and acafan positions.

[10.3] This multiplicity of fan and scholar positions is only one part of acafans' identities, and the work of interrogating fannish disclosure in acafan scholars is part of a larger conversation about the place of identity and identification in fan studies scholarship. Ingram-Waters's (2010) reflections on the ways her pregnant body changed the nature of the relationships she could build with her interview subjects and Wanzo's (2015) argument about the absence of race analysis in fan studies and the need "to explore what may be missing" (¶5.4) reflect this growing conversation about the ways our various identities visibly and invisibly inflect our scholarship. Fan identities and their disclosure are another dimension of this complex relationship of identity and scholarship. My examination of these disclosures echoes calls not only to attend to what we might miss if we neglect to talk about this interrelationship but also to think through how our identities might facilitate or complicate the identifications we seek to establish with our readers and with the communities we study and participate in as part of an ethical research practice.
Further work on these questions of fannish identity in particular might investigate why scholars choose to disclose or refrain from disclosing their fan (or other) identities, how they choose what and how much of their fan identities to disclose and what rhetorical impact, if any, they thought these disclosures would have in their work. We can certainly speculate on the answers to these questions: disclosure might be intended primarily to serve persuasive purpose, or to establish the author's bona fides in the fandom and/or scholarly community, or to allow the author to share their overwhelming enthusiasm about fandom. I cannot speak for any other fan scholar and can only offer my own insights. For me, disclosing my identity as a fan is about being proud of my fannish history, open about its influence in my scholarship, and, yes, a bit about trying to demonstrate that I have the right to do the work I do.

This complex negotiation of disclosure, identity, and identification is an acknowledgement of a complex history of tension between fans and scholars and serves as a reflection of current values within the field of fan studies that value fan voices. Yet the use of disclosures of fan identity is not consistent across scholarship in the field—a reminder that acafans ourselves are still uncertain about navigating our multiple identities and the role(s) those identities should play in our fan studies scholarship. As we continue to work in the liminal space between fandom and scholarship, it is to our benefit to question our practices and make apparent the ways in which our values express themselves in our scholarship.

11. Acknowledgements

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12. Note

1. For this article, I define "fan identity" as an individual's self-identification as a fan of a particular media space or artifact such as a movie, TV show, book, or band and as a participant in fannish activities beyond the media artifact. As Jenkins (quoted in Jenkins and Scott 2013, xiv) has explained, a fan in the context of fandom studies is an individual who does more than merely appreciate the text; fans engage with the text in some way such as consuming or creating fan works, participating in fannish activities like conferences, and/or engaging in critique of the media.

References


Praxis

Placing fandom, studying fans: Modified acafandom in practice

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[0.1] Abstract—For nearly three decades, the field of fan studies has helped to shift the conversation on fandom from a study of pathological individuals to exploring how groups make use of and transform the contemporary media landscape. Fandom itself is also changing. What was once a niche subculture is now a way for us to make sense of the mediated world around us. As the concept and structures of fandom expand, we as fandom researchers must broaden our methodology to analyze fans who aren't like us while also keeping the empathetic understanding of fandom that has made the field what it is. One attempt at this project is the modified acafandom approach developed as part of the Locating Imagination project. In researching film tourism, something I had little interest in personally participating in, I needed to go beyond the traditional autoethnographic acafan approach and develop my skills as a social sciences researcher. However, it was important to me to foreground the perspective of fan studies as a field throughout the project. The result shows how the modified acafandom approach can be useful in both qualitative media research and fan studies. The research modalities of the social sciences can usefully broaden the field of fandom research.

[0.2] Keywords—Interviewing; Methodology; Online ethnography; Participant observation; Research design


1. Introduction

[1.1] How do we study fandom? As the articles in this special issue suggest, this is not an easy question to answer. Fandom, after all, is in itself complex—simply defining what it is and, subsequently, who fans are is something that has raised as many divisions as explanations. It is intensely personal and built around communities, remarkably productive and focused on consumption, part of a progressive, global identity and a significant contributor to contemporary right-wing movements. The contradictions around what fandom is and how people experience it mean that it is a difficult subject to study but also show how
crucial it is to do so. Fandom is not only a niche subculture but a way of relating to a wide range of aspects of mediatized society (Dean 2017), and to understand contemporary social practice, we need to address it.

[1.2] For the researcher, this also raises problems that are often complicated by our own history. Fandom is an increasingly prevalent part of daily life, the life of the academic included. Many scholars come to fandom research having already spent at least some of their lives as fans, and indeed, the traditions of fandom research encourage making this not only known but also part of the research. In staking out the concept of acafandom (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002, 2012; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Phillips 2010; Stein et al. 2011), of centering one's own fandom in researching fandom, the approach of fan studies has been to look at fandom from as emic a perspective as possible—one's own experience with being a fan.

[1.3] This has proven to be a fruitful approach to researching fandom but not without its limitations, as I discovered when I started my doctoral research. I was greatly inspired by the acafandom preparation but found it not completely adequate to the particular fan practice that I was studying, that of film tourism. As someone who didn't feel compelled to participate in it myself but was interested in the practice, I could not entirely rely on the acafandom approaches that I knew. I needed to draw on the methodology of the social sciences, specifically traditional techniques such as participatory observation and interviews, but I did not want to completely lose the mentality of acafandom and the insights it offered, as I felt it had produced the best understandings of fandom. As an early-career researcher, I set out to try to do this in my work.

[1.4] It is that process that I will detail in this article, an approach I took to calling (if just to myself) modified acafandom. To me, this meant using my own experience with fandom as a tool in investigating a different form of fandom—of keeping my own fandom and how I would like it seen in mind while doing my research and to use my empathy toward fandom as a starting point in collecting and analyzing my data. It is not so much a proscription for future researchers to follow as it is an exploration of how I went out to try to incorporate different methodologies into my fandom research and how I tried to incorporate fandom insights into the social science approaches I found. This did not come about overnight. It was ultimately an emergent process, drawing greatly on the grounded approach developed by Charmaz (2006) and adapting as the project evolved, starting with my own understanding of what fans do and moving outward. This flexibility in being able to follow the research was a somewhat lucky one but ultimately became an important way of thinking about developing a research project.

[1.5] I discuss it in three parts, beginning with a reflection on acafandom and why it was necessary to modify it in the first place, looking at how it was and wasn't useful in researching film tourism. Following this, I detail exactly how I went about conducting my research and give my insights into how I used my specific methodologies—netnography, participatory observation, and interviews. Finally, I reflect on the importance of taking an emergent and grounded approach to this research and how that flexibility shaped the existing result.
[1.6] My goal here is to show how the traditions of social science and acafandom can work together in exploring and studying fan practices and communities, in terms of where they might complement each other and how they both played an important role in my particular research project. I hope that this article can be of assistance for others who might want to take similar approaches in the future, as fan studies rises to meet the challenges of contemporary fandom.

2. Acafandom and the fan academic

[2.1] When I started my doctoral project on film tourism—visiting places associated with a movie or television show—I had some idea of what I wanted to do with it. I had a prior interest in fandom and fans, and film tourism seemed to fit into that category. What's more, focusing explicitly on the tourists as fans and how that might shape and impact the experience of film tourism was relatively lacking in film tourism research until that point (Karpovich 2010). Because of my existing knowledge of and interest in fan studies, I felt that this was something that needed to be taken into consideration when researching contemporary film tourism. On some level, I felt, those who make an effort to visit a filming location are fans. There was an affective level to the practice that needed to be addressed.

[2.2] While still an emerging researcher, I did have some experience and knowledge of fandom research. It had been something that had interested me since the beginning of my experience in academia, where I started out in media studies, soon discovering that fan studies was a field that existed and that I could actually build a career out of researching something that was so interesting to me. I was particularly inspired by the acafan or scholar-fan approach (Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002, 2012; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Philips 2010; Stein et al. 2011) (note 1), a stance favored in fan studies where the researcher foregrounds his or her own perspective as a fan in doing research, not only drawing on their history of fandom in discussing it but also being very clear that they are fans themselves.

[2.3] There are significant benefits to this approach. Acknowledging the researcher's own position as a fan destabilizes the traditional relationship between the researcher and the researched—rather than an elite outsider representing the strange customs of an Other, the community is explained by someone who is part of it. The researcher does not hold himself or herself above the group being studied but rather feels part of it and works to explain and analyze it in collaboration with other members. The insider knowledge gained from being part of this community contributes to a fuller picture of it, one that comes closer to the lived experience of its members. While not completely mitigating the "crisis of representation" that has gripped ethnography and the social sciences (Rosenau 1992; Gubrium and Holstein 2012a), it presents one response to it by foregrounding the subjectivity of the researcher, self-reflexively noting that it is their reality as a fan and community member that is discussed, and that they have inhabited this reality means that they can represent it accurately.

[2.4] In general, this approach has been of benefit to fan studies as a discipline (Ford 2014), built as it was around the desire to depathologize fandom. In showing fandom from closer to the fans' perspective, the more positive aspects of fandom—its creativity, its critical nature,
its sociality—can be highlighted, showing what fandom offers and the way in which being a fan represents a critical as well as loving relationship with popular culture that draws it closer to high culture. This has largely changed the opinion on fans in media studies, recasting them from deluded, obsessive over-consumers to creative producers with an admirable way of engaging with popular culture in a media-rich environment. And in admitting to one's own fandom, scholars demonstrate that fans aren't just some other that needs to be objectively dissected and studied—they are part of us. As a fan, I found this inspiring.

[2.5] However, that does not mean there aren't drawbacks, one of which I realized at the early stages of my project. As Hills points out, the reliance of the field on the perspective of aca fandom means that "areas of fan practice remain in the margins of academic work as long as there are not scholar-fans mediating these precise activities" (2012, 19–20). The fans drawn to research have largely come out of what was once known as media fandom, the organized fandom around (often, but not exclusively, science-fiction and fantasy) films and television shows. Fans are eager to showcase why their own fandoms are particularly interesting and to demonstrate the sort of fan activities that prove fandom is worth taking seriously. This has led to certain activities, like fan fiction, being continually covered while more ordinary fan activities are neglected (Hills 2010; Sandvoss and Kearns 2014), particularly if they don't fit into the idea of transformative fan practices, and to certain fandoms appearing a great deal in the literature while others appear not at all (Hills 2012). The dependence on the acafan model has led to a limiting of what fan studies covers and a canonizing of certain texts and practices, which is particularly worrisome as fandom becomes recognized as an important structuring factor across a much wider part of contemporary life. To share its relevance with the broader academic community, fan studies needs to expand.

[2.6] For myself, I found the traditional acafan model limiting because I was, personally, not all that interested in being a film tourist. The practice was intriguing precisely because I felt I did not understand it on a personal level. This meant that I could not draw on my own experience as I had done in previous work and as had been done in many of the works on fandom that I would base my theoretical models on. However, I do have a personal history with fandom and fan practice, having been involved in it, in some form or another, for most of my life. I have written and read fan fiction, been to conventions (although not many), and have been an enthusiastic fan of many texts throughout my life. It has shaped who I am as a person and a researcher. I wanted to keep that mentality as I did my research, as I felt that the recognizing of that position has demonstrated benefits in studying fandom.

[2.7] This became my first step into modified aca fandom and somewhat of a guiding moral principle: to take my own fandom as a starting point in conducting my research while not making it the focal point. I thought of my own fandom both as a tool to communicate with, in terms of how I would approach the fans I would eventually research, and as a point of empathy in considering my data. This was not my fandom, but I wanted to think of it as akin to my own. To return to Hills (2012) and his somewhat provocative challenge to fan studies researchers, the goal with my approach was not to validate a particular position or practice (other than perhaps film tourism itself), as he warns that the canonization of types of fandom
by acafans can do, but to attempt to investigate and understand the multiplicity of fan practices and groupings within the practice of film tourism. The easiest way for me to do this was to keep in mind my own fandom and how it impacts my life and might be seen by others.

[2.8] I could do this because I came to the project with little experience of this practice on my own and thus lacked a personal stance towards its moral economies (Hills 2012), a position I tried to maintain as I encountered clashes (such as between different groups of fans of The Prisoner (1967–68) in Portmeirion). This might not be possible or acceptable for all research on fandom, but it is a useful stance for a modified acafandom as it uses the understanding of one's own fandom as an empathic tool to investigate fandom that looks different. This is an important issue for fan studies in this day and age, as not all fandom looks like the kind we are familiar with (Dean 2017), but our insights as scholars (and fans) are needed in order to not regress to an academic concept of fandom centered around deviance and also to better explain fandom's nuances.

[2.9] For this project, my modified understanding of acafandom also meant that I needed to reconsider what I actually did in terms of data-gathering and analysis. I was trained in media and cultural studies, a humanities field with a focus on analyzing texts and applying this analysis to certain behaviors. However, that would not be entirely suitable for the questions I had about film tourism. As I would be primarily dealing with others rather than my own perspectives on the fandom and its practices or even on the works produced by fan-tourists, I needed to use different methodologies, as intimidating as it felt. I therefore utilized a combination of participatory observation, online content analysis, and, most importantly, interviews with fans in order to develop my argument. In trying to gain an understanding of film tourism, it was necessary to move away from the textual focus of fan studies as I knew it and consider my methodological choices in a more systematic way.

[2.10] In this, I joined an increasing number of fan scholars who have looked toward the social sciences for methodological guidance as the field matures (Evans and Stasi 2014; Ford 2014; Jensen 2016). Fan studies has largely had a textual focus, developing out of cultural studies and its strong tradition of textual analysis in order to discuss what fans do with popular culture and why it is significant (Jenkins 2014). This meant it did not have the stricter concerns about methodology that are found in the social sciences (Evans and Stasi 2014) and instead focused more on developing theoretical insights grounded in close reading of the texts produced by fans. The rise of the internet and the significant role it would play in expanding fan communication and practices greatly facilitated this approach by providing access to a large amount of textual material for fandom researchers to work with.

[2.11] Fans were among the first adopters of the internet, and as the internet's reach expanded, fan culture came along with it (Coppa 2006; Jenkins 2006). From creative works like fan fiction and fan film to the discussions between fans that increasingly took place in online writing, not to mention the works of popular culture that fandoms coalesced around, fandom researchers could therefore draw on a significant corpus of texts. This approach has been fruitful, developing concepts (such as transmedia storytelling or convergence culture) that have become key terms of media and cultural studies (Evans and Stasi 2014), and
clearly demonstrating fans' role as an indicator species of the media ecology.

[2.12] However, as with the reliance on the acafan concept, the focus on textual output privileges certain kinds of fan over others (Hills 2010, 2012; Sandvoss and Kearns 2014; Jenkins 2014), with the ones that do participate in media through textual production becoming the standard-bearers of fandom in general. Fan studies needs to expand both in terms of methodology and the fans studied. This is not to say that textual analysis of fandom, even of media fandom, should be abandoned but that it can no longer be the only, or even the main, way in which fans are studied. We as a field must draw on the traditions developed in the social sciences in order to study others while still maintaining the insight and creativity that has made the field so vital and productive in a relatively short period of time.

[2.13] This is what I attempt to do here. In the next part of this paper, I will detail how this worked in practice, discussing my methodological and analytical choices throughout the process of my research. I also hope to show why I felt that keeping the acafandom stance was important as I made use of these methodologies.

3. Methodological choices in film tourism

[3.1] While not so much a traditional ethnography, because it is concerned with a particular question instead of a broader portrait of the community, I took an ethnographic approach to researching film tourism. This aligns well with the aims and mindset of a modified acafandom. My goal was to represent my respondent's perspectives on their practices, using the lens of fandom. To do this, I used three main methods—netnography, participatory observation, and especially interviews—which I will now go into in more detail in order to show how this can work in practice.

4. Netnography

[4.1] My research process began with the internet. To me as a fandom researcher, this made the most sense as a starting point. Netnography (Kozinets 2010) and other forms of online content analysis are one of the backbones of fandom research, playing an important role from its earliest days (Jenkins 1992). The increased profile and accessibility of fan communities online provide a great deal of data for researchers on fandom to draw upon, and the studies of such communities and their practices are far too numerous to list here. Indeed, there is a sense that to study contemporary fandom is to study these online communities and their works—that is, after all, where fandom is thought to be primarily located today. When I began my project, I also assumed that much of my data would be found online.

[4.2] However, I soon found that there was often less actually written by film tourists than I expected, and as I went into my fieldwork and interviews, I found that it often appealed to so-called "momentary" (Hills 2010) or "ordinary" (Sandvoss and Kearns 2014) fans who while emotionally involved in their object of fandom did not find it necessary to communicate with other fans online about it. They were, simply, a different kind of fan.
[4.3] This is not to say that material gathered online played no role in my research. It was an integral initial stage, important both in identifying important places to go and in understanding the active concerns of the fandoms studied—what they considered, generally, to be important to the community, its tensions, and its relationships with locations. While not all fans would find the issues expressed in the online community relevant, it did provide me a starting point for developing my participatory observation and interviews. However, when it was present, as in my research on the *Prisoner* fan community, online data provided not only an important backgrounding for the interviews and participatory observation but also a confirmation of certain issues raised in them. By looking at what is posted in public fan communities, both now and in the past, and at the way that fans write about *The Prisoner's* main filming location Portmeirion on fan websites and magazines, I could confirm much of what my interviewees (many whom participate[d] in these communities) said about their relationship with Portmeirion and its importance to the fandom as a whole.

[4.4] However, what netnography in general showed me was that I needed to think about who fans were and what they did differently. Online communication and communities, while interesting and important, are not everything. The connection of what fans do with being online is a limiting perspective—it is ultimately only one form of fandom. In order to understand film tourism and its role in contemporary fandom, I needed to make use of the physical world as well.

5. Participant observation

[5.1] From my initial observations of the fan communities through online ethnography, I moved to participatory observation. The goal with this part of the research was to participate as a (new) fan, to bodily experience the site, its practices, and its group dynamics (Spradley 1980; DeWalt, DeWalt, and Wayland 1998). This was done either in public places, such as at Wizarding World of Harry Potter or the commercial *Game of Thrones* (2011–19) tours in Dubrovnik and Northern Ireland, or in fan settings such as the two fan conventions (TitanCon and PortmeirionCon) that I participated in. In the former, my goal was first to explore and get to know the site and how it was presented to tourists and then to observe other participants' actions in the place. I feel that these unobtrusive observations, at public places without expectations of privacy, did not require my disclosure as a researcher. For the fan conventions, where the expectation is that participants will be around fellow fans (and only fellow fans), I received permission from the organizers to attend as a researcher and announced myself as one to whomever I talked to. I felt this was ethically necessary because these gatherings are seen as functions for the private fan community rather than the general public, and in receiving permission to attend as a researcher and announcing my presence I respected the fans' right to control their own space—just as I would have wanted.

[5.2] In all cases, the fieldwork was done in short trips rather than the more long-term fieldwork common in anthropology. My fieldwork took the shape and structure, roughly, of the holidays that they were observing—a week or so in Belfast, Dubrovnik, and Portmeirion, return weekend trips for the conventions in Belfast and Portmeirion, and a three-day Universal Studios package in Orlando. While a longer process of embedding myself would be necessary for a deeper ethnography of these fan cultures, this time was considered
suitable for understanding these places as holiday destinations. These are transitory places 
with transitory populations, and it was that transitory nature that generally interested me. I 
felt that my time spent on location was suitable for forming observations about how fans 
interacted with these locations and each other that, while comparatively superficial, provided 
a good grounding for the kinds of questions that I would ask in my interviews.

[5.3] More importantly, it gave me a sense of how these locations felt, in a physical sense, 
and the affordances that they engendered. I approached this part of the research as an active 
participant, one who "seeks to do what other people are doing" (Spradley 1980, 60). In the 
public locations, I wandered as a fan-tourist, buying souvenirs, walking the streets, drinking 
Butterbeer, and essentially people-watching with a purpose. At the fan conventions, I 
participated as an enthusiastic newcomer (albeit one that announced her presence as a 
researcher), eager to put on costumes, answer trivia questions, and at one point even 
participate in an archery contest. I also participated in social events at both conventions, such 
as dances and social drinks. (I also made sure I was up-to-date with the respective texts.) 
While it might not be the most scientific way to put it, I had fun with this part of the 
fieldwork, letting myself act as if I had gone without research in mind and enjoying the 
presence of fans and the way in which they celebrated their object of fandom through and in 
place. I found I could also use this enthusiasm in order to make the personal connections that 
are crucial to ethnographic practice (Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland 1998). By participating 
actively, I showed that I was someone who, on some level, got why they were there.

[5.4] In both kinds of places, I took fieldnotes in the moment (DeWalt, DeWalt, and Wayland 
1998), handwriting in a small notebook or, eventually, on my phone, as it seemed far less 
obtrusive than writing in a notebook in such a close social setting would be. These 
observations contained not only descriptions of what I did where, what other people were 
doing, and other details but also my thoughts on what was happening and what I felt to be 
important issues to follow up with during the interviews. I reread them in the evening and 
when I returned, adding where necessary, and used them to prepare the interviews as well as 
consulting them when I went to write the eventual report.

[5.5] This approach allowed me to feel in some way what the experience is like for fans, 
while also demonstrating an ability to appreciate their style of fandom that made potential 
respondents willing to help in my research. I found that enthusiastic participation helped a 
great deal in putting people at ease, and the willingness to explore what I could do in these 
places helped to put myself into an empathetic mindset. It also, and perhaps most 
importantly considering the difficulty of finding online accounts of the practice, brought me 
in contact with the fan-tourists themselves.

6. Interviews

[6.1] While I utilized participatory observation and online content analysis, the primary 
method of this research was interviews. As Kvale and Brinkmann state, "the qualitative 
research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to 
unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific 
explanations" (2009, 1). My research questions were about the meaning of the experience of
film tourism, and to answer these questions, I needed to ask those for whom it has meaning. Participant observation can only take me so far (Atkinson and Coffey 2012), and the online content analysis, while useful, was, as I discussed above, limited. Therefore, focusing on interviews was determined to be the best tactic. The first step in this is to establish some kind of rapport with those being interviewed—to ensure that I would treat them, their stories, and their lives with respect (Hermanowicz 2002). In dealing with fans, this is particularly important. Fans are still frequently seen as deviant and weird and are often reluctant to talk about their fandom with outsiders for fear of being mocked. However, with those who are seen as sympathetic, they can be quite loquacious, eager to discuss their favorite fan objects and the impact this has had on their lives. Fandom is therefore a different sort of subject than many of the more sensitive topics that social science research has focused on and which most of its guidelines are directed toward. Fans generally consider their fandom, fan objects, and the role it has played in their lives a positive and enjoyable thing to discuss but are aware of others' negative reactions to it and sensitive to having this important part of themselves denigrated.

[6.2] It was here that my own experience with fandom and my willingness to display and talk about it proved particularly useful. That I could talk about fandom itself and sometimes even the text in question with a sense of enthusiasm and knowledge meant that I had already taken the first step. I had proven myself, which, for this particular project, proved to be useful in gathering data and conducting interviews, as my interviewees were relaxed, willing to share, and on some occasions, directing me toward friends to interview as well. Taking a detached approach would have been less useful. Without my existing experience, my interviews and the data gathered from them would have been entirely different and possibly not as fruitful.

[6.3] As befitting my own more postmodernist and social constructivist background, my approach to interviews can be considered active (Gubrium and Holstein 2012b) in that I understand the interview process to be an active construction of meaning, both by myself and the respondents. I had a specific research question and/or problem in mind and designed the interviews in order to investigate this problem. The interviews I conducted were semistructured, utilizing an interview guide developed before the interviews but allowing for changes during the interviews themselves as necessary (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Questions varied between experiential/phenomenologically focused—what was done when and why—and emotionally focused—how experiences felt and were recalled—and were workshopped with my supervisor before the interviews were conducted. The respondents themselves, too, are active creators of meaning, in that they are not "vessels of answers" (Gubrium and Holstein, 14) for me to mine for objective truths but that they are presenting stories and narratives about their world that construct meaning in a certain way. I trusted that this is truthful information, in the sense that they were not lying to me about their experiences, memories, or feelings, but they are stories that I have elicited for a purpose. They are not neutral—but nor can they be.

[6.4] As befitting the grounded approach that I will discuss later in this article, initial interviews impacted the later ones, with the guides shifting and changing slightly as the process went on. My approach was much like Kvale and Brinkmann's conceptualization of
the "traveler" style of interviewing, in which the researcher wanders the landscape of the data seeking out stories about it and the "potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler's interpretations of the narratives he or she brings back to home audiences" (2009, 48–49). In keeping with this, I considered data collection and analysis as part of the same process, developing my ideas about the meaning of the data as I collected it and altering the interview guides as necessary to further develop these ideas. This was facilitated by two of the cases—Game of Thrones and The Prisoner—requiring a multisited approach in which different groups of fans were interviewed in different places over a space of several months, which meant I had time to think about the interviews in the interim. However, this was also facilitated by me making use of several case studies in general, as the cases built on each other in particular ways, impacting the way in which I thought about not only their specificities, but the phenomenon of film tourism more generally.

[6.5] Interviews were conducted in English, my native language and also the native language of the majority of my interviewees (a limitation that I was not able to overcome). Many, although not all, were conducted via Skype or the telephone. While this has disadvantages in terms of not being physically present with the interviewees and therefore being unable to always get the important physical nuances of a conversation (Hermanowicz 2002; Shuy 2011), for this study it had several advantages. Indeed, I switched to a Skype and/or telephone approach after attempting onsite interviews for my first study only to find that they are difficult to do well in a holiday setting. Those who are willing to participate in the interviews are unwilling to spend much time out of their holiday in participating, delivering shorter answers and wishing to get quickly back to their leisure activities. Financial and logistical concerns meant that following up in person was nearly impossible. By interviewing later via Skype or telephone, however, this is mitigated—interviewees can decide when they wish to be interviewed and ensure that there is enough time in which to complete the interview. That they could control where it happened also meant that they were in a more relaxed and contemplative state (compared to the chaos and noise of the location) and in a place that they felt comfortable and secure. It also meant that they were enthusiastic about participating and more aware of what it meant and what it would entail, as they had time to think about it as a result of the lag in being asked and the interview process commencing. The third case, on The Prisoner fans in Portmeirion, also involved some onsite interviewing, but because of the nature of the holiday (a fan convention over several days, with down time for socializing and relaxing), the interviews conducted there were also solicited ahead of time and conducted at the time and place of the interviewee's choosing. Therefore, conducting interviews in this fashion made the most sense for this research (helped by the visuality of Skype, which meant I could still see the majority of my respondents and they could see me) and offered several advantages that overshadowed its drawbacks.

[6.6] Once conducted, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, either by me or a research assistant depending on time and funding. I am a humanities scholar, trained in analyzing texts and concepts, and therefore I took a hermeneutic approach to the interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). By this I mean that I understood these interview transcripts as texts—as narratives and stories that my respondents told about their lives and practices—and treated
them as such. This also extended to the eventual goals of the research: developing a conceptual understanding of what film tourism can do for the fans who participate in it.

[6.7] Reading through the transcripts as full texts was therefore quite important to me, to understand them as narratives that could then be connected to other narratives (Riessmann 2012). In these initial readings my first thoughts about the cases came to the forefront, helped by a process of memo-writing (note 2) as I read. At this point I utilized specialized software to do a finer, line-by-line coding of the interviews (Charmaz 2006), identifying commonalities and differences on the level of specific words and statements. I then began to focus on the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) of my cases, identifying the major thematic and theoretical issues raised by my understanding of the data and its story and the different ways that the fan-tourists presented themselves. I also consulted the full texts of the interviews as I wrote, as I wanted to make sure I wasn't losing the overall story of the data by focusing too heavily on the codes—an attempt to balance the social science and humanities approach to the interviews.

[6.8] Compared to autoethnography or traditional acafandom, however, doing this research meant I needed to grapple with the impossibility of truly representing others, a difficult task mentally. This was not my life, which meant I had a responsibility to the person whose life it was, but I still needed to believe that I could add something to the discussion of these practices. This is something that the social sciences have grappled with in recent decades (Rosenau 1992), and understanding that this struggle is inherent to doing this kind of research was thus extremely helpful to me as a researcher. There is a recognition that the end result is based on the researcher's interpretations, as long as it is honest to the data. In the words of Rosenblatt, "I hope to write truth, not the truth, but certainly a truth" (2012, 17). In taking this as a guide, I felt I could bring myself and my background back into my results. I did not need to produce a full sociological survey of film tourism, but I could interpret the stories and narratives of my interviews in order to develop a conceptual and theoretical understanding of what film tourism as a practice can be.

[6.9] It is in combing the interpretive ethos of the humanities with the structure of the social sciences that I feel is a strength of modified acafandom. It lets me make use of the strengths of the acafan position—its respect for those being studied, the awareness of the position of the researcher, and the affective grounding of fandom—while keeping the focus on the experience of others. I am, after all, only one person, and I feel that different perspectives are necessary in order to explain a practice as complicated as film tourism (and the multiplicity of fandom in general). However, the interpretation of these different perspectives is mine, which I feel is what the researcher offers to the process—the "aca" part of acafandom. While I sent respondents copies of their interview transcripts when possible, I did not solicit their feedback on the interpretations I made (although I did send the final published articles to several respondents who wished to read them). I felt this was necessary in order to maintain my critical perspective, despite the connections I made with my respondents and my desire to be truthful to the data.

[6.10] This is how I, and assumedly others doing similar work, make use of social science methodology. In the end, I found it not as foreign as I thought starting out. After all, in some
fashion, it is based on interpreting texts and drawing on my theoretical grounding in media and cultural studies. However, it began with the fans who have been so kind as to share their experiences with me.

7. Grounding the research

[7.1] That I consider this work to have begun with the fans who share their experiences with me also points to the final aspect of my methodological approach to the topic of film tourism, namely, that this was an inductive and emergent research, one that changed and grew throughout the course of the research project. In this, I was greatly indebted to the definition of grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2006), an approach that I feel dovetails nicely with the concerns and methodologies of fan studies. Charmaz portrays grounded theory as a "fluid, interactive, and open-ended" (178) process, one that is constantly evolving as the research goes on but is informed by what the researcher brings to the situation. It is a flexible approach, with guidelines rather than proscriptions, that allows different explorations of the data and the results that come from it. And ultimately, it begins with the data.

[7.2] This is the approach that I used when writing up my results, both for the articles I would write about the individual case studies and for the eventual final dissertation. I began with fairly open-ended questions about the experience of these places and went into the field with the intent of exploring where these questions would go. I built the interviews around this beginning question but left them open in order to follow up on different themes as they emerged, with each interview building on the last in some fashion. The themes that I discerned from my reading and coding of the interview data, my participatory observations, and online data were organized through a process of memo-writing; these themes eventually became theoretical concepts. It is at this point that I began the writing process, which brought all these observations and ideas together into a more coherent whole, connecting them to relevant prior research. The entirety of the work is therefore built around the ideas from the data analysis, with theoretical developments coming out of what I understand from the data rather than starting with a theory-based hypothesis and basing the data analysis around proving or disproving it.

[7.3] This grounded, emergent approach is also reflected in the way I designed the whole research project. Each case study built on aspects of the one before it, drawing from its conclusions and process in order to push the entire project forward. The first case, centered around Game of Thrones tourism, focused on the immediate imaginative experience of tourists, and allowed me to explore and gain an understanding of onsite film location tourism. It was here that I established some of the questions around the relationships between reality, fantasy, and physical experience that would guide the research as a whole.

[7.4] Armed with this grounding, I turned my attention to a recreated location of the sort that had been dismissed by both some of the respondents of my previous case and the literature that I read to support it. With a sense of how fan-tourists responded to the actual locations of filming, and the cultural values put on the real thing, I wanted to investigate the opposite—a recreated environment that I had encountered during a trip to Orlando, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. The enthusiasm of many Harry Potter fans toward this environment raised
different questions about authenticity and realism than had been addressed in prior research on film tourism, including my own. In researching these, I also encountered theoretical issues that hadn't come to the fore in my analysis of Game of Thrones tourism—namely, the ability to revisit the location (sometimes, in the case of Florida residents, on a very frequent basis) and the inherent sociality of being in an environment with so many other fans.

[7.5] It was these questions that ended up being at the forefront of my final case, investigating the relationship that fans of The Prisoner had with its main filming location of Portmeirion. As a long-established filming location and gathering place for fans of the show, it was a good opportunity to expand on the themes of the previous case while also looking at issues of longevity and sustainability in film tourism that had not been addressed in the previous cases. In its current form, however, it would have been impossible to do so without the experience of the other cases in the background. It was through having the understanding of contemporary Game of Thrones tourism and the experience at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter that I approached The Prisoner with the concerns I did, which then enabled me to draw particular conclusions from the data I gathered.

[7.6] This emergent approach also meant that it was not until I completed the cases that I developed a complete theoretical framework for my final dissertation. I was able to construct a broader theoretical exploration of film tourism by drawing on the issues and concerns raised in the case studies, comparing their similarities and differences in order to explore the ways in which film tourism was used and experienced by the fans and fan cultures profiled. It looked very different than the attempt I made to do this at the very beginning of my project, which I feel shows the value of this kind of inductive, emergent research.

[7.7] It is the emergent aspect of a grounded-theory approach that I think is of most use for a modified acafandom. To return to Hills (2012), what fan studies, as a discipline, often lacks is a sense of the multiplicity in fandom and fan practice. However, it is difficult to design a project around this multiplicity. What worked for me was thinking of uncertainty as a positive quality, that by starting in my own fandom and working outward I could follow what different fans were doing and keep in mind that this will change the more that I learned about them (which would lead to a more rounded final result). As with getting into a particular canon, the more I learned, the more I realized I had to learn about, which added to my enthusiasm for the project. Additionally, in keeping with fan studies' tradition of starting from already-existing fan practices, thinking of research as emergent—on the basis of what you get out of the data throughout and built upon what came before—can be a useful way of conceptualizing research design. I could adapt to what was out there as I encountered it. The grounded theory approach I used here gave me the flexibility to go in different directions and to think about film tourism—and fandom as a whole—differently as my research project went on.

8. Conclusion

[8.1] In this article, I have reflected on not only the steps I actually took in doing my research project but also the experience of using fan studies as a research strategy—its benefits and its drawbacks and how it can be adapted to different practices and perspectives.
Over the past several decades fan studies has grown into a vibrant field, while fandom itself has expanded from a niche interest within film and television to an integral part of understanding contemporary relationships with media and culture, touching on everything from politics to visual art and beyond. At this crucial junction, it is important for fandom researchers to reflect on how they conduct their research and what it means to study fandom outside of its traditional spaces and approaches.

[8.2] I present one such method of doing so here, an approach I call modified acafandom. Drawing from the acafandom tradition, which builds upon the researcher's own experience with the fans and fandom being studied, I talk about how I drew on my own experience with fandom in conducting my research, while not claiming membership in the fan groups being studied. What this meant in practice is that fandom and my familiarity with its norms and attitudes was at the heart of my research design—it is how I understood my topic and how I focused my research questions. In conducting my research, it meant that I utilized my understanding and experience with fandom and fan practice to observe, approach, and interview fans, rather than basing my analysis on my experience of being a fan of these objects in a particular way. This approach drew on some of the traditions of the social sciences, such as netnography, participatory observation, and interviews, which were necessary in order to investigate my topic—after all, I am just one person, and fandom is full of multiplicities. I feel that this allowed me to draw on the strengths of traditional fandom research while expanding to new places.

[8.3] For myself, embracing the traditions of social science research allowed me to expand my own thinking about what fandom was. As a result of my experience researching film tourism in this way, I changed my perspective on how fans behaved and how they thought. I realized how necessary it is to look beyond the places I was comfortable with and the fans that resembled me and my friends. It was an intimidating experience, but ultimately a rewarding one. This is something I believe can benefit all fandom researchers. It leads to a needed reflexivity in regards to fandom and fan practice, reminding us that our way of doing fandom is not necessarily the only way. In using qualitative research methodologies and engaging with a broader spectrum of fans, we start to break down some of the insularity of the field as well as improve our own research by encountering new ideas and perspectives. This is a necessary step to understanding what fandom is and can be. However, we can do so without disregarding the benefits of utilizing one's own fandom. This, too, is part of the needed reflexivity for the field as it expands, as it allows us to acknowledge what our own experience brings to our research. It not only gives us an understanding of what our respondents go through but also can facilitate the research itself—I would not have had as much success in interviewing if I wasn't able to demonstrate my fandom credentials. What my approach shows is that researching other fans and forms of fandom does not mean that we must discard what brought us to fan studies in the first place, and our own fandom can, indeed, be an important tool when engaging with other fans.

[8.4] I don't suggest that this is the only way to face the new opportunities (and challenges) for fan studies and fandom research nor that my approach is revolutionary for the field. There are research projects and ideas that this approach would not suit, and other fandom researchers have taken similar approaches to mine. Rather, it is one way of building upon
what has come before in fandom research and a suggestion of how these methods can be adapted to the current state of fandom. Fandom researchers have important insights into the contemporary media environment, where more and more relationships with mediated objects can be seen to have fannish qualities, and it is crucial that we are able to expand from the field's traditional subjects and practices into ones that look less like them. How can we use our skills and knowledge to analyze fandoms that we don't have personal experience with? This was a challenge that I was faced with in designing and executing my research project, and this was the way I went about meeting it. My hope is that this account can be of some help to other researchers in dealing with the same challenges and present one way of moving forward.

9. Notes

1. See also the series discussing the term on Jenkins's blog beginning here: http://henryjenkins.org/2011/06/acafandom_and_beyond_week_one.html.

2. The term for notes taken by the researcher as they code their data, containing observations, thoughts, feelings, and so forth about the data as the researcher spends more time with it.

10. References


"She's a fan, but this was supposed to be scientific": Fan misunderstandings and acafan mistakes

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[0.1] Abstract—I here reflect on my first forays into fan studies, two separate projects on fans' reactions to Tom Hiddleston's short-lived relationship with Taylor Swift. After discovering live tweets of my 2018 Fan Studies Network presentation that included yet-to-be-published survey research I collected on post-Hiddleswift fannish behaviors, some fans turned to the Anonymous Ask feature of a Hiddleston-focused Tumblr blog to interrogate the results, an article I had recently published, and me. I highlight this experience as a way to reexamine my methodological choices going forward when working with fan populations while writing for academic audiences. Ultimately, I realize future misinterpretations might be prevented by transparency as an acafan on Tumblr and more consistent interaction with fans across social media platforms.

[0.2] Keywords—Anonymous Ask; Antifans; Celebrity studies; Hiddleswift; Live tweets; Social media; Survey research; Tumblr; Twitter

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1. Introduction

[1.1] The fact that you quote lareinedenfer, the worst toxic hater, so extensively in your study is what de-legitimises it for me. Let's be honest, you never liked the relationship and your whole "study" was just bias-confirmation. Your own. That's why you are so "surprised" that your survey shows such different results than what you thought was the fandom's reaction. But that's what happens when you only look at the rantings of a toxic.

—anonymous, Tumblr

[1.2] I'll be honest. Deciding to open my essay for this special issue on fan studies methodologies with this unforgiving anonymous Tumblr message was not easy. I had already composed several responses to similar critics to clarify the scope of my work in the months
after presenting my Hiddleswift survey research at the 2018 Fan Studies Network conference. But here I was again, faced with someone conflating two separate projects, failing to acknowledge that I quoted other Tumblr bloggers besides lareinedenfer, and describing my research position as biased. Although the message ultimately reveals a lack of understanding of what academics who study fandoms do, particularly those who are also fans of their objects of study, it has also made me realize there was more I could have done to make my work accessible to the Hiddlestoner fandom, as well as more I can do to prevent future misinterpretations of my research.

[1.3] The identity crises endured by new and veteran acafans alike is hardly a new topic of discussion: the introduction to Matt Hills's 2002 book *Fan Cultures* provides an extensive literature review distinguishing the differences among academics, fans, scholar-fans, and fan-scholars. Between June and October 2011, Henry Jenkins's *Confessions of an Aca-Fan* blog featured twenty-seven posts on the topic of "Aca-Fandom and beyond," giving leading fan studies scholars the space to debate the term. Most applicable to the experience I reflect upon in this essay is Louisa Stein's (2011) suggestion that the term "'aca-fan' is not a category of scholar or a defined community, nor even a fixed position, but rather a descriptor of an ongoing, ever shifting critical and personal process."

2. The internet researcher and her internet boyfriend

[2.1] In order that you may better understand how my aca and fan worlds collided, I should start by explaining that the how, why, and when people use online platforms to tell their stories and reach an audience has fascinated me throughout my academic career. My 2010 doctoral dissertation in the field of rhetoric and composition focused on authorship and collaboration in the post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans blogosphere. As a New Orleans native myself, I utilized self-narrative, an autoethnographic technique Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner define as "texts by complete-member researchers" who "explore groups of which they are already members or in which...they have become full members with complete identification and acceptance" (quoted in Chang 2008, 33). I also relied on qualitative methods such as interactive interviewing—answering the same questions I asked my tech-savvy participants (in a wiki space no less!)—to learn how blogging (as it was understood in 2005) became the genre through which first individuals and then citizen groups found agency.

[2.2] Reflecting on that experience now, I realize it was my five years of continuous online interaction with fellow bloggers, in the comments sections of our blogs and on the NOLA (New Orleans, Louisiana) blogger listserv, coupled with my in-person participation at their inaugural Rising Tide Conference on the Future of New Orleans in August 2006 that solidified their trust in me and the interest this group would have in my dissertation project. After all, other than the blog posts lamenting the loss of my childhood home and detailing my parents' Federal Emergency Management Agency and insurance company experiences, I was a transplanted New Orleanian pursuing my graduate degree in Florida who did not have to deal with any of the daily hardships common to other NOLA bloggers' post-Katrina experience. Any of the interviewees could have at any time simply told me to go read their blog rather than communicate to me about what they had written, why, and what it might
have meant in the wider scheme of things; however, our shared passion for New Orleans and technology overcame any such discrepancies.

[2.3] Conversely, as a fan of Tom Hiddleston's since he first appeared as Loki in *Thor* (2011), I operated online more as a lurker than a content creator, especially on Tumblr, since I had not yet built up a fandom-specific network there. When news of the pairing of Tom and Taylor Swift—dubbed Hiddleswift by the entertainment news media—broke in June 2016 and Tom's fans took to social media to sound off, I was drawn to finding, liking, and reblogging viewpoints that resonated with mine. Yes, I will admit that as a fan, I was initially shocked and subsequently disheartened every time a paparazzi picture of Tom and Taylor was posted from yet another exotic location. But as an internet researcher, I also knew I had to write about it. The exigence was certainly not comparable to a natural or national disaster, but the impacted community was turning to blog spaces to react.

[2.4] While reblogging photosets and GIFs, sharing fan art and memes, and locating/reading fan fiction were the primary reasons I joined Tumblr in January 2012, my acafan turn in 2016 led me to "care more about members' contributions" in order to make more explicit "social connections" (Jenkins et. al. 2009) within the Hiddleston fandom. However, unlike my fellow New Orleanians, whose blog sites began as a direct result of the storm in 2005 and which fostered a sense of community for me, the Hiddleston fandom on Tumblr and the site's interface did not make it easy for me to feel part of a networked community. In "It's About Who You Know: Social Capital, Hierarchies and Fandom," Bertha Chin (2018) describes some fandoms that direct new fans to "a comprehensive list…often featur[ing] fanfiction authors and artists who are well liked and have accumulated a substantial amount of reputation within the fandom, not merely for being great writers and artists, but at times, for being fan community leaders" (243). Because I was beginning my formal fan studies work at the onset of "Hiddleswift," however, an event that divided what had previously been a united Hiddleston fandom (not to mention caused some fic authors and artists to cease their creations all together), reputations were in flux and finding leaders and comprehensive lists of important fan works was challenging.

[2.5] Unlike the WordPress or Blogger platforms that provide themes allowing, even prompting, users to maintain lists of links on their home page, blogrolls on Tumblr sites are few and far between. Without guidance from trusted superfan sites, I relied instead on the recommended blogs in my dashboard, curated by algorithms that had analyzed my own Tumblr blog's content, tags, and liking/reblogging activity. As a result, the list of blogs I followed during that time became populated by those who either used a picture of Tom Hiddleston as their avatar, mentioned him in their page description or tagline, or included "Hiddles" in their site name, e.g., "damnyouhiddles," "teacuphiddles," "hiddlescheekbones," "tomhiddleslove," and "hard-on-for-hiddleston." Although I would go on to contact bloggers with non-Hiddles usernames for permission to quote from their posts, at this early stage, I admit to "not recognizing the size or scope of the fandom…and using limited messaging and search facilities" (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014, 775). Still, I do feel my two projects, the first qualitative and the second quantitative, were successful in capturing the "fluidity of engagement" (Deller 2015) within the Hiddleston fandom at that time.
3. Academic creation of Hiddleswift research projects

[3.1] In early 2017, I began work on an article for the special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures (TWC)* dedicated to Tumblr and fandom (Morimoto and Stein 2018). "'Remember a Week Ago When Tom Hiddleston Could Do No Wrong?': Tumblr Reactions to the Loss of an Internet Boyfriend" explored the ways Tumblr, unlike Twitter or Facebook, provided the space the British actor's fans needed to analyze his unexpected relationship with Taylor Swift (Pignetti 2018a). As I wrote there, "While Booth notes that Tumblr's nature is to place 'emphasis on the image rather than the written word' (2017, 238)…the spectacle that was tagged #Hiddleswift inspired posts that often ranged between 600 and 2,100 words" (Pignetti 2018a, ¶ 4.1). Crafted for the symposium section of the journal, which according to the journal's submission guidelines encourages "concise, thematically contained essays" (Transformative Works and Cultures n.d.), I limited my discussion to two Hiddlestoners' posts and submitted the piece in July 2017. Because of the brevity of the romance, by then, both celebrities had moved on, and their respective fandoms had quieted. However, in August 2017, I contacted my editors for permission to amend the symposium piece in order to include examples from the resurgence of reactions to the "I <3 TS" tank tops that appeared in Swift's "Look What You Made Me Do" music video (note 1).

[3.2] Given how quickly the entertainment media resuscitated both the portmanteaus and timelines associated with Swift's former boyfriends when her *Reputation* album dropped in November 2017, I proposed a Hiddleswift presentation to the Fan Studies Network (FSN) conference to be held in Cardiff, Wales, in the summer of 2018. My intent was to do an extended analysis of the Tumblr blogs I had found since submitting my work to *TWC* because even though the relationship was over, to some fans, the damage to Hiddleston's reputation was permanent. New posts reflected their frustration over the countless articles that pejoratively linked Hiddleston's name to Swift's (figure 1), something they had feared as soon as news of the pairing hit back in 2016.

![Figure 1. Screenshot of a daily update Google alert on Tom Hiddleston from November 10, 2017, the week of Taylor Swift's album release. In all but one of the headlines, the entertainment media was speculating about which ex-boyfriend inspired which song.](image)

[3.3] While the content of these new Tumblr posts was rich, in the months leading up to the
FSN conference, I became more intrigued by the contrast between responses to the same news items about Hiddleston across social media platforms. For example, despite the joy that a new *GQ* portfolio of pictures of Tom donning fitted, brown, striped suits brought some, others could not help but notice that instead of promoting his new film, *Kong: Skull Island* (2017), he spent the majority of the corresponding cover story defending his relationship with Taylor and the aforementioned "I <3 TS" tank top (Brodesser-Akner 2017). Even its author Taffy Brodesser-Akner (2017) was taken aback: "He is so sad, and I can't take it anymore, so I put my hand on his and I say, 'Tom, Tom, it's okay. You don't have to talk about the tank top anymore. I got it. I understand. I'll tell the world.' But he can't stop talking about it. He literally cannot stop talking about it."

[3.4] Consider what happened when a Tumblr post titled "On the GQ Interview" (coincidentally authored by Tumblr user lareinedenfer (2017), "the worst toxic hater" mentioned in the epigraph) was shared (not by me) in the closed Facebook group "Hiddleston Gossip—Anything Goes" (note 2). The comments quickly moved away from the content of lareinedenfer's (2017) post, most of which mocked Tom's conversation with Brodesser-Akner and ultimately labeled him "desperate and contrived." Instead, it incited a debate about who gets to be called a real fan. Respondents outlined reasons why fans should or shouldn't doubt Tom's integrity and attempted to explain that critiques of his behavior didn't make them nonfans or haters. Most pertinent to my interests as a social media scholar, I noticed several references to Tumblr users—in this thread and others—as "creepy," "delusional," "crazies," "trolls," and "rabid pets."

[3.5] While I had observed some fandom infighting when other internet boyfriends, like Benedict Cumberbatch and Chris Evans, went public with relationships, I decided to pursue a quantitative project to gauge how permanent an impact Hiddleston's relationship with Swift made upon his fandom. Wondering if fan shaming was widespread, particularly on platforms like Tumblr and Twitter, where users can hide behind pseudonyms or go completely anonymous, I also sought to learn more about Hiddleston fans' social media behaviors. The ten-question survey, which was approved by my university's institutional review board and which collected no demographic data, was open from May 17 to June 18, 2018. It received nearly 400 responses within the first twenty-four hours of its launch and 593 responses in total. These fans clearly had been waiting for the opportunity to speak their minds!

[3.6] Given the use of air quotes by the anonymous asker in the epigraph to describe my "study" and "surprise" at the survey results, my focus in this praxis piece will be on the survey results to the question, "Would you say Tom's brief relationship with Taylor Swift in 2016 impacted your fannish behaviors (enthusiasm) within the Hiddlestoner community?" (Pignetti 2018b), as it best illustrates the fandom's split. The options for answers were "yes," "no," or "temporarily." A follow-up question for those who answered "yes" or "temporarily" offered suggestions as to what "enthusiasm" might mean, e.g., reading and/or writing fan fiction involving Tom or characters he has portrayed; posting about him on social media; leaving or joining different fan groups as a result of the relationship; returning or selling DVDs or other merchandise related to his films; shifting focus to another celebrity/actor fandom; or the open-text option "other," where responders could describe their responses.
Ultimately, the majority of those surveyed felt the relationship did not make a permanent impact on their status as fans of Tom, with 60.03 percent reporting "no" impact occurred, 17.35 percent reporting "yes," and 22.62 percent reporting "temporarily." "Other" responses, however, should provide some insight into why I hypothesized otherwise about their online experiences in presumably safe fannish spaces (figure 2).

![Figure 2. Eleven of the 71 text responses to the "other" option for those who answered "yes" or "temporarily" to the question about the impact of Hiddleswift upon their "fannish behaviors (enthusiasm) within the Hiddlestoner community." These reveal a change in fans' social media reading, viewing, and posting experiences as a direct result of Hiddleswift.](image)

[3.7] My June 29, 2018, FSN presentation, "'When Your Fave Is Problematic': The Impact of Hiddleswift on Hiddlestoners" (Pignetti 2018b), elaborated on these opinions to conclude that while many still considered themselves fans of Tom's work as an actor, some categorically stopped interacting with the fandom on social media during Hiddleswift. As one fan described that three-month period in the open answer section, "I'm more of a casual fan. I would never ascribe myself as a 'Hiddlestoner,' but the spectacle could not be escaped with the barrage of articles and photos, on every platform. It got to the point that I had to filter everything and honestly could not take any pleasure in reading about current and future work projects. Everything was overshadowed. Once she was out of the picture and a bit of normalcy returned I could enjoy once again reading about the Hamlet performances, etc."

[3.8] Indeed, I met several fan studies scholars at the conference who, based on their use of Loki GIFs to punctuate their tweets, also appreciated Tom's work. During breaks between sessions, our face-to-face conversations would veer either toward speculating why Tom's public relations team had allowed things to get so out of hand or toward wanting to collaborate on projects related to Taylor Swift, i.e., the problematic actions of her fans toward the fan groups of other male entertainers she has dated as well as the brand of "white feminism" that she has brought to the entertainment industry. As someone without a media studies background, I came away from my first FSN conference with the impression that my Hiddleswift research was of value, particularly to current scholarly conversations about the authenticity of celebrity.

4. Fan reactions to Hiddleswift research projects
[4.1] Then I logged back into my Tumblr account.

[4.2] There I found Hiddleston fans who presumably had participated in my survey, because they were familiar with both it and my name enough to (1) discover the live tweets from my #FSN2018 session which then (2) led them to locate and read my TWC article, which had just been published weeks prior, and (3) turn to the anonymous ask feature of a Hiddleston-focused Tumblr blog run by pseudonymous user insanely-smart to interrogate both.

[4.3] Before I dive into what they asked and subsequently discussed in the days and months following the FSN conference, and more importantly, how I could have prevented their confusion, allow me to speculate briefly about how they may have found my work. As suggested in the paragraph above, it seems most askers were familiar with my survey project, something I had posted about on various Hiddleston-focused Facebook groups and had directly asked a number of Twitter and Tumblr fan accounts to share. My original Tumblr post soliciting participation received 102 notes, which I believe directly correlates to the 400+ survey responses I received in the first twenty-four hours of the survey's being open (figure 3).
Figure 3. Screenshot of my original Tumblr post from May 18, 2018, which I reblogged later in the day to say thank you for all the likes and reblogs that spread the word about my "Impact of Hiddleswift" survey.

[4.4] Since my Tumblr and Twitter handles are the same—phdaisy—it is possible that I gained followers on both platforms as a result of attention to the survey. If so, it would have been my tweets rather than my Tumblr posts that made them aware of my FSN conference participation. In fact, throughout the two-day conference, nearly 1,500 live tweets were posted with #FSN2018, helping those not able to attend the conference to follow along. Even if the most enthusiastic fans kept versions of Tom's name on Google alerts or as part of an advanced search on TweetDeck, being guided to the conference hashtag via my tweets certainly would have assisted their finding references to Hiddleston and talk of his fandom. Moreover, between June 15, 2018, and October 22, 2019, visitors to my Twitter page would see the following as my pinned tweet, which could also explain their quick finding of the TWC article: "Two years to the date those 'Tinker, Taylor Snogs A Spy' on Rhode Island rocks pics appeared in @TheSun, my piece on #Hiddleswift & tumblr #fandom has been
published in the new issue of TWC edited by @l_e_s & @aca-fanmom! #internetboyfriend #fsn2018 https://t.co/Fjof2XatZE" (Pignetti 2018c).

[4.5] As previously stated, I rarely create my own content on Tumblr, and unfortunately, that habit led to my neglect in making a similar announcement on the blogging platform. Truthfully, this was less a deliberate choice and more my standard practice; I wanted to tag the issue editors and reach the academic Twitter audience I recognized made up a significant portion of my nearly 2,100 followers. However, even with only 109 Tumblr followers, neglecting to make them aware of this publication news, especially since the article focused on Tumblr as "a site of critical discourse" (Booth 2017, 240), was a major misstep on my part. As you recall, the TWC article had been completed the previous year, but I had just put myself on their radar as "the survey researcher" the month prior, so this was a missed opportunity to distinguish my two Hiddleswift projects from one another.

[4.6] Returning to the subject of the anonymous asks, I ought to note that I was not tagged in all the answers Tumblr blogger insanely-smart provided her askers, but as soon as I saw a few in a row, dated and timestamped the exact afternoon I was participating in the FSN conference, I used the search tool on her blog page to find others that mentioned "Daisy" or my screen name "phdaisy" (note 3). To summarize some of that early scrutiny: fans questioned the ethics of my quoting from Tumblr blogs in the article, even though I had gained permission, and my "dissecting his [Hiddleston's] every word to find deeper meaning and inconsistency" (insanely-smart 2018a) when, in actuality, I only quoted him in my presentation twice.

[4.7] With regards to the ask (figure 4), let me begin by addressing my article's use of first person in what the asker and Tumblr blogger insanely-smart felt was "supposed to be scientific" and "proper academic writing," respectively (insanely-smart 2018b) (note 4). Because this was my first fan studies publication and because it was describing fractures in a fandom that I was a part of, I had purposefully chosen to publish the piece in the symposium section of TWC. That way, I could begin with my own experiences of tracking the entertainment news and social media posts on the relationship before considering how Tumblr provided a forum for Hiddleston fans to process their reactions to the relationship. As the "ETA" (edited to add) in her answer indicates, insanely-smart adjusted her stance that the article should not have been written "that casually" to go on to explain the distinct sections of the journal and how my piece was an example of "a personal essay integrated with scholarship" (insanely-smart 2018b). While self-justifying, I also feel it necessary to point out that the opinions the asker in figure 4 references in his/her critique of me actually all appear in my final footnote as "moments that divided the fandom further" (Pignetti 2018a, n2) and were not discussed in the article itself.
Figure 4. Screenshot of an anonymous ask that Tumblr user insanely-smart received and answered on the day of my FSN presentation, June 29, 2018. The asker expected my survey results to be published already, even though data collection had ended less than two weeks prior, and thus expressed disappointment in only being able to find my TWC journal article.

[4.8] This ask was not the only evidence of the #FSN2018 live tweets arousing an interest that only led to disappointment when fans found “only an article” and not the survey results (insanely-smart 2018b). With the survey data collection, article publication, and conference presentation all entering the Hiddlestoners' consciousness within a six-week period, conflation of the projects continued, even after insanely-smart answered, "The article isn't what she presented today" (insanely-smart 2018b). But perhaps most damaging to my ethos with the fandom was my inclusion of—in both the article and presentation—Tumblr blogger lareinedenfer.

5. The toxic

[5.1] It seems my lack of pre-Hiddleswift history with the Hiddlestoner fandom on Tumblr caused me to highlight, in the words of the anonymous ask I open with, the "rantings of a toxic." In fact, another user messaged me to express their dismay in my using lareinedenfer as a source in the TWC article, describing her as "nasty and cruel from the start, a troll who went after Hiddleston's fandom" (anonymous Tumblr direct message to author, July 6, 2018). In my defense, I never solely featured her in the article or my presentation, instead always including her opinions alongside those of other Tumblr bloggers. When I began reviewing countless Hiddlestoners' posts back in June 2016, I never saw disparaging posts about particular users, so it would have been difficult for me to know, as insanely-smart describes it, that "loooool before H[iddle]S[wift]...she [lareinedenfer] was harassing and bullying fanfic writers" (cenobitic-anchorite 2018).

[5.2] But even if I did know her history beforehand, there is no denying lareinedenfer's way of speaking on the topic of Hiddleswift was direct. I chose her posts due to their prolific nature, with several extending beyond 1,000 words. Yet, my critics once again turned to insanely-smart to question my choice: "One thing is for sure: lareinedenfer, one of the
absolute worst toxics, will have multiple orgasms seeing that much of this 'study' is based on
the vitriol she spewed. And this passes for 'academic research' these days? Very
disappointing" (cenobitic-anchorite 2018).

[5.3] insanely-smart once again came to my rescue by noting "researchers have always
studied nasty people, or included them in research. They're part of the human spectrum"
(cenobitic-anchorite 2018), but not without also making the following comments about
lareinedenfer: "For me, she is THE toxic. End of. The others are merely gossipmongers"
(cenobitic-anchorite 2018). When I reblogged this ask and answer exchange on my own
Tumblr blog to add my explanation of how and why lareinedenfer's posts fit in the context of
TWC's special issue on Tumblr and fandom, there was one reply that stood out. Tumblr user
cenobitic-anchorite (2018) acknowledged my note as an "interesting addition" to the study,
and then used the following hashtags: "#neat stuff," "#been following this at arm's reach
which is probably the best way to study fandom sometimes," and "#but I respect what
Daisy's doing here."

[5.4] As an academic well-versed in qualitative methods but new to working with fan
populations, the flurry of anonymous asks questioning my research in the days and months
after the FSN conference had me fearing visits to Tumblr altogether (note 5). So when I saw
this reaction, dated September 5, 2018, with its reference to fandom studies as better for
being undertaken "at arm's reach," I knew at least a few of my followers were beginning to
understand the precarious positions of someone who is both a fan and an academic. And this
was because I was finally using the same platform as the group I was studying. My
conclusion will elaborate on this seemingly simple but crucial way I can make my work
more transparent to the fans I am studying, but suffice it to say, as soon as I began reblogging
asks and answers to then add my own perspective, more nods of respect like the one above
appeared.

[5.5] However, my reliance on lareinedenfer was something a few could not forgive, even
though she has never used her blog space (which either she or Tumblr deactivated in June
2019) to boast about being part of an academic publication in order to "validate [her] own
rantings" (insanely-smart 2018c). In fact, in my messages requesting permission to quote
from her blog in the first TWC piece and then again for this one, her replies were succinct but
cooperative. Even when I let her know that my current discussion would include references
to her as a "toxic," she replied, "I don't really care about people's opinions" (lareinedenfer
Tumblr direct message to author, n.d.). Still, there was growing concern about the academic
attention I was bringing to the Hiddlestoner fandom—good and bad—on Tumblr: "People at
that conference won't just be laughing bemused at the toxics. They'll also be equally
bemused and patronising towards blogs like yours, Saney. I imagine they find the
'intellectual' discussions and claims about who knows Tom best, his career etc, quaint—no
matter which blog" (insanely-smart 2018d).

[5.6] Again, insanely-smart tried to right this wrong impression by answering, "Well, it's a
Fandom Studies conference, so they aren't particularly 'laughing at' people; they're interested
in the sociology of it all" (insanely-smart 2018d). Whether or not that was enough of an
explanation, I'll never know. The askers moved on to another topic that weekend: Tom's
surprise appearance at the South Bank Sky Arts Awards in London, where he presented Benedict Cumberbatch with the Outstanding Achievement Award (Hiddlesfashion 2018). But that asker's depiction of "people at that conference" as "patronising" troubles me. To conclude, I would like to borrow from the "goodwill ethics of online research methods" Brittany Kelley describes in her 2016 TWC piece by the same name to propose ways that my future acafan work can become more respectful of my human subjects across social media platforms.

6. Tumblr-ing forward

[6.1] Only now that I have achieved some distance from these two Hiddleswift projects do I realize how my history of pursuing personal research, thereby producing what some interpreted as "overly confessional" writing (Phillips 2010), and then including opinions from a "toxic" member of the fandom all worked to undermine my academic authority with this fan group. As unsettling as it was for me to find questions and responses to my research on another person's blog rather than addressed directly to me, even after the blogger insanely-smart tagged me as a fellow Tumblr user, the experience has prompted me to reexamine my methods in order to consider a readership comprising both academics and fans. Michelle Fine describes this charge as "working the hyphen," that is, more carefully considering "how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations" (as cited in Kelley 2016, ¶ 4.7).

[6.2] For example, as popular as the survey was, I was not surprised that fans wanted to see the data that emerged from it, but I was surprised by the speed with which they wanted it. These days, fans have grown accustomed to taking quizzes that prove their knowledge or loyalty to a fandom and receiving instantaneous results to share on their social media timelines. Reviewing the boilerplate language within my university's institutional review board consent statement, which opened the Hiddleswift survey, I see now that it explained my project's goals but did not indicate when or where results would be published. Kelley (2016) suggests researchers "share the report with participants as soon as possible, and to be willing to talk through its writing, so participants can have a chance to negotiate different meanings, and even to pull out of the research entirely" (¶ 4.7). Moreover, because I was limited to a fifteen-minute presentation at the FSN conference, I knew my first pass at reportage would not include everything, and because I collected anonymous data, I had not even considered the negotiation of different meanings. My plans were to write things up over the summer, first informally in a post-conference blog post (complete with a selection of slides) on my daisypignetti.com WordPress site (which I did on July 15, 2018, in a post titled "FSN2018: Impact of Hiddleswift" [Pignetti 2018d]) and then more formally as a journal article or book chapter (which I am still doing). But these are the plans of an academic with an academic audience and academic publishing timelines on her mind, not to mention a 4/4 teaching load.

[6.3] Given the anonymous asks began as the result of stumbling upon live tweets, some of which may have included pictures of my slides but could neither capture the essence of my extemporaneous delivery nor appreciate the full range of audience responses to my presentation, I have been reminded that time is of the essence in internet-based fan research.
Even with my cross posting the aforementioned July 15 blog post to Tumblr and tagging insanely-smart with the hope she would reblog it to her followers to offer them answers to their previously asked questions (she didn't), relying on my former postconference habits is no longer sufficient. If I am going to use fans' vocal posts to inform my work, I need to reciprocate with more frequent Tumblr posts about my progress, upcoming conference presentations, and spin-off projects. Something else I can do to prevent future misinterpretations when fans invariably come into contact with my work is leave my Tumblr blog's ask box open, which would embody Kelley's (2016) extension of the term "transparency" as one that fosters "a sense of collaboration with participants" (¶ 4.12). Because the feature is disabled by default, and as even after one does enable it, there is another step to allow anonymous asks, I never even considered making anonymous asks available, which emphasizes my former position as a lurker on Tumblr. Truthfully, the feature had not even caught my eye until my experience of seeing the Hiddleston fans turn to their trusted Tumblr authors rather than me, which was likely in order to protect their anonymity.

[6.4] In other words, because the majority of my survey participants came from Tumblr, I should have immersed myself in the Tumblr fandom more rather than play it safe in my familiar Facebook groups and academic Twitter circles. Not only did I miss an opportunity to inform my fellow fans of the publication of my TWC article before I left for the FSN conference, but if I had I created a Tumblr post about my publication, I could have provided "an explicit methodological reflection on [my] digital (auto)ethnographical practices" (Evans and Stasi 2014, 18). In plain language, I could have explained how and why I selected the Tumblr blogs that I quoted. As Casey Fiesler (2019) writes in "Why (and how) academics should blog their papers": "Blogging about papers is also a way to share work more easily with the community you studied...You can include information in a blog post that might not be in the paper itself. It can be nice to reflect on the research process and journey beyond the context of that formal write-up."

[6.5] Doing this type of self-reflexive work in those precious two weeks between the TWC article publication and my FSN presentation could have put Tumblr user lareinedenfer's reputation on my radar, prevented fans' conflation of the article with the survey, and also set up the latter's potential value as a quantitative and, thus, more objective look at the fandom's reactions. Indeed, regarding the value of data, one asker expressed the following concern to insanely-smart soon after taking my survey in May 2018: "I've been Tom's fan for less than a year... (didn't know him in 2016), so I don't think my answers mean so much. But I'm worried about the results being publicly discussed, couldn't that be even more damaging?" (insanely-smart 2018e) I am not sure if the asker meant public discussion would be damaging to Tom Hiddleston's reputation or his fandom's, but insanely-smart's reply about the usefulness of results is intriguing in light of how the current social media landscape has blurred the lines between entertainment news and opinion pieces:

[6.6] I mean, that is a concern. But these are things that have been or are being discussed anyway—but without any data behind them. At this point, this is the closest we'll get to that. I think, personally, I'd rather have this out there with factual information. Because you never know, she may discover that not as many
people have left as was thought (or have come back). To me, anyway, that kind of information could be far more useful than a gossip site like Lainey (with tons of followers) saying people dislike Tom, as if it's true—which we're seeing with TR [Thor: Ragnarok (2017)] and IW [Avengers: Infinity War (2018)] reception, that it's not. But of course, you're right that release of the information could dredge up stuff from clickbait sites, which will be tiring. Honestly, though, it's still happening, no matter what. (insanely-smart 2018e)

[6.7] If you recall, sixty percent of those surveyed stated Tom's relationship with Taylor had no impact on their fannish behaviors. When asked for follow-up explanation, 168 of 384 respondents chose the option, "I'm a loyal fan no matter who he dates." Likewise, in open responses, frustration with the media coverage of the "Hiddleswift" spectacle and hatred of Taylor Swift were expressed far more often than any loss of respect for Tom. To quote Fiesler (2019) again, although she was referring to scientific communication more than celebrity gossip, "Even if you aren't writing about your research, someone else might be." Thus, it is my intent to be more explicit in my use of both online platforms (e.g., Tumblr and Twitter) and academic spaces like TWC and FSN meetings when distributing data and telling my "own story" (Fiesler 2019) alongside other popular culture headlines.

[6.8] References to Tom Hiddleston continue to appear in entertainment news posts about Taylor Swift, primarily those that reference song lyrics (figure 5). Recaps of their highly publicized relationship are also frequently provided whenever writers describe her current, more private relationship with another British actor, Joe Alwyn. For example, In Style contrasts the two relationships thusly: "For reference, we struggled to find even one pic of the two even standing near each other, while 'Taylor Swift Tom Hiddleston' has 11.8 million Google hits" (Whittaker 2017).

![Image of Taylor Swift and Tom Hiddleston](image_url)

Figure 5. On May 6, 2019, in their barrage of posts gearing up for the Met Gala, E!News shared a video on their Instagram page of what was the first glimpse the world saw of Taylor Swift and Tom Hiddleston together, dancing at the 2016 Met Gala event. Their caption—"No nothing good starts in a getaway car, but hop in!"—references the Swift song media outlets and fans have most associated with her relationship with Hiddleston, "Getaway Car," from her 2017 album Reputation.

[6.9] Unlike the therapeutic nature of Tumblr's endless scrollability, described by Rebecca...
Williams (2018) regarding series' endings or characters' canonical deaths, where "constant repeat viewing of the same content…works to assuage fannish anxieties, helping fans cope" (¶ 1.2), many Hiddlestoners do not want any reminders of Tom's ever having dated Taylor. Indeed, when asked if they had ever been fans of Taylor, 427 of my 593 survey respondents answered "never." When I shared an early draft of this article with insanely-smart (something Judith Fathallah recommends in her 2016 article about accountability, transparency, and reciprocity), she expressed concern that my research is dredging up feelings from the past. As another fan put it, "Tom has moved on with his life, shouldn't we?" (insanely-smart 2018f). At the heart of humanities research is learning from the past in order to understand our present and imagine the future. The Hiddleswift relationship was a critical moment in Hiddlestoner fandom's history, and while my TWC article focused on a few reactions to Tom and Taylor's three-month relationship, the survey data has revealed there is much more to investigate when it comes to how the media depicts celebrity couplings as well as how fans treat other fans based on their views of those couplings, specifically on Tumblr (note 6).

[6.10] As a professor housed in an English department, my career focus is teaching and researching writing, specifically, "the act of producing and distributing writing and the ways in which technology assists, promotes, impedes, and/or shapes that process" (Porter 2007, xviii). With this agenda in mind, I am entering the fan studies field as someone who has blogged since 2003 and has written a dissertation on a place-specific blogosphere, the latter of which was no small undertaking. As such, it now seems obvious to me that as I was examining Tumblr as a blog space for Hiddleswift discourse, I should have been blogging my survey project's progress there for the fan community in addition to information-sharing across social media platforms for my academic colleagues. This misstep reiterates my discussion about needing to have a better grasp of the Tumblr community, a researcher practice Kelley (2016) describes as "gain[ing] a clear view of the particulars of their site(s) of study" (¶ 3.6).

[6.11] Moreover, as this flurry of anonymous asks has highlighted, there are various authorial options the Tumblr platform provides that can "cause…conflict within fandom" (Minkel quoted in Morimoto 2018, ¶ 30). Thus, as part of my 2020 sabbatical leave, I plan to shift my focus onto those Tumblr users who run their blogs primarily as anonymous ask spaces rather than on a particular fandom. In doing so, I hope to learn whether or not there are rules established and shared about the types of asks they will and will not answer, how quickly they will move on to new topics if questions are repeated, and how much of a time commitment it is to stay online and answer questions, particularly during times when the blog's featured television show, movie, or celebrity is making headlines (or, as was my experience, is being discussed at an academic conference).

7. Notes

1. For those unfamiliar with the tank top in question and its impact, it is best described by Ellie Woodward (2017): "The image of Hiddleston and Swift frolicking in the ocean at her 4th of July party as he wore a T-shirt emblazoned with her initials was widely regarded as evidence that the relationship amounted to nothing more than a laughable PR stunt, and the
pair were mocked mercilessly for the duration of their three-month union." As I added to my TWC piece, once the "Look What You Made Me Do" (2017) music video came out, fans were angered that "Taylor was calling attention to the shirt that Tom, not she, had been endlessly mocked about on the Fourth of July, and, to enrage Hiddlestoners further, she began selling the version from the video on her website at $50 each" (Pignetti 2018a, ¶ 5.3). Further proof of the tank top's being a permanent identifier of the relationship, and one negatively attributed to Tom, appears in the opening sentence of an April 25, 2019, Cosmopolitan magazine article: "Taylor Swift must have learned a lot from the super-public mess that was her relationship with Tom 'Questionable Taste in Tank Tops' Hiddleston, because her relationship with British actor Joe Alwyn has been insanely private" (Bonner 2019).

2. At 120 members, "Hiddleston Gossip—Anything Goes" (https://www.facebook.com/groups/hiddlestongossipnorules) is a small group when compared to the 15,864 "Hiddlestoners on Facebook" (https://www.facebook.com/groups/Hiddlestoners/), which boasts of being the first of Tom's Facebook fan groups to be established in May 2012. But as the gossip group's name infers, no topics are off limits. Meanwhile, to this day, the Hiddlestoners prohibit "any speculation or discussion regarding any female companion seen with Tom who isn't a relative or friend," a moratorium that began as a result of posts about Taylor Swift in June 2016.

3. Unfortunately, the Tumblr blog http://insanely-smart.tumblr.com, which is discussed at length in this essay, was taken down in August 2018 as part of a purge by Tumblr of celebrity-focused blogs that posted paparazzi pictures subject to copyright. However, screenshots of several of the asks I quote, along with their original (but dead) URLs, appear in my July 25, 2018, blog post, "FSN2018: I tumble 4 ya" (Pignetti 2018e). The Tumblr blog http://maevecurrywrites.tumblr.com/, quoted in note 6, was also taken down that August, but I was able to locate its text via the Wayback Machine.

4. These value judgments are at the heart of acafan deliberations, with Hills (who relies on the term scholar-fan) claiming, "Respect is aligned with, and given to, the 'good' and rational academic who is expected to be detached and rational, even about his/her own investments in popular culture. Respect is not to be given lightly to those subjects who...deviate from the regulatory norms of academic writing or performance" (2002, 28).

5. I realize now that those who expressed disappointment could merely be par for the "callout culture" course Roach (2017) describes as happening "within their own communities." Because I do not know how many anonymous askers there were, only the number of asks I saw Tumblr user insanely-smart answer, it is possible they could have all come from a single source or a very few fans.

6. Not wanting to distract readers from my newly found insights as an acafan, I do feel it necessary to share at least one of the more candid summaries of what happened to the Hiddleston fandom, by Tumblr user maevecurrywrites (2017): "Everything EXPLODED, people who were all YAY RELATIONSHIP SO PERFECT TOGETHER were shitting all over people who were like TAYLOR SWIFT, No THANK YOU...names like jealous, hater,
bitter, and toxic were tossed around like confetti on New Year's Eve, subtle and not-so-subtle racist comments were made on and off anon to WOC, and there was fan shaming galore, and fucking hell, what a SHITSHOW. Many left completely, some pulled back, others kept going, but the joy was sucked out of things like a popped balloon and that balloon stayed deflated for a good while. A lot of the fun, it seemed, had gone MIA."

8. References


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Praxis

Applying Brenda Dervin's sense-making methodology to fan studies

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[0.1] Abstract—Communication scholar Brenda Dervin created sense-making methodology (SMM), an approach for conducting interviews that draws on metatheoretical concepts such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, and the humanistic approach to psychology. Since its formulation, SMM has been utilized across different disciplines through the development of interview protocols for both one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Among these studies are those that focus on people's engagement with media products or with each other in relation to media products. These SMM audience and reception studies demonstrate that the methodology can be useful for studying fans by bringing a more systematic, and thus quantifiable, approach to a phenomenological, interpretive study of fan behavior, be it mental, emotional, physical, or social. SMM would allow for studies that analyze how fans make sense of a situation involving their fandom and fan identity. After explaining what SMM is and how it has been used to study fans, a case study demonstrates how SMM may suggest a way to define being a fan and applying the concept of fandom beyond the traditional domains of sports, media, and popular culture.

[0.2] Keywords—Attitudes; Definitions; Identity; Lifespan; Nontraditional fandoms


1. Introduction

[1.1] Fan studies research has done a tremendous job of legitimizing the importance of fandom in people's lives (Reinhard 2018). Fans now find themselves less castigated as fanatics and sociocultural outsiders, as their actions have become better understood. At the same time, rather than completely celebrating the fan, research also considers the darker sides of fandom, from toxic fandom to fan exploitation. As a discipline, fan studies has developed different theories and utilized various theories to better understand fandom's role in a person's life and the fan's role in societies and cultures.

[1.2] Furthermore, fan studies scholars now discuss how to apply these concepts and
approaches to other areas of life, such as politics. Abigail De Kosnik addressed this application in her keynote address at the first Fan Studies Network North America conference in October of 2018. Her call for viewing political partisanship as akin to fan wars aligns with my own call for applying fractured fandom concepts to the study of political and religious ideological differences (Reinhard 2018), as well as Ashley Hinck's (2019) work on the use of fandoms to inspire civic engagement. Such research could help further demonstrate how normal it is to be a fan, through revealing how this identity reflects just another aspect of living and making sense of the world and oneself.

[1.3] Thus, as with any robust field of study, more remains to be investigated. In this article, I focus on the need to understand one person's experience within multiple fandoms, following what Matt Hills (2005) termed "cyclical fandom" to explain how fans move between different objects of affection (803). People are rarely fans of only one thing. A person's fandoms ebb and wane as they age, move, and develop different needs and wants. Even within one year, a person's fandoms are multiple, as they live and move through different parts of the world, both physical and abstract. Rarely does one thing satisfy a person's needs and wants in life, nor should it, lest the person restrict themselves and their experiences unnecessarily. Before understanding fans' experiences with these different aspects of fandom, however, the concept of fandom needs clarification.

[1.4] At the time of writing, fan studies and the general public appear to use at least three definitions of fandom. First, some apply the label to the focus of the individual fan's or fan community's interest, such as media franchises, popular cultural texts, or sports teams: "Star Wars is my number one fandom," meaning it exists as an object I can rank in relation to others. Second, some apply the label to describe the fan community that arises around that focus or object of affection: "Some in the fandom hate The Last Jedi." Third, some apply the label to describe a state of mind towards that object of affection: "My fandom is all Star Wars," meaning that I have a particular way of thinking, feeling, and acting that involves this object. Now, the first and last sentences overlap, intentionally. My definition of fandom combines these two, as I see fandom as an attitude toward some object of affection.

[1.5] At any fandom's center lies the object of affection, whether physical (e.g., media product, locale, sport) or abstract (e.g., ideology, activity, theory). A person adopts an affective stance to that object, from highly positive (e.g., fan) to highly negative (e.g., antifan). This affective stance relates to some cognitive need or gratification for engagement, from situational and personal to general and communal. Based on the affective stance and cognitive need, fans engages in behavioral activities that express the fandom; such behavioral activities begin with the repetitive (e.g., repeatedly returning) and expand into the discursive (e.g., fan discourse), the cumulative (e.g., fan collections), and the productive (e.g., fan food blogs) and/or transformative (e.g., cosplay, fan art, fan fiction). Overall, this definition views a fandom as an attitudinal state (Reinhard 2018) because it represents something that defines fans' perspectives and actions in fandom-related situations, such as those that occur within fan communities or in fans' interpretations of fannish texts.

[1.6] Fan studies research tends to focus on the fan community and fans' social behaviors. Per Amber Davisson and Paul Booth's (2007) observation, such research relies largely on
ethnographies of group behavior or textual readings of fan productions. Research done on individual behaviors tends to focus on the discursive, cumulative, productive, and transformative aspects of fandom, and usually within a specific fandom. Less is known about how fans make sense of themselves as fans over time and across different fandoms; research into this would provide a more holistic appreciation of the role fandom plays during fans' lives, which could illuminate how and why fans repeatedly return to the same object of affection across different situations. In arguing for the need to study fan worlds, Matt Hills (2017) observes that fan studies must do more both to study people in their real-world experiences with fandom and to understand how, as Lori Hitchcock Morimoto and Bertha Chin state, "fandom is always performed against a backdrop of real-world events, constraints, and subjectivities" (quoted in Hills 2017).

[1.7] Understanding fan worlds requires a methodology that combines fans' phenomenological perspectives of fandom with their perspectives on real-world events and constraints. Communication scholar Brenda Dervin created sense-making methodology (SMM) as an approach to conducting interviews that draws on metatheoretical concepts such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, and humanistic psychology. Since its formulation, SMM has been utilized across different disciplines—from library studies to reception studies—through the development of interview protocols for both one-on-one interviews and focus groups.

[1.8] SMM audience and reception studies demonstrate SMM's utility to fan studies; it brings a more systematic, and thus quantifiable, approach to a phenomenological, interpretive study of fan behavior, whether mental, emotional, or social factors are considered. SMM allows for studies that analyze how fans make sense of situations involving their fandom. Studying situations from fans' perspectives reveals how their agency influenced those situations, as well as the extent to which external factors shaped the situations and the fans. Additionally, because SMM requires researchers to bracket themselves from interviews and provide the space and time for participants to reflect on their own experiences, SMM encourages fans to become theorists of their own fandoms. Using SMM could provide insights into how fans see themselves, their objects of affection, their attitudes, their actions, their fan communities, and the situations that activate and impact their fandom-related identities.

[1.9] While I view fans as theorists of their own fandoms, other fan scholars have called to understand fans as empowered agents, both in their fandom experiences and during fan studies research (Evans and Stasi 2014; Monaco 2010). In 2005, Cornel Sandvoss drew on Wolfgang Iser, among other scholars, to suggest the need to reconsider how fans read the text at the center of their fandom and how they negotiate the boundaries of their fandom. Similarly, Davisson and Booth (2007) argued the field needs to better understand fans' activities by researching fans' interactions with texts; to support their argument, they developed a mixed methods approach to studying this textual interaction and related identities. In making an argument for studying how fans use fandoms for personal identity expression, Hills (2005) presented a case study demonstrating a methodological approach that offered him and his interviewee a feeling of "working together to make sense of media-related routines" (814). Davisson, Booth, and Hills presented possible methodologies for
addressing Sandvoss's theoretical focus while also positioning the interviewee as a coresearcher. What I argue in this paper is that SMM protocols allow for the study of individual fans' fandom-related identities from a coresearcher perspective.

[1.10] Having fans theorize themselves through SMM interview protocols could help researchers better understand what it means to be a fan and the factors that influence fans' actions and reactions in situations involving their fandom. Such insights could illustrate how fans interact with other fans, with antifans, and with nonfans; with capitalist and oppositional organizations and forces; with sociocultural and political discourses and institutions; and with the other areas of their lives. I here describe SMM and how it has been used to study fans through a case study. The case study demonstrates the insights possible from SMM's application by suggesting a way to define being a fan and applying the concept of fandom beyond the traditional domains of sports, media, and popular culture.

2. Presenting SMM

[2.1] SMM views humans as sense-making beings who continually attempt to understand the world and what, why, and how things happen (Dervin 2008; Dervin and Foreman-Wernet 2003; Reinhard 2018; Reinhard and Dervin 2013b). They use these sense-makings to make decisions and move through situations. Humans possess the agency to struggle with and make sense of the various stimuli and information saturating the world in which they live. Their sense-makings may be cued or constrained by demographic, psychological, or even sociocultural traits—such as people acting according to gendered scripts of behavior—or the sense-makings may result from unpredictable aspects of the situation that prompt them to actively engage in order to determine the best course of action. Perhaps some problem—a struggle, confusion, or question—exists that they have never faced before; or perhaps they just do what they have done before. Regardless of the situation's novelty or familiarity, SMM seeks to understand both how individuals make sense of the situation and the behaviors that result from their sense-makings.

[2.2] To understand people's sense-makings, SMM relies on a metaphor. Founded in the work of Richard Carter (2003), SMM uses the idea of discontinuity or gap as a universal of the human condition (Dervin 1975; Reinhard and Dervin 2013b). The sense-making triangle underlines and explains SMM's methodological metaphor (Dervin 2008; Dervin and Foreman-Wernet 2003). At the bottom of this triangle, SMM places the gap, which suggests that people experience lengths of time in which they find themselves struggling with questions, confusions, concerns—issues that give them anything from a brief pause for reflection to a lengthy period of consternation as they determine what to do. The gap metaphor suggests that when people face a problem, they take actions to make sense of the problem and address it—even if they undertake actions that seemingly worked in the past.

[2.3] The rest of the metaphor focuses on understanding how a person attempts to bridge the gap and move through the situation (Dervin 2008; Dervin and Foreman-Wernet 2003). SMM asks people to consider their actions and how they viewed these actions as they worked through their situations. People's bridging can involve anything that helps them make sense of the situation and their response to it. Per this conceptualization, every moment in life
remains distinct from any other moment. People move through life facing new moments, and they must make sense of the moment and of themselves in the moment. SMM interviewers must provide interviewees with the time and space to reflect on the moment and their sensemakings in that moment; with SMM, the interviewee becomes coresearchers, conducting their own theorizing about their experiences with the moment (Reinhard and Dervin 2013b).

[2.4] With this metaphorical foundation, SMM informs different interviewing protocols meant to foreground interviewees perspectives on their experiences. Because SMM views people as theorists of their own lives, SMM interviewers structure protocols to empower people to speak as much or as little as they like (Dervin 2008; Dervin and Foreman-Wernet 2003). To assist people in theorizing about their own lives, SMM interviewers bracket their own power by keeping questions short and repetitive to remove any bias or influence an interviewer may bring into the interview (Dervin 2008; Dervin and Foreman-Wernet 2003). The interviewer must create a neutral space in which the interviewee engages their own interpretive activities as they work through just how and why they did what they did. This interpretive activity involves an attempt to interrogate and surround the phenomenon under study, prompted by the researcher's questions. The researcher's focus is on listening, and power is given to interviewees to draw their own connections between the various elements of the situation (Reinhard and Dervin 2013b).

3. Applying SMM to fan studies

[3.1] SMM's focus on the individual's sense-making includes understanding how the individual uses any sources of information to move through the situation under consideration. Because sources of information can help or hinder how a person works through the situation, SMM has been used in various reception studies to understand how people make sense of and use the media products in their lives (see Dworkin, Foreman-Wernet, and Dervin 1999; Reinhard 2008; Reinhard and Dervin 2012, 2013a; Shields 1999). SMM, then, allows for a different way to conceptualize the relationship between audiences, media products, and media use that goes beyond the theorizations common in media effects, uses, and gratifications approaches by focusing on more complex interactivities between media and person (Reinhard and Dervin 2013b)—similar to the work done by Davisson and Booth (2007).

[3.2] Indeed, fan studies already transcend these traditional media studies approaches. Common methods to study fans include ethnographies, autoethnographies, questionnaires, interviews, and textual readings. No one way is better than another, and all working together provide a complicated understanding of being a fan. Close readings give access to fan productions to understand the meaning-making, performative aspects. Ethnographies provide insights into how fans interact with others, both online and off-line, while autoethnographies conflate the researcher with the subject to reduce othering. Interviews allow fans to express themselves, in their own words, and provide in-depth information about how they interpret their fandom and their actions. Questionnaires allow more fans to share their insights and can demonstrate patterns in a fandom or fan communities.

[3.3] Less covered by these methods are fans' phenomenological responses to specific
fandom-related situations. Rarely do these approaches compare fandoms based on actual lived experiences. I utilize SMM to address these gaps and the concerns of a "crisis of representation" that can lead to othering fans (Evans and Stasi 2014, 13). SMM brings situationality to media reception studies and attends to how fans respond interpretively, affectively, and materially to the situation being studied (Reinhard & Dervin 2013b). Rather than assume the situation impacts people, SMM requires researchers to focus on individuals' perspectives on the situation and how they see it impacting their thoughts, feelings, and actions. To understand how a fan makes sense of being a fan, meaning making should be studied from the perspective of specific situations the fan experienced.

[3.4] I have utilized SMM several times to study fans. My dissertation (Reinhard 2008) sought to understand how people make sense of gender stereotypes in relation to their media use. For this study, I interviewed people about media they repeatedly returned to, the basic requirement for establishing a fandom. Using SMM provided these participants the ability to reflect on their own experiences with gender norms and perceptions of appropriateness in relation to these potential fandoms. While the interview did not explicitly ask about fandom, this behavior of repeatedly returning suggests its possibility, even in situations where perceptions of gender-inappropriate behavior may have prevented some—particularly men—from comfortably expressing their fandom (Reinhard and Miller 2015).

[3.5] In a larger study (Reinhard 2018), I used SMM to structure self-interviews with fans, having them recall times when they experienced problems with other fans, nonfans, or even antifans. In an analysis of what I termed fractured fandom, SMM allowed me to probe how communication processes led to tensions, rifts, and worse with other individuals and/or within and between fan communities, as well as to determine if communication could provide the solution to such fractured experiences. Using this self-interviewing approach provided the fans with a safe space in which to express their emotional reactions to what happened when their fandoms broke down.

[3.6] These two studies utilized SMM in different ways to understand fandom. The work conducted for my dissertation examined how fans made sense of a specific media product, and thus their potential fandom. The work on fractured fandoms used SMM to gather stories of contentious communication and then analyze those situations. Thus, the first study focused on media reception from a fan's perspective, assuming that repeatedly returning to a media product constituted a basic level of fandom, while the second study focused on communication problems experienced by self-identified fans.

[3.7] The case study I present in this article looks at a fan not through my own assumptions or his self-identification but rather by focusing on the repeatedly returning activity as a defining feature of fandom and using that feature to explore his experiences with different fandoms. I sought to develop an interview to compare different types of fandom across an individual's life to show the common threads that connect these fandoms together. In a sense, I hoped to demonstrate that fandom can involve more than sports, media, or popular cultural objects, while also illustrating the importance of being a fan to people's perception of themselves. The following section presents how I used SMM to develop the interview.
4. Repeatedly returning case study

[4.1] In this case study, I used an SMM lifeline interview (Dervin 2008) to ask a college-aged, white, male, midwestern American resident to recall engagements with three different objects of affection: a media object, a locale, and an activity. The participant chose video games as the media object, a city park as the locale, and writing as the activity. For each engagement, I asked him at what age it started and how long it lasted. Following that, I asked him standard SMM questions to surround his experiences with each object of focus both when he first engaged with it and the last or most recent time he engaged with it. These standard questions were asked repeatedly, with changes to wording occurring only to reflect the situation being discussed, to focus the interview on the participant's agency to self-theorize, and to work through how he made sense of his life, both at the time of the situation and in reflection on it.

[4.2] To present the results of this interview, I relied on grounded text analysis: I read through the transcript of the interview several times to locate themes in how the participant made sense of these experiences. This comparative process revealed overlapping themes in how he saw himself, his life, and what matters to him. Overall, five themes emerged, reflecting both positive and negative reflections on his fandoms: identity creation, self-blame, inspiration, escape, and return to innocence. These themes align with findings from previous fan studies research regarding how fans make sense of their fandom, even when the fandoms presented here extend beyond the traditional areas of life studied.

5. Identity creation

[5.1] All three objects of affection inspired the participant to reflect on their relation to his development of his sense of self. He recalled the importance of video games, his media object of affection, since his childhood, describing them as a "road mark for my life" while reflecting on how playing them "turned me into a loner." While this reflection suggests a negative relationship with the object of affection, he also discussed how this experience related to a positive self-perception: "I particularly pride myself on that I am able to [be self-reliant] because not everybody is."

[5.2] He also recalled his experiences of repeatedly returning to a specific city park, his chosen locale of affection, as a child. He called the park "what [I] remember earliest, and a lot of things happened back then, and it was just something you could go back to." Like the video games, he said going to this park "sort of sparked who I am now, kind of started me down that trail." He also had a negative and positive appraisal of this fandom. He thought favorably on his experiences in the park and how they took him outdoors, away from his video games, as "up until then I was pretty much a shut-in." Yet, at the same time, the way he ended this fandom—when his family moved away, forcing him to leave it—indicates a negative period in his life.

[5.3] His experiences with writing, his chosen activity of affection, involved attempts to find himself through finding his voice. He said that writing allows for "my own expression, my own ideas" to come through: "It's that whole idea, you know, is that you are creating
something and that's pretty much the bottom line of it." Unlike the other two engagements, this one did not involve the theme as seen from positive and negative perspectives. Writing was only seen as leading to a positive, helping him discover and develop his sense of self. This lack of a negative perspective on identity creation may also explain why writing did not feature the same self-blame themes, explored below, as the other two fandoms.

[5.4] Identity creation is a common theme across any type of fandom, as media and popular culture provides the objects around which identities and communities form (Williams 2008). Henry Jenkins (1992) explains that such communities form to reflect the dissolution of traditional social communities, built around common interests and identities. Finding a fandom relates to recognizing and exploring one's own interests, which then leads people to find others with similar interests and thus learn more about themselves in the process (Jenkins 2006). In a sense, because of the importance of group membership, fan identities operate like other social identities; from a communication perspective, then, this means that we must consider how a person expresses their fandom in different situations when they interact with others. Here the participant's fandoms demonstrated how he constructed his identity in relation to the object, other individuals, and larger social and cultural discourses. That construction, however, was not simply a positive process.

6. Self-blame

[6.1] As discussed, the participant's fandoms involved both positive and negative valences. This negative relationship also occurred when the participant critiqued himself. With the video games, he referred to himself as "kind of a loner" because he had few friends and lived in a "remote part of town." He explained that the video games served as a coping mechanism for this isolation. Being called "plenty of names" growing up led to his internalization of these critiques, and he blamed himself for his poor social standing. Although he later befriended other gamers, as he grew up, he "start[ed] to believe [the stereotypes]…because in every stereotype there's at least a salt of truth."

[6.2] As regards the city park, the participant felt that having to abandon the locale due to his family's move was somehow his fault: "Why me, what did I do wrong?" When his mother fell ill, he had to end this fandom, and just before their move, his mother "was really, really angry." Being young and not understanding what was happening, the participant tended "to equate those things together because back then it was I didn't know any better." In both fandoms, he blamed himself, either for repeatedly returning to it, as with the video games, or ending the engagement, as with the city park. His actions with the video games seemed to cause him pain, as he felt he resembled the gamer stereotype: a loner without friends who substitutes video games for companions. His inability to return to his favorite city park related to his feelings of powerlessness over his family's relocation.

[6.3] Thus, for both fandoms, the participant's engaging or disengaging with the fandom caused him pain, and he blamed himself for that pain because he saw those actions as under his control. Conversely, he considered writing as a way out of a negative period in his life: "I was depressed. I didn't have something to do in my life." Rather than blame himself for letting writing take control of his sense of self (as with the video games) or his emotions (as
with the city park), writing seemed to function more to mitigate his self-blame, serving more as a source of inspiration.

[6.4] Feelings of shame and guilt appear commonly associated with fandom, especially if fans view themselves in a converse relationship to more mainstream social and cultural norms. Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2012) examined the feelings of shame associated with the Supernatural fandom and found those feelings related to how the fans perceived nonfans' opinions of them, which they felt aligned with stereotypes of fans in mainstream culture. Their fandom and fan community thus became a safe space. Shame can be particularly acute if fans perceive the mainstream to be rejecting their fandom (Brennan 2014). Fans who responded to my fractured fandom study reported similar types of shame when engaging with others; such internalized shame can lead to more bonding with other fans but also to problems when others question a fandom, creating defensiveness and communication breakdown (Reinhard 2018). In the study discussed here, the participant's sense of shame and guilt led him to blame himself, either for not making friends or not making the most of his life.

7. Inspiration

[7.1] Even with a negative relationship between the fandoms and his identity, the participant still saw the fandoms serving an inspirational role. For instance, he wanted to play video games to do extraordinary things and to form aspirations: "Every kid wants to be something great—an astronaut, a fireman, you know, a superhero, and I was no different…it's something you aspire for." He knew he most likely would not lead the extraordinary life he experienced when playing the video games, but dreaming of doing so was important: "Someone once said that when humans lose their ability to dream, they lose their ability to live. And I agree with that statement wholeheartedly." Playing video games provided a way to think through possible goals.

[7.2] The participant enjoyed going to the city park because it helped him make friends, something he found difficult as a child. When forced to move, he spoke to a friend who was "sad to see me go." Having this connection with another person inspired the participant to improve himself: "That idea that somebody really cares about you leaving is something that really helps, really helps drive you to do better things." His video game fandom provided him with life goals, and the relationships that emerged from his city park fandom helped him think that he had a life worth living.

[7.3] When it came to his writing, it seems the participant found a meaningful outlet. He recalled being "a basket case, pretty much, and then once I found out I wanted to do this now, it really gave me that kind of, it really gave me a drive of something I wanted to do." His love of writing helped him deal with the darkness in his life. His other fandoms functioned in similar ways: playing video games helped him cope with his loneliness, and the friends from the park helped him cope with losing that place of refuge.

[7.4] Fan studies research commonly shows how fandoms inspire fans to commune, create, critique, and collectively engage in activism. Fans communicate and interact with other fans
through a variety of activities, from informing one another about their object of affection to reworking that object for their own and the fan community’s pleasures (Baym 1998). Fans can work individually or collectively, such as in attempts to save their object of affection from cancellation (Scardaville 2005) or by engaging in philanthropy (Bennett 2014). This fan's inspiration was more personal, more focused on dealing with his own life, but that makes his fandoms no less helpful in the long run.

8. Escape

[8.1] All three fandoms helped the participant cope with something in his life. He turned to video games when "my family was going through a lot of problems…, and I guess that's where that whole idea started is that I just wanted to sit down and forget about it." Playing video games helped him escape the tensions affecting his family at that time. As a child, his powerlessness caused him to think that "sometimes ignorance is the best policy" because "when you cannot affect what's going on around you…the only thing that logically follows is to remove yourself from that situation until it blows over." Video games became a source of escape to make it easier to handle the problems plaguing his family.

[8.2] He also saw the park as "a safe place" that he could escape to after getting into trouble at school: "I got into it a lot with people because…I have a big mouth and I run it like a sailor. And back then it got me into a lot of trouble." The park became a place of refuge, as his mother would wait for him there, making it "a safe place because not only is this a place that I know but my authority figure is here to protect me." This park became a place of respite from the fights he instigated, and his ability to connect with others likely furthered his perception that he could relax and not worry while there.

[8.3] As with his other fandoms, the participant said writing allowed him to "get away," but this idea of escapism is not as negative as using video games to hide in ignorance or escaping to the park to hide from the pain he caused others. Instead, he saw the escapism offered by writing as leading to something better: "Along the lines of the wanting to get away, but in the same vein, it's more of wanting to express something." Writing allowed him to express his own personal truth and share his experiences with others, allowing them to view the world through his eyes. While writing is normally considered a solitary activity and thus a potential escape from reality, the participant hoped this fandom would improve reality, for himself and others. While he may have needed to escape for a time to compose texts, he ultimately hoped he could connect to others through this fandom.

[8.4] Escapism is often derided as a negative part of fandom, because people withdrawing from real life aligns with traditional conceptualization of fans as abnormal (Harris 1998; Jenson 1992). However, sometimes escapism is needed to provide a safe space and as a way to relieve stress. Scodari's (1998) analysis of fan communities found that fans preferred to silence discussions perceived as negative in order to retain their safe space. Escapism can also help fans cope with the demands of their lives (Kozinets 2001). Zubernis and Larsen (2012) argued that participating in fandom had therapeutic effects, as fans could express themselves without constraint in an accepting community. This participant experienced both of these forms of escapism.
9. Return to innocence

[9.1] Ultimately, each fandom's impact on the participant's life led to a sense of nostalgia, of wishing he could return to the time when he first engaged with each object of affection. While each fandom helped him grow and mature, he still expressed a desire to return to those initial feelings brought about by the object of affection.

[9.2] With video games, the participant lamented learning more about the commonalities of video games, as this knowledge changed how he experienced the games: "Something that used to be exciting has become routine." When asked about what he would change, he said he would "want to be a kid again. Well, to have that same kind of innocence for when I first started playing, because after you do something for so long, you don't feel the same way about it anymore." The initial thrill of playing a video game, of learning how to control and master it, dulled throughout his life. Although it may have helped inspire him to become a better person, that initial reaction to this object of affection could never be the same the more he repeatedly returned to it.

[9.3] The desire for that same thrill emerged in his discussion of his writing fandom. He stated that he wanted "to get the same kind of joy that I got from writing at first. It's not the same kind of thing that I get now." He wished to have both this joy and the professionalism he felt he had developed throughout the years. However, he recognized that "it's really something you can't have both ways" as he sought "to find a balance" between the inexperienced joy of learning to write and all that he had learned about developing his craft and voice. As regards video games, he wanted to relive the affective reaction that helped create his new fandom, but as regards writing, he hoped he could maintain a feeling of joy while being more serious about writing and what it could mean in his life.

[9.4] With the city park, however, his reminiscences were different, as he indicated a desire to return there free from the guilt of thinking he had to abandon it because he had done something wrong: "I would say that it would give me a place to go for a couple more years. I would have imagined that by that time I would be grown-up enough to understand why this is happening—that it's not my fault." Having the fandom end due to circumstances outside of his control have resulted in his possessing a different sort of nostalgia for the park than for writing or video games. He felt that perhaps, if he could return, he could regain something he felt had been stolen from him. Overall, then, his reminiscing dealt with reexperiencing the initial feelings of joy that helped form his fandoms. He wished to regain that feeling of joy and the accompanying feeling of control over his own life.

[9.5] Nostalgia connects back to escapism, as it allows fans to return to a time when they were more comfortable (Thomas 2009). Nostalgia can drive fan activities like collecting, which provides a tangible link to fans' initial affective responses to a fandom (Geraghty 2014). Nonetheless, while fans can reengage with an object of fandom to perhaps experience something new or something they initially missed (Thomas 2009), they can never experience the same affective responses that initially fueled their fandom. That feeling only exists in fans' memories. This participant's nostalgia existed as a desire to recapture an impossibility inherent to fandom, given the basic feature of repeatedly returning to the object of affection.
10. Summarizing the participant's fan experiences through an SMM lens

[10.1] The participant's three different fandoms involved tensions between identity creation and self-blame, escapism and inspiration, and a desire to return to a time perceived as better. Whether the fandom involved a media object, a location, or an activity, his passion and his interpretive and physical behaviors demonstrated the complexity of each fandom. His fandoms were filled with both positive and negative thoughts, feelings, and actions, all of which overlapped regardless of the type of fandom discussed. In a sense, then, his attitudes toward the objects of affection were relatively similar, even if the objects were not.

[10.2] Rather than framing his life as a collection of different fandoms, this interview illustrated how the participant's experiences with different fandoms related to his central concerns in complex, often overlapping ways. His fandoms expressed how he saw himself and helped him to see himself in new ways. This interview suggests that being a fan of anything highlights the struggles a fan faces throughout life. A fan does not express different identities through different fandoms but instead expresses the same life struggles across different arenas and even within the same fandom across time and space. The participant repeatedly returned to things that mattered to him affectively, cognitively, and socially, and those returnings also helped him see himself differently and to change over time.

[10.3] What emerged across these experiences, then, aligns with Hills's concept of cyclical fandom, as the analysis demonstrates "the emergence of patterns" through repeated engagement with different objects (2005, 804). The individual may not have been aware of these patterns when engaging with the fandom, but through reflection and theorization, he could see the patterns emerging in his actions and how they related to his sense of self. When asked about how he saw these different experiences relating to one another and himself, he said, "Everything I do comes together to create me. Not on a physical level but there are a lot of questions that I have to ask myself every day. And those questions are, that's what makes me...I can't find things about myself unless I ask these questions. And I guess it's not really complex to say, but when it boils right down to it...It's one of those things you just have to do." By providing the participant with the space, time, and discursive power to reflect on his life, he was able to illustrate patterns that helped him move from the specific situated events to larger philosophies that underscored his life.

11. Implications for applying SMM

[11.1] Across the studies that I have conducted, I have found one of SMM's main strengths to lie in the possibility it provides to compare different types of situations. Because SMM focuses on the interviewee's own theorizing of the situation, the comparison point can be either the interviewee or some defining characteristic of the situation. Using the interviewee as the comparison point allows one to study fandom across a person's life and to understand both how fandom changes over a person's life and how a person's life changes because of their fandom(s). This case study illustrates that application. Using SMM to study fans could illuminate how fandom changes over time, and how it impacts other areas of a person's life. Doing so would align with the call from Harrington, Bielby, and Bardo (2011) that we
recognize how fandom changes as people mature.

[11.2] Additionally, using the person as the comparison point allows for studies that cross-sectionally consider different fandoms or different areas of life that are not traditionally conceptualized as fandom. This case study demonstrated that the same identity issues exist when engaging with a locale or an activity as do in more traditional fandoms, such as those related to media objects or sports. This comparative analysis could also be extended to other areas of life, such as food, religion, or politics. It may be that fandom involves repeatedly returning to what matters most in a person's life, and that, like attitudes, what matters most ties in with deeply held beliefs about the world (Reinhard 2018). If this is true, then a person's religious and/or political ideologies should align with any fandom they have. The self-theorizing aspect of SMM could help illuminate these connections.

[11.3] Finally, using some characteristic of the situation as the comparison point could allow for comparisons across people. A limitation of this case study is that it only considered one person, indicating the need to interview more people and compare their experiences with different types of fandoms. The fractured fandom study, however, demonstrated the ability to compare people and fandoms to find commonalities in how fans communicated with one another (Reinhard 2018). Furthermore, comparing across fandoms—especially by including nontraditional fandoms—could illustrate that fandom is a common aspect of life and of being human. What happens in a fan community resembles what happens in other communities; a fandom-related identity interacts and interrelates to the other social identities a person has. The comparative potential of an SMM study could help illuminate these commonalities.

[11.4] These different potentials for applying SMM suggests that more studies must be conducted using SMM to fully demonstrate what can be learned from the approach. The comparative potential suggests future directions for what to study and how to study it. As with all of fan studies, much can still be done—and should be done—to expand the boundaries of the field, and SMM presents one way to do so.

12. References


Praxis

Benefits of quantitative and doctrinal methodological approaches to fan studies research

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[0.1] Abstract—This discussion of the main practices of both legal research and fan studies research explores their key differences and similarities to demonstrate that there are important conclusions that can be drawn from the discourse between the two. The methodology of this research into copyright and fan fiction will be used as a case study to demonstrate how well these fields intersect. This research investigates whether transformative works of fan fiction should be covered by the new fair-dealing exception for pastiche within UK copyright law (Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988), similar to parody. To discuss this, my research investigates whether it can be said empirically and doctrinally that fan fiction could be classified as a special case that does not adversely affect the rights holders' interests, as required by Article 13 of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and Article 9 of the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works. By adding doctrinal and empirical research methods to fan studies, the argument can be made that fan fiction is not harmful to the underlying work and does not interfere with the copyright holders' normal exploitation of that work, and as such should be permitted as fair dealing.

[0.2] Keywords—Doctrinal studies; Ethical considerations; Law; Legal methodologies; Philosophical worldview; UK copyright law


1. Introduction

[1.1] The study of fandom, "a daring and innovative topic" (Lamerichs 2018, 238), has been approached in many different ways, each with their own benefits and limitations. Research into fandom, shaped using the model set out in Jenkins's seminal work Textual Poachers (Jenkins 2012), has a traditional home in the humanities, with its preference for ontologies such as social constructionism and phenomenology. Yet fan studies is also essentially interdisciplinary, "with both bridges and divides" between researchers in the humanities and social sciences (Evans and Stasi 2014, 6). These different disciplinary approaches were used
to great effect regarding research into the early adoption of online methods of dissemination of fan works such as vidding and fan fiction, covered by both humanities-based media studies research and social science analysis within economics and intellectual property law. This article will establish how doctrinal and empirical legal methodologies bridge the gap between social science and the humanities by permitting the addressing of new research questions into how the UK market and the law handles textual reuses (poaching). This article will demonstrate how this use of legal methodologies, ontologies, and epistemologies benefits fan studies as a whole. As the legal and fannish worlds are changing to reflect changes in society, it is urgent that this gap is bridged, especially in the UK, with its relative dearth of fan fiction–based copyright scholarship yet a growing number of fan writers.

[1.2] Fan studies and copyright scholarship can benefit each other by drawing on each other's backgrounds and research methods. Fan studies covers subjects as diverse as information studies and cultural studies. The historical majority of literature on fan studies situates it firmly within the humanities, mostly within media studies (Booth 2015; Coppa 2006); audience studies (Phillips 2011; Stein 2015); and archives (De Kosnik 2016). Legal research is improved by building on these theoretical, archival community-centered methods to further develop the research into the identity of fans and the incentives behind their outputs "to carefully consider just who we are speaking for" (Hills 2012, 14). Knowing whose voice we are supporting permits a sharp focus of methodology in relation to research questions and the ethics of the chosen approach. This consideration is one of the improvements that fan studies brings to legal research.

[1.3] One of the ways copyright research and fan studies can come together is in relation to the identity of producers and users of materials, which fan studies clarifies. Copyright scholarship and fan scholarship both focus on the identity of and incentives for producers. The identity of fan producers has been much discussed in fan studies in relation to many characteristics—race (Pande 2018; Stanfill 2018), feminism and gender (Coppa 2008; Jones 2014; McCracken 1999; Wanzo 2016), and power (Kelsey and Bennett 2014). Legal research has a much more simplistic view of production as incentivized by commercial considerations, and it could learn much from fan studies. By focusing on individual, specific characteristics of fans, fan studies research has permitted important discussions on subjective elements of fan studies not seen in legal research in the UK. While US legal research into fandom dates back at least as far as 1997 (Tushnet 1997) and has been much developed (Schwabach 2011; Stendell 2005), the UK has yet to follow suit.

[1.4] If we recognize the importance of the proper framing of fan art works (Seymour 2018), this lack of legal research into fan fiction in the UK is important. The US legal regime has a substantially different copyright regime from the UK. Not only is the copyright protection of characters significantly less clear in the UK than in the US, but there are also important differences between copyright exceptions in the two locations. During the last legislative change in the UK, it was held impossible to import the US doctrine into the UK (Hargreaves 2011). This change to copyright law brought in a new copyright exception for pastiche and parody (Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 §30A) without clearly defining the term pastiche. While it is argued that fan fiction should fit within this definition (Hudson 2017), there has been no case law to back this up. Fan scholars within the UK (or researching the
UK) thus have clarity from fan studies research regarding the identity of fans yet lack information as to how the law sees their output. Research regarding the effect of copyright law on fandom in the UK can be done in the light of a variety of ontologies and epistemologies. This paper takes on the suspicions of the humanities regarding the applicability of legal ontologies such as objectivism and epistemologies such as positivism and postpositivism. It acknowledges the impact that the law has on fans, and thus the importance of bridging the gap between ontological and epistemological theories in both disciplines in order to resolve the friction. On one hand, copyright law applies (at least in theory) to all actors on the market, irrespective of the opinions of those actors. Using this as the lens through which research is done permits research into how the rules (and the existence of legal teams retained by copyright holders to enforce them) can shape the behavior of fan fiction writers and their representatives (such as the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW). On the other hand, the way fans interact with works can be seen as a question of the subjectivist position that is shown in social constructionism. This bridge between two methodologies (law and fan studies) answers the call by Ford to widen fan studies research to cover "new challenges…old stereotypes and power imbalances" (Ford 2014, 66).

This article explores the importance of interdisciplinary research that bridges the gap between legal and sociological or media studies–based fan research. A legal empirical focus using quantitative data alongside doctrinal studies will fill the methodological literature gap seen within much of the fan/producer relationship research within fan studies. While much has been written in the fan/producer field (Bennett, Chin, and Jones 2014; De Kosnik 2012; Scott 2009; Turk 2014; Williams 2010), it is mostly practice-based, qualitative, or highly theoretical. This has many benefits for the field of study and is mostly due to the historical criticism within media and cultural studies toward the realism shown in legal and empirical research (Evans and Stasi 2014, 13). Despite the concerns felt by media and cultural researchers toward legal research methodologies, large-scale quantitative data analysis paired with doctrinal research permits an important different ontological and epistemological view, as called for by Evans and Stasi (2014, 6). Where fan studies research meets policy research, empirical copyright methodologies are highly important, as they can be used to check how accurate their conclusions are (Epstein and Martin 2014, 4). Empirical legal analysis also allows for a development of Jenkins's ideas on transformative works (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013) and answers the call to widen fan studies research to cover "new challenges…old stereotypes and power imbalances" (Ford 2014, 66).

This article is laid out as follows. Section 2 describes the relevance of law to fan studies and fannish creativity to further the argument that legal methodologies should be used to bridge the gap mentioned above by Evans and Stasi. Section 3 gives an explanation of relevant legal work that approaches fan studies, including an analysis of how well copyright debates approach the different voices mentioned above contained within fandom, and who specifically is helped or harmed by strong copyright enforcement. Section 4 brings an analysis of the main ontologies and epistemologies contained within fan studies and copyright research, to compare and contrast each and demonstrate how the interplay between the two can benefit fan studies research. Section 5 lays out the limitations of these methods for fan studies scholarship. Finally, a conclusion is laid out that shows that using legal
methodologies can have benefits for fan studies.

2. Relevance of law to fan studies and fannish creativity

[2.1] Legal approaches have much to offer fan studies and fannish creativity in relation to fan–producer relationships and the mainstreaming and commercialization of fandom. The significant work undertaken by the Organization for Transformative Work's Legal Advocacy team demonstrates this, working to promote legal policy within the US and elsewhere that balances the rights of creators and fans. The main focus of the OTW's work is that all fan works are legal under the US fair use copyright exception because of their transformative nature, and thus should be "accepted as a legitimate creative activity" (http://www.transformativeworks.org/what_we_believe/). The OTW does this by working with legislators to include certain types of work used in fan works within the Digital Millennium Copyright Act fair use exceptions, as well as presenting amicus briefs to courts in intellectual property law cases. The OTW has also set up the online Archive of Our Own site to host noncommercial fan works, protecting it by hosting it on their own servers rather than risking it being taken down by a third-party ISP that receives an overenthusiastic takedown notice (Tandy 2013, 169). The OTW legal advocacy team defends the servers and forms networks to protect these works against legal claims by producers.

[2.2] There is much doctrinal research on fan works and copyright law, mostly situated within US law. This increases the scope of the theoretical underpinning of media studies, as called for by leading scholars (Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee 2008). US copyright research clearly describes the balance that intellectual property law treads between helping creators and helping fan fiction writers. Legal research can be broken down into two distinct types of methodology: doctrinal and interdisciplinary (Arthurs 1983). Doctrinal research (the study of how legal doctrines are formed via an analysis of legal rules) is the primary form of much legal research, with its focus on policy analysis, logic, and analogical reasoning (Chynoweth 2008, 37). It is composed of illustrative research about legal rules and research into legal theory such as legal philosophy. Interdisciplinary research comprises fundamental research regarding such topics as law and economics or the sociology of law, and law reform research, such as sociolegal studies to put the law in context (Arthurs 1983; Chynoweth 2008, 29). Most doctrinal copyright research into fan fiction is interdisciplinary, focusing on the use of sociology to suggest law reform around the application of fair use to fan fiction (Chatelain 2012; Krato 2016; Schuster 2013). This is helpful to fan scholars, as it clarifies the rules that society currently has at its disposal to apply to fan fiction.

[2.3] Legal research benefits fannish creativity, as it permits clarity regarding exactly what fans can and cannot do online with the works they love. Equally, knowing what producers can and cannot stop fans doing gives parity of knowledge and power, in an environment where producers are heavy-handed with cease-and-desist letters. While much fan fiction is noncommercial, created by amateur writers and posted on archives such as Archive of Our Own, fandom is increasingly being commercialized. Commercial enterprises have started entering the market. For five years, Amazon permitted the sale of commercial fan fiction on its Kindle e-book reader through Kindle Worlds, whereby producers of certain fandoms licensed their works for others to use in their fan fiction writing. While this was a very niche
market with limited fandoms (and was only somewhat successful while it remained open),
by following on the heels of Fanlib it demonstrated a possible trend toward more
commercial publication of fan fiction. How, then, do we enable the publication of
noncommercial fan fiction, and how do we ensure that commercial fan fiction writers are not
taken advantage of by overprotective license terms, or indeed a requirement to purchase a
license where legally there is no need?

[2.4] The move toward commercializing fandom means fan studies should look toward legal
research into commercial reuses of creative works, such as remix and parody. These works
tend to rely upon similar copyright exceptions (Article 107 US Copyright Act 1976's fair use
in the US, §28-30A CDPA 1988's fair dealing in the UK, Article 5 InfoSoc Directive's
"Exceptions and Limitations" in the EU—see paragraph 3.3) to justify publication despite
infringement claims from the creator of the underlying work. In each jurisdiction, the
commercial/noncommercial nature of the transformative work is only one of a number of
judgments made regarding whether a use or dealing with a copyright work is fair and thus
should not be prohibited by copyright law (Jacques 2015a; Jacques 2015b; Scharf 2012).
Fairness exceptions and limitations ensure that copyright law is flexible enough to permit for
new, socially beneficial uses of copyright works (see Section 3 "Law 101 for Fan Scholars").
Fan fiction, with its links to groups such as racial minorities or LGBTQ+ communities that
mainstream media does not successfully represent, would seem to meet this test. As such,
knowledge of how strictly copyright law is drawn around other commercial reuses of works
is helpful to fan studies.

[2.5] It is clear, however, that producers and fan creators do not stick to the letter of the law.
Producers overstep their boundaries, sending legal takedown and cease-and-desist letters to
fans whose creations are legally permitted because of the fair use or fair dealing exceptions.
Fair use itself has been called "merely the right to hire a lawyer to defend your right to
create" (Lessig 2004, 187). While the existence of copyright exceptions should mean that fan
creators do not need to ask permission to use the works in a way that the law permits, reality
tells a different story. The lack of clarity on the boundaries of both fair use and fair dealing
exceptions, the high costs of attending court to defend fan creations, and the relatively large
financial liability that producers can threaten creators with should they be found guilty of
infringement, mean many individual fan creators felt a need to give up their right to publish
their work. This has led to the argument that "the astonishingly broad regulations that pass
under the name 'copyright' silence speech and creativity" (Lessig 2004, 187). This reinforces
the importance of the work of the OTW (see ¶ 2.1) and other legal bodies, who have striven
to defend the right of fan creators to write and share their works online.

[2.6] Equally, fan studies has much to offer IP legal studies. The focus on fan–producer
relationships gives new insight into legal research that mostly focuses on commercial
production and reuses, rather than the more personal, nonmonetary incentives engaged by
fan studies. Fan studies therefore operates to push back against the assumption that creativity
will not happen without money. In a digital age, where social engagement, development, and
representation occur online through the sharing of cultural works across geographical
boundaries, it is of vital importance that laws that constrain these interactions (such as
copyright) fully understand and engage with their stakeholders when being updated (such as
can be seen in the furor surrounding the passage of the Copyright in a Digital Single Market Directive in Europe). For example, online fandom groups interact in a different but complementary fashion to commercial creators and consumers, in order to protect their ability to create fan fiction (Lantagne 2016). As such, interdisciplinary legal and media studies research has benefits for both the humanities and the social sciences.

3. Copyright law for fan studies scholars

[3.1] Having explained the importance of legal research to fan studies, this paper will now give a brief explanation regarding exactly what copyright research tells us about fan activities. The issue of transformative, derivative uses of fictional works boils down to a simple question—"Who controls a story—its creator or its fans?" (Rose 2011, 75). In the traditional view of copyright, the author is the one who controls and tells the story in a way they see fit or gives permission to others to do so through a license. The standard incentive function of allowing the original creator a monopoly over their story states that but for this protection, original creators would not be able to charge enough to make it worth their while to create (Elkin-Koren and Salzberger 2013; Landes and Posner 1989). As such, the theory states that production of creative works falls where copyright protection is weakest, and that exceptions (like fair use/fair dealing) should be narrowly drawn. Drawing out this argument, it assumes that copyright protection benefits both the producer and society as a whole, which benefits from the increased production of creative works.

[3.2] In the UK, copyright protection is contained within the Copyright Designs and Patents Act of 1988, which states that copyright subsists in original literary dramatic, musical, or artistic works (S1(1)(a)) once the works are recorded. This provides protection for all underlying works such as TV shows, books, or movies that fan creators use to base their works on. It is illegal to copy the underlying work (or substantial parts of it) without a license (s17). Fannish creators struggle to have their creations deemed legal, especially if they use characters from US-based underlying works. In the US, characters have a long legal history of protection outside of the work in which they appear (although the test for when they are sufficiently creative to become so differs—see Detective Comics Inc. v. Bruns Publications Inc., 1940; Metro-Goldwyn Mayer v. American Honda Corp, 1995; Nichols v. United Pictures Corp, 1930; and Warner Bros Pictures Inc. v. Columbia Broad. Sys. Inc., 1954). Even if infringement of the underlying work as a whole cannot be proved, infringement of any characters from the original work that appear in the fan fiction is likely to be provable. This is problematic for fannish creativity.

[3.3] Fan fiction writers seeking to use UK-based works will likely do no better, despite the lack of legislative history on the topic of copyright protection of characters. There is a move toward looking at the importance of the taken part to the underlying work, rather than the definition of what was copied (England and Wales Cricket Board Ltd. v. Tixdaq Ltd., 2016). Most characters that appear in fan fiction do so because they are sufficiently delineated to be a clear expression of original artistic choices made by the producer—and are thus both deserving of copyright protection and engaging to the audience. Characters, either as expressions of artistic choice or as substantial parts of the underlying work, may now attract copyright protection in the UK. Thus, without the benefit of a copyright exception such as
fair use or fair dealing to cover them, courts will deem fan fiction to be infringing copyright in the underlying work in both the UK and US. By extension, current copyright law in this regard may harm fannish creators.

[3.4] Fan creators argue their works should be protected as either fair uses (if in the US) or fair dealings (UK) with the underlying work, as their use is one which a "fair minded and honest" person would make of the underlying work (Hyde Park Residence v. Yelland, 2000). This legal argument is the central focus of work to protect fan creations in both the UK and the USA. The analysis of the fairness of the manipulation or utilization of the underlying work by fan creators is functionally different in the UK and USA because of fundamental differences in the legislation. In the UK, the dealing must be defined within a closed list of specified types—research/private study, quotations, or parody/pastiche/caricature (§28–30 CDPA 1988) before a decision can be made on fairness. In comparison, in the US the tests for use are open-ended (§107 US Copyright Act 1976).

[3.5] The argument for the application of the US fair use exception to fan fiction is well made in several scholarly articles (Lantagne 2011; Lipton 2014; Stendell 2005; Tushnet 1997), but is less popular in UK legal research on fair dealing (Bukatz 2013; Khaosaeng 2014). Legal fan studies scholars argue that the focus of copyright research is incorrect. Rather than assuming that unauthorized derivatives act as substitute goods and thus siphon demand away from the original, the copyright question should actually be framed as "What if...stories and characters actually gain value when people share them?" (Rose 2011, 101). Fan fiction in this light may have a neutral or maybe even positive effect on sales. Positive externalities, such as increased awareness of the underlying work, and prolonging demand for future works in the series based on the characters, are not sufficiently engaged with in the literature or in case law. If they were, fan creators argue that fan fiction would be clearly legal under both fair use and fair dealing.

[3.6] Even if fan fiction does not harm the underlying work by having a direct substitution function, producers still argue that it should not be permitted because of damage caused by harming the reputation of the underlying work, and as such fan fiction should still not be a fair use or a fair dealing with their copyrighted work. While important to producers, this form of harm is at best only one factor that is taken into account within the fair use/fair dealing exceptions (Buccafusco, Heald, and Wu 2017). The judgment for fairness protects uses that have important social welfare benefits while also bearing in mind the need to protect the expected returns to the copyright owner. The UK fairness test considers several things: the amount of "quotations" taken, the type of use made of them, and the proportions (Hubbard v. Vosper, 1972). Courts discuss tarnishment under the fourth factor of the fair use test in the US (the potentially harmful effect of the unauthorized use on the market for the work). In the UK, arguments about tarnishment would be made under the economic impact test from Ashdown v. Telegraph Group (2002), which falls under the "use made" section of the exception. Counsel could also raise the issue within the overarching Berne Convention Article 9/TRIPs Convention Article 13 legislation that requires fair dealings do not conflict with the normal exploitation of the work. If courts in the UK were to accept that argument, fan creators might find it hard to publish their works without infringement proceedings. Because of the lack of clear legal precedent on how fair dealing in the UK applies to fan
works, this is a clear research question where legal research has much to benefit fan studies.

4. Ontology and epistemology

[4.1] The study of the law is not only important to fan studies because of its ability to open up important research questions surrounding the ability of fan creators to protect their work using the fair dealing or fair use exceptions. It also has much to offer because of the largely different ontologies and epistemologies it uses in comparison to fan studies. Ontologies and epistemologies are important as they show "how the researcher views 'reality'" (Jonker and Pennink 2010, 25; Crotty 1998). The values that underlie the thoughts and actions of the legal researcher as they carry out their tasks (Gummesson 1999) have important differences to those of the social or fannish researcher. Used together, they can investigate how important laws are to the fan community, as well as the organizations that protect against potential legal over-encroachment such as the OTW. By bringing together legal and fannish ontologies and epistemologies, we can also build up our awareness of power structures within media production, one of the main questions in media studies (Couldry and Hobart 2010, 79).

[4.2] Ontologies permit for a discussion of the researcher's beliefs about the world—do social objects (like laws) exist outside of individuals (objectivism), or are they being constantly rebuilt and renewed by changing viewpoints and deeds (constructivism)? The question of which ontology and epistemology to ground research in arises when bridging the gap between fan studies and the law. Much legal research grounds itself within objectivism—the theory that "social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors" (Bryman 2016, 29). Laws like copyright, they argue, at first instance apply to all actors on the market, irrespective of the opinions of those actors. The rules, and the existence of legal teams retained by copyright holders to enforce them, can exert pressure on fan fiction writers and readers and their representatives. For example, Fanfiction.net removed works relating to certain fandoms after communication from the authors or their lawyers rather than waiting for a court judgment to force them to take the works down, in spite of the lack of clarity in case law surrounding the application of copyright law to these types of work. Objectivism is the main ontology behind most empirical research, as it allows for research into social entities as tangible objects that can be standardized and investigated scientifically. This offers a very different standpoint from much media and fan studies research, and has benefits for policy review. However, as will be shown, there are also some drawbacks to it, meaning much humanities-based research rejects it as a foundation because of its lack of reflection of the importance of subjective experience and social power.

[4.3] Given that neither the law nor previous research gives a clear view of how copyright should apply to fan works, there is a distinct need for quantitative, empirical work, building on previous trends in media research (Bräuchler and Postill 2010, 2). This empiricism requires an objectivist grounding as it "entail[s] the collection of numerical data, a deductive view of the relationship between theory and research, a preference for a natural science approach…and an objectivist conception of social reality" (Bryman 2016, 149). Examining theories by testing the relationship between measurable numeric variables using statistics is
helpful to fan scholars, as it permits for research questions to be asked, such as how relevant copyright law is to the specific actions of fans and producers—or how harmful fan fiction production is to sales figures of the underlying works. Researchers use deductive reasoning to test their theories to avoid bias and ensure they account for all explanations. It is important in quantitative research that later scholars and researchers (Creswell 2014) can replicate the findings.

[4.4] Building on quantitative research, empiricism states that theories must be tested before being categorized as knowledge, and that adding to the sum of human knowledge is a "legitimate goal in its own right" (Bryman 2016, 20). Empirical legal research has been further defined as legal research that "uses statistical techniques and analyses…that employ data…that facilitate descriptions of or inferences to a larger sample or population as well as replication by other scholars" (Heise 1998, 810). This large sample is of importance to fan research when trying to generate theories and laws in relation to transcultural fandom (Chin and Morimoto 2013), as it allows for analysis of issues not contained within national or cultural borders. There is a growing trend toward empirical work within copyright literature on both sides of the Atlantic. Empirical studies have been undertaken in the US into the opinions of judges in fair use cases (Asay, Sloan, and Sobczak 2020; Barton 2008) and in the UK into the effect of peer-to-peer piracy (Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf 2007; Rob and Waldfogel 2006). These works show that there is a growing demand for empirical work focusing on copyright exceptions such as relied upon by fan fiction, since policy work so often uses a cost-benefit approach to balance gains and losses to welfare from a suggested change in the law. The previous nonempirical legal approach, it is claimed, "has little credibility unless [gains and losses] can be measured empirically, since…the outcome depends upon quantitative not qualitative results" (Towse, Handke, and Stepan 2008, 4).

There have been many calls within copyright for detailed empirical sociolegal studies to be undertaken (Bok 1983; Friedman 1986; Lee 2008; Png 2006). This would not only benefit the field of legal research, but also fan studies as it might strengthen the calling for a more structured fair use/fair dealing defense to permit fan fiction publication (should it show that social welfare benefits outweigh the harm caused to the producer). Even if research in this area demonstrated the reverse, that too would be beneficial as it would develop understanding of the legal rules in the currently somewhat murky waters. Despite the rejection of its objectivist framework (see ¶ 4.7), empiricism can therefore have benefits to fan studies research.

[4.5] Of most relevance to fan researchers, empirical work into the optimal levels of copyright protection regarding unauthorized derivative works has shown that the welfare gains for consumers when file-sharing (i.e., exchanging a direct copy of a work) extend beyond the direct losses suffered by producers (Towse, Handke, and Stepan 2008). It is therefore no longer sufficient in research for producers to argue that even direct piracy is harmful enough to society that we need strong copyright protection. This is an important research question for fan studies, as it gives the opportunity for fannish creators to call for further empirical research regarding the effects of their works on the underlying product.

[4.6] Empirical methods are not only important within legal research. Leading fan researchers are beginning to use quantitative methodologies to undertake their work (De
Kosnik et al. 2015; Yin et al. 2017). This research has used either a case study approach or a large-scale quantitative analysis of fan fiction archives to draw several important conclusions. Primarily, it has been strongly demonstrated that fan fiction archives such as Fanfiction.net contain a large amount of information regarding how fans interact with media, and importantly that "data scraping and data analysis of these sites can yield a range of insights about consumers' mindshare as measures through their creative activities" (De Kosnik et al. 2015, 161). The conclusions from these studies from outside legal research demonstrate specific positive social externalities that fan fiction demonstrates, which have yet to be analyzed by legal research in the UK. One of these positive externalities is that fan fiction is most often written as a work-in-progress, posted online by writers who use the websites as learning environments to develop their writing skills (Campbell et al. 2016; Evans et al. 2017). This research could benefit fannish creativity as it could, for example, be used to support a call for the fair dealing exception for research and study under §29(1) Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

[4.7] In comparison to this historical use of empirical, objectivist methods in legal research, fan studies researchers predominantly situate themselves within the ontology of social constructionism. They look upon positivism and objectivism with deep mistrust, arguing that reality (even in relation to the laws that apply to society) is subjective—and is a construction of the culture in which it appears, dependent on the role of social power within organizations and legal bodies (Locke and Becker 1998). This ontology states that social objects, such as laws or knowledge, are produced through social interaction, and are constantly being updated and changed through these interactions (Bryman 2016, 29; Guba and Lincoln 1994). There is no natural concept or understanding of ideas like intellectual property ownership, social constructionists argue, as all social rules are created specifically by the history and culture in which they appear (Rapley 2018, 4–5, citing Burr 2015). Fan fiction authors are perhaps using their writing like social constructivists to "seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 8). This may be especially true of fan fiction that represents minorities, such as the LGBTQ+ community or ethnic minorities. This ontology has benefits for social and media researchers, for example when investigating the rules that fan fiction writers impose and abide by within their own communities. It seems that the two perspectives suffer from a necessary amount of friction, yet concepts and techniques are increasingly being borrowed and hybrid methods formed (Diesling 1966, 130) in order to bridge the gap between the two ontologies.

[4.8] Epistemologies concern what the knowledge is about a particular discipline, or what it should be (Bryman 2016, 24). The two main epistemologies in social research are positivism and interpretivism. Once again, fan studies research contrasts with legal research in that fan studies prefers the interpretivism-based phenomenology tradition rather than the more experiment-based positivism, which calls for the application of scientific methods such as quantitative studies to the investigation of "social reality" (Bryman 2016, 24). Phenomenology researchers argue that "the extent to which the law, in and of itself, can effect change...has been subject to debate" (Barlow et al. 2019, 2; Smart 1989). Legal epistemologies will be examined before fan studies epistemologies in order to acknowledge the different approaches before moving on in part 5 to demonstrate how these differences may be bridged.
Positivists believe that research should "test theories and provide material for the development of laws" (Bryman 2016, 24). They assume that there is an objective external reality that can be discovered through reliable, replicable, and valid empirical testing. To carry out the test scientifically, the researcher must remain separate from the research subjects they are testing in order to avoid their own biases influencing the research. However, the absolute purist view of positivism may not apply to people who are not as bound by rules as subjects within a scientific study. In social research, there may be other factors that influence the behavior of the test subjects. We cannot be sure that the specific action we are testing is the one that causes the outcome. Postpositivist philosophy, with a focus on determination, reductionism, empirics, and theory verification (Creswell and Creswell 2018, 6), is an improvement, and has an important place within fan studies research. Media studies has a strong history in empirical, positivist work (Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee 2008), which can be developed through the use of copyright research with its roots in postpositivism, deductivism, and inductivism.

These legal epistemologies are looked at with mistrust by many humanities researchers, who argue that the research should be undertaken using interpretivism such as phenomenology. People and cultural institutions form their own reality distinct from other groups. In this instance, fan fiction authors and readers have a view of how copyright law applies and should apply to them that is different from the viewpoint of standard authors and publishers. These individuals interpret the law and their behavior in relation to it to generate a reality that is therefore a social construction or creation (Becker 1982). Given its subjective nature, it is not possible to measure reality empirically. In preference, researchers that subscribe to this paradigm tend toward qualitative research such as interviews and surveys. This phenomenology research in fan studies is carried out using several different perspectives: either as scholar-fans/acafans (Jenkins 2012)), where academics write for other academics on fandom-related topics, or as fan-scholars, where fans use academic concepts to write for other nonacademics (Hills 2002, 2). However, I follow the current thinking (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Hills 2012) that there is less distinction between the academic and fan than Jenkins's term demonstrates.

Legal objectivism and positivism therefore builds on the social constructivism and phenomenology of fan studies research to allow for research questions to be answered in relation to how well copyright law is internalized by fans and producers. Laws such as those regarding copyright are drawn up to encourage certain behaviors seen as socially beneficial, while stifling behaviors deemed harmful. Specifically, using both fan studies and copyright research allows for investigation into how constrained certain behavior of fans is by copyright law, as well as how empowered producers are. Therefore, ontologies and epistemologies from both backgrounds should be taken into account when undertaking research into the fandom and the law. However, it does have some limitations.

5. Limitations

The methodological backgrounds of legal research are at times directly opposite to those of fan studies, and it can be hard to see how to bridge the gap between the two. This paper has sought to do just that. Legal research has been criticized for being too
"technocratic and divorced from any human values save economic efficiency" (Williams 2009, 244). It is true that there has been a move toward empirical, objectivist, positivist thinking within legal research, given the belief that this research can more "accurately gauge the uncertainty of their conclusions" (Epstein and Martin 2014, 4). Hargreaves, in his review of copyright law, followed this in his conclusion that "policy should balance measurable economic objectives against social goals" (Hargreaves 2011, 8). However, there are several well-known issues that arise from the use of quantitative methodologies (Kitchin 2016, 34; Quan-Haase and McCay-Peet 2016, 45); namely, that with the increase in data analytics, correlation is being deemed sufficient to conclude advances in technology and policy without the need to prove causation. It is perhaps being forgotten in an age of big data that even large datasets are still only samples of larger populations, and their collection and analysis is not free of bias from the researcher that undertakes the project.

[5.2] While economics is therefore important when evaluating policy, to truly understand and evaluate the second part of Hargreaves' equation (social goals) may require more qualitative, subjectivist, and interpretivist research into how individuals understand the world around them and how they interact with it. Only then can the balance truly be struck between improving the economic welfare of the parties involved and their social welfare. Social constructionism aims to improve the understanding of how individuals such as fannish creators interact with each other, the original work, and the producer of that work, as well as the legal regime in which they operate. By doing so, social constructionist researchers aim to overcome the issue with objectivist research that it is not representative of the wider society in which it operates.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] This paper set out to explain how legal doctrinal and empirical research may improve fan studies. By examining how legal research is undertaken and the relevance of copyright law to fannish creators, I have demonstrated that it opens up research questions that may not yet have been answered within fan studies; namely, within the preexisting sphere of fan–producer relationships. Examples might include how fan creators in the UK can best protect their work, and how relevant is the work of bodies such as the Organization for Transformative Works. There are natural links therefore between law and fandom studies, not least that there is a known "interplay between the actual and aspirational aspects of social and legal phenomena" (Williams 2009, 243). Legal research has a different methodological grounding from fan studies research in relation to ontology and epistemology, yet these distinctions are not always deterministic of research methods in either school of study (Bryman 2016, 625) and, increasingly, methods are shared between the two. As such, I believe it is possible to use the interdisciplinary nature of fan studies to bridge the gap between the humanities and social sciences (Evans and Stasi 2014, 6).

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Fans, community, and conflict in the pages of Picture Play, 1920–38

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[0.1] Abstract—Fan history remains a neglected subdiscipline of fan studies, in part because of the methodological complications in dealing with a community of fans who may be deceased. Fan magazines, and particularly fan magazine letter sections, are a way for fan historians to access the views and opinions of classic Hollywood fans of the 1920s and 1930s—a community otherwise largely lost to history. Judicious use of the freely available 1920, 1930, and 1940 US census records helps researchers establish which letters were written by real, existing fans; further census information can help establish a demographic profile of the fan magazine community as a whole. Content analysis of fan letters illustrates the preoccupations of particular fans, as well as the way they established and negotiated particular codes of behavior within their fandom. A focus on particular fans who wrote to the magazine repeatedly over the course of multiple years can help historians recreate the fannish journey traveled by now-dead fans over the course of years or even decades.

[0.2] Keywords—Fan magazines; Fandom history; Film history; Readers' letters


1. Introduction

[1.1] Throughout the mid-1930s, fan magazine Modern Screen published at the beginning of each year an article covering its predictions for the year to come. These were conveyed to the magazine by the mysterious Dareos, a self-proclaimed "Hollywood prophet and seer." With a long list of predictions, ranging from the obvious "four divorces of big stars" to the more specific "attempt to kidnap the child of a famous blonde," the magazine could guarantee a reasonable success rate—as indeed it regularly reminded its readers (Lang 1932, 40–41). Yet even the great Dareos repeatedly failed to predict the usefulness of magazines such as his very own Modern Screen to future fan historians. Here I seek to remedy this oversight and investigate this phenomenon in some detail.

[1.2] Anthony Slide defines the fan magazine as "fundamentally a film- and entertainment-
related periodical aimed at a general fan, an average member of the moviegoing public who
more often than not was female" (2010, 12). These periodicals were thus popular magazines
produced for, not by, fans, published by independent companies with close ties to the
Hollywood studios. They were widely read; for example, circulation figures compiled by
Polley (2019) indicate that by the mid-1930s, at least eleven of these publications had a
monthly circulation of more than 100,000 a month, with seven selling more than 250,000
monthly copies, with each of these issues likely read by at least three people. The longevity
and popularity of these periodicals make them a rich source to film and fan historians.

[1.3] Here, in a focus on the interbellum period between World War I and World War II, a
case study examining readers' letters printed in the magazine Picture Play during 1920–38
permits analysis of the different ways such letters can be used by fan historians to access past
audiences, which exist now outside of the reach of oral history. Such analysis is performed
first in terms of the demographics of this particular audience, but also second in terms of its
particular preoccupations, including the way it conceived of its own fandom and shaped and
reshaped different senses of fan community.

[1.4] Here some concerns particular to the field of fan studies—for example, the emphasis on
fan agency, self-understanding, and community—are interrogated alongside the field of film
reception studies, which tends to have a more contemporary focus, and which has previously
tackled historical spectatorship and fandom in various guises. These two fields usefully
inform one another. I begin by assessing the context of film scholarship today, with a focus
on audience reception studies and on the use of fan magazines as primary sources.

[1.5] Audience reception studies as a field has a long history and is rooted in the seminal
work of Stuart Hall ([1973] 1980), a cultural studies scholar who proposes a model of active,
rather than passive, reception. Hall's work highlights the importance of the specific identities
and experiences of audience members in their negotiations of particular cultural products.
Within the field of film history specifically, this kind of research has taken on various forms,
with one tension apparent throughout between the theorized/ideal spectator and the empirical
study of specific extant audiences. Barbara Klinger defines film reception studies as the
examination of "a network of relationships between a film or filmic element, adjacent
intertextual fields such as censorship, exhibition practices, star publicity and reviews, and the
dominant or alternative ideologies of society at a particular time," then notes that a "total
[reception] history does not tell us […] how specific individuals responded to films," except
"in the case of empirical research on fans and spectators" (1997, 108, 114). Many
foundational works largely focus on such a total history; Miriam Hansen's Babel and
Babylon (1991), for example, uses the reception of certain films and stars to explore the way
cinematic spectatorship interacts with discourses on the public sphere.

[1.6] However, my own research is situated more within the realm of empirical research into
particular spectators, as indeed are a number of other film-historical works. Shelley Stamp's
Movie-Struck Girls (2000), for example, focuses on early movies and female fans; her work
uses, to an extent, readers' letters as sources to investigate the spectatorship of particular
films. Janet Staiger, in the earlier Interpreting Films (1992), takes a similar approach. Her
work demonstrates the way both readers' letters and published reviews can be used to
examine the reception of particular films. She usefully notes that "the spectator cannot be
generalized into some idealized subject, devoid of networks of sexual, cultural, political,
ethnic, racial, cognitive and historical differences" (138). Her later Media Reception Studies
(2005) does not provide as close a reading as her previous book, but it nonetheless warrants
a mention here. Its chapter on fans directly engages with Henry Jenkins's foundational fan
studies work, thus bringing these discourses on fan community into contact with film history
specifically, which this article also strives to do.

[1.7] Other scholars have considered reception history in the context not of the reception of
particular films but of particular performers or stars. Important examples include Richard
Dyer and Richard deCordova. Dyer's Heavenly Bodies (1986) in particular stands out in this
regard; it focuses on three particular stars in three ideological but also demographic
contexts—for example, in investigating male gay spectatorship and fandom of Judy Garland.
It therefore privileges notions of fan community and identity, and it uses fan magazines as a
key source, with reviews, letters, and articles fitting into the category that Dyer, in Stars,
terms "criticism and commentaries"—a key way stars are created and read by audiences
(1979, 62).

[1.8] Tamar Jeffers McDonald's Doris Day Confidential (2013) investigates the stardom of
one particular star, but it focuses more directly on the research possibilities of fan magazines,
which are at the heart of her methodology to investigate Doris Day's star persona. However,
as a result of this particular focus, the book does not examine their participatory elements.
Sumiko Higashi's Stars, Fans, and Consumption in the 1950s (2014) focuses on the
magazine itself rather than on one particular star, and it therefore does contain a section
entirely on fandom. Nonetheless, it largely ignores fan letters (and indeed individual fans),
instead focusing on advice columns, advertisements, and similar elements.

[1.9] To find a broader approach to the study of empirical historical audiences apart from a
specific focus on a particular film or star, and one with an interest in fan community, we must
and Annette Kuhn's Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory (2002).
Both are concerned with the experiences and memories of movie fans in 1930s (Kuhn) and
the 1940s to 1950s (Stacey) Britain; both are interested in the views and opinions of fans
generally, beyond one particular star or film; and both express a specific interest in the views
and opinions of a real rather than theorized audience.

[1.10] Both also agree on the methodological difficulties of such a wide-ranging examination
of historical fan communities. Despite the available statistics on the demographics of film-
goers—and, more broadly, the films and stars they enjoy and do not enjoy—"we hardly,"
Kuhn notes, "know these people at all"—a sentiment Stacey, in Star Gazing (1994), echoes
in the title of her third chapter, "The Lost Audience." Through a range of methodological
approaches, including interviews and questionnaires, both authors attempt to find this
audience again, even as they question these fans about how they experienced film culture in
their younger years. Fan magazines and letters are used sparingly because the emphasis is
largely on oral history. However, this interesting methodological approach is difficult to
carry out today: whereas Kuhn in 2002 could still write that "the picturegoing heyday of the
1930s generation lies within living memory" (3), in 2019, this is increasingly not the case. Most movie fans active in the 1930s are now deceased, so contemporary fan historians must seek other avenues for research.

[1.11] Fan magazines are not the only resources that can be used in this context. Indeed, from the 1980s onward, scholars have used extensive archival research to unearth traces of such historical fandoms, focusing on scrapbooks, letters, and diaries. Fuller Seeley (2017) reflects on her own research in this regard, remembering "years of digging around museum, university and private archives, antique shops and eBay listings" (30). Other scholars, such as Diana Anselmo (2017), use such materials—often in combination with printed readers' letters—specifically to examine female silent film fans, uncovering, for example, the potential homoerotic desires underlying certain aspects of their fandom.

[1.12] My own choice to focus here solely on letters printed in fan magazines has two key reasons. First, the huge national and indeed international popularity of the fan magazines of the era ensured that they attracted not just fans of a particular star or film but were instead consumed by a wide-ranging group of people with some enduring interest in some aspect of film culture. Second, this popularity makes these magazines and their letters ideal as a lens through which to examine the formation of a fan community. Letters circulated between fans, or between fans and stars; scrapbooks could be shared among fan friends. However, fan magazine letter pages served "almost like a movie fan internet website that included discussion forum, blog, and tweets" (Fuller Seeley 2017, 33). A letter published in such a magazine immediately won a readership of several hundred thousand other fans, who could read this letter and engage with it, for example by writing their own replies, which in turn might also get published. In this preinternet era, fan magazines allowed fans a sense of community that they were unlikely to find elsewhere.

[1.13] Marsha Orgeron examines the fan magazine in this particular context, with a focus on participation and community, but although Orgeron states that "fan magazines regularly encouraged epistolary responses from their readers and often rewarded them as well" (2009, 5), the emphasis is on the way the magazines attempted to shape the fan community, rather than on the way this fan community may have reacted to such tactics. The focus on fan letters may be extended in this useful way—to be used specifically to investigate what Stacey (1994) calls the lost audience in an empirical sense, with a focus on fan community and self-understanding rather than on specific stars and films, or on the strategies of the magazine.

[1.14] Stacey (1993) comments on the potential usefulness of fan letters; she notes that they are interesting, but she voices a few caveats. The first of these is connected to the fact that fan letters printed in magazines were, by their very nature, selected, and in a sense mediated, by the editorial staff of the magazine. Therefore, "the agenda for legitimate topics was largely framed by the producers of the magazine" rather than freely decided upon by fans (266). The second, connected to this, notes that such "mainstream publications" may not express "the opinions of more marginal groups." That is, the letters cannot be said to accurately represent the views of all spectators (266). Third, she notes perhaps her most basic concern, affecting the fan-produced nature of the letters itself: "As 'urban legend' and
more reliable academic sources have it, those printed may well be concocted by office staff at the magazine" (266). This concern is also echoed by Diana Anselmo-Sequiera: while she uses such letters, she notes that they may be "manufactured or not," and she sees them primarily as valuable to underline particular cultural discourses about fans (2015, 15).

[1.15] Although Stacey's (1993) first two arguments are well taken—and I will address them further below—I here develop a methodology to begin to address the third concern. After all, in order to use readers' letters to access this past fan community, we have to establish that at least a reasonable number of the letters were written by real members of that community. My case study provides a methodology to do this. Then, having done so, I will demonstrate three different ways fan letters contribute to our knowledge of fans of what we now term classic Hollywood.

2. Case study: *Picture Play*, 1920–38

[2.1] A number of digitization initiatives, through projects such as the Media History Digital Library, have recently made a wide range of fan magazines freely available online, thereby creating unique new opportunities for film researchers. Although many of these magazines could previously be found in archives, their digitization greatly improved accessibility and searchability, thus facilitating particularly big data projects, such as this one on readers' letters. Such digitization has also assisted researchers in looking beyond the two first fan magazines—*Motion Picture Story Magazine*, which originated the genre, and *Photoplay*, which has been privileged by researchers as a result of its availability on microfilm (Petersen 2013; Hoyt 2014)—and has permitted them to investigate a number of their younger yet no less popular siblings, including *Picture Play*, *Screenland*, *New Movie Magazine*, *Film Fun*, and *Silver Screen*.

[2.2] Elsewhere in my work on fan letters I include *Photoplay* and *Motion Picture* (Lanckman 2019), but here I choose to focus on a different magazine, *Picture Play*, across a period of eighteen years. (All parenthetical citations are to *Picture Play*.)* Picture Play* was a slightly later (April 1915) competitor to *Photoplay* and *Motion Picture*, which, once it became a monthly magazine in 1916, was virtually identical in format and price to these older publications. Although the magazine was not the single most popular magazine in any particular year—an honor reserved for *Motion Picture Magazine* (1910s), *Photoplay* (1920s, 1950s, and 1960s), and *Modern Screen* (1930s) (Polley 2019)—it was nonetheless hugely popular, with monthly circulation figures ranging from 164,649 in 1925 to 452,174 in 1937.

[2.3] These circulation figures are important in setting the scene for this case study: they demonstrate a distinction between this research into classic Hollywood fans and fan studies research focusing on later periods. Although many fans individually likely belonged to one or more marginalized groups in terms of class, gender, immigration status, race, or sexuality, the wider fandom itself was mainstream in a way many later fandoms were not. Indeed, Henry Jenkins begins the first chapter of *Textual Poachers* (1992, 2013) with an anecdote demonstrating the widespread social mockery aimed at Star Trek fans. This notion of marginality, of niche interest, has become inextricably linked to notions of fandom.
Classic Hollywood fans, however, are in a crucially different position in this regard. Their fandom is that of the most influential entertainment medium available at the time. By 1930, the first year for which reliable attendance information exists, eighty million people within the United States were going to the movies weekly—65 percent of the total US population at the time (Balio 1996, 13). As a result, fan magazines were mainstream products. They were not small-run, obscure publications created by a tiny group of devoted fans. Rather, they were high-quality, often physically sizable, and widely sold periodicals—and many titles were available. By the late 1940s, "one might find as many as twenty magazines for sale at the local newsstand" (Slide 2010, 3).

This is also connected to the definition of "fan" the magazines used. Whereas Daniel Cavicchi demonstrates that even in the nineteenth century the notion of the fan as a particularly involved lover of a particular media text or performer—whose "engagement […] was different from that of other audience members" (2007, 244)—existed, the magazines did not really use this distinction between fans and general audience members. As Slide notes, the publications were particularly aimed at "a general fan, an average member of the moviegoing public" (2010, 12)—someone who might embrace the selectivity highlighted by Cavicchi and thus focus on particular performers or films but who might also simply enjoy the movies in general. This specificity, or lack thereof, further becomes apparent when dealing with the actual content of individual fan letters.

First, however, I will outline the parameters of this particular case study. The issue of access to fan magazines of the classic Hollywood era has in recent years been partially solved as a result of the efforts of the Media History Digital Library (MHDL); researchers can use its search platform, Lantern, to search for particular terms or issues, leaf through digital copies, download images or entire issues, and more. While the possibility of such directed searches may have its downsides—leading researchers to miss features a more serendipitous exploration might have exposed—this has nonetheless had a huge impact for the field and has greatly facilitated big data research.

The MHDL's Picture Play holdings run from the magazine's birth in 1915 to 1938, three years before it merged with Charm magazine and thus disappeared as an independent publication (Slide 2010). The magazine only began publishing a readers' letters section, "What the Fans Think," in April 1920, and for this reason, the remit of my case study will be the years 1920 to 1938, roughly covering the period between the two world wars. In order to make the vast number of letters published in these magazines—twelve issues a year, each containing up to thirty letters per issue—more manageable, I created seven samples of three consecutive months each, spread evenly across the nineteen years of my case study, covering the years 1920, 1923, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935, and 1938. These samples can be studied in three different ways: fan demographics, letter content analysis, and individual fans. I discuss each below.

3. Fan demographics and the US census

The first approach I will take addresses the concern voiced by Stacey (1993) in terms of the veracity of the fan letters as letters written by existing fans, rather than by the magazine's
editors. In this context, it is important to note that these letters were not, for the most part, anonymous: each letter was published alongside some identifying information of its writers, which in Picture Play often took the form of a full postal address. With this information, I was able to use the now-digitized US census records for the years 1920, 1930, and 1940, which are released with a seventy-two-year delay, to locate particular fans and thus verify their existence.

[3.2] However, the census is not only useful in this important respect. It also reveals additional demographic details about each writer, such as each person's gender, race, immigration status, marital status, and profession. After identifying a number of real letter writers, it is possible to use the additional data located in this way to examine the demographic profile of fan letter writers and thus to interrogate particular truisms about such writers, such as the fact that the magazines were consumed primarily, or perhaps even exclusively, by young women (Slide 2010; Polley 2019).

[3.3] Over the course of the twenty-one months that my analysis covered, I located 472 letters; for the purpose of this case study, I focus on fans writing within the United States, excluding foreign letters. This left me with 385 letters to research. Some of these were signed in ways that made it impossible to locate the authors using the census; all twenty letters printed in 1920, for example, were signed with initials or nicknames, as the magazine was still experimenting with its format. Nonetheless, of these 385 letter writers, I could identify 107 (27.8 percent) as real people. Although this means the majority of letter writers remain unidentified, it is nonetheless a significant number, which may help assuage concerns about veracity: many of these letters were not fabricated by the magazine's editorial staff but were written by real movie fans. (Of course, it is also likely that many of the unidentifiable initialed or nicknamed letters were in fact written by real individuals; we simply have no way of proving this.) Considering the letters on a year-by-year basis, the results are even more impressive, with over 30 percent of the letters having authors identified for the years 1929 (38.5 percent) and 1938 (32 percent).

[3.4] These 107 verified letters can then be analyzed demographically in a number of ways. Regarding gender, of these fans, 75 (70 percent) were women, and 32 (30 percent) were men. This indicates that although most readers were indeed female, a not insignificant minority of active male readers also existed. In terms of age, even this relatively limited sample of letters demonstrates a wide demographic variety. The median age of those writing to the magazine over the course of these years was twenty-one, with an average age of 24.5, thus demonstrating the existence of quite a few outliers. Indeed, twelve of the letter writers identified were over forty at the time of writing, and five were in their fifties.

[3.5] One area where this particular case study identified no diversity at all is that of race. All writers were identified as white in the census, and no subdivisions (for example, Italian, Irish, Anglo-Saxon, Jewish) were made. This does not mean that no people of different races ever read or wrote to fan magazines. In August 1940, for example, a black girl wrote to Photoplay to discuss her own nascent singing career, noting explicitly, "I am a Negro girl, so life is a little more difficult for me than for a white girl" (August 1940, 80). And of course it is possible that some of the unidentified fans might have been nonwhite. Nonetheless, these
census findings demonstrate a valuable point, and one also raised by Stacey: the "mainstream" fan magazine conveyed, or at least conveyed disproportionately, the views of the racially privileged rather than "the opinions of more marginal groups" (1993, 266). This should remind researchers that although fan magazines provide valuable insights, and reach across boundaries of age, gender, geography, and often class, they nonetheless did not speak to all readers equally.

[3.6] This demographic information can be put to further use than simply examining the representation of people of different genders, races, or ages in the pages of the magazine, particularly once we add the chronological element. In this way, for example, we can see that the average age of the letter writers actually went up markedly from 1923 (21.5 percent) to 1935 (29.1 percent), possibly demonstrating the way a number of readers began reading the magazine at a young age, then remained loyal to Picture Play as they grew older. This is also apparent when the content of the letters is analyzed: many older fans describe themselves as "an old subscriber" (August 1935, 80) or note that "for many years [they] have been reading this department" (August 1935, 10).

[3.7] The possibilities of this type of demographic research can go far beyond this fairly superficial observation. For example, it would be possible for researchers with a particular interest in immigrant fandoms to look at the number of identified fans who were first- or second-generation immigrants and examine their views. Fans originating from a particular geographic location—such as Eastern Europe—could then be considered in the context of the predominantly Jewish immigration wave during the first decades of the twentieth century, and their letters could be read alongside narratives on fandom published in the Yiddish press, considered in the context of discourses on assimilation and integration. A demographic examination of fan letters first demonstrates the legitimacy of these letters as objects of study; second, it allows us to place these letters and their writers not just in the context of the history of their specific fan magazines but also in the context of various aspects of early twentieth-century history.

4. Content analysis of the letters

[4.1] The content of the letters traced can be divided into several categories, including focused on a particular star, film, or aspect of the film industry. These include a letter noting that, rather than Garbo, Dietrich, or Chatterton, "Helen Hayes is the best actress on the screen today" (July 1932, 14), but also a letter that, while criticizing the new sound cinema, asks, "Can't something be done about this?" (July 1929, 12). Such letters can be useful in establishing particular aspects of the public persona of certain stars, noting different fans' views on films or on developments within the industry. They might also have fulfilled the function of "structures of accommodation," helping fans to come to terms with significant changes in terms of their own movie-going experience (Hall 1979, 78).

[4.2] Such letters went beyond the "coming to terms" process, however, and often took on an advisory slant, sometimes accompanied by direct address aimed at stars, film industry professionals, studios, or even the industry as a whole. They thereby embody the notion of "consumer activism," through which fans "assert their right to make judgments and to
express opinions" (Jenkins 1992, 278)—and indeed, in this industry-steered publication, to influence the industry directly. Some handled this fairly politely, but others took a more aggressive tone. A letter from August 1929 complains of the way starlet Eva Von Berne, whose Hollywood career lasted a mere six months, was treated by Hollywood, ending rather threateningly by stating that "those responsible for this outrage will suffer" (August 1929, 103).

[4.3] Significantly, such letters demonstrate that the fans writing them believed industry professionals, even stars, faithfully read them—a conceit supported by the fan magazine itself. In September 1923, for example, an interview with Mae Murray begins with the actress stating that she enjoyed playing varied roles, followed by the observation, "Really, really, isn't this a little too much for some of the contributors of What the Fans Think?" The fans are here posited as not just silent observers and admirers but rather as a necessary and indeed powerful group—one whose likes and dislikes matter and should be taken into account, even by stars.

[4.4] Another variant of the letter connected to stars, films, or the movie industry is the "artistic" letter; after all, one of the key characteristics of fandom is that it constitutes "a particular Art World" (Jenkins 2013, 279). Because the fairly strictly circumscribed format of the magazine letter leaves limited space for artistic impression, most of these take the form of short poems focusing on an aspect of the film industry. In 1932, one contributor wrote a rhyming ode to Greta Garbo entitled "The Great Garbo," praising the star's beauty in eighteen lines (September 1932, 14).

[4.5] Others work with the restrictions of the magazine medium in different ways, such as writers who match stars with songs that "fits [their] personalities" (July 1935, 80). One such letter I found uses classical music for this purpose; others use more contemporary songs, such as "A Cup of Coffee, a Sandwich, and You" for May McAvoy (August 1926, 10). This is a fascinating use of the fan letter in that it prefigures, in a prototypical form, much later practices such as vidding. As a result of technological restrictions, letter writers might be unable to actually edit footage, but they nonetheless use their chosen songs to "draw out aspects of the emotional lives of the characters [here, stars] or otherwise get inside their heads" (Jenkins 2006, 155). This parallel is illustrated further by the letter's allusion to shipping, with the 1925 song "Tea for Two" dedicated not to one star but to a star couple, Helen Ferguson and Bill Russell, whose relationship is summarized through the song by this particular fan.

[4.6] However, many letters published in Picture Play do not focus primarily on stars, films, or the industry as a whole. Instead, they fall within the broad category of fans and fandom. These fans essentially create within the magazine's pages an "alternative social community" within which fandom can happen (Jenkins 2013, 280). Such letters perform a number of different functions of varying complexity. There is the category of letters that essentially praises Picture Play for providing fans with information about their idols but also offers them, in the letter section, the opportunity to share their opinions with one another. In July 1920, for example, three of these were published, with one fan noting, "Your department is great—I do enjoy reading other fans' views of the plays and players" (July 1920, 76).
However, this letter also demonstrates what would become a continuous thread through the letter sections in years to come: the fact that even fans praising the magazine or letter section do not necessarily extend their praise to the specific letters printed. After noting her enjoyment of the letter department, and indeed of "reading other fans' views," a July 1920 fan continues: "But I cannot understand how 'Mary's Faithful Admirer' can ever think that Nazimova is not like a real person" (July 1920, 76). The fan then continues at some length, with a recommendation of a few Alla Nazimova films that will make the previous writer love the star as well. It ends by stating, "I do hope someone else will come to my aid in defense of this delightful star."

This statement is prophetic for much of the rhetoric printed in "What the Fans Think" throughout the rest of its existence. Fans would not simply write to voice their own opinions or share advice. Rather, they would also react to previous letters, often over many months. In this way, the magazine letter sections, although mediated in some sense by the magazine (which chose which letters to publish), become a forum for nationwide and often international fan conversation in a way that was otherwise almost impossible in this predigital era.

Whereas in the 1920 sample such fan reactions were mostly relatively small in scale, later years demonstrate fargoing chains of letters focusing on the same topic, and often violently disagreeing with previous writers. One such chain happened in Picture Play across the year 1925. Because the collection available in MHDL only has the issues of Picture Play from March 1925 onward, the letter chain's beginning is obscure, but later responses can help uncover the earlier letters. We can deduce therefore that in November 1924, regular Picture Play contributor Helen Klumph published an article in the form of a "letter to the fans" in which she broadly notes that some stars were kinder people or better actors than others, and that she prefers to interview those whom she personally liked.

This inspired many reactions—I counted eighteen overall—over the course of 1925, with the first published during the first two months of that year. These letters are not available digitally but can be broadly reconstructed from the letters reacting to them in April 1925. One, by Betty Ruth Janright, reacts to Klumph's letter by saying she should instead "write about all the stars and praise all of them," because, after all, "it is just as easy to praise as to criticize" (April 1925, 12). Another, by Aaron S. Brundige, instead agrees with Klumph, noting that she should adopt a rule not to interview any star who had been divorced, thus highlighting the perceived morality of the movie industry and its stars as another area of particular concern (April 1925, 13). In April 1925, Picture Play allocated a special subsection of its letter section to the responses to both letters, as indeed it would continue to do sporadically throughout the years, in order to allow space for specific debates to unfold.

Responses to Brundige were largely limited to this month alone, with one agreeing that only "stars whose reputations are untouched by suspicion of scandal" should be interviewed and another exclaiming "SHAME ON YOU!" at interviewers not following this rule (April 1925, 13). Others were more pragmatic, noting that Brundige had "a censor's mind" and that his rule would bar many of "the screen's most interesting personalities" from
the pages of the magazine (April 1925, 13). Although debates about censorship would continue to rage in the pages of "What the Fans Think," this particular thread of debate in response to Klumph's letter faded quickly.

[4.12] Another thread, however, did not. It came in response to Janright's letter, with one letter, written by Jean Kilmer, attacking Janright's sentiments outright. This letter notes that even "little girls" like Janright should realize that it is impractical to simply praise an entire class of people outright. Instead of "rapturously throwing adjectives of admiration" upon the stars, she recommends "a little discretion and plain common sense" (April 1925, 13). However, this triggered another furious response from Janright the next month, when the young fan argued that because fans are those who can make or break stars, all stars must by definition be "wonderful people in every way," even if she had not met any of them personally. "All the real fans," she concludes, thought as she did (May 1925, 10). However, the same subsection within the letter department—Picture Play grouped all letters on this topic together—contains a letter by Marion Delahey, who disagrees both with Janright and with a separate article printed in Picture Play, and who notes that she thinks "it [is] a disgrace the way [the stars] are idealized" because they are not "gods and goddesses" (May 1925, 10).

[4.13] Further responses abounded over the course of the next few months, including one particularly scathing epistle from Kilmer—once more responding to Janright—in the July issue, in which she sarcastically declares herself "rebuffed and rebuked" because she clearly "knew not whereof [she] spoke." She then proceeds to explain in some detail that her own definition of fandom does not involve blind adoration but instead a critical approach where needed (July 1925, 118). Other fans, including M. Elizabeth Kapitz, who had written earlier to disagree with Brundige's criticism of divorced stars, wrote to agree with Janright's "determined loyalty," which to Kapitz was preferable to "the cynical knocking of some other fans" (July 1925, 118). Yet more fans wrote in response to Marion Delahey's critique of idealizing the stars. The final letter in this debate, entitled "The Debate Continues," was published in November 1925, a full year after the initial Klumph letter that started it all. It mentioned no fewer than five fellow fans by name, including original instigator Janright, whom this final writer broadly agreed with (November 1925, 117–18).

[4.14] Such a letter chain—which this kind of big data research of fan magazine materials is ideally placed to discover—is interesting to scholars for a number of reasons. For researchers interested in stars, this particular series of letters demonstrates fans in the 1920s debating the ordinary versus extraordinary nature of Hollywood stars in a sometimes crude, sometimes sarcastic, but also often fairly sophisticated ways, and with an intensity and months-long focus that clearly demonstrates the extent of this debate—which a number of key academic works discuss, including Dyer's Stars (1979) and deCordova's Picture Personalities (1990).

[4.15] The letter chain also emphasizes the way fan writing permits writers to perceive each other as individuals, aiming writers' responses at a particular person and even attempting to glean particular facts about the person on the other side of the page through the content of her letters. This individual address can also be seen in the fan letter sections more widely,
outside of wide-ranging letter chains. The fact that *Picture Play* encouraged the publication of full addresses is important because it allowed fans to engage in or to invite private correspondence outside the magazine's pages. This happened for better and for worse. One example is a letter published in July 1930 entitled "An Appeal to 'Dorothy,'" where the writer simply wrote in—with her full address—to ask another writer, who had not allowed her full name to be published, to write to her. The fact that Dorothy was English and the letter writer American only underlines the international nature of these fan connections and communities, even in a predigital age (July 1930, 11).

[4.16] It also underlines a number of topics frequently discussed in the letter section, including the emphasis on policing the way other fans experience their fandom—essentially comprising a policing of the preferred "critical and interpretive practices" within the fan community (Jenkins 1992), and indeed agreement and disagreement about fan practices more broadly. In the context of these specific letters, it involves the approach—universally approving or more critical—that "good" fans ought to take toward their stars, but other letters address different public or private aspects of the fan experience. Such letters often combine a description of the writer's own practices with advice to other specific fans or to the fan community in general.

[4.17] The public letters often describe a real-life encounter with the star, which is then used to establish the fan credentials of the writer. Whereas other fans have only seen Rudolph Valentino on screen, this fan has met him in the flesh and can advise her fellow fans accordingly. In August 1923, the magazine published three such letters—grouped together, as was *Picture Play*’s wont, in a small separate section—focusing on real-life encounters with Valentino. The writers' assessments of the star varied wildly, with one admiring him unreservedly and another denouncing his "ugly disposition," but they also contained observations about their own fandom, such as one fan's attempt to bring Valentino a flower, and notes about the behaviors of other fans at such events, such as those who "mobbed" him and "rushed upon him" (August 1923, 104). Other letters on real-life encounters went one step further and outright used the lived experience of the writer to advise other fans to "judge [the star] a little less harshly in future" now they have heard about the star's good behavior in real life (August 1923, 108).

[4.18] Further descriptions of public fandom experiences focus partially on fan policing but more on fan communication outside of the pages of the letter section. Such letters could focus on fan clubs. Fans could write to *Picture Play* simply to ask, as one person did in July 1929, "What is a fan club?," or note their membership of a fan club in order to advise fellow fans that through the increased access to the star such membership implies, they are able to defend the star against detractors (September 1929, 10). Important here is the fact that because of the publication of full addresses in *Picture Play*, it was easy for fellow fans to contact the letter writers personally, with many fans specifically inviting this type of direct contact as a means of communication that was less cumbersome than the letter section.

[4.19] More private fannish practices were also not exempt from discussion within the letter section. Indeed, many fans wrote in to describe the way in which, for example, they displayed pictures of their favorites in photo frames. In August 1929, one fan describes the
way she purchased two photo frames five years ago, noting that one has retained a picture of Ramon Novarro ever since, whereas the other has reflected her changing tastes in stars (August 1929, 10). Yet this same month's section contained a letter from another fan who wondered about the "psychology back of collecting pictures of people you don't know and will probably never know," and which criticized the way fans went "perfectly dippy over the idea" (August 1929, 12). The writer concludes that such fans should read Freud to help fix their problem.

[4.20] Correspondence with stars was also a key topic in terms of fan practices, with letters (including several letter chains) published throughout the eighteen years examined here. A key aspect of such correspondence was the acquisition of signed photographs, which could be acquired from the studios for a fee, often twenty-five cents, to be included with the letter. Discussions on this topic varied. They included a series of practical complaints; many fans, for example, became exasperated when they sent quarters yet did not receive the hoped-for reply or photograph, which made them wonder, "Where, oh where, do the quarters go?" (July 1929, 11). Others complained about the different approaches seemingly taken by different studios, so that sometimes one received a photograph for free, and sometimes one sent quarter upon quarter without a response. "I, too," states one fan in response to an earlier letter, "think the stars should send better photos to those who send money" (July 1929, 11). Another fan takes the lack of response as a deeply personal slight, stating that even were the desired autograph to arrive after all, "I shall refuse to accept it, unless there is a note of explanation for the delay" (August 1929, 13).

[4.21] Others, however, respond in defense of the stars, often berating their fellow fans for approaching the fan correspondence question in a way they considered wrong. One English fan, for example, states that American stars were in fact "wonderful" in terms of signed pictures, whereas British stars send a postcard to their fans at best, and also questions whether those complaining about unanswered letters had even thought to include stamps (July 1926, 10). Others criticize their fellow fans in less practical ways, instead questioning their sincerity and the quality of their correspondence, which is tied to the magazine's letter section itself: "If many of the fans write the kind of letter to the stars that they send in to you for publication, I don't wonder that they never receive photos" (July 1923, 106).

[4.22] Many fans, in arguing that the stars did indeed treat their fans properly, include a list of their collected pictures in their letters, as if to establish their credibility and position as arbiter of "appropriate" fandom through their fan successes. The above writer who used the magazine letter section to demonstrate the low quality of letters stars likely received did this, naming over twenty stars she had corresponded with over the years, sometimes in very "intimate" letters, "including little snapshots" (July 1923, 106). Another letter, five years later, did this as well, this time also indicating some of the things the fan herself had done in order to reach out to stars; she sent a "water-color sketch" to one star, for example, and received a signed photograph in return; she also notes the way all autographs she has were actually signed to her by name. "The stars," she concludes, "have been wonderfully kind to me" (September 1928, 9).

5. Individual fans
This last letter also helps to highlight a third way in which these fan letters can be used, particularly in the context of a sustained study of letters over the course of multiple decades: they can help uncover writers who had many letters published in the magazine. Once such a recurring fan is identified, Lantern makes it easy to locate the full range of such a fan's letters, which can provide researchers with a detailed view of the evolution of the fan's public fandom. Even my relatively small-scale investigation identified eight individuals who wrote more than one letter to *Picture Play*, with one—Elinor Garrison of Olympia, Washington—publishing letters in 1926, 1929, and 1932. It is Garrison who is the author of the above letter.

Garrison was a white woman born between 1905 and 1909 (the 1920 and 1930 census records disagree on this) from a middle-class background; her father was the manager of a mining company. She published a total of twelve letters between January 1926 and July 1932, all in *Picture Play*, demonstrating her loyalty to this one specific magazine—a feat all the more impressive because it coincided also with some major changes in Garrison's own life. In September 1928, for example, she spoke of her "two years' illness," whereas by July 1930, Garrison had married; her letters from this moment onward would be signed "Elinor Garrison Henderson," sometimes preceded by "Mrs.," thereby identifying herself, through the inclusion of her maiden name, as a frequent and perhaps well-known fan while also clearly marking herself as married.

The content of Garrison's letters echoes the development of her engagement with fandom over the range of six formative years; her three 1926 letters are fairly simple and concern themselves with her particular likes and dislikes in terms of stars and films, without any further engagement. By 1927, however, Garrison's letters show an awareness of fan community that was previously lacking. Her June 1927 letter, entitled "Some More Friends Made through *Picture Play*," is essentially a tribute to the different people Garrison met through the magazine's letter section. The fact that *Picture Play* was the only one of the magazines to publish full addresses clearly helped create an interactive fan community. Garrison mentions that two years before (so before her own first letter to "What the Fans Think") she "answered a letter from an English fan" that had appeared in the section, which led to her joining the Norma Talmadge Club, and then a year later to traveling from Washington to Cleveland to meet in person with the club's president, Constance Riquer, herself also a frequent contributor to the letter section. Garrison then goes on to list a number of other fan friends made through the magazine, including English actress Jean Webster Brouch, a fan in Siberia, and two fans in India.

At this point, Garrison is clearly deeply involved in the international fan community, which is echoed also through her two remaining mentions in *Picture Play* in 1927. One letter essentially berates her fellow movie fans for their "silly and sickening poems and grief-stricken letters" about the death of Valentino (July 1927, 10), and another letter appears in the "Fan Clubs" section of the magazine as the head of a "Movie Star Snapshot Exchange" (August 1927, 120). In September 1928, she demonstrates both her engagement with fan letter discourse (here on correspondence with stars) and her credibility as an experienced fan through her letter, quoted above, on the different photographs and letters she received from a range of stars, mentioning over thirty stars by name (September 1928, 9).
In 1929, she reiterates her connection with the wider fan community by writing a letter thanking all those who had written to her, noting that some had shared exclusive, sometimes signed, photographs with her. Once again, she includes some advice for others who perhaps wish to imitate her fanish success: "Write sincere letters to your favorites, praising or criticizing them, as you feel" (January 1929, 13). In July 1929, she publishes an update on her extensive collection (because "so many fans" had written to her asking about her "movie treasures"), this time highlighting new acquisitions made in the previous ten months.

Garrison's remaining three letters, written in 1930 and 1932 and signed now by her married name, Eleanor Garrison Henderson, echo these earlier topics—the letter imploring Dorothy to write, mentioned above, is hers—but also push beyond this in ways that emphasize the writer's longevity within the fandom. Here the writer reflects on her own earlier fan preferences—"about four years ago my favorite was John Gilbert" (March 1932, 12)—or inquires about earlier fan initiatives that new and younger readers might not have heard of—asking about the "Valentino memorials and clubs we used to read about" and wondering if they have been disbanded six years after the star's death (July 1932, 14).

Garrison's case demonstrates the usefulness of this type of big data research of fan letters published across a number of years. By following individual fans in this way, we can gather insights about their own demographic identity and life trajectory, as well as their fannish preferences and engagement over the years, as well as the fan communities within which they operated. First, we can investigate the meanings these communities held to particular fans; an example pertaining to Garrison might be that of her reported two-year illness, which could reflect the importance of such a fan community to disabled or long-term ill (and therefore homebound) movie fans. Second, fannish longevity created recurring or lasting fans, who could establish their fan credentials through the medium of the letter section, thus demonstrating the fannish hierarchies at play. Third, and more broadly, these letters give us a wider view of an interconnected fan community operating at this time, centered around, but not solely contained to, the letter section in Picture Play; examples here are Garrison's attempts to connect with Dorothy (her British fan friend) and her real-life engagement with the Norma Talmadge fan club and its president.

6. Conclusion

If Dareos, the Hollywood prophet, had looked slightly further into the future, he might have gazed on a hopeful afterlife for the fan magazine. This sort of afterlife can serve a useful purpose to the twenty-first-century fan historian, particularly in terms of the way these ephemeral publications—made to bring Hollywood's news to their faithful fans rather than to last across the years—can now be cross-referenced and analyzed with some specificity.

A demographic examination of a number of letters published between 1920 and 1938 establishes that, contrary to fears regarding the veracity of such letters, the editors of the magazine did not in fact concoct the letters themselves. Examining the content of these letters can help contemporary researchers understand the ways in which the fan community reading Picture Play functioned—in terms of its views on particular films, stars, or industry standards, but particularly in terms of its private and public practices, and in terms of fan
policing, communication, and conflict. Finally, a study of particular recurring writers can demonstrate how fans' attitudes about the above topics and their involvement with their fan community evolved over the years, as they remained loyal to Picture Play but also aged alongside the movies and stars they loved.

[6.3] These three methodological approaches may be taken into a number of different directions—some of which I have mentioned in passing, others of which I have no doubt entirely failed to think of. Analysis of the Picture Play letters column demonstrates the ways in which the genre of the fan magazine can help us to access a community of intelligent, versatile, creative, and now deceased fans. Kuhn notes that "we hardly know these people at all" (2002, 3), but readers' letters sections in magazines such as Picture Play can help us get to know these fans a little better after all.

7. References


Praxis

Beyond the multidisciplinary in fan studies: Learning how to talk among disciplines

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Abstract—In light of the Fan Studies Network's statement regarding fan studies being overrun with whiteness, we are in a unique position to engage in scholarship that challenges the overwhelmingly white and Global North–centric structures that define how we study fan cultures. Multidisciplinarity, which may be understood as disciplines laid side by side, should be contrasted with interdisciplinarity, which requires true dialogue. Despite recent field-shifting work by fan studies scholars such as Bertha Chin, Lori Morimoto, Rukmini Pande, and Rebecca Wanzo, more work needs to be done to both acknowledge and build on current research in transcultural fandom. In a dialogue that reflects the progress of our own striving toward interdisciplinary and transcultural work in fan studies, we seek to demonstrate a possible way forward for the field of fan studies to become more truly interdisciplinary and transcultural in its focus.

Keywords—Dialogue; Interdisciplinary; Transcultural


1. Introduction: The capacious field of fan studies
At the 2018 Fan Studies Network Conference in Cardiff, Wales, UK, Naomi Jacobs argued that we need to go beyond multidisciplinarity within fan studies. To be multidisciplinary, she argued, was merely to have multiple disciplines near each other, whether these disciplines talked to each other or not. By contrast, to be interdisciplinary requires dialogue—a reflexive process of deep and active listening, reflective response, and progress toward synthesis of ideas. True interdisciplinarity, Jacobs argued, is something that fan studies desperately needs in order to move forward (a version of this conference paper is included in the Theory section of this volume: see https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1665). While "multidisciplinary" has become something of a trendy term, what the term lacks are the conversations, the disagreements, the misunderstandings, and the aha! moments that emerge during interdisciplinary work. What it misses are the kinds of innovations that a dedication to interdisciplinarity can lead to.

While preparing for the 2019 Fan Studies Network conference in Portsmouth, many fan scholars rightfully pointed out that not enough has been done to engage with transcultural fandoms and fans. This led to the authors' own discussion of the differing economies and experiences of fans across multiple contexts, including Western contexts (such as the United States and the United Kingdom), and in Far Eastern contexts—namely, East Asian fans centered in Taiwan, China, and Japan. These discussions have helped us to better learn how to engage in interdisciplinary discussion, and to see the ways in which fan studies theories can be extended, deepened, and even refined by looking at fans that have before been underrepresented in much of the scholarship (similar arguments have been made recently by De Kosnik 2018; Morimoto 2018a and 2018b; Pande 2018a and 2018b; Stanfill 2018; Woo 2018). What it means to be participatory and transformative is very different within these contexts, and these differences, in turn, can better inform how to read ever-globalizing fan practices and discover what these practices might tell us about learning and education.

In this article, we share our own experience with interdisciplinary and transcultural work, which began with a workshop we ran in June 2018 that considered the gendered nature of fan practices and fan studies, and what this might tell us as educators and librarians. We are a group of academics across the range of the academic experiences and fields—Erika is a doctoral student in Culture, Media and Creative Industries at King’s College London (KCL). Brit, while trained as a writing teacher and literacy studies scholar, now serves at KCL as a Teaching Fellow in Digital Cultures, where they continue their work on the intersections of literacies, fan writing, and the digital. Ludi is a librarian at SOAS and Honorary Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Information Science at City, University of London, who is interested in how fans seek out, use, and remediate information, and who gained her PhD in Information Science through researching the information behavior of media fans in online spaces. Kristen is a Lecturer in Digital Curation at KCL focusing mainly on teaching students about metadata and digital asset management systems. While we come from a range of backgrounds and academic study, and while we are working at different points in our academic careers, we all share an intense interest in how people engage with popular culture.

We have chosen to write this article as a conversation rather than as a typical academic article because we want to show how talking to each other is perhaps the most difficult yet
most crucial component of effective and meaningful interdisciplinary and transcultural work. Furthermore, we have chosen to present our conversation (and work) in progress, rather than as a typical academic piece, to show how, first, interdisciplinary work can often be slower and require more patience (though concomitantly more rewarding) than single-field work, and second, that other types of "outputs" bring value to the scholarly community, even if they do not look like the traditional academic journal article or monograph. We were particularly inspired by the dialogic format in Freund and Fielding (2013), which was used as a guideline in the creation of this piece.

2. Fan practice and gender: Ludi—Gender, the affirmational, and the transformative

[2.1] My interdisciplinary journey into gender literacy and fan studies began in spring 2018, when I was contacted by Brit via Twitter about collaborating on a workshop. My background is in library and information science (LIS), which means I am familiar with the idea of literacies. As Kristen will discuss later, information literacy is one of the central concerns of Information Science and how we can best teach information users (in other words, everyone) to evaluate and critically think about the sources they encounter. In short, information literacy is "the ability to make efficient and effective use of information sources" (Julien 2001, 1054). This kind of work, however, doesn't tend to take place outside of LIS, so I was interested in "talking outside the echo chamber" and seeking commonalities across other disciplines and cultures. I was also aware, through my doctoral studies on the information behavior of fans (Price 2017), of the drive within fan studies toward interdisciplinary and transcultural work. Thus, I jumped at the opportunity to take part in Brit's workshop.

[2.2] Brit wanted to share the concept of gender literacy, and how fandom is a space for developing and negotiating such literacy. The potential overlap with the more familiar information literacy immediately piqued my interest. Within LIS, there is much literature on gender and information behavior, but there is a difference between exploring how certain literacies are gendered and what it means to be gender literate. From a fan studies perspective, it has been well-documented that fan activities are gendered. The difference between affirmational and transformative fan practices are usually marked by gender divides—see, for example, obsession_inc's original Dreamwidth thread (2009), Tossenberger's interview in Jenkins (2011), and De Kosnik (2016, 146). In my doctoral research, where I was attempting to build a broad model of fan information behavior, gender was admittedly on the periphery of my research, but informants raised the point again and again:

[2.3] Encyclopedic [i.e., affirmational] fandoms enjoy mastery of the industry canon. They don't do "transformational" work like write fanfiction. They tend to be predominantly male and somewhat derisive of derivative creative works based on their fandom (Participant 3).

[2.4] It should be noted that a lot of times, it is female fans who get turned into a punchline and how "haha look at this fan and their whacky stories." Male fans rarely get the same degree of scrutiny [sic] or mockery that female fans have to face. (Participant 9)
While these gendered practices do appear to exist, it is worth noting that the divide is not set in stone. There are, for example, men who write fan fiction; and there are certainly women who contribute facts and trivia to fan-based wikis. Take, for example, Hellekson and Busse's (2014, 3–4) definitions of affirmative and transformative practices, where the former's purpose is to "collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyze, and critique," and the latter's is to "take a creative step to make the words and characters their own." Using this as a guideline, we can see that many fans who are women and girls engage in affirmative practices (such as collecting figurines or writing meta that analyzes the source text), while many fans who are men and boys engage in transformative practices (such as engaging in cosplay or drawing fan art). Can we say that fan practices are truly gendered? And if so, what does that mean for the fan communities that engage in them?


Ludi raises an important question, and I think part of the answer links to how fans engage with and represent gender in their stories. I was especially struck by Ludi's point that fan texts provide cornerstones to building and negotiating knowledge in fan communities. I'd never considered this before, but it's a useful analytical lens. To take an example: during our workshop, I talked about Fem!Harry communities, where the writers portray Harry Potter as a woman. I discussed one particularly striking example of this practice in the story *An Avalanche*, a Harry Potter-The Lord of the Rings (LOTR) crossover by Lady Hallen (2014). In this story, "Heather" Potter has fulfilled her prophecy by killing Voldemort, but she has lost the war. Feeling there is nothing left for them in England, Heather, Hermione, Luna, and Draco decide to travel to another dimension. The group travel to the LOTR universe, and somehow become embroiled in yet another battle against evil. It is implied by Lady Hallen that the LOTR universe is not especially welcoming to women with power. In this way, then, perhaps Lady Hallen's Fem!Harry is not only a rebodying of the very character of Harry Potter, but a rebodying of the LOTR universe to include more powerful, three-dimensional woman characters.

What I've learned from Ludi's and Kristen's expertise in information science is that another reading of this example might suggest that these fan writers are expanding the very field of possibility for Harry Potter and LOTR fan discourses. Within Fem!Harry, fan fiction writers are negotiating the gendered canons of Harry Potter, as well as the notions of "femme" and "female." Within this perspective, gender literacy means not only the emotional and embodied elements of reading and writing about and with gender, but it also includes the tags and categorizations that not only make something like Fem!Harry possible, but make it findable and (re)shapeable by the entire fan community.

However, it should also be pointed out that, within these Fem!Harry communities (at least in my experience at Fanfiction.net), rather than finding unique opportunities for representations of trans*, nonbinary, genderqueer, and/or gender nonconforming identities, often, the play with gender is applied in very binary forms. Lady Hallen reported in an interview that, for her, the reason she writes Harry Potter as Heather Potter is because she feels more comfortable writing a female character, and pairing a female Harry with Draco
Malfoy (Lady Hallen, pers. comm., September 16, 2014). In other words, while this writer has arguably empowered herself by rebodying Harry to include her own desires, she has also engaged (though not a mean-spirited way) in discourses that are ultimately queer-phobic \textsuperscript{note 1}. An additional complicating factor here is that Lady Hallen is Filipina, and currently living in the Philippines, so her views of gender and the gender binary, as well as the queer community, are shaped by a very different cultural context. Furthermore, her work on texts coming from Western spaces, such as the Harry Potter series and \textit{The Lord of the Rings}, is in a doubled conversation with the source texts and the cultures these texts reflect, as well as the complex relationships Lady Hallen must have with these texts as filtered through the lens of the Philippines' colonial past, especially at the hands of the United States until 1946. While I have yet to dig into these complications, it is important to acknowledge that while Lady Hallen's representation of gender is highly binaristic, it is also being done within a context of reading with and yet against the texts and their silence on nonwhite people (see De Kosnik 2018).

[3.4] Part of our work, then, as academics is not only to describe the ways in which fans might play with gender but also to call out the ways in which these practices are cisnormative, as they can often be both in fandom and in fan studies. In other words, while this example of Fem!Harry does show how fans might play with gender, it also shows how limited and even hegemonic this play can be. Furthermore, the more we engage in transcultural fandom, the more important it is for us to gain better understandings of what gender literacy might mean as Western texts are filtered through the cultural lenses and experiences of those from the Global South. Ultimately, I would say that fan practices are highly gendered, but that this gendering is sensitive to national, cultural, racial, and linguistic contexts.

4. Fan practice and gender: Kristen—Scaffolding and hegemonic masculinity

[4.1] My contributions to the workshop drew more from observations and interests in inclusive pedagogies than long-term research in fan studies. So, although I am relatively new to and unfamiliar with fan studies, working with Brit and Ludi has been an opportunity to reflect on and refine my conceptualizations of inclusive and transformative pedagogical practices. Over the past three years, I've endeavored to develop inclusive pedagogies, particularly in my assessment-heavy modules. Based on these efforts, I've explored ways to include students in developing marking criteria and the form and extent of feedback given for each assessment. My overarching goal is to develop collaborative methods for building and evaluating technical and literacy skills so that students perceive the value of their practices in the learning process. Over the past three years, I've enjoyed working in an international and diverse space and observed many different strategies students employ to obtain desired marks or change their learning strategies. I've taken this time to observe how gender, cultural identity, and educational background shape students' perceptions of their abilities and their willingness to ask questions during lectures and seminars and to sometimes constructively challenge my authority.

[4.2] So when Brit began discussing fan studies and the dynamic communities they engage in, I was more than intrigued. Not just because Brit had new insights into literacy and
pedagogies but because they also presented a new avenue for drawing connections between the different areas of my research: gender, literacy, and identity. I contributed to our workshop because I wanted to participate in discussions about pedagogies that encourage students to practice and enhance their approaches to reading, writing, and collaboration. I've looked at this from the perspectives of Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of peripheral participation and Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (2012).

[4.3] In brief, legitimate peripheral participation is a strategy for implementing scaffolding in curriculum design. Lave and Wenger observed that the concept of scaffolding (first introduced by Lev Vygotsky [2012]) could be applied outside of classrooms. Scaffolding theorized that we don't solve problems in a vacuum; we work with others and depend on feedback from our peers to gauge our ability to try new things and how successful our efforts might have been. Vygotsky was keenly interested in the experiences of children in formal education settings, and he argued that the ways we are taught to solve problems affect our attitudes toward risk taking and the unknown. Lave and Wenger agree that context matters, and they explore the limitations of formal education settings, and the creative, social, and informal practices that affect the ways we perceive learning. Putting theory into practice is not a linear process: identifying policies and procedures for assessment and curriculum design can lead to creative problem solving to improve classroom dynamics (and make the most use of limited teaching time). While working with policies and experimenting with classroom management, it is important to consider the perspectives and privileges influencing the decision-making process. Theories like hegemonic masculinity can be particularly helpful here. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory highlights the cultural complexities of gender and the power dynamics that may go unnoticed because they are assumed to be correct or unavoidable. While they focus on a critique of masculine identities, both scholars invest time and effort in situating men within wider cultural, political, and economic networks. While the connection between literacy and gender is not always clear or direct, it is important to consider how they interact, as different facets of our social and cultural practices. Fan fiction offers a unique space for these negotiations. Not only because creative adaptations of popular media are encouraged, but because peer review is an ongoing process of building shared sentiments, visions, and imagined alternatives to mainstream media.

5. Fan practice and gender: Erika—BL culture, funü, and tongrenzhi

[5.1] In order to address how fan practices are gendered, I introduced my ethnographic research on New Member—the first boys' love (BL) stage play in Taiwan, focusing on the interrelationship between producers, tongrenzhi (fan-made magazine) writers, and fans who are women and girls. Based on this case study, I think that the gendered fan practice exists in the process of interpreting or decoding the source text, and creating fans' own works. New Member is the first BL stage play in Taiwan to be affiliated with its own series of BL cultural products and activities. It attracted a huge number of new audiences from among the women BL fans—funü—most of whom had never gone into a theater for any kind of performance, let alone a BL event. There have been three productions of New Member from 2014 to 2016. The story takes place in a fictional high school in Taiwan. After their lead singer drops out, the student rock band welcomes a new member, An Qifan, who is the protagonist of the play.
In the band's rehearsals, Qifan gradually develops a crush on the guitarist Pei Shiguang. After a series of attempts at communication, quarrels, and conflicts, Qifan finally realizes that true love can transcend any difference, even gender.

[5.2] New Member is especially striking because of the way it extends BL. BL originated in the 1970s as a genre of Japanese shōjo manga (girls' comics) that featured "love, sex and romance between boys and young men" and later transformed into different forms of cultural texts (Martin 2012, 365). As the popularity of the BL genre increased, a funü (rotten girls) community arose along with it. Funü refers to a group of women, the majority of whom are young and heterosexual, who proactively consume, circulate, reproduce, and associate with the BL culture as it manifests in a wide range of cultural products, including manga, animation, video games, light novels, and cosplay (Galbraith 2011). Following Ludi and Brit, based on the case of New Member, I also argue that the practice of fans is highly gendered here, especially in the process of interpreting source text and creating tongrenzhi, which is the core practice of funü. That is because funü treat the storyline of New Member as the source text and interpret it creatively to create their own works. In this process of creation, the male characters in the stage play and the actors themselves become cultural products, because funü are keen on consuming the beauty and sexuality of the actors and imagining the romantic relationship between male characters by creating tongrenzhi.

[5.3] Moreover, Kristen's use of hegemonic masculinity has inspired me to revisit the study of fandom. As some researchers (e.g., Galbraith 2011) have defined, the BL text itself is primarily created and read by women authors. It has established a relatively free fantasy platform for women, where they could escape from the male gaze to view men's beauty, sexuality, body, and desire, and express their thinking of the idealized romantic relationship. Based on some Asian fans' practices, we could witness that such fan culture has established a close connection with the experience of women and negotiation with mainstream society.

[5.4] The original intention in creating New Member could help to explain this point. Funü in Taiwan was usually misunderstood as a freak group by the mainstream, which always stereotypes funü as a group of slovenly, weird, and lascivious women (Wang 2016, 27). Thus, inspired by their own members' experiences as funü, the troupe decided to create an original stage play, New Member, in order to help the public understand these girls and accept BL culture. Moreover, the practice of the first generation of funü in Taiwan also indicates the cultural links between BL writers and LGBT support. In the 1990s, Taiwanese culture changed drastically when martial law, restrictions on establishing political parties, and state control of mass media were all abolished. Discussions and student movements of democracy rippled through the country. Those student movements influenced Taiwanese young people deeply and awoke their consciousness of democracy and freedom, and discussions on homosexual rights began to spread among high schools in Taipei. Students considered themselves pioneers in the wave of LGBT acceptance and advocacy, and some girls in the high school comic club began to create amateur manga to promote homosexual love. Among them, BL was one of the most important genres. Therefore, from the Asian perspective, the attitudes of BL fans toward masculinity and homosexuality could be seen as BL becoming a tool for expressing subculture and also providing a resistant space in culture.
6. Interaction of gender and literacy: Ludi—Fans, gender, and information literacy

[6.1] Information literacy (IL) is a core area of research in LIS—for practitioners and academics alike. A key area of IL research focuses on developing methods for engaging with users, as a means to enhance users' understandings of their information behaviors. While traditional forms of IL focus on library-centric interactions and information sources, there is a growing trend to explore IL outside of the library, and to consider the transferability of IL skills and practices into more diverse environments. Combining fan studies and IL offers a unique opportunity to engage with a diverse and creative community that is equally invested in destabilizing normative literacy practices.

[6.2] Let us first assume that fan works may be gendered along affirmational and transformative lines. From a LIS perspective, both affirmational and transformative forms of fan practice are integral to the wider information flows seen within fandom—that of creation, organization, dissemination, preservation, and ultimately remediation. Fans are providers of information (e.g., through informal wikis, walkthroughs, guides, rec lists, etc.—which are usually favored over official sources), which they organize (via strategies such as the "curated folksonomies" [Bullard 2014] that we see on sites like AO3); preserve (through initiatives such as the Open Doors project); and remediate, or, indeed, remix (through transformative formats such as fan fiction, fan art, fan vids, etc.). Affirmational or encyclopedic fan texts are ways in which fans can aggregate the fan community's knowledge of the source text, and thus disseminate such knowledge back to that community. Transformative fan texts are ways in which the fan community may navigate and negotiate that knowledge, and again share their understanding of the source text with said community. Both types of fan text inform fan understandings of the source text; they build the fan community as much as they are built by the fan community. In many cases, both types can form informational or creative works of their own—for example, in her article on fan wikis, Feleki (2016, 55) found that both affirmational and transformative practices come into play to produce fan wikis, and that in such contexts both exist in symbiosis, rather than as opposing concepts.

[6.3] There is a cyclical movement of information, that is entered into at many points, where information users (i.e., fans) may add to the sum of knowledge; take from it in order to build further works, both encyclopedic or creative; or even organize, index, and classify it (as the volunteer tag wranglers on AO3 do). These are all practices that, at every stage, are intrinsic to the fan community. This means that information, and the creation of fan information works, is not strictly gendered in itself. Where it might be gendered is in how fans choose to deconstruct, remix, or use information resources in the creation of their own fan works—in whether such information is used to create further affirmational and/or transformative works. But, as discussed in the previous section, it isn't always clear-cut where gendered boundaries lie in the creation of fan works, or even if gender should be taken as binary in such cases. My own interest in Brit and Kristen's idea of gender literacy is that in my own research, gender was a noticeable peripheral concern of my informants, one that I did not have time to explore further—for example, it would have been interesting to delve more into whether fan conceptions of gender are as binary and cisnormative as the brief participant references to gender indicated. This gap is something that Brit and Kristen's gender literacy concept might
go some way in helping to flesh out, thus giving a rounder appreciation of the gendered aspects of fan information behavior.

7. Interaction of gender and literacy: Brit—The craft of fan writing

[7.1] I've been deeply struck by two of Ludi's points: first, that fan practices occur in flows of information; and second, that the movement of information within fandoms is cyclical. In my own work, I looked at "fan canon" or fanon within certain communities. In particular, I followed the trope of the "marriage law" fic (note 2) in Harry Potter communities, specifically those that wrote about a romantic and/or sexual relationship between Severus Snape and Hermione Granger (SS/HG). At some point, the marriage law concept was brand-new—it was an extension of the existing universe of Harry Potter. In fact, it started as a challenge posed by chelleybean on the WIKTT Yahoo Group in 2003. In the time since this initial challenge, it has become extremely popular within SS/HG communities, to the point where many different versions existed.

[7.2] When I first looked at these communities, I focused largely on the resistant elements of fanon. But Ludi's and Kristen's expertise in information literacies provides even more depth. While it is important to investigate each individual story to understand the nuances of marriage law fics within a community, it is also important to identify the ways in which tagging is used across communities in ways that both resist the source-text author's (J. K. Rowling's) intent by having Severus Snape and Hermione Granger engage in a sexual relationship, and yet still reflect dominant ideologies regarding marriage—as necessary to procreation, as well as being limited to a binary understanding of men and women. The tagging in this community also deals with particular ideologies regarding law—as something that is decided by a small minority of those with power and inflicted upon the public, and as something a good citizen cannot escape.

[7.3] As I am beginning to understand, thanks to Ludi and Kristen, an IL perspective helps to better address the ways in which fan fiction practices demonstrate alternative approaches to LIS and literacy—fans are capable of not just naming genres but creating them through their complex social processes of searching, reading, responding/reviewing, and writing. In this way, tags and the ideologies they refract and reflect might be seen as ways in which fans quickly show their identification and disidentification with certain genres, fandoms, characters, and so on, and as one way fans label their expectations for fics, especially when these are not canon-compliant representations of characters, settings, plotlines, and so on. This perspective can have important impacts on education praxis. Within fandom, folksonomies are, ultimately, created by groups of fans themselves (though these are not without their own power dynamics) rather than by a small minority of experts, as tends to be the case in a classroom or library environment. One possibility, then, for more effective education might be to open up meaning-making to include learners in the development of educational resources, from taxonomies to vocabulary to content, which could likely empower learners, as it does fan writers, by providing a more collaborative educational environment.
8. Interaction of gender and literacy: Erika—BL fan writing and hierarchical community

[8.1] Considering fan writing practice as a kind of IL, Ludi discussed above that the gendered practice of fans mainly exists in the deconstruction of the source information and the creation of fans' own works. I agree with this statement, based on my case study from the perspective of the East. However, the fan writing in the East is more diverse regarding nonbinary and noncisnormative narratives, especially in BL works. BL, developing from one of the genres of Japanese shōjo manga, always features the romance between boys and young men who are lacking masculinity and characterized by the beauty of androgyny. As Galbraith observes, in BL texts, "genitals are blurred, body hair is absent, and penetration is not graphic" (Galbraith 2011, 212). Furthermore, drawing from four months of fieldwork in Taiwan with the BL fans, I have collected some BL tongrenzhi about the male characters in New Member with a special theme—they give birth to a baby. In such story, sex is often not the focus; instead, the pregnancy process of male characters in the idealized romantic relationships is highlighted. These cases, to some degree, could prove that the gendered fan practice from the Eastern perspective is not always binary and cisnormative.

[8.2] Furthermore, the assumptions of Ludi and Kristen inspire me to examine the Eastern fan practice from the perspective of IL. Funü fans not only establish the fan community providing a free space for their own creation, but also tend to form subgroups in it based on different preference of BL couples. That is, the funü fan community has become a hierarchical and heterogeneous system. For example, a funü group may be fond of the same BL work, but the individual members may prefer different man-man or M/M couples and so might split to form different subgroups. Within these subgroups, the funü allies usually center on one or more tongrenzhi creators. A-Xu is the leader of one such funü subgroup.

[8.3] In order to promote the second production run of New Member, A-Xu posted a message for her funü readers advertising that if any funü bought tickets from her, the buyer would not only get the discount, but receive a BL tongrenzhi created by A-Xu for free. A-Xu used her tongrenzhi as an incentive to attract her funü readers to buy the tickets. As Jenkins (2009, 7) mentions, fan groups involve a relationship similar to the one between masters and apprentices in that some of the most experienced people are willing to deliver the knowledge, information, and skills to the novices, and fans always believe in the value and significance of their own contributions. The tongrenzhi creators can be considered as the more experienced people—experience demonstrated by A-Xu in her subgroup by drawing tongrenzhi and thus delivering her thinking, preferences, and tastes regarding the BL couples to her own funü fans. As a tongrenzhi cartoonist, A-Xu not only acquired pleasure from the contribution of being a ticket agent to promote New Member, but also earned prestige and respect from her funü fans by drawing tongrenzhi to deliver the information to other funü.

[8.4] Ludi has classified two types of fan texts: affirmational and transformative, and points out that these two types often intertwine to form their own creative works. My case may become another example to prove Ludi’s statement. Firstly, in order to attract more outsiders, the tongrenzhi texts have the function of affirmational fan texts to aggregate the knowledge of the original text of New Member to introduce the whole background story to new
audiences. Meanwhile, tongrenzhi also has the characteristics of transformative fan texts, because tongrenzhi is the second creation of fans, so that to some degree, it conveys personal opinions and understandings. The tongrenzhi authors acquire more power not only through creating tongrenzhi to introduce New Member to nonfans, but also through forming their own subgroups in the fan community. I agree with Brit's opinion that those discourses were ingrained within symbolic and cultural capitals among fans, because when the tongrenzhi authors create their works to attract new fans, they begin to possess more knowledge than others, and then have more power and right of speech in the subgroup. Therefore, the fan community is never considered as homogeneous. Instead, the complexity in power/knowledge dynamics and hierarchy within fan communities should be given more attention.

9. Fan fiction, teaching, and libraries: Brit—The power of the Mary Sue and fan collaborations

[9.1] I'm especially intrigued by what Kristen has said about creative approaches to assessment. Throughout my work, I've been interested in fan collaborations. Fans do have firm rules about plagiarism (Tushnet 2007; Kelley 2016), but ultimately, they acknowledge the collaborative nature of the making of fan works (including fan writing, fan art, fan videos, etc.). During the workshop, I discussed one intriguing example of how information behaviors, literacies, and collaborative making come together within one wrestling fan fiction subcommunity on Fanfiction.net, WWE Fanfiction World, where collaborative writing and what other communities would refer to as "Mary Sue stories" are used frequently—that is, they celebrate designing characters that are positive reflections of themselves and their desires within the WWE universe.

[9.2] Within fan folklore, the Mary Sue story is a common practice of newbie fan writers, who are depicted as young, naive, less educated, and overly driven by their romantic desires (Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1997). However, in reality, the Mary Sue is often very generative for fan writers, because she allows fans to place themselves into both individual stories and larger discourses that they are otherwise excluded from. Liloweewoah and babyxbxgurl's story (2010), "Fallin' for You" (note 3), is an especially intriguing example of the transformative power of the Mary Sue. It recounts the stories of original characters (OCs)—Kimberly (owned by babyxbxgurl) and Nicole (owned by lilo). Lilo's OC, Nicole, is of particular interest because she shares traits with lilo: she is in her early twenties and Filipina-American. Moreover, Nicole shares traits with Mary Sues from lilo's other stories: they all tend to be clumsy, and to do important work behind the scenes for WWE. While these elements of the Mary Sue might lead to suspicion or even disgust in another fan community, in WWE Fanfiction World, the Mary Sue OC is a common occurrence. The responses to "Fallin' for You" are uniformly positive. Moreover, this story was written with the creator of the subcommunity, suggesting, in conjunction with its popularity, that the community rejects the dominant distaste for the Mary Sue.

[9.3] In WWE Fanfiction World, the Mary Sue is important because she allows people to write their fantasies and to share these fantasies with friends. Furthermore, in this community, the Mary Sue is a tool for collaboration, which allows writers to develop their
craft alongside lasting friendships. From an educational perspective, lilo's and babyxbxgurl's use of the Mary Sue, along with the collaborative nature of much of fan writing, reminds us that there are many different ways in which effective learning and knowledge-making happen, and that we would be well-served to revisit our ideas of best practices. What's more, in this case (note 4), both writers share the identity of Filipina-American, which has been reflected differently through their own experiences growing up in the United States, as well as babyxbxgurl's knowledge of her parents' immigration experience. Through their friendship and writing, they are able to expand the possibilities of the WWE universe, and to address the nuances of Filipina identities within the United States and the larger Philippine diaspora.

10. Fan fiction, teaching, and libraries: Kristen—Challenging conceptions of literacy and taste

[10.1] I have used Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of participation and Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinities present to functionally identify my biases and limitations as a teacher. Both theories promote reflection and collaboration among researchers, teachers, and participants. Beginning to work in fan study spaces has presented new opportunities to consider the ways literacies intersect and to experiment with different ways to raise students' consciousness about these intersections. Changing the ways we evaluate learning is easier said than done, but adopting more inclusive, ongoing, and peer-based assessment is one way to move forward. First, the creative and collaborative aspects of fan writing practices can help teachers develop more inclusive forms of literacy instruction, as Brit mentioned earlier. Second, the organizational and analytical aspects of fandoms can help teachers develop more inclusive and socially constructed forms of feedback and more appropriate and usable information management.

[10.2] For example, as I began to discuss above, one of my areas of interest explores the way(s) collaborative writing facilitate creative forms of information and digital literacies. Before the workshop, I found it a bit difficult to discuss writing because I do not always teach classes where essays are appropriate forms of assessment—instead, students submit extensible markup language (XML) records. After working with Erika, I started to think more critically about the types of materials I asked students to work with—the books, images, and documents they worked with were often outside their existing scope of knowledge, mostly because I selected Western-centric and English-language materials. With my new awareness about the implicit biases in my selection of materials, I, admittedly, struggled to discuss learning strategies with students. Setting up discussion forums, asking them to select materials they were comfortable with, and encouraging them to submit versions of their records in Mandarin or Japanese did not work. I believe these efforts failed because I did not encourage students to collaborate—either with me, or with their classmates. Now I feel more confident in asking students to first view XML as a kind of writing that takes practice, and I encourage students to collaborate while completing their assessments.

[10.3] It is quite easy to say "include students in learning," but not quite so easy to actually include them. While it is possible to directly ask students about their learning experiences
and assess their literacy skills, it takes time to build a rapport that encourages students to first talk to each other and then share their experiences with classroom learning and receiving feedback on their work. I have found that it is effective to ask students to talk about how they do research to learn about the images and books they catalog. Discussions about what search terms they use to Google information, and how they share this information with their classmates, can shed light on what language students are most comfortable reading, and how much information they are comfortable sharing and/or reusing before they feel they are plagiarizing or copying work. This, I think, is a more subtle way to engage students in IL practices—it enables collaborative information-seeking and, what's more, collaborative evaluation and application of information. These last two practices, I think, are key to creating inclusive learning practices that students can transfer from one classroom environment to another. These discussions facilitate connecting complex concepts like gender and culture so that we can reflect on our assumptions about students (or peers) and our roles in participating in learning processes.

[10.4] Together, these two aspects of participation and hegemonic masculinities are ways to develop guidelines and teaching practices that facilitate cocreated content that expresses student learning. With an awareness of how gender, class, and experience interact, we can start to discuss the difficulties we have in balancing our optimism about students with the practicalities of teaching without falling prey to institutional (deeply Anglo-centric) rhetoric. However, the subjects explored through fan fiction are rarely topics we ask students to engage with in assessments—perhaps we might ask them to analyze fan fiction, but not write it, or review it.

11. Fan fiction, teaching, and libraries: Ludi—Fan archives and the anticollection

[11.1] As Kristen rightly intimates, one of the most powerful aspects of fandom and fan works is the voice they give to marginalized groups. It is not merely through the practice of writing fan fiction that this is achieved but through the entire body of fan works, of fans' "archontic production" (Derecho 2006). This re-sites the concept of the fan archive as a potential teaching resource created by and for marginalized communities, or as an alternative voice to more mainstream audiences and/or archive users.

[11.2] One of the largest and most celebrated repositories for fan works on the web—Archive of Our Own (AO3)—was set up and is run almost exclusively by women. This is important from a LIS perspective, because it suggests that fannish spaces can challenge patriarchal and hegemonic conceptions of the archive—of the memory institutions that are the bastions of our human culture. Transformational fannish archives, however, favor feminized-centric experiences, queer culture, and what might be termed "folk production"—voices that have rarely been heard in traditional cultural spaces. In fact, Martens (2011) pointed out AO3 as one of the exemplars of what she calls the anticollection—collections that fall outside the remit of normal memory institutions. AO3 is a significant example of this, not only because it represents minorities, but also because it champions the worldview of its users in the very metadata systems that it uses. Its tag-wrangling system allows authors/creators to self-tag their work, while all tags are standardized on the back end by volunteers (tag wranglers), once the tag becomes popular enough
What is important here is that the original tag is preserved, thus preserving the authenticity of the original post. This is in contrast to standard library subject headings, where metadata is prescribed in a top-down, monolithic approach, that may not serve the user's true needs or worldview. Tag-wrangling, by contrast, standardizes tags (which aids in the discoverability of fan works in the collection), and also preserves the original tag used by the author/creator, thus protecting that creator's voice. This is not without its difficulties—see Bullard (2017)—but in general, AO3 succeeds in maintaining the marginalized voices that compose its anticollection, voices that tend to get swamped in the hegemonic practices of mainstream cultural memory institutions. In this way, the fan archive allows students, and others, to challenge what Kristen has called "institutional (deeply Anglo-Centric) rhetoric."

12. Fan practices in increasingly globalized and digitized economies: Erika—Prosumption of fandom

As I discuss above, tongrenzhi authors become spontaneous independent promoters to attract new fans entering the theater. They are also able to influence the source text through their production and consumption of BL tongrenzhi. In general, the original works are isolated from funü. Because of the infringement of copyright, their BL fantasies are hardly known by the original producers, at least not publicly. However, in the New Member phenomenon, the isolation between the original stage play and the BL tongrenzhi has been broken.

In December 2014, one month after the first production of New Member, the biggest tongrenzhi market in Taiwan, CWT38 (Comic World in Taiwan 38), opened. Inspired by the popularity of New Member, many funü fans planned to sell their own BL tongrenzhi about it. The playwright, Jane, was very curious as to what their funü audiences thought about their stage play. So the troupe collected all the relevant tongrenzhi from CWT38. They were so touched by those fan-made works that they decided to repay their funü fans in the second run of performances. As thanks to their funü fans, Jane wrote the fans' fantasies— their tongrenzhi stories—into reality. In the 2015 performance run, these tongrenzhi stories became the daily bonus scenes attached to each day's performance. The bonus scenes involved happy endings for four couples. Each was based on a story created by funü fans in their amateur works. Among the nine performances in 2015, each bonus was put on the stage twice, and on the last day, the troupe designed a "thank you" program to express their sincere appreciation by reading a list of all funü fans' names. It was very meaningful for funü—as many of them told me in their interviews—because it meant that the name of every funü fan was written in the official script. A-Xu said that when she heard her name spoken by her favorite actor, she immediately started crying. "It is really unbelievable that my dearest idol knows my name and says 'thank you' to me!" A-Xu said.

Although I have explained that the traditional production and consumption boundaries have been disrupted and funü became prosumers, I disagree that fans have full initiative to be prosumers; they are still appropriated by producers. In the case of New Member, fans participate in cultural production, distribution, and consumption as prosumers, but such
processes were designed more or less by the troupe from the beginning. The troupe, as producers, created and promoted *New Member* through *funü*'s familiar ways, like posting advertisements on Plurk and in comic stores, and encouraging *funü* to expand the popularity of *New Member* in the *funü* fan community by creating and selling *tongrenzhi*. On the one hand, fans become free promoters to advertise the cultural products (the stage play) without any material reward from the producers; on the other hand, fans are perceived as enthusiastic consumers to buy the products of their favorite stage play. For fans, such appropriation seems to be covered up by their willingness and enthusiasm. They are glad to spontaneously promote their beloved cultural products, and they feel honored that their creations have received an official response. More interestingly, for the *tongrenzhi* authors, they are not merely appropriated by the producers, but also take advantage of the troupe's encouragement to become producers in their subgroups to establish their own prestige and power. The interaction between such producers and fans is quite complicated—they both need each other and use each other.

13. **Fan practices in increasingly globalized and digitized economies: Ludi—Men and women making money from fan fiction**

[13.1] It's interesting that Erika brings up prosumption, since part of my doctoral research touched on patterns of money-making and entrepreneurship in fandom, although firmly from a Western viewpoint. In Western-based fan communities, it is quite normal to see requests for donations or Patreon contributions for fan projects such as podcasts, YouTube channels, and dedicated websites (spaces where the proportion of male fans is much higher, I would contend, than in transformational spaces), understandably to defray the costs of production, bandwidth usage, and so on. Such practices are rarely associated with what might be considered the most transformational of fan works—fan fiction. Jones (2014) discusses the outcry from Twilight fans that followed the publishing in 2011 of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, with one cited fan describing it as a "poorly written and poorly edited soap opera that was 'published' to line James's and TWCS's [The Writer's Coffee Shop] pockets" (¶ 1.5). Fan culture, Jones further argues here, exists in a gift economy. To make money from transformational works is to subvert the gift economy, but it also means that women are likely to be disproportionately denied payment for the fruits of their labor (whether they desire it or not), precisely because they are the main producers of transformative works. This, of course, leads to debates on whether capitalist paradigms have any place in fandom at all, but that is outside the scope of this article.

[13.2] Erika's work is important, because it highlights the ways in which Far Eastern fandoms differ from Western fandoms in the realm of fan economies. Certainly, in the West, it is not the norm for fan fiction writers to profit from their work. In countries such as China and Japan, it is acceptable to make money from fan works that would usually risk a cease-and-desist action from a producer or media company, and for women to gain remuneration for their fan fiction and/or art. *Tongrenzhi* is a case in point; but this also extends to fan fiction. In China, there are sites such as Starting Point Woman's Net (*Qidian nüsheng wang*), a place where female writers are given the opportunity to earn money via a pay-per-word model, or accept monetary gifts from readers—and fan fiction is also posted on this site (Feng 2013, 26–27; Xiong 2015). This suggests that in the Far East at least, attitudes to
profiting economically from transformative works are vastly different to those in the West. How this translates to cultural and social differences—if at all—is deserving of more investigation.

14. Fan practices in increasingly globalized and digitized economies: Brit—Emotion economies

[14.1] I was really interested in the very different forms of exchange that Erika and Ludi discussed. Hills (2002) has already warned us not to see fandom as completely separate from the larger capitalist economy in which we live. However, when we look at the practices of tongrenzhi and funü, even Hills' (2002) discussion of the split fan is inadequate to address fan practices beyond the Global North (even considering the increasing use of Patreon that Ludi discussed). If we consider my earlier examples of Lady Hallen's work with Fem!Harry and liloweewoah's and babyxbxgurl's work with WWE and the Mary Sue, we begin to see a complex situation as fandom, particularly fan fiction, is practiced almost solely in online spaces with a near-global reach. First, we find fan writers who are based in the Philippines or the United States with Filipino cultural and linguistic backgrounds being shepherded into fan fiction practices on sites such as Fanfiction.net and AO3, which maintain the baggage both of the Western literary fanzines of the 1970s to the 1990s, and of the US and UK paranoia regarding copyright. These writers are in a literal contact zone (Pratt 1991) of political-economic and cultural differences when it comes to gender, good writing, and ownership. I have learned from engagement with Erika's work that these examples are not just interesting for how fans write in/about these fandoms, but even more so for what they represent in terms of the complexities of transcultural and international fan practices. Ultimately, Erika's work raises two really important questions: (1) How can we provide a more complex picture of fannishness worldwide? (2) How can we account for the fan prosumer within the ever-increasing reality that now we are all, to some degree, prosumers, whether we actively choose to be or not (Fuchs 2017)?

15. Conclusion

[15.1] Interdisciplinarity requires communication, and communication requires having something to talk about. Our work to date has given us plenty to talk about, and we are still investing in projects that allow us to pool our research areas and expertise. Over the past year, our collaborations have evolved from sharing ideas to developing a shared research agenda. Beginning with a workshop designed to promote open discussion has enabled ongoing conversations that identify and explore many points of crossover—the overlapping layers that our respective disciplines share. In the course of doing this work together, we have begun to identify some areas for future research in the field of fan studies, as follows.

[15.2] Fan practices, taken from a wide view, should be studied in more depth in relation to what they might teach us regarding curriculum, classroom practices, and certainly assessment, because they are potential sites through which students can enter into a dialogue with the typical paradigms of educational institutions and libraries.
[15.3] Better understanding of gender and fan practices requires studying the parallels and divergences in fan practices other than those in the West, and Far Eastern fan cultures is one useful place to start. There are interesting parallels, and significant divergences, between feminized fan practices in Western and Far Eastern fan cultures.

[15.4] Moving fan studies forward will mean interdisciplinary and transcultural research teams. Importantly, these teams cannot be too big, like the World Lord of the Rings and World Game of Thrones projects. When a team becomes too big, it becomes impossible to develop effective and meaningful research outputs for the field and for fans in any format. Instead, effective fan studies teams can consciously bring together members from different fields, and ask them to focus on how their different training and research interests can and do overlap. Ideally, they would include researchers who have a range of languages beyond English. Additionally, fan studies has a long history of excellent qualitative research, but it could benefit from quantitative analysis, as Benjamin Woo (2018) has pointed out. Therefore, effective fan studies teams would include experienced quantitative researchers in media studies, digital humanities, and even digital sociology.

[15.5] Through our own ongoing dialogue, we have become even more dedicated to exploring how fan cultures and fan practices challenge systems of power. Working in an interdisciplinary dialogue enables us to discuss and practice different methodologies (like textual analysis and ethnography), which provides important inspiration for future research and teaching. This conversation is just the beginning, but we hope it serves as inspiration not only for us, but for the field as a whole.

16. Notes

1. By using the term "queer-phobic" here, I include the nuances that exist within the QUILTBAG+ community (queer/questioning, undecided, intersex, lesbian, trans*, bisexual/pansexual, asexual, gay, and genderqueer, plus any other identities not otherwise represented here). I intend it as an inclusive label.

2. Within this trope, two characters are forced into a marriage by legislation. It has often been used in Harry Potter fandom as a way to forge a relationship between Hermione Granger and Severus Snape. For more information, see the Fanlore discussion of the development of this trope here: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Marriage_Law_Challenge.

3. It is important to note that I have received both liloweewoah's and babyxbxgurl's permission to share the direct link to this story in all of my future publications.

4. In babyxbxgurl's case, both of her parents immigrated from the Philippines.

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Exploring a threshold concept framework to fan studies research methodologies

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Abstract—We turn to threshold concept theory to imagine ways scholars can approach fan studies methodologies and make their research and underlying values more explicit, as well as outline what some common and shared values and foundational concepts are in the discipline. We consider notions that all fans understand and value, regardless of home discipline, and the ways such shared understandings can lead to shared and consistent research methods and methodologies. We also provide some examples and illustrations from our own experiences before concluding with a threshold concept–inspired framework for conceiving of fan studies methodologies.

Keywords—Interdisciplinarity; Methodology; Shared values


1. Introduction

Like many fans, neither of us knew what fan studies was until we were deep into it ourselves as both practitioners and scholars. Danielle was introduced to fan studies during her master's degree, where she studied literature and read fan fiction simultaneously and in similar ways. She felt some disciplinary tension, wondering if she would be allowed to study fan texts as a literary scholar rather than a scholar in media studies. Mandy wrote fan fiction secretly for years, with others scoffing that she wasn't writing anything real. She then met Danielle during graduate school, where she realized that people in her field of composition and rhetoric—and in other fields across the academy—dedicated their research to this area of study. Our introduction to fan studies, then, happened organically, and sometimes in conflict with others' perceptions of what fan studies is and is not. We happened upon this field without explicit instruction; we learned more about it as we moved forward with it. And we wonder how fan studies can be made more explicit for newcomers in the field, both in terms of what it is and how people study it.
As we will discuss in this piece, there may not—and perhaps should not—be one set of methods or one concrete methodology for all fan studies scholars to use in their research, given the diversity of academic disciplines that contribute to fan studies. Sam Ford (2014) reminds us that fan studies is an "undisciplined discipline" with concentrated efforts by practitioners and scholars for it to remain so (54). Fan studies is indeed a field made up of—and made rich by—various disciplines and influences, which provide many pathways into the field. However, as we will posit, there are inherent and overlapping values and beliefs undergirding one's fan research methodologies and approaches that should be made explicit. We are not advocating for any particular set of rules when it comes to the study of fans and fan works, but in order for us to "express a common sense of ethics, practices, and stances" in fan studies, we need to come together and think carefully about what we know, how we know it, how others might see it, and what we must understand to approach fan works as fan studies scholars. In other words, we need to have some explicit semblance of a connection and interaction across disciplines when thinking about the work we do and how we do it in order to not only do it ourselves but also facilitate entry into the field.

To address those needs, we explore how threshold concept theory—an interdisciplinary framework known for its focus on process and acceptance of struggle and liminality—can lend itself to making fan studies methods and methodologies more explicit and accessible for both newcomers to the field and seasoned practitioners, buoyed by our own experiences with it. As we will argue, threshold concepts can be helpful tools both for fan studies scholars and fans themselves to consider in their methods, methodologies, and practices. We can think of threshold concepts here in relation to fan studies as ways of thinking and practicing. Building from this framework, we also offer three threshold concepts we've begun to identify for fan studies, hoping to start an important conversation about inherent beliefs and ways of doing and researching in the field.

2. Threshold concepts: Definitions and application to fan studies

Threshold concepts are foundational concepts a person internalizes as they come to fully participate in a discipline. Ray Land and colleagues (2005) define threshold concepts as "concepts that bind a subject together, being fundamental to ways of thinking and [practicing] in that discipline" (54). They are "akin to a portal" that opens "a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (53). Threshold concepts are characterized as transformative, probably irreversible, integrative, possibly often bounded, and often inherently troublesome (Meyer and Land 2003). To provide an example, "pain" is a threshold concept for undergraduate medical students: it transforms their thinking from personal to "in the discipline" because they learn to see pain differently as a medical practitioner. They view pain in a helpful way to diagnose and treat patients as opposed to the negative perceptions they've likely experienced themselves in the past (Meyer and Land 2005, 374).

To that end, there's undoubtedly an essence of transformation involved that characterizes threshold concepts. Once students learn threshold concepts, there's no going back—an internal shift in their perspective takes place that often cannot be unlearned and brings them into the discipline. Students go through recursive, nonlinear learning tunnels
during their transformational journeys, but some learners are better able to traverse the tunnel and grasp certain threshold concepts sooner (Rattray 2016). There's also a sense of loss as a learner lets go of a previous way of thinking in favor of the transformed one. They must "strip away, or have stripped from them, the old identity" as they veer toward a new one (Goethe, quoted in Meyer and Land, 2005, 376). They must see "the universe through the eyes of another" (Proust, quoted in Land et al. 2005). This opens a new portal through which to view the world while also closing a formerly used one.

[2.3] Threshold concept theory can be seen as a useful tool that instructors—and fields like fan studies—can use to help learners master and struggle through disciplinary concepts, as well as a helpful framework to use when building courses and curricula. It's a tool that relies on disciplinary and subject expertise and ways of thinking and being, and, arguably, it exists without a home discipline of its own. It also makes more explicit to newcomers what masters have spent years gleaning. Much discussion of threshold concepts revolves around disciplinarity, and it's especially interesting to think about threshold concepts in the context of fan studies as a field that exists on the edge and in the midst of various disciplines, as we and others have already established (Ford 2014; Evans and Stasi 2014, 6).

[2.4] Building from this discussion of threshold concepts and of doing and being in the context of fan studies, we'd like to share what we've identified as the possible threshold concepts fans and fan studies scholars encounter in their work. We are thinking about what it means to do fan studies, how one becomes a fan, and what conceptions and understandings fans embrace and embody as they become members of these communities. Explicitly naming and examining these concepts is important, for many scholars and practitioners alike may implicitly already find them integral to fan work and useful for better understanding and advancing the work that they do. Ultimately, we hope that our discussion helps to elucidate what threshold concept theory may look like in our field and make room for further conversations to be had.

[2.5] First and foremost, we affirm that fan fiction is a valid form of literature and writing that is worth scholarly attention. To the readership of this journal, this statement may already be familiar and affirm your beliefs about fan fiction. As we described in the introduction, we both came upon this concept organically, without anyone explicitly telling us what it was and that it was true. But it's nonetheless there, rooted in our educations and our lived experiences as we now formally study fan fiction. We argue that the fact that this concept seems so intuitive to us, and to many others in the field, while perhaps not resonating with people outside of our field, indicates that this concept is something that we internalize when we become acquainted with fandom and fan studies.

[2.6] In line with that first threshold concept, we embrace that the creation of fan works is not just copying another's creative work, and can be generative and meaningful for creators and audiences alike. Again, this statement may feel familiar to those immersed in fan studies scholarship and those involved in fan communities, but this concept is something that a person has to acquire and learn over time to fully understand, appreciate, and operate within the community. We recognize that this is a concept that might be difficult for someone outside of the fan studies field, or those new to the field, to automatically accept and
understand. Mandy, for example, has been asked several times by colleagues when she will start to write real fiction instead of copying others' characters and storylines, which indicates a difference in understanding about what kind of writing is valid. Those who do not currently accept or understand that fan fiction is a genre in its own right may still be in the process of learning about and experiencing fan studies, or they have previous (mis)conceptions about what fan works are. Resulting from such experiences, we wonder what steps need to happen for colleagues to cross the appropriate threshold and stop asking such questions about copying. We also think about how they could possibly make this leap when, unlike in a more formalized area of study such as writing or history, people are not likely to take a designated class in fan studies to introduce them to such ways of doing and being.

[2.7] Finally, we posit here that fan studies researchers must respect fans' agency and consent when conducting research on them and their works. The notion that fan studies researchers should respect the unique situation of fan works and the potential precarity of fans has been adopted by *Transformative Works and Cultures* in their submissions guidelines, and this notion has been taken up extensively in fan studies scholarship (OTW n.d.). Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (2012) address how fan studies methods have diverged (or, at least, should diverge) from those of the humanities by their different approach to close readings of texts: "fans perceive the space where they create their artworks as closed," and "it is not ethical to ignore fans' expectations of privacy" (39–46). Busse and Hellekson advocate for asking permission from fan creators whenever possible or making an effort to conceal the creator's identity. Similarly, Brittany Kelley (2016) writes that "we have a responsibility to enact an ethics of goodwill that balances the concerns of fans with those of scholarly development" (¶ 1.7). This could involve forming relationships with participants and making sure they are aware of the goals of one's research study (Kelley 2016, ¶ 4.11). Our threshold concept is clearly one that is already being explored in fan studies scholarship, indicating that it is an idea most of us have engaged with at some point.

[2.8] Though our ideas are by no means definitive or exhaustive, in our three proposed threshold concepts for fan studies we see values and principles that we—both as scholars and practitioners of this field—inhernently recognize and agree with and that have changed us at our cores. In other words, because we accept these three concepts to be true in our work, we approach fan studies differently than someone who has not. We also see, in naming and describing these threshold concepts, a generative way to help introduce others into the field, be it burgeoning fan fiction writers, students taking a fan studies–themed course, or people who have no idea what fan fiction is. And if the threshold concepts above seem obvious to you (if you think of course fan works are not just copies!), it is likely that you have already crossed those thresholds, as many in fan studies have.

[2.9] From this discussion, we wonder: do such threshold concepts happen more organically than formally, as fans interact with work largely outside of the academy and begin to learn more and appreciate more about it as they go? Why is this? How can we make it more explicit? In asking such questions, we arrive at a certain tension and crossing between learning in a classroom and practicing outside the classroom as it relates to fan studies, which brings about even more methodological questions for us to consider as we move forward. How can one study this phenomenon of crossing fan studies thresholds when so
much of it happens outside an academic setting? What tools and methods would be most helpful to see this transformation? Ultimately, we advocate for more explicit attention given to the values and ways of doing and being that we as fan studies scholars have come to internalize, which will manifest itself also in the methods and methodologies that we adopt when doing our work and demonstrating what it is we know and value.

3. Conclusion and takeaways

[3.1] It is important to recognize that even though scholars and practitioners of fan studies hail from numerous academic disciplines, professional workplaces, and areas of inquiry, there are still certain things about fan studies that most of us share in order to do fan studies and think about it in a certain way. We have begun to lay out what we consider to be threshold concepts—foundational concepts a person comes to internalize when practicing in a discipline—within fan studies. We also argue in this essay that explicit attention to and consideration of concepts like these can be a generative way to introduce people to the work, activity, and scholarship of fan studies.

[3.2] In doing this work, we must acknowledge that there are very real differences in disciplinary training that have effects and consequences, which is why it is so important to articulate and make explicit our shared beliefs. For example, Danielle's first foray into fan studies led to much confusion and uncertainty in both herself and her academic advisors regarding how to discuss and cite fan works because literary scholars typically do not need to obtain authors' permission to reference their works. As Danielle became more immersed in the field, she became aware of the shared beliefs of those working in the field and internalized those beliefs. However, this process could have been expedited had she been made more explicitly aware of these policies in the field, which indicates the value of clearly laying out fan studies threshold concepts and values (as Transformative Works and Cultures does in their submission guidelines, as previously discussed).

[3.3] Articulating the shared beliefs of fan studies scholars will ease the process of neophytes becoming experts and also has the potential to ensure that more fan studies research is being conducted in an ethical manner. Although threshold concepts often seem obvious to those immersed in the field, they may be more difficult for outsiders and newcomers. Understanding what our shared beliefs are, as well as why they exist, will help to produce a more cohesive and explicit fan studies methodology that crosses disciplines without discounting the unique benefits different disciplines and disciplinary traditions can bring to our richly interdisciplinary field.

[3.4] We write this essay, then, as two fan studies scholars bringing with them multiple identities and positionalities: both of us as fans, academic researchers, and teachers, but one of us as a literature scholar, one of us a composition and rhetoric scholar, and each of us uniquely exposed to methods and methodologies through our education and experiences. These similarities and differences are what make our endeavors as fan writers and scholars rich and storied. Methodologies that embrace and are receptive to such disciplinarity and framing are part of what makes fan studies research invigorating. In parting, we wish to reiterate the value of that interdisciplinary cumulation and also the advantages of making
underpinning values more explicit in our research and our discussions of our research.

4. Acknowledgements

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5. References


Sense.
Symposium

Negotiating acafandom as a first-time researcher

S. Eliza Ader

Independent Researcher

[0.1] Abstract—This reflection on positionality draws on experiences from undertaking an undergraduate writing research project involving a series of email/chat server interviews with fan fiction authors active on Archive of Our Own. The identity of the acafan is a negotiated spectrum that relates to positionality and knowledge production.

[0.2] Keywords—AO3; Archive of Our Own; Interviews; Knowledge production; Positionality; Power relations; Research methods


1. Introduction

[1.1] It is February 2018. I am in a second-year geography class in the campus theater, watching my lecturer use his daughter's whale-shark toy and a box to demonstrate how we need to think about risk during our undergraduate dissertation projects. Later, he goes on to talk about positionality. From the seriousness with which he addresses these topics, I know that they are important; however, at this point, everything feels abstract—PowerPoint slides and concepts and people dozing off around me. It was not until later, when I was researching and writing the dissertation, or now, with it receding into the blur that is the end of my undergraduate degree, that risk, positionality, and the ethics of research actually began to mean concrete things to me. In light of that, this essay is going to take one of those concepts—positionality—and briefly explore how it, along with the concurrent processes of identity creation and knowledge production, could be conceptualized differently in fan studies due to the hybrid nature of the acafan researcher.

[1.2] To begin: positionality is the notion of how personal views and position in space-time can affect how a person views the world (Sánchez 2010). One way it came about is through the feminist movement in geography in the 1980s and 1990s as "a means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge," (Rose 1997, 306), thus challenging the supremacy of objectivist knowledge and recognizing that in the search for universality, one does violence by subduing other knowledges that may not fit into the narrative one is attempting to build. If, instead, one accepts that all knowledge is a product of
positions of actors and objects in the world, and therefore wholly subjective, one can work to build an egalitarian and empowering set of knowledges that give space for a diverse array of voices, acknowledging the complexity of the social worlds that surround us (Dwyer and Limb 2001). It is something that has been worked over a lot in the last three decades, but considering the fact that every project is different, it is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to ideas such as positionality. Gillian Rose (1997) argues that having one model for such concepts is actually impossible, as positionality and reflexivity (the actual process of examining one's subjectivity) work in a self-constructing manner, building the self up differently with each project undertaken. This idea of the self-as-palimpsest, scraped over and clean but with remnants of past selves half-visible below the surface, is both beautiful and tricky. How do we engage with those past selves in new research projects? How do we even know whether the self we are constructing in the present is one that is useful to the research?

2. Dispatches from an undergraduate field diary

[2.1] Tonight I've started to reach out to some of the more famous authors in the MCU fandom on AO3. This has me nervous, mostly due to power relations I think. These guys are the big guns, the Victor Hugos and Madeline Millers and Toni Morrisons of the fanfiction world. I'm a little fish, [my internet pseudonym] is a perfectly un-extraordinary writer, buried in the rockfall of content that gets created and shaken loose into the archive every single day. (05/08/18)

[2.2] Mainly, I think my biases in this internet research could be to do with grammar, as I am communicating textually with these people; I am more likely to think favorably of people who respond with good grammar, possibly because of ease. Good grammar says a lot about education, class, and disability, actually, if you read into it more—the more you read and the more educated you are, the better your grammar will be, as is the case if you don't suffer from a learning disorder such as dyslexia. (11/08/18)

[2.3] Anyway. I'm currently bringing up a few theorists in interviews, and it's an interesting moment of power relations because it really highlights my position as a researcher who has read and thought about these texts. I'm not even sure if I should be doing it, you know. (11/09/18)

[2.4] The three quotes above are all excerpts from the field diary I kept while I was carrying out my primary research—interviews, in this case. All three were written in response to my growing awareness of my positionality. The first outlines how I felt approaching famous fan fiction authors, which was a nerve-racking experience, considering just how much I admired them as a fan and fellow author myself—even the vaunted position of academic could not ease the nerves, the fear that they would find a request for an interview to be weird or encroaching in some way. The second was a response to the exercise outlined in Hesse-Biber's (2006) paper, which provides prompts to start one off thinking about one's positionality. All of her considerations were to do with face-to-face interviews, whereas mine were digital—over email or Google Hangouts. I had not come across much literature
considering the differences in positionality over this kind of space—dispersed and disconnected from the legal identities of my participants—with one notable exception being Anna de Jong's (2015) paper on Facebook as a space for storytelling. Grammar was the only thing I could think of that would potentially trigger any unconscious bias I might have, considering the fact that for all fan fiction's boundary-pushing in content, participants' opinions on form tend to adhere to more generally acceptable cultural notions of what constitutes good writing (Fathallah 2017; my own 2018 research). The final quote is a response to some of my authors' reactions when I brought up theorists like Barthes and Foucault as provocations, so to speak. It felt important to consider positionality again here, because these authors and concepts had the potential to make my interviewees uncomfortable, especially as many of my theorists are Dead White Men™, and fan fiction is very much a haven for queer and female cultural producers (de Kosnik 2016; Minkel 2014).

[2.5] What I took away from all of the above is this idea that positionality is not just a lumpen thing, a box to tick before you carry merrily on your way. It is a social relation; a flexing exchange that is constantly, minutely, being (re)constituted as the interview carries on. It is different with each interviewee and each interview takes a different form, a different pace. With this in mind, I am going to continue this paper with a discussion on positionality as a social relation and how it relates to acafandom, proposing that both work as kinds of spectrum, and that this spectrum in turn has an impact on the negotiation of knowledge production.

3. Positionality as spectrum

[3.1] The idea of identity as something performative, (re)produced, rather than something absolute and fixed has been around for some time, evolving from work like Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* and becoming a taken-for-granted process in the world where identity categories become about interactions rather than objective absolutes (Dixon and Jones 2006). Theory such as this has also become standard in discussions of acafandom, the hybrid identity of an academic researcher who is also a participant of the fan communities they study (TWC Editor 2008). Acafan identity, I have argued, could be conceptualized somewhat like a spectrum, rather than just a middle-ground category between the two—a spectrum upon which one is constantly in motion, constantly (re)negotiating one's identity. Since identity is linked so strongly to positionality, it therefore follows that if one is constantly (re)negotiating one's identity, the same process will take place with regards to one's positionality. It feels different depending on where you are with the research process, what you are doing. To elucidate, here are two brief examples developed from the research diary extracts above.

[3.2] The nerves upon requesting interviews of famous fan fiction authors were, I think, a symptom of a shift more toward the fan end of the spectrum. I was more aware of myself as a fan of their work than as a student carrying out research; the power relations felt like they had shifted—some had turned and were acting on me instead of being propagated by me. This was a contravention of everything I had read previously regarding acafandom, where the power was assumed to all be in the hands of the researcher (Bode 2008; Jenkins 2008; Fathallah 2017). It is likely that most of it still is, and it does not mean that academics can
stop thinking about and taking responsibility for the power relations created by their research; however, the experience made me realize that sometimes my identity as a fan, and my position as a small, quiet author in my corner of AO3, will override the woman with research training and a project to complete.

[3.3] An instance in which the opposite occurred can be seen in the third example from the section above, where I was discussing texts with my interviewees. Here, I felt very much the awkward academic, bringing the opinions of all these Dead White Men into the sphere of majority female/nonbinary discussion and experience. During these exchanges, through which my interviewees were generally quite critical of the theorists, I found myself feeling like I had to side with my interviewees, like I had to shift myself further back down the spectrum toward fan and away from academic.

[3.4] Positionality could, to go even further, be related to the actual facts of knowledge production. Depending on how one constructs oneself as either a fan or an academic, it might depend how work is written or carried out—for example, someone more to the academic end of the spectrum might focus on relating fan knowledge to existing academic theory, whereas a researcher more on the fan end might focus more on fannish knowledge as a different kind of knowledge but still valid in its own right, or use it as a critique of academic theory. The likeliest result, with identity, positionality, and knowledge production, is going to be some kind of middle ground; but even within that, there are questions of which end of the spectrum is prioritized at any one given moment—which end of the spectrum will provide the most useful critical goggles with which to analyze any particular knowledge claims. Take, for example, the famous Roland Barthes essay "The Death of the Author" (1977). It makes interesting points about refusing to fix the meaning of a text and about the prioritization of the reader. However, as Kristina Busse (2017) points out, authorial identity is still extremely important for marginalized people, and the minute women and nonwhite people began to obtain the esteemed position of author, that pedestal began being ripped down by the white male academy. In this way, she appears to be using her background as a fan studies scholar, and perhaps as a fan herself, to set her position up in opposition to that of Roland Barthes and by extension the white male academy that has been the hegemonic narrative until recently, thus challenging the knowledges produced.

4. Concluding thoughts

[4.1] The most important thing about positionality is that it does not finish when the data collection finishes, and it carries on into the process of analyzing and writing up. Choosing arguments and data to prioritize is an exercise of power, and therefore positionality should still be present as a voice in the back of your mind, looking over your decisions and asking why you have chosen this particular respondent over another, or whether you are prioritizing one set of opinions in favor of another. Are you making a decision as a fan or as an academic? I found that it was harder to see myself as a fan when I had stepped away from the actual process of interviewing—I was still participating in fannish culture as I wrote up the dissertation, but suddenly it was as if this big divide between the two had sprung up.

[4.2] Perhaps a remedy would just be to keep the duality of your researching identity in the
back of your mind as you write; being an acafan means that you are writing a representation that comes from your own personal experience—it means you, the researcher, understand where your participants are coming from, because often you have been there, too. You are not commenting on something you do not know, like Benedict Cumberbatch did regarding Sherlock fan fiction (Minkel 2014); instead, you are embracing the in-betweenness of your role as both a fan and an academic. It has to be an embrace. There are rarely any easy answers when it comes to questions of identity and power relations—it is why we discuss them so endlessly. However, leaning in and embracing the complexity that exists throughout the entire research process and being aware of the fact that identity and positionality exist on spectrums that you are either at the mercy of or can use as a useful tool of knowledge production means that we might be more alert to the shifts in them or able to use them to our advantage.

5. References


Symposium

Fan users and platform studies

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[0.1] Abstract—An analysis of the issues and limitations inherent in platform studies considers what the field could offer fan studies despite such obstacles and notes some key concepts to keep in mind when considering a platform studies approach to fan studies work. Fan studies scholars may need to adapt certain elements of platform studies in order to suit both fan studies work and the wider cultural idea of what a platform is.

[0.2] Keywords—Ethics; Methodology; Reception


1. Introduction to platform studies

[1.1] Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost introduced the term *platform studies* in 2007 during the first HASTAC conference in Durham, North Carolina, and formalized this concept two years later in *Racing the Beam* (2009), the first book in MIT Press's Platform Studies series. According to its creators, platform studies explores "the relationships between these systems [platforms] and creativity, design, expression, and culture" (4). Montfort and Bogost define platforms as "the hardware and software design of standardized computing systems" (2) and as one of five layers of technology present in all media, with code, form/function, interface, and reception/operation being the other four (146). Overall, platform studies operates from the idea that culture and computing have a close-knit relationship: cultural contexts shape platform development, and platform affordances and internal cultures enable different means of creating, sharing, and discussing creative content.

[1.2] Thus, platform studies already appears to share important features with fan studies. To begin with, both are interested in certain modes of production, but both also acknowledge that such modes neither exist in a vacuum nor can be separated from their larger cultural contexts. Similarly, both platform studies and fan studies require scholars to acknowledge the existence of communities with specialized knowledges, niche interests, and activities, which are often located within online spaces.

[1.3] Many important fan studies projects already build from the acknowledgment that platforms can influence, inform, or inhibit both fan works and the communities that make
use of them. Because most platforms are for-profit technologies, they open up important questions about the possibilities of maintaining a gift economy such as fandom (Booth 2017; Stanfill 2019), the intersections between technological affordance and fannish practice (Stanfill 2019; Stein 2015, 2018), and the ethics of moderation (Gillespie 2018) and observation (Busse 2018; Jensen 2016; Stein and Busse 2009). In other cases, fan studies scholarship that acknowledges platforms' foundational role in new media fandoms is also acknowledging and appreciating fan users' central though still often "indiscernible" role (Apperley and Parikka 2018, 354) in the sociotechnical nature of that platform (Gillespie 2018, 18).

[1.4] However, despite the overlap, intersections, and dialogue between fan studies and the tenets of platform studies, there are few formal mergers between the two fields—an absence that could stem from a number of factors. In this brief essay, I explore some issues and limitations inherent in Montfort and Bogost's original conception of platform studies, discuss what platform studies could offer fan studies despite such obstacles, and note some key concepts to keep in mind when considering a platform studies approach to fan studies work.

2. Testing for bugs: Known issues and limitations of platform studies

[2.1] The very first issue regarding platform studies stems from its creators themselves: Montfort and Bogost conceptualize the term in two different ways, each with its own distinct connotations. For instance, in their HASTAC talk, they describe platform studies as "a rich approach that can provide a variety of insights about new media's evolution" (2007, 190, italics added), while in Racing the Beam, they use it as the plural of a term more analogous to case study (2009, 150), thus describing an individual analysis rather than an approach. Muddying the water still further, Bogost has claimed that "platform studies isn't a particular approach; you can be more formalist or materialist, more anthropological or more of a computer scientist…you'll still be doing platform studies, as long as you consider the platform deeply" (quoted in Jenkins 2009; italics added) and Montfort has insisted that the term doesn't denote "a methodology or even a method" (2018, ¶ 5). Thus, the term's creators themselves are often vague about what precisely platform studies entails, including whether they envision it as a tool, a concept, an approach, a field, or something else entirely.

[2.2] Despite this opacity, though, other scholars have taken up platform studies as a methodology, albeit with the common critique that "Montfort and Bogost primarily performed platform studies rather than explicate[d] its method" (Apperley and Parikka 2018, 350). Scholars in disciplines ranging from computer science to communication (Gillespie 2018), video game studies (Apperley and Parikka 2018), film and media studies (Anable 2018; Leorke 2012; Weltevrede and Borra 2016), cultural studies (Anable 2018), and even analog game studies with no digital component whatsoever (Bellomy 2017; Švelch 2016) have all drawn from platform studies' evaluation of creative content alongside the platforms that enable and house it, which is the same central concept that I imagine would be most productive to fan studies. The fan communities, cultures, practices, and works that are created and supported on one platform will be significantly different from those evident on another platform, and much of this difference comes down to what each platform's technological features enable users to do. Because exploring the attributes of a fandom
already involves thinking about the platform (or, less commonly, offline space) where these attributes are observed, formalizing this implicit treatment through a platform studies methodology can increase a fan studies project's transparency while also decreasing potential biases and assumptions.

[2.3] The second known issue with platform studies as it stands is that Montfort and Bogost work from a technically limited definition of the term platform, using it in strictly computational terms. Indeed, in their "Frequently Questioned Answers," Bogost and Montfort (2009) commit an entire "Misconception" segment to the idea that "everything these days is a platform" (1, 3). However, others have pointed out that the definition of platform has been expanded to more "conceptual" meanings (Gillespie 2010, 352) that are deployed knowingly, politically, and strategically (Gillespie 2018) so that private companies can try to deny responsibility for the content they host (Judd 2019, ¶ 83).

[2.4] It might be easier, then, to follow Weltevrede and Borra (2016) in thinking of platform studies as divided into two camps, with Gillespie and his peers focusing on platform politics while Montfort and Bogost, and their followers emphasize "platform as architectures" (1). While both of these perspectives do "recognize how platforms preconfigure specific practices through designed features and functions" (1), they approach this shared admission from divergent angles: Gillespie (2018) finds that it is "too late" (20) to avoid the widely-accepted "sociotechnical" definition of a platform (18), while Montfort and Bogost continue to conceive of platform studies in computational terms. Fan studies can certainly draw from either camp, as Casey Fiesler's work demonstrates in its range from discussions of fandom migrations (Dym and Fiesler 2018) to a case study on the incorporation of feminist human-computer interaction (HCI) values in on AO3's design (Fiesler, Morrison, and Bruckman 2016): the former focuses more on the cultural or political ramifications of fans' moves across different platforms, with their varying conceptions of public space, while the latter emphasizes the more architectural aspects of AO3, such as its open-source code. So the platform politics and the platform architectures factions each offer something different but valuable to fan studies projects, depending on whether scholars are more interested in the cultural or the technical side of exploring how and why a fan community or fan work exists on a particular platform and in its particular relation to a canon text.

[2.5] A third known issue with platform studies comes from scholars who point out more theoretical limitations in Montfort and Bogost's work. Some note that platform studies implies a teleological linearity and that the MIT Press Platform Studies series "risks reducing platform studies to a generic formula that limits, rather than expands, the approach's contribution to studies of digital culture" (Leorke 2012, 258), while others worry that the singular focus on computing could exclude interdisciplinary scholars from other fields (Jenkins 2009). Still others point out that Montfort and Bogost's initial concept tends to underrecognize users' own roles in that vaunted relationship between creative content and platform (Apperley and Parikka 2018), particularly by ignoring bodies and experiences as additional "systems differently encoded by race, ability, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality" (Anable 2018, 136). As Apperley and Parikka note, ideally users should be considered "central to platform studies" (354)— and I maintain that fan studies as a field would have an incredible advantage in doing so.
Put another way, fan studies can address one of platform studies' most outstanding initial limitations by focusing on fans in their role as platform users: fan users, we might say. The shortcoming that Apperley and Parikka (2018) note above is that users play a particular role in bridging the spaces between a platform and the creative content on it; they argue that Montfort and Bogost don't consider this role enough. Fan studies, however, is already inherently invested in such users, and can even bring new insights to the politics-versus-architecture conversation specifically because fan works are so rarely the type of creative content that a platform was initially created to support, facilitate, or host (note 1).

Fan studies scholars should be aware of these three issues—ambiguity about what platform studies is, different definitions of what constitutes a platform, and theoretical limitations of the concept itself. Nevertheless, as I demonstrate below, fan studies is already doing important work on platforms using a combination of the platform politics and platform architectures approaches, even if the term platform studies itself is largely absent from this work. These existing connections make it important to consider what a more formal platform studies approach or methodology might look like within fan studies, and why it might take these particular forms.

3. Reimagining a platform studies (approach) for fan studies (work)

As mentioned above, much important fan studies work builds major arguments regarding field-specific methods, ethical issues, and their impacts upon the term platform (Booth 2012; Busse 2018; Jensen 2016; Stein and Busse 2009). So does significant scholarship on fan practices and fan production (Ellcessor 2018; Hills 2017; Hinck 2019; Morris 2018; Scott 2019; Stein 2015). Within these bodies of work, fan studies scholars often mention that a platform's visibility and accessibility to nonusers, as well as that platform's features, ownership, and culture(s), all influence what kinds of fans and fan works can be found there; likewise, these platform-specific factors all impact how scholars should approach those fans and fan works. To take two examples from among many, platforms are central to the ethical stance that the fan work "is never just 'a text' but [also] connected with the community surrounding [it]" (Jensen 2016, 262) and also to the realization that the work produced within fan spaces is intended only for certain publics (Busse and Hellekson 2012).

Taken together, the scholarship that I’ve traced in part above, plus the ways in which fans tend to be early adopters of new technologies (Ellcessor 2018; Jenkins 2006), all signal that fan studies' interest in platforms will not diminish any time soon, and rightfully so. Similarly, the trajectories and interests discussed above also demonstrate that fan studies already "[considers] the platform deeply" (Jenkins 2009, ¶ 5) from a variety of platform politics and platform architectures approaches, even if these specific terms are not always in evidence.

Unfortunately, the realization that fan studies could continue to benefit from a platform studies approach does not automatically translate into a clear-cut methodology to replace Montfort and Bogost's own rather opaque one, which mainly promotes "the investigation of underlying computing systems and how they enable, constrain, shape, and support the creative work that is done on them" (Montfort and Bogost 2009, vii). At the same time,
though, the flexibility inherent in adapting this opaque approach may actually prove to be a strength when, as Karen Hellekson argues, "any methodology created in a field as fast-moving as fan studies would be obsolete within months" (Brooker, Duffet, and Hellekson 2018, 69). Ultimately, then, it may be more productive to sketch out important considerations for a fan studies–platform studies approach than it would be to outline hard-and-fast rules.

[3.4] First, a platform studies approach in fan studies work should consider and demonstrate how the project will deal with those three challenges named in the previous section: ambiguity, differing definitions, and theoretical limitations. That is, the fan studies project should make its own relationship to these three obstacles clear: whether it accepts/engages/builds from Montfort and Bogost's (2007, 2009, 2009b; Jenkins 2009; Montfort 2018) initial ambiguity, which of their differing definitions it has stakes in, and whether it engages with any of the limitations other critics have described.

[3.5] Second, a platform studies approach to fan studies work on platform "content providers" (Gillespie 2018, 19), such as Tumblr, Twitter, AO3, or FanFiction.net, might also clarify whether this project draws more from the platform politics angle à la Gillespie or the platform architectures position assumed by Montfort and Bogost. That is, what will the fan studies project be considering more deeply—the computational-slash-technical side of the platform and how it works, or the more social and community-oriented part and how/where/why fan users employ those features? Or perhaps both in equal measure?

[3.6] Third, a fan studies project going this route is probably best served by outlining its own specific platform studies approach. As I hope to have shown with this brief essay, there are a whole host of interesting and productive concepts at play within platform studies more generally, such that the fan studies project can engage with ideas including "online content providers" (Gillespie 2010, 347), moderation as commodity (Gillespie 2018), larger cultural impact and influence (Montfort and Bogost 2009), simplification of delivery and development (Bogost and Montfort 2008), and more. Whatever the researcher's selections, though, it will be crucial to outline the fan studies project's specific methodology and engagement with platform studies concepts.

[3.7] Here, the flexibility and transparency with which we approach the ethics of fan studies work can also summarize my recommendations regarding a platform studies approach: "Within this complex environment, fan studies researchers must continue to interrogate our own research goals, motivations and protocols each time we enter a fan community or examine a fan work" (Zubernis and Davis 2016, 304). The three general considerations I've outlined above can be distilled to articulate a comparable suggestion: because each platform that fans utilize has its own forms of accessibility, ownership, features, and culture(s), the platform studies approach to each one should take the existence of such differences into account, even as platform studies itself can also broaden fan studies' capacity to study these differences.

4. Note
Archival platforms like AO3 and FanFiction.net are counterexamples, since hosting fan works is their main purpose, but fans were not the only or even the main audience of purported users for social media and communication platforms such as Twitter and even Tumblr. Streaming platforms and mainstream publishing platforms complicate matters further, since their design for fan-users is intentional but limited. On these platforms, fan-users are expected to access, consume, and rate content, and sometimes even to curate it in limited ways, but there tends to be little explicit architectural or cultural support for other forms of engagement, particularly transformative ones.

5. References


Symposium

Methodological model for fictocritical fan fiction as research

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[0.1] Abstract—Distanced and objective research methodologies that generate a divide between the practitioner and their practice present a need for an authentic model that is more representative of the immersive, connected, and subjective experience of the writer-researcher. Fictocritical fan fiction as research methodology suggests a means of investigating the field of fan fiction studies from within through engagement in the practice of fan fiction itself. An exemplar study of X-Files (1993–2018) fandom shows how the creative researcher may authentically engage in fandom research and fan fiction practice while maintaining the necessary level of rigor appropriate for research.

[0.2] Keywords—Autoethnography; Creative work; Exegesis; Fictocriticism; Practice-led


1. Introduction

[1.1] Fan fiction has been explored through many lenses in fan studies' short but rich lifespan as a discipline—as a creative writing practice, as performance art, as a form of social commentary, and much more. In designing my doctoral research project, "Fandom Files: Fanfiction, Fictocriticism, and Creative Writing Pedagogy," which explores fan fiction as a pedagogical tool and a method of creative arts research, I found a need for an appropriately sensitive and rigorous approach that builds upon the foundational work of those who came before me. Such an approach needed not only to accommodate research into fan fiction but also to establish fan fiction itself as research, that is, as an outcome of research practice.

[1.2] This short paper focuses on a specific methodological process for investigating fan fiction and the communities that generate it through engagement with the dynamic social and creative practices of fan fiction. Founded on the principles of practice-led research, this bricolage-like approach mimics the multifaceted and fluid nature of online fandom by reappropriating best-fit methodologies from the field. It draws, in particular, on the noninvasive methods of ethnography and autoethnography—such as immersion, case study,
informal interview, and field observation—and fictocriticism. Fictocriticism, an originally anthropological research methodology blending fact, fiction, archival research, and ethnography, is an approach in which findings are explored, critiqued, and ultimately presented seamlessly as a single multipurpose, often memoir-like text (Gibbs 2005). This model, fictocritical fan fiction as research methodology, enables the creative researcher to engage in fandom research and fan fiction practice in an authentic manner while maintaining a level of rigor appropriate for postgraduate and postdoctoral research.

2. Practice-led research and the creative arts

[2.1] Practice-led research adopts the postmodernist perspective on the nature of knowledge, emphasizing that knowledge is not absolute and may be embodied in an artwork or an act, not only in numbers or formal texts (Smith and Dean 2009). It also requires, by its very name, both practice and research, both act and reflection. While both elements vary wildly between projects, in maintaining its validity as a methodology, practice-led research must be appropriately robust and rigorous (Smith and Dean 2009; Stewart 2001).

[2.2] In the creative arts, practice-based research is very often considered to be research involving an act of artistic creation, such as of a painting. However, artist-researchers have questioned the merit of creative works generated for the sole purpose of research, noting the impact of strict methodological restrictions and controls, as well as the demand that practitioners be distanced or removed, upon the creative process (Buckley 2014; Gibbs 2005; Stewart 2001). Are works created solely for research still art? Are they even worthy of study? The creation of art for art's sake without the boundaries and measures expected in most other forms of research may support the belief commonly held among other disciplines that arts practice research is frivolous and lacking in critical depth, whereas art created as research output devalues the practice of artistic creation itself (Webb and Brien 2011).

[2.3] The careful selection of best-fit methodologies to form a bricolage approach avoids limiting, misrepresenting, or impacting findings by applying inappropriate methods considered correct according to more rigid methodologies (Barrett and Bolt 2007; Stewart 2001; Webb and Brien 2011). Attempts to force an alien methodology upon a research subject may fail to fully encapsulate its true nature or even, as in some fan fiction research involving the study of a community of human participants, invalidate or unduly influence findings with its invasiveness. Selecting methodologies native to the field of research allows the practice to unfold naturally, ensuring both a genuine creative process and a product worthy of critical reflection and analysis (Smith and Dean 2009). In keeping with methods already natural to the practice of online fan fiction writing, this model employs autoethnographic tools—those being the methods of community observation, communication, and assimilation in the community under observation—and the tool of writing itself, in this instance presented as a form of fictocriticism.

3. (Auto)ethnography and online fandom

[3.1] Online fandom has become an immersive, multisite social environment with a wealth
of embodied and objectified cultural capital (Johnson 2004, as cited in Barrett and Bolt 2007), not unlike a traditional community. As such, autoethnography has become a popular methodology in fan studies, as it is a social research methodology that explores cultural experience through personal interactions with communities (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). As fan studies research is usually concerned with a creative practice that is inextricably tied to the community in which it is situated, autoethnographic approaches enable the researcher to engage effectively with both the social creative process and critical research without compromising the integrity of either. Autoethnographic research challenges more traditional academic representations of people, communities, and experiences by objective outsiders by instead seeking to capture the lived experience of those it studies through socially conscious interactions, noninvasive qualitative research methods, and honest, holistic, personal depictions of findings (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). However, traditional ethnographic methods, such as fieldwork, community observation, surveys, interviews, case studies, and secondary data/document analysis (Whitehead 2005), are also employed in fan studies.

[3.2] Some previous studies of the fan fiction community have used online ethnography (Black 2008; McGrath-Kerr 2006). In such studies, which do not include a research focus on the creative practice of writing fan fiction, the need to include the perspectives of the practitioner-researcher has been less significant. For instance, Rebecca W. Black (2008) explored the role of fan fiction practice and community engagement in English language acquisition by teens learning English. Similarly, though on a smaller scale, Rachel McGrath-Kerr (2006) employed an ethnographic approach in her study of female fans of the sci-fi television show *Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007) and their perceptions of female identity and portrayal in the source media.

[3.3] Using a different approach but also examining female fans and their interactions in the real world, Katherine Larsen and Lynn S. Zubernis (2013, 2011) undertook a long-term autoethnographic study chronicling the early years of the *Supernatural* (2005–) fandom. The study, which was not originally intended to include the researchers themselves, resulted in two different texts: a critical, objective analysis of findings from the ethnography, published as *Fandom at the Crossroads: Celebration, Shame, and Fan/Producer Relationships* (2011), and a nonfiction account of the personal learnings and memorable experiences of the researchers, as well as the emotional costs of their research and fannish activities, published as *Fangasm: Supernatural Fangirls* (2013). Read together, these texts convey the full scope of knowledge and experience gained from this research. Autoethnographic methods used include fieldwork, both structured and informal interviews, participant observations, secondary data analysis, and, differing significantly from more distanced ethnographic studies, the researchers' personal feelings and their reactions to and perceptions of their experiences.

[3.4] What is significant in these examples is the use of the specific ethnographic tools, both classical and innovative, qualitative and quantitative, that best fit the project and most effectively enable the researcher to understand the community or cultural system being studied (Whitehead 2005). As in the aforementioned autoethnographic and ethnographic studies (Black 2008; Larsen and Zubernis 2013, 2011; McGrath-Kerr 2006), using
fictocritical fan fiction research enables the researcher to explore their research questions through engagement with a single popular fandom by employing ethnographic methodological tools, including fieldwork, case studies of career fan fiction writers, textual analyses of samples of fiction works, surveys, and interviews (Whitehead 2005), and autoethnographic tools, such as a reflection or affective response. Unlike prior studies, my PhD project also explores the practice of fan fiction writing, revealing knowledge about the artform not discernible simply through reading it or reading about it (Perry 2007), in a creative form through which further inquiry may be taken: fictocriticism.

4. Fictocriticism and fan fiction

[4.1] While relatively new, even radical (Gibbs 2005), fictocritical creative writing is gaining ground as a legitimate research practice in the humanities and arts (Brewster 2013; Haseman 2007). The term fictocriticism was coined by anthropologist Michael Taussig and continues to be used as an ethnographic, autoethnographic, and biographic research tool, both as a method of inquiry and a means of presenting and disseminating research findings (Brewster 2013). As a method, fictocriticism takes an interdisciplinary approach to human subject research, employing various techniques and conventions from traditional genre forms, both scientific and literary, in order to explore, interpret, critique, and represent many facets of knowledge simultaneously (Brewster 2013; Gibbs 2005; Nettelbeck 1998). This use of fictional forms allows researchers to more truthfully investigate and reflect the human experience, making room for such elements as doubt, contradiction, ambivalence, and feeling, which are likely to be excluded in traditional research reports (Brewster 2013; Gibbs 2005). In representing a community or cultural system, the socially just ethnographer is charged with using the best tools available to her, in both data collection and data presentation and dissemination (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011; Whitehead 2005).

[4.2] Fictocriticism offers researchers a means of resistance against restrictive, rigid, even boring (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005) forms such as the essay or report, forms that have been condemned by some for their failings in communicating the complexities of human and creative research (Brewster 2013; Buckley 2014; Gibbs 2005; Haseman 2007; Richardson and St. Pierre 2005). At the same time, this patchwork approach to exploring through writing mimics the fan fiction experience—characters from Fandom A thrown into the world of Fandom B, faced with mature ethical themes and written as a series of songs. In fan fiction, we cherish any combination that allows writers to bring out the meanings, truths, and motives they seek to know or express, without their being expected to write PG-rated screenplays simply because this is the original form of the source media.

[4.3] Far from writing for art's sake, fictocriticism represents a blending of creative and critical forms to explore the practice under study through writing practice (Perry 2007). Demands for its rigor and integrity come from within, as Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) and Haseman (2007) have expressed in their works. Similar to Larsen and Zubernis's (2013, 2011) study, fictocritical fan fiction research will produce two textual products—one critically reflective, one personal and creative—that together represent a fuller, more holistic understanding of the project's findings than can be gleaned from only one or the other (Perry 2007).
In "Fandom Files: Fan fiction, Fictocriticism, and Creative Writing Pedagogy," a full-length, case fic-style *X-Files* fan fiction is woven into the thesis, allowing the iconic characters of Mulder and Scully to enthusiastically chase wild ideas and then critically analyze the findings against established theory. They mount their investigation in the research aims, explore the case history and background in the literature review, justify their approach in the methodology, and unravel continuing mysteries as the chapters progress. A chapter about copyright is narrativized as a higher authority shutting down the case, to the protests of a vocal community, with Mulder and Scully then left to argue about their place in a shaky, terminated investigation. This allows me to examine the literature around these issues while unpacking the concerns and opinions of interviewees, and to contrast the two viewpoints both in critical text and through the characters, but also to explore and give voice to my own position as someone participating in this community.

An ongoing aim of this research is to explore the learning enabled through fan fiction practice, and this is supported by the fictocritical fan fiction through self-exploration, self-insertion, and reflection. The integrated nature of the two textual components is, while somewhat experimental (Gibbs 2005), intended to bring together the meanings simultaneously being brought about by creative and reflective practice while honoring the bricolage nature of online fandom, the writing process, and this model's multifaceted design (Baker 2012; Webb and Brien 2011). In situating the author as central and fundamental (Brewster 2013; Nettelbeck 1998), and by employing the elements of fictional, playful writing as methodological research tools (Brewster 2013; Gibbs 2005), fictocriticism dovetails ideally with autoethnographic methodologies in a practice-led approach.

### 5. Conclusion

Several decades of quality research establishing the vast and diverse fields of fan fiction studies has provided us with many exemplary methodologies on which to model future studies, and this very brief paper does not intend to suggest that there is a single, correct way to do fan fiction research. In this discipline, such a suggestion would be akin to claiming that only canon got the ending right or that one ship is more legitimate than another. Rather, this paper intends to contribute to the discussion around methodologies being used in fan fiction research and to offer a model for positioning fictocritical fan fiction writing practice as both a mode and a product of research. The use of such a model assures the researcher that the study's design is appropriately robust, without compromising the authentic fan fiction writing process being studied, and, hopefully, without undermining the unbridled joy of the fandom experience.

### 6. Appendix

The fictocritical component of this paper and its corresponding chapter in the final thesis is live on Archive of Our Own at [https://archiveofourown.org/works/16119566](https://archiveofourown.org/works/16119566).

### 7. References


[0.1] Abstract—Autoethnography may be regarded as writing of and about the self as embedded in culture; however, neurotypical status affects autoethnographic perception, and such so-called autiethnographies can cross the boundaries of humanism by providing examples of metahumanist subjectivity. As an autistic gamer, I engage with games in a different way, showcasing how (dis)abled gaming, neurotypicality, fannishness, and sociopolitical responses are never independent from one another. Autiethnographies blur the limitations of science and creative writing, and may be expressed through other forms of communication, such as a performance, a podcast, or a work of visual art.

[0.2] Keywords—Autism; Autoethnography; Disability; Ethnography; Fan art; Gaming; Intersectionality; Ministeck Stalin


1. Introduction

[1.1] This article is about the methodology I use in both my doctoral work and the book I am working on now, a close reading of the genealogy of a cultural icon speaking to the imagination and consciousness through the lens of what I call my "autiethnography"—a writing of and about the autistic self. Neurotypical status (note 1) is quite an important aspect of intersectionality, given how it affects autoethnographic perception. Autiethnographies can thus not only tell stories about autism as a special way of being-in-the-world, but also cross the boundaries of humanism by giving examples of metahumanist subjectivity (note 2). Another reason why I think it is important for me to express my personal experiences is, to paraphrase Gloria Wekker (in her 2006 portrait of Misi Juliette Cummings), that while my narrative is a uniquely individual story, it is as much a collective story, a story of a female gamer and acafan (note 3) with Asperger syndrome. By zooming in and out in the writing of an autiethnography, issues of intersectionality versus simultaneity (its opposite) can be addressed as well (note 4).

[1.2] This article will open with an exploration of the concept of storytelling and an overview of the literature on autoethnographic research and its particular usefulness and
implementation for gamers with disabilities. After that I will introduce my idea of the autoethnography and give some personal examples of it. I will conclude with a case study as an example of a nonwritten autoethnography, the Ministeck Stalin I use to critique the many problematic aspects of turn-based strategy video games.

2. Autoethnography

[2.1] There is a clear gap in the autoethnographic research on autistic gaming experiences, as well as in the autoethnographic research on turn-based strategy games. Therefore, through the lens of autoethnography, I am working on a book (working title: #KingAlfred) that explores the genealogy of a cultural item: how images travel within structures that never die, following the (semiotic) traces of where the figure has been and what its function was, how it was used to construct meanings, and so on. Because there is no scholarly writing about the depiction of Alfred the Great in video games, I hope that I can make a contribution toward an understanding of historical reimagining and identity-building methods in games that will be beneficial in the context of imaginary creature studies, where virtual manifestations of historical figures remain underexplored as well (note 5).

[2.2] As a method of examining how gamers might perceive this representation, I have chosen to write an autoethnography, an autistic autoethnography. The combination of autobiography and ethnography can be regarded as writing of and about the self, embedded in culture. The way I use it is very similar to the practice of autoethnography as mobilized by Magdalena Górska (2016): "[it] is not mobilized here in the form of a method that produces a 'research object.' It, rather, provides a specific corpo-affective attention and sensitivity through which I ask questions, intervene, and analyze" (197). Storytelling might be a rather new method of performing scholarly research, but it is in its essence something very natural to do. When an event seems incomprehensible, people will try to make a story of it so that the misunderstood becomes recognizable (Olthof and Vermetten 1994, 104). The construction of stories is therefore a very common form of interpretation, as by organizing observations and by creating cohesion within a story, people make sense of the world around them (Crossley 2000, 10).

[2.3] The need for explanatory stories seems even stronger when events force an entirely new storyline (Baart 2002, 40). In order to get a crisis under control, the construction of stories is inevitable: we describe what happens to be able to understand it (Olthof and Vermetten 1994, 103). In this way, storytelling seems to be an inescapable reaction to adversity. As the story changes continuously, it greatly affects the narrator and the narrator's vision of the past, the present, and the future (Frank 1995, 55). This form of scholarly writing is very much connected to what Donna Haraway (1988) has called "situated knowledges"—knowledge that is located, embodied, and marked by subjective experiences.

[2.4] The application of autoethnography to gaming has generated a lot of interest, in consideration of the versatility and practicality that autoethnography brings to the scene. Put succinctly, autoethnography allows for gaming to be more relatable and realistic to the player because it mirrors personal aspects that the gamers can relate to, by examining the gaming experience through the lens of the player's reactions (e.g., Miller 2008; Borchard 2015;
Cuttell 2015). There already has been a great deal of scholarly research conducted using the theory of autoethnography in gaming to explore a gamer's subjective reactions (e.g., Miller 2008; Borchard 2015; Cuttell 2015). Many researchers have focused on using autoethnography to outline how the gaming culture discriminates against disabled persons, thereby rendering gaming a problematic or impossible activity for many disabled persons (Romano 2014). Others have explored autoethnographic studies on the impact of gaming in dealing with (so-called) psychological disorders and trauma. Predominantly, autoethnographic research in gaming has been used to gain a better understanding of sports fans to tailor the games to be more suitable for the sports fandom. Additionally, autoethnographic research on sports fandom has been used in dealing with the obsessive passions often found among sports fans (Parry 2012).

[2.5] Despite the existent corpus on autoethnography in gaming, there is a dearth of information concerning the suitability of the practice with the solitary gamer (Shaw 2012). Additionally, most autoethnographic research in gaming has focused on role-playing games because these game worlds seem like they were made for playing the anthropologist; as Jakub Majewski (2018) said about Skyrim, "the player learns about society and culture as an engaged insider who must personally talk to others and learn ways of doing in the right contexts and locations" (150). There is a clear gap in autoethnographic research about turn-based strategy games, which is odd, considering the popularity of this genre. Most autoethnographies on gaming also do not consider the extraludic narratives (Anderson 2018), the game narratives that are communicated outside of the game, which for me as a gamer form an inseparable part of my experience.

[2.6] On the whole, the subject of autoethnography in gaming has been explored to some extent, but there is ample room for additional work, especially when it comes to autoethnographies written by someone from a minority group—which I am, as an autistic gamer. Moreover, I find it strange that little attention is given to the challenges that are faced by researchers who use nontraditional methodologies such as autoethnography; it is a common occurrence that much of these researchers' work is not well received on social media (Campbell 2017).

3. Autieethnography

[3.1] The label "autism" refers to a range of complex neurological aspects that lead to the autistic brain being wired differently. But just like the label on a jam pot might list the ingredients but reveal little about the taste or one's experience in eating the jam, the label that a person likes to identify him/herself with tells little about the lived experiences. What does being autistic mean for an autistic person? I plead for a type of fan studies research from the angle that everyone has different perceptions in mind and that the human memory is more reconstructive than reproductive in nature. That means that nobody can accurately interpret our actions and feelings without us expressing them themselves.

[3.2] In first-person writing, the narrator is not the author but rather a (re)construction, a virtual persona that allows for space to think and interpret. As Teunie van der Palen (2014) explained, "autism offers a position from which to regard this zeitgeist which it is said to
characterise" (3). Autism will help us to practice humanism, as most of the existing literature about the realities of autism is codified as uncontroversial, commoditized, and uncritical (Said 2004, 22, 28). As a method to offer an impression of these lived experiences, a significant part of my scholarly work consists of creating what I call an autiethnographies: forms of autoethnography by someone who identifies as being on the autistic spectrum.

[3.3] In my case, autiethnography is based on three pillars. First and foremost is my experiential expertise as an autistic person as well as the reflection on it from various angles (mostly psychological theories). Second is the scholarly discourse—academic research on autism (within game) studies, musicology, sociology, gender studies, disability studies, and so forth. Third is my perspective from counseling children with autism. (I also graduated in applied child psychology, with a focus on the effect of music on children with autism.) To theoretically frame my views and experiences, I like to build on a lot of different theories from various disciplines. It is as though I am walking through a secondhand shop and taking everything that looks interesting. It does not matter what it was designed for earlier so long as I can adjust it to help me. Also, I do not want to limit myself by only shopping in preselected departments.

[3.4] My approach is similar to what Jack Halberstam (writing as Judith, in 2011) has called "low theory" (a term adapted from Stuart Hall's work) as a model of thinking that "revels in the detours, twists and turns through knowing and confusion" to employ new dimensions of "the unplanned, the unexpected, the improvised, and the surprising" (15) with the aim to "push through the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing, and into a more chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing" (2). It is important that autiethnographies are being written as a commentary on the norms and beliefs about autism based on writings by nonautistic people about people living with autistic conditions. A personal and true experience can only be illuminated by self-writing (Kronstein 2017). Through autiethnography, others can truly understand the identity of an autistic person subjectively.

[3.5] As an autistic gamer, I engage with games in a different way. For example, I am much more focused on the details, and I have difficulty keeping track of the whole game play. For this reason, I altered the game *Fallout: New Vegas* (Bethesda Softworks, 2010) in such a way that the nonplayer characters (NPCs) who want to shoot at me immediately drop dead—this gives me time to examine all the little, beautiful graphic details to my heart's content. Another aspect of my gameplay is that I quickly become attached to my virtual characters; this is why I hacked Nadia (my character from *Fallout*) into *Wasteland 2* (Deep Silver, 2014) as well. This was a trick I had done many times before as a kid in creating my own games; for example, on my Dad's 386 DOS PC, I made Roger Wilco from Sierra On-Line's Space Quest series into an NPC in an altered King's Quest series (Sierra Entertainment, 1980–), with some platform levels featuring both Commander Keen (from the id Software games) and Yoshi (from Nintendo's Super Mario games). Also, because I am very sensitive to sound and music, I often hear what Gorbman (1987) has called "unheard melodies"—the background or wallpaper music in games—and I love to play them on my piano, cello, and flutes. These personal examples showcase how gaming, neurotypicality, fannishness, and sociopolitical responses are never independent from one another. They show that
autiethnographies are not always expressed through writing alone, which is also the case with Ministeck Stalin, my case study.

4. Case study: Ministeck Stalin

[4.1] Another character that I met on the 386 PC was Stalin, one of the playable leaders in Sid Meier's Civilization (MicroProse, 1991). Twenty years later, I wanted to personally respond to seeing a genocidal leader as a character in a game. Therefore, I ran a slightly altered version of the DOSBox emulation software on my Linux system, which allowed me to run this old video game and make a screenshot that could be rastered in GIMP image editing software. Armed with this rendering of the image I had remembered, I started to re-create it in Ministeck, which is a LEGO-like toy system for making mosaic pictures (with different colored pieces that have pins on their back, with which they are attached to appropriately perforated plastic plates).

[4.2] "But why?" you might ask (and indeed this often has been asked). First of all, I really like working with Ministeck—the focus on detail and need for repetitive movements really fit my autism. And the esthetics of the finished products are very similar to the pixelated art of my favorite retro games. But more importantly, I wanted to make an intervention by "changing the stories," as Haraway has put it. My Ministeck Stalin is a kind of anti-fan art that comments on the representation of Joseph Dzhugashvili in the game Civilization. It is not a parody—it is an observation about how we deal with that piece of history.

[4.3] As a child, I encountered Stalin in my game as "leader of the Russians"; as an adult, I see young people on the train wearing the hammer and sickle symbol. Similarly, if I were to see Hitler in a child's play then find myself on the train with passengers sporting swastikas, that would provoke great moral indignation. Stalin is one of the worst war criminals of recent history—the number of people who underwent an unnatural death during his reign is estimated at twenty million, plus another such number to comprise the Russian soldiers and civilians killed by the Germans in World War II. But in Civ, Stalin is depicted like a clownsque cartoon character.

[4.4] My Civ-Stalin is exemplary and symbolic for the many problems in representations through computer games. Many turn-based single or multiplayer strategy games have colonizing, if not fascist tendencies. They encourage colonial strategies (one game is even called Colonization) and are rather US-centric—for example, in their distribution of the world's "wonders." This is a very topical problem and has been noted by other game scholars as well. For example, Dom Ford (2016) demonstrated in his essay in Game Studies that Civilization V is also a very problematic game in terms of (post-)colonial thinking. And Alexander Galloway's Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture (2006) critiques the whole Civilization series for "its nationalism and imperialism, its expansionist logic, as well as its implicit racism and classism." Representation is often problematic in cases of historical figures such as Stalin, as well as in the images provided for minority groups.

5. Conclusion
Autoethnography is a particular form of storytelling, a combination of autobiography and ethnography, that can be regarded as writing of and about the self, embedded in culture. In terms of intersectionality, neurotypical status affects autoethnographic perception. Because autism is a bodily experience, autiethnographies can cross the boundaries of humanism by providing examples of metahumanist subjectivity.

As an autistic gamer, I engage with games in a different way, which can enrich our understanding of the perception of a particular game. I might notice unheard melodies and visual details that neurotypical gamers overlook. My personal examples showcase how gaming, neurotypicality, fannishness, and sociopolitical responses are never independent from one another for me. Moreover, my case study shows that this approach is not limited to writing.

Autiethnographies are already blurring the limitations of science and creative writing, but their border-crossing does not have to stop there. One's lived experience can also be empathized with when it is not written down but expressed through other forms of communication—like a performance, a podcast, or a work of visual art. It is my hope that this technique can contribute toward broader understandings of people on the autism spectrum as well as of perceived experiences of playing a game.

6. Acknowledgments

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7. Notes

1. With "neurotypical," I refer to the term used by the autism community to describe what society refers to as "normal," aka not displaying or characterized by autistic or other neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behavior.

2. In the definition of Jaime del Val and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (2010), metahumanism is "a critique of some of humanism's foundational premises such as the free will, autonomy and superiority of anthropoi due to their rationality" (¶ 1).

3. An acafan (also aca-fan and Aca/Fan) is an academic who identifies as a fan and vice versa, or in the words of Henry Jenkins, "a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic."

4. With "intersectionality," I refer to both the sociological term in general and to the specific intersection of the neurodivergence and autoethnographies, in which autiethnographies can represent this intersection.

5. My PhD thesis does something similar. It is on how fan art about the cyborg mermaid can empower misfits, in my case the autistic misfit. All case studies were found in the realm of
8. References


Symposium

Diving into the lacuna: Fan studies, methodologies, and mending the gaps

Dawn Walls-Thumma

[0.1] Abstract—With its autoethnographic tradition, fan studies research sometimes draws from similar intellectual and emotional impulses as the creation of fan works themselves, namely the perception of a lack and the need to repair that gap. Likewise, methodologies can intentionally or inadvertently respond to gaps in the scholarship.

[0.2] Keywords—Fan fiction; J. R. R. Tolkien; Surveys


1. Origin stories

[1.1] My fan fiction origin story begins, like many others, with a lacuna—a gap, an interstice in the text. I had recently discovered fan fiction based upon J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* (1977), the myths and history that precede his more famous *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), and I was reading it voraciously, hours of it each day. It satisfied hungers about the book I didn't even know I had. But there was something missing, a perspective not taken—or not fully taken: a lacuna. It was like a hole burned in the middle of the page. It drew one's notice, it inspired wonderment that turned to sorrow that turned to frustration—because it was always there, this hole, seemingly irreparable and eternal—until the day when I read a comment on a poem that screamed the lack of this essential perspective, and the frustration turned to anger. I knew then that I could either turn into the kind of person who rails at strangers on the internet—creating more lacunae—or I could repair the lacuna.

[1.2] I opened a new Word document and got to work.

[1.3] Fan fiction is a genre of lacunae. Sheenagh Pugh first classified fan fiction as wanting "more of" or 'more from" texts; fan studies has run wild with the "more from" and its implied landscape of lacunae (2005, 19). Henry Jenkins writes of "build[ing fan] culture within the gaps and margins of commercially circulating texts" (2013, 35). Camille Bacon-Smith documented a lack of satisfying relationships and plot simultaneity as provoking fan works (1992). Abigail Derecho notes how a lack of nonwhite and female characters
encourages the production of "literature of the subordinate"—fan fiction (2006, 71). Lack of representation is likewise cited by fans in their meta as a motive for their fan works (note 1). Anne Jamison identifies "not knowing" as an essential element of fan fiction because of fandom's tendency to push past "familiar ground": in short, to enter the lacuna (2013, 3). Obsession_inc writes in her influential essay about affirmational and transformational fandoms of fan fiction's purpose in "fix[ing] a disappointing issue," especially a "lack of sex-having between two characters" (https://obsession-inc.dreamwidth.org/82589.html). There is the gapfiller, that ubiquitous genre unique to fan fiction, often called a "missing scene" in media fandom, that smooths and repairs the rifts in the story. In all instances, fan fiction is less an act of embroidering an existent and coherent whole than an act of mending.

2. The lacuna

[2.1] I'm uncertain whether I share an origin story with other fan fiction studies scholars because I'm still not entirely sure I qualify as one. My BA is in psychology, my graduate studies were in Old English literature, and I'm now a middle-school humanities teacher. I fell into fan fiction studies by accident, into a lacuna.

[2.2] In front of me on my desk, right now, is Framing Fan Fiction by Kristina Busse (2017). On its cover is a word cloud of fan fiction terms and fandoms. I remember taking it to the beach to read for the first time. Under a brilliant summer sun, I sat in a beach chair and perched it on my knees, searching the cover for my fandom in the word cloud. It must be there. It's a huge, old fandom.

[2.3] It wasn't there.

[2.4] It took weeks to finally find it. It's the smallest word in the word cloud and tucked between the arms of the letter "u" within the word "subject": The Lord of the Rings. It is a literal illustration of the lacuna I perceived and into which I fell, although I doubt that Busse intended it that way. Tolkien-based fan fiction is profuse and old. The first known Tolkien fan fic appeared in a 1958 zine called I Palantir^237;r, and from 1958 onward, there was always Tolkien fan fiction and Tolkienfic zines (https://fanlore.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Tolkien_Fandom). When fan fiction made its great leap online, Tolkien fan fiction authors seized the opportunity as enthusiastically as any. Susan Booker, in 2004, estimated that nearly 10 percent of fan fiction websites were Tolkien-based. As of this writing, in 2019, Tolkien-related categories are in the top five book fandoms for both Fanfiction.net and an Archive of Our Own (AO3)—#4 on both. The only other fandom to make the top five on both is Harry Potter (note 2).

[2.5] At least Busse included The Lord of the Rings, illegible though it may be and stuck literally into the middle of another, larger word. Anne Jamison's 2013 Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World doesn't index a single mention of Tolkien. Nor is the issue limited to scholars: FAN/FIC magazine lists big fandoms. Tolkien fandom isn't there. Then there are the nods to the fandom that are outright erroneous. Busse and Hellekson's introduction to their 2006 collection Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet uses Tolkien as an example of a complex canon (which is true) but identifies Ralph Bakshi's
animated films as a part of that canon (which would surprise the hell out of any Tolkien fan fiction writer). Even the tendency to index mentions of Tolkien-based fan fiction under "Lord of the Rings" betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the fandom, since a not-insignificant number of Tolkien-based stories are grounded in *The Silmarillion* or, after the 2012 film release, *The Hobbit.* (As of this writing, on AO3, there are about twice as many *Hobbit* fics and nearly as many *Silmarillion* fics as there are stories based on *The Lord of the Rings.*) Even reading broadly about fan fiction, I find myself in awe of something that feels so wonderful and needful and strange—and very often not at all what I know of fan fiction from belonging to the Tolkienfic fandom. My fan studies books are littered with marginalia that echo "not true in Tolkienfic" throughout and across books.

[2.6] So the word cloud on *Framing Fan Fiction* felt illustrative to me. There is Lord of the Rings, as small as can be, because I think fan fiction studies scholars often know that Tolkien-based fan fiction deserves mention but don't much know what to do with it beyond that. The result: Tolkien-based fan fiction is barely studied, and most of what exists is undertaken by scholars who also work in Tolkien studies, not fan—much less fan fiction—studies. I am a case in point, my graduate work in Old English literature having situated me perfectly for Tolkien studies but—aside from a comfort with methodology and statistics from my days as an undergrad psych major—leaving me fumbling whenever I stagger into fan studies. But it's that hole, that lacuna again, that drives me to wonderment, to sorrow, to irritation, to action.

3. Fix-it fic

[3.1] From the Latin word *lacus* comes both the words *lacuna* and *lake,* the latter a gap in the very bones of the earth that is filled with something different and strange, something glinting and pliant and sustaining. It speaks to the promise that comes with a lack: that it will be fixed, filled. When I felt the lack of that certain perspective in the *Silmarillion* fic fandom, I spent a year pounding out the story that would fill it and ended up with a 350,000-word novel, and so I became a fic writer.

[3.2] When I felt the lack in fan fiction studies, I responded similarly. What other choice was there, really? Like the *Silmarillion* fic writers with whom I disagreed but whose work had brought me such sustenance and joy, I was and am deeply appreciative of the work of the scholars whose work I discuss above. But it seemed to describe a different world than the one to which I belonged, where affirmational and transformational impulses can be so deeply entwined as to be indistinguishable (and fan fiction studies has tended to emphasize the latter).

[3.3] I was a graduate student at the time when I noticed the lacuna in fan studies and so had access to many of the tools of academia, namely an Institutional Review Board. The Tolkien Fan Fiction Survey was the result this time, a 169-item survey that sought to document the values and practices of the people who wrote and read Tolkien-based fan fiction. Between December 2014 and November 2015, 1,052 participants recorded valid responses (note 3).

[3.4] The methodology was one that demanded recognition. It generated numbers that could
be held up as a quantifiable yawp: "Here we are! Here is what we do!" My roots are planted in the social sciences, and having been schooled in how to quantify human behavior, in reducing psychoemotional and social complexity to a table of numbers, I was/am perhaps guilty of revering quantitative data above the complicated social/emotional welter that is the actual community and its actual practices beneath the numbers. The chief criticism I received during and after the survey was the lack of any free-response fields for participants to clarify (and complicate) their responses. Because complexity wasn't what I wanted, not yet anyway. I wanted the relative certitude—of definition, of mere existence—that numbers seemed to promise.

4. The lack

[4.1] I first began to notice that Tolkien-based fan fiction was almost never mentioned on Metafandom in the mid-2000s. Metafandom—a group that collected links to discussions in fandom—is where I developed the taste for fan studies that would someday lead me to that lacuna that produced the Tolkien Fan Fiction survey. Like published fan fiction studies, the posts featured on Metafandom mostly ignored the Tolkien fan fiction community of which I was a part, and its generalized discussions of fan fiction often did not apply to us. Nonetheless, I loved it, and when it closed, I mourned.

[4.2] Initially, I blamed us, the Tolkien fan fiction community itself, for why we weren't included. We were isolationists. We had built our online spaces and communities and didn't tend to intermix with other fandoms or show much interest in what they were discussing or doing. We disdained the confluence of social justice and fan works. We resisted new technology. We didn't migrate to Dreamwidth when the rest of fandom did. We never used Delicious or other social media sites. We adopted Tumblr only because the *Hobbit* film fans did, and as they discovered the books, they generated enough fannish activity there to coax even us out of our bucolic, hobbitish online villages. (And many fans hated it, and many fans still do.)

[4.3] All of these things remain factors. But my survey and other data have highlighted other reasons why perhaps those isolationist fans felt they didn't fit in the wider fic fandom, and why fan fiction studies researchers didn't feel that Tolkien fan fiction fit what they were doing. Why it may have been difficult to know even where to begin with us.

[4.4] One reason is the marriage between media fandom and fan fiction. Fan fiction studies have tended to focus on media or transmedia fandoms, and while with two blockbuster film trilogies and nearly two dozen books, the Tolkienfic fandom is undoubtedly transmedia, it tends to operate in the opposite direction of the transmedia fandoms that receive the most attention. The films almost universally drive fic writers to the books and the book canon rather than the other way around, which is notable. Compare Sherlockian fandom, the existence and fan fiction of which is even more venerable and enduring than Tolkien fandom. The BBC series does not drive fans to the stories and novels of Arthur Conan Doyle; for some, it certainly does, but the Sherlockian and *Sherlock* (2010–17) fandoms remain separate entities. The Harry Potter fic fandom, like Tolkien, places high value on the books, but both Chris Rankin (2013) and Amy Sturgis (2004) observe that the films,
sanctioned as they are by J. K. Rowling, have become an inextricable extension of the book canon. This is not to say that the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* films have no influence. They do, mostly in terms of imagery (Sturgis). Pure moviewerse fan fiction, however, is essentially nonexistent. The Tolkien Fan Fiction Survey, distributed at the zenith of the *Hobbit* trilogy, had three participants out of 1,052 who used only the films for their stories. Furthermore, there is a large contingent of the fandom—the *Silmarillion* fandom—where there is no film.

[4.5] Tolkien-based fan fiction is in many ways nearer to a literary fandom, despite the nearly gravitational force of the films, with the idiosyncrasies that literary fandoms bring to the media fandom landscape. Fans' relationships to and perceptions of authority differ, for one. Motives for writing and the community's focus do not align with media fandom. Social justice is one prominent area of difference. Out of curiosity, I compared discussions linked on Metafandom in January through March of 2007 and the discussions conducted on the Silmarillion Writers' Guild (SWG) Yahoo! mailing list that same year; 16 percent of the linked discussions on Metafandom concerned social justice in some way. Social justice wasn't mentioned once on the SWG that entire year, and it's not like Tolkien doesn't provide fertile ground for such discussions; they just were not, until recently, of much interest to Tolkien fan fiction writers ([note 4](#)). (I should note also that SWG members, on the survey, were among the most likely to view their fan fiction as having a social justice purpose; their reticence here reflects the broader fandom culture.) But given the emphasis in fan studies on resistant reading, on flipping the power differentials between original creators and their fans, on the twisting of media texts to make room for fans of myriad identities and experiences to see themselves in media texts, to discover a conclave of fans—however large and venerable it may be—who were more content to debate Elvish grammar or the parentage of obscure characters, who used their stories to comment on Middle-earth and not modern life, might have been unsettling when so much of fan fiction studies elevates the radical and transgressive.

5. The lake

[5.1] And so our methods trace a route that dives into the gaps we need to fill even as it weaves amid the ones we don't yet dare.

[5.2] My survey, five years later—and as I've begun work on preparing the second iteration, hopefully to be distributed at the end of this year—plummets into the abyss with all the noisy grace of a cannonball. I look back at it with emotions very similar to that first fic I wrote: a little mortified but cognizant still that it felt imperative at the time. I see in its shape my need to affirm our existence from the depths of the lacuna. And that my recognition of the need for a subtler touch next time comes from the diminishing sense of urgency: the lacuna, the lack, the lake; the glint in the darkness of something silver, liquid, scintillating. Sustaining.

6. Notes

[1](#). For example, the LiveJournal user hesychasm engaged in a project that surveyed the
number of characters in their fan fiction from various racial groups, noting that, "speaking as a person of color, I am not comfortable with using the lack of minority characters or minority actors as an excuse not to write about them." Hesychasm provides a list of links to other fan fiction writers who have undertaken similar analyses of their work (https://hesychasm.livejournal.com/246894.html?format=light).

2. An Archive of Our Own's system of categorizing fan works makes it impossible to get a hard count of fan works in fandoms like Tolkien, Sherlock, or Harry Potter where fans are creating based on multiple texts. Creators can not only choose specific texts (e.g., "The Silmarillion and other histories of Middle-Earth") but broader categories (e.g., "TOLKIEN J. R. R.—Works & Related Fandoms"), and they can select multiple categories as well, so there is neither a single category that contains all the works for a broadly defined fandom, nor is it possible to add up all the works under the various categories to generate a total for that fandom. Nonetheless, the fact that "TOLKIEN J. R. R.—Works & Related Fandoms" is the fourth most popular literary fandom shows the current relevance of this fandom in addition to its longevity.

3. The Tolkien Fan Fiction Survey was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American Public University on December 23, 2014.


7. References


Symposium

The affective labor of fan studies: A pedagogical problem in two parts

Regina Yung Lee

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[0.1] Abstract—This work describes the iterative redesign of a single introductory fan studies course over several years. The exigencies of teaching fandom tactics, combined with institutional uptake of affective labor, affect students' learning. Methods of addressing these issues in the next iteration of the course are contemplated.

[0.2] Keywords—Academia; Fan studies courses; Pedagogy; Teaching


1. Introduction

[1.1] There is more to the work of the fan studies classroom than teaching technique. I found this out through multiple iterations of a single course on fandoms, and the transforming architectures of instructor labor that came with them. What I want to articulate here are the depth of fandom's pedagogical acts, evident in this course's design and execution, and the specific affective labor forms, as well as the work these pedagogical acts require when they come into contact with the institutional structures of the university. To no one's surprise, fandom's methods teach fandom effectively, but deploying these tactics requires prodigious affective labor—perhaps a commentary on fandom's pedagogical methodology, which seems to center on targeted forms of care work. Attempting to replicate something like fandom communities in my classroom resulted in institutional uptake and functionalization of that care—from both myself and my students. It also resulted in increases in immersion and connection with the subject matter. Here's what I've been thinking through as I revise the course once more.

2. The backstory

[2.1] I first proposed a special topics course on fan studies in spring 2015, knowing that its subject matter would likely be popular. I had underestimated the thirst: fifty seats filled in two days with students from a variety of majors. Using Hellekson and Busse's 2014 Fan
*Fiction Studies Reader,* then hot off the press, we ventured together through discussions of slash as critiques of heteronormative representation, the alternate universe (AU) as feminist analytic, the recap as transnational mediation, postcolonial studies and racebending, and fan vidding as a tactical angle of responsive engagement. My primary forms of assessment comprised small collaborative written assignments, an individual paper, and a collective transformative final project. It all seemed to go relatively well.

[2.2] But after that first quarter, I realized that although we had covered the content, little of our learning had departed from a traditional lecture-based university course. Students' online interactions were fairly minimal, even as we studied online gift economies and digital mediation. In addition, I was still considered the major authority, even when our study took us to fandoms I did not know well. This was at odds with my own fannish education, both in fandom and in my piecemeal entry into the field of fan studies. The border tensions between fan cultures and academic coursework delineated a necessary rethinking of the syllabus. Could fandom's own techniques be used to teach fan studies in a formalized way?

[2.3] At this critical juncture, two things happened together: I read Paul Booth's illuminating article "Fandom in the Classroom: A Pedagogy of Fan Studies" (2012), which discusses his pedagogical process and gives some examples, and I went to WisCon 39, where fan studies scholars discussed TheoryOfFicGate in the immediate aftermath of this controversy ([https://fanlore.org/wiki/TheoryOfFicGate](https://fanlore.org/wiki/TheoryOfFicGate)). A brief recap: in "Theory of Fan Fiction," a student-led credit offering at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2015, students were directed to read and respond to fan works on the Archive of Our Own fan fiction site ([https://archiveofourown.org/](https://archiveofourown.org/)). However, without discussion of the comment's relational aspects, the students' responses left disruption behind them. This incident highlighted the problems with assuming fandom communication norms are transparent or self-evident ([note 1](#)).

[2.4] These two events galvanized my initial course redesign. While I had taught my students about fan studies as a field, I had not prepared them to tactically address issues emerging from its assumptions, which mostly follow those of fandom (Pande 2018). As Booth puts it, "By treating the classroom as a minute fan community, students effectively discussed the contemporary media scene and articulated a meaningful point of view about the practices of fandom. In other words, treating students as fans helped illustrate connections between fan culture and classroom culture" (2012, 174–75).

[2.5] I was about to find out how strong those connections actually were.

3. Reboot 1: The hybrid course

[3.1] My overhaul focused on the concepts laid out above: teach fan studies using fandom's own responsive, critical, and personally invested methods; engage students through collaborative networked online production; and discuss the ethics of accessing fan-created works. I created the online component of the course to flatten the power dynamics of lecture-based interactions. I hoped the peer-to-peer responses would mimic the many-to-many relations forming fandom ecologies of gift and response (Turk and Johnson 2012).
Before teaching the course again, I contacted the fan creators on my syllabus, letting them know about the course, providing multiple options for acknowledgment or anonymity, informing them of the boundaries we use for interaction with their work, and requesting permission to use their work. All creators now had a reliable way to interact with me, especially if their needs changed. I also discussed these preparations openly with students on the first day, telling them what I had done and why I had done it. My goal with this part of the revision was to have students become keenly aware of the ethical components of studying, working with, and engaging with online communities (Busse 2018).

I refocused student production around two weekly individual comments on our learning management system (LMS) and one weekly collaborative project, with a changing array of classmates. I provided an initial set of roles and descriptions for each five-person group: The Mod, The Researcher, The Archivist, The QC, and The Uploader. These roles were based on fan subbing groups from the mid-2000s who spread amateur translations of East Asian popular media, as described by Mizuko Ito (2012). In using these group categories, I introduced awareness of transnational and multilingual online fandom practices, coalescing around our unit on Korean popular culture in Anglophone contexts.

As I planned the course, I imagined it as a form of immersion—an educational dip in the shallow end of the emotive, affectionate, digitally mediated, interactive all-inclusiveness that had characterized my own fandom heyday. A central tenet of these fannish responses was a kind of deep feeling for the work, respect for canon knowledge on display in the transformative work, and recognition of the time and labor that had gone into its creation. For my students, I called this care work "affection," and I delimited its presence as the defining separation between academic and fannish forms of writing.

4. Initial results

Students leapt enthusiastically into the redesigned course. Their desire to learn and their willingness to experiment quickly led to massive amounts of output: two comments plus a collaborative project put total output at something like 100 comments and ten projects per week. Students' peer teaching, resource sharing, and desire to learn were evident. Together, we tried online quizzes, slide PDFs, asynchronous and synchronous assignments, collaborative and solo online work, and collaborative and solo classwork. Sometimes it worked.

But sometimes it didn't. The format I designed wore away at us. Instead of an immersive dip into online participatory communities, our work ran aground on two major structural hurdles. First was the LMS-based interaction, which kept students' conversations within the class (note 2); it rendered their interactions through the complex matrix associated with student grading—which was its job. Second, the fervent devotion of a fandom model resulted in significant instructor burnout. The structures of reciprocity were so asymmetrically lopsided that comments the students were taking minutes to write were taking me days to return. This lopsidedness was highlighted by the unexpected but fortunate addition of a teaching assistant. These two circumstances brought to light the pedagogical conclusion that fandom's asymmetrical voracity and (interestingly) its basic motivations...
could be artificially echoed through the inducement of peer pressure.

5. The two-part problem

[5.1] With this redesign, the work or labor of fandom became a productive area of exploration, with students up in arms about whether fan writers should be paid, and whether or not such labor should protect the fan creator as copyright does the original work. Having students create works was a good technique for getting them invested in such creation's specific affordances and helping them understand the importance of invisible labor like that of the beta reader or fan sub QC, or even the emotional investment of a good reader.

[5.2] But the labor of the course was concomitantly immense. As Paul Booth notes, "I ask my students to work as fans" (2012, 175), and I required the same of myself. To do so was to insist on a kind of affective engagement from all of us that the university, frankly, may have no right to demand. How closely related were the simultaneous emergence of the inclusion of fandom methods, the methodology of affective engagement, institutional appropriation, and significant labor overload?

[5.3] First, fandom methods are not always legible as knowledge-gathering tools; these methods required repeated explication to students and TAs. Because students were being asked to work in unfamiliar forms using new methods, their midquarter assessments recorded confusion around the purpose and goals of their weekly exercises, even as I laboriously rehearsed these in each class. But students' transformed understandings joyously unfolded in their final collaborative projects as they deployed fan methods as creative, practical, tactical responses to canon texts.

[5.4] Second, the redesign required that I model and reflect fandom's intense digitally mediated affection back to all fifty students simultaneously. While each student commented on assigned fan works and students' group products two to three times a week, I commented back 110 times per week, engaging carefully, faithfully, and without replication. This was clearly unsustainable—and an indication of the reproductive care work (often gendered and racialized) that instructors perform (Chua 2000; Ahmed 2017). But I had created a bigger problem for myself: I had functionalized the gift of response. I had also hidden my labor from the institution through my refusal to institute a rubric.

[5.5] For fandom studies and its pedagogical wing, my anecdotal findings provided valuable insights into the problematic integrations of fannish methods into course-based assignments. I tracked my lagging capacity through the quarter as a time-based index of my affective labor. The addition of a TA and my partial withdrawal from commenting made these clear. Also, my new distance meant I was no longer course-correcting students' specific misunderstandings in midair. Without overt address of the comment's power in building fandom rapport, it was increasingly difficult to integrate students' collective online experiences into the classroom experience.

[5.6] This brought me to the heart of the matter. At a fundamental level, the students were contributing their gifts, and my TA and I were reciprocating them. However, combining the
affectively weighted precision of the good comment with institutional assessment structures resulted in a cooption of the good comment by the assessment: that is, the care and precision of the good comment, as well as the affective labor required to produce it, vanished into the institution's LMS-mediated grading structures. I needed to untangle the functionalization of the comment from the LMS and illuminate the laborious work of the good comment, for both my students' sake and my own.

6. Reboot 2: Getting out

[6.1] Three things I'll do going forward:

[6.2] I already have a scaffolded lesson on how to build a good comment. I will be leaning into the institutionalization model to create a rubric as well. By assigning readily discernible values, the rubric simplifies work for both graders and submitters. By privileging fan-derived values, the rubric teaches the good comment through fannish norms. I am eager to see if a clear explication of the rubric's purpose and formation leads to better clarity in the classroom.

[6.3] Next, the weekly group projects will only continue for three weeks. I will continue the fan-derived random group roles, scaffolding for the final project, but all of the exercises will become transformative works because this was the group exercise that the students in the course designated as being the most helpful and interesting (and difficult). Leveraging fandom versions of response and critique to productively discuss course readings in fan studies should produce good summative assessment.

[6.4] I am still working out how to reintegrate effective online methodologies into the course, especially through the LMS. How to work collectively without either exposing my students to differentially damaging online circumstances or else burying all our work out of sight? The functionalization of affective relations between fans and their production seems to spiral much wider inside of this educational structure. One thing I can guarantee: no more grading 110 times a week.

[6.5] This record of the five years I spent refining a single fan studies course demonstrates the pervasive persistence of functionalization as a primary mode of online production, especially within the academy, highlighting serious inequities in the practices of teaching and scholarship within the US academy. I have offered this account as neither encomium nor invective but instead as proof of concept and an example of necessary change. The fan studies class can be taught using pedagogical tactics developed from within fan communities. It just risks functionalizing both the classroom and the tactics to the extant work of the institution as it is, not as we would like it to become. To this end, the Transformative Works and Cultures special issue on Fan Pedagogies, coedited with Paul Booth, addresses these complex discussions in more detail, includes more voices, and uses better tactics. We will find our solutions together—as fandom has for a long time. I continue to believe it is possible.

7. Acknowledgments
With deep gratitude to the students of GWSS 290 S15, and GWSS 272 A16, W18, and A18, whose dedication, enthusiasm, love, and hard work fill all the interstices of this contribution.

8. Notes

1. Interestingly, this expectation of civility is where Rukmini Pande (2018) opens a discussion of what fans are and are not willing to discuss among themselves, including the thorny questions of racial representation and inclusion, like RaceFail ’09 (https://fanlore.org/wiki/RaceFail_%2709). In consonance with Sara Ahmed's 2010 formulation of the "feminist killjoy" (someone who refuses the social tranquility of normalization), Pande refers to this critical interpolation as the act of a "fandom killjoy," considering the interruption as making an epistemological claim; see the introduction and Pande's discussion of RaceFail in chapter 1 for more. Reinterpretation of TheoryOfFicGate through these lenses would make for some interesting analysis but is beyond my scope here.

2. Keeping the comments within the class was a safety concern on my part, given the differential risks my students would face online, as well as part of my promise to fandom content creators that my students would not disturb the ecologies surrounding their work in digital arenas. I explained my logic to the students, and we came up with several course norms surrounding the leaving of comments at a later time, away from course-specific requirements—basically a restoration of a primarily fannish one-to-one relation over the created work.

9. References


**Symposium**

**Fan studies, citation practices, and fannish knowledge production**

**Milena Popova**

**Rogue scholar, Bath, United Kingdom**

[0.1] Abstract—Mapping the fine line we walk as fan studies scholars engaging with fannish knowledge production.

[0.2] Keyword—Acafandom


[1] Fannish activities and output of interest to fan studies scholars vary widely, as do the reasons why we are interested in fannish material. Alongside (or even as part of) their creative output, fannish communities produce commentary on and critiques of mainstream media, documentations of fannish history, statistics about fans, theories about fannish experiences, new forms of data management and archiving, and so on. I have in fact argued elsewhere that some fan fiction in itself constitutes original knowledge production on issues of sexual consent (Popova 2018, Popova forthcoming). Yet fan studies engagement with fannish output can at times be haphazard. It is tempting to treat fans as equals, regardless of where and how we are engaging with them. Most of us are, after all, fans as well as academics. I am both elmyra and Dr. Milena Popova, and so frequently I speak as both a fan and an academic. Others do this too: Matt Hills (2014) engages with and critiques fannish theorizing as if it were on an equal level to a published and peer-reviewed academic paper. On the other hand, we can also focus too much on treating fans' creations entirely as "data", thus failing to acknowledge that fans are knowledge creators in their own right. The submission guidelines for *Transformative Works and Culture* (Transformative Works and Cultures n.d.), for instance, focus on the protection of fan sources and recommend obtaining permission for using fan fiction stories and blog posts as research data. There is friction here both between our dual roles as aca/fans and between different orientations toward the material and communities we study. This friction is further exacerbated by the fact that academic and fannish communities have different rules of engagement, different knowledge production and validation practices, and different epistemological foundations. How, then, should we engage with fannish production and knowledges when we speak as academics in academic spaces? What responsibilities do we have to fan sources, not just to protect them...
but also to acknowledge their contribution to knowledge and to engage with it respectfully, taking into account that fannish and academic knowledge production do not operate on a level playing field? In the remainder of this piece I review three case studies (fannish chronicling of fannish history, fan stats, and fannish theorizing) to highlight some of the challenges and questions that arise from our dual positionality as aca/fans and our orientation to fannish material, particularly for our engagement and citation practices in academic spaces.

[2] The chronicling of fannish history is an interesting example when it comes to fan studies scholars' relationship with fannish outputs. This kind of chronicling can range from collaborative projects run by the Organization for Transformative Works such as Fanlore to individual fans' research of and writing about the histories of events, communities, or even tropes. Yet as historians know, there is no such thing as a single, impartial, and accurate historical account, and historiography tells us as much about the writer(s) as about the events they chronicle. As fan studies scholars, we engage with fannish histories in a range of different ways. We may find a Fanlore page or a fan's documentation of the origins of the A/B/O trope (netweight 2013) a useful starting point in our own explorations of a topic. But like undergraduates who've been warned against citing Wikipedia, we often shy away from acknowledging the contribution that fannish documentation of fannish history has made to our own work. We may, however, also want to approach fannish histories with a historian's eye and ask of these histories what they do tell us about both the writers and the events they chronicle, whom they might privilege and whose points of view they might erase, or how they compare to other histories of the same event. There is great value in asking these questions, as they may enable us to shed light on power structures within fannish spaces that may otherwise be obscured. When we do this, however, our orientation to the material changes: it becomes "data," or possibly something for us to argue against. Neither of these orientations is necessarily wrong, but each comes with a set of ethical considerations and questions we should be asking. Much like the fans we study, we too put our stamp on the material; we choose to silence some and privilege others, and in some ways we occupy a position of power vis-à-vis fannish communities—though the power relationship isn't one-directional or uncomplicated. Fans can ruin scholarly careers; scholars can draw unwanted attention and scrutiny to individuals or groups of fans. At the same time, leaving some material, fannish behaviors, or structures unscrutinized privileges the status quo even when that may actively be harming some members of fannish communities. There is potential for harm to be done in all directions, both by action and by inaction. Research questions, orientation to fannish material, and citation practices all have an ethical dimension to them, which we should consider throughout our research process.

[3] Statistics and demographic data are another area where fans have done substantial work (e.g., centrumlumina 2013, destinationtoast 2013, finnagain 2017) that fan studies scholars frequently rely on but sometimes struggle to acknowledge. I recently peer reviewed a paper in which the author had quoted numbers from a well-known fandom survey but cited a prominent fan studies scholar (who had presumably quoted the same numbers in their work) as the source. In my review, I gently encouraged the author to acknowledge the original source of the data instead. Fandom stats, however, have their own issues and limitations (as most fandom stats practitioners themselves would openly acknowledge). How a survey is
promoted or how questions are phrased may significantly impact the responses, and whether such biases were intentional, the result of structural forces, or accidental despite the survey author's best efforts is often hard to tell. I use and credit fandom stats data in my own work, but I am also frequently frustrated by it. I wish some questions had been asked differently—sometimes because that would make my work easier, but frequently because a particular question doesn't work for me as a fan or as a person. Demographic questions about gender frequently fall into this category: I am a nonbinary trans person, and the surveys that have the right boxes for me (in any context, not just fandom) are few and far between. It is therefore sometimes tempting to critique survey design beyond the limitations acknowledged by the author when I cite fandom stats data in my academic work. Unless my work is specifically about fandom stats practitioners' ideas of gender (which it has not been to date), that impulse is not an academic one, and indulging it by having Dr. Milena Popova pontificate on survey design in an otherwise unrelated paper would not add value. Instead, I find ways of working around the limitations of the data and am careful to only make claims that the data as presented can support. Perhaps one day, wearing elmyra or one of my other fannish hats, I will reach out in private to fandom stats practitioners and say "Hey, do you think next time you do this you could word the gender question differently please, for these reasons?" And maybe I won't. The point here is that what hat I wear and the platform and approach I use all matter. Where elmyra can have a friendly conversation with a fellow fan, Dr. Milena Popova would be inappropriately leveraging a position of power.

[4] Similar considerations apply to fannish theorizing of fans' own cultures and experiences. Matt Hills (2014) uses a paper published in this journal to disagree with a popular blog post by obsession_inc (2009) that splits fannish activities along somewhat gendered lines into affirmational (such as memorizing and sharing trivia or collecting merchandise) and transformational (such as writing fan fiction, vidding, or creating fan art). Hills presents the case studies of Dalek building and Daft Punk helmet construction as examples of what he calls "mimetic fandom," which he claims confuses the affirmational/transformational binary. Hills quotes directly from obsession_inc's blog post on multiple occasions, and his orientation toward it is clearly that of a scholar addressing and critiquing a fellow scholar's work, dissecting the proposed model and pointing out flaws in it. In fairness to Hills, he also shows how the affirmational/transformational binary is influential in academic fan studies and argues for a problematization of it there. Yet in this, his orientation to obsession_inc is the same as his orientation to, say, Henry Jenkins. Now, it is possible that I don't move in the right fannish or academic circles, that I am not in on the big secret that there is another, academic side to obsession_inc, similar to my elmyra/Dr. Milena Popova hats. But even if Hills himself were obsession_inc, I would argue that his treatment of the affirmational/transformational fandom blog post is dubious at best. Fannish knowledge production and theorizing is produced by fans for fans. It builds on different intellectual traditions and knowledge bases. It may or may not have access to the same theoretical resources as professional fan studies scholars but certainly does not have the same cultural capital. It has epistemological foundations and knowledge validation procedures barely intelligible to academia as such. While it is absolutely right to acknowledge fannish knowledge production and treat it as such, we also need to recognize the power differential between fan studies scholars and fans and, if we wish to engage with fannish knowledge production, do so as much as possible on its terms, not ours, especially when we do so in
academic spaces where we already have the upper hand.

[5] It can be difficult to decide how to engage with and cite fannish material, as by far not all of it is merely "data" in our research, and even when it is there can be complications. Above all, I would like to advocate for a wider recognition of fannish knowledge production as such. Alongside this, we need to acknowledge that such knowledge production is sufficiently different from our own that we cannot simply treat fans as fellow scholars. Where we are building on fannish work, we need to give the proper credit through citation. Where we are tempted to argue back, we need to be extremely conscious that the playing field is not level and that while most of our colleagues are also fans, not all fans are colleagues. Our citation practices for fannish output, then, should take into account our orientation to the material, the ethics of the research, and the power relationships involved.

References


Interview

Interview with Louisa Ellen Stein: Whole self and felt scholarship in fan studies

Julia E. Largent, Milena Popova, and Elise Vist

[0.1] Abstract—Fan studies scholar Louisa Ellen Stein discusses her journey into felt scholarship and whole self scholarship in fan studies. Her fannish interests and personal identities are varied and affect her scholarship in different ways. Choosing how and when to reveal and interrogate them is difficult but important work.

[0.2] Keywords—Acafan; Methodologies; Political activism; Research; Vidding


[1] Q: First of all, thank you for participating in this interview. The TWC special issue on fan studies methodologies was partly sparked by your keynote at the Fan Studies Network 2017 meeting and some of the questions you raised about our different identities (fans, scholars, activists, to name just a few), especially in politically challenging times. We are taken with the concept of felt scholarship, and what we'd like to do in this interview is talk about both your fannish and academic practice and what some of your ideas mean for how we do fan studies.

[2] Could you tell us more about your fannish practice? What do you do? What makes you squee? And how does that spill over into your scholarship?

[3] LES: I'm struck by the fact that you lead off with a question about my own fannishness and fannish activity. I remember a time when I would have been hesitant to share the specifics of my fandom, and also when folks probably wouldn't have asked, or for that matter perhaps wouldn't have wanted to know. I know this is still a fraught issue for many for a host of reasons—either because of professional insecurity (especially graduate students but even pretenure professors) and also for personal reasons. Some fandoms and fan practices are easier to share than others.

[4] My main fandom practice these days is vidding (that is, editing fan music videos). I've been vidding since around 2006...a big portion of my life when I think about it! I think I've always had vidding in me. When I was thirteen or so I made a video in which I set my camp art class lithographs to the "Sounds of Silence," and when I was in college I made an
experimental film editing old family films intercut with Yiddish women's poetry set to Kate Bush. Not pretentious at all...So it seems I've always been fascinated with juxtaposing audio to video to create something more, something new, something that triggers emotion in the viewer (and in me!). When I found vids and vidding, it was like everything clicked into place—this was my medium, a medium that took what I loved (both music and TV) and synthesized them into something more and something shareable, something that communicated fannish investment.

[5] I've made my share of intellectual self reflexive metavids and my share of feels vids, or what some might call Lord King Bad Vids, and more often, videos that work in the weird in-between space between those two poles. In that way my vidding echoes my academic concerns and vice versa, as I have always seemed to want to muddy the assumed divides between intellectual and emotional, and between personal and political. So in some ways vidding has been the constant that's made me squee over the decades—well that, and Supernatural (CW, 2005–). I can't believe that show dragged me back in! I'm catching up on season 13 now.

[6] In terms of what makes me squee fandomwise these days, I'm definitely a TV media fangirl, but recently I've shifted somewhat from the WB/CW teen TV shows that used to be my bread and butter to an ever-growing love for anime. This is something that I've been able to share with my daughter, and I've found unexpected joy in sharing my home and life with an evolving/growing fan person. Right now we're obsessing over the quirky show the Disastrous Life of Saiki K. (2016) and also all things Hamilton (2015). Oh, and I made a very undignified noise while standing in a rental car line when I saw over Twitter that the new Yuri on Ice movie [scheduled for 2019] would feature young Victor. Vidding feeds all of this enthusiasm because I'm always thinking, what will give me amazing or fun or provocative visuals for a vid?

[7] So how does all this to spill into my scholarship? I have always felt that the insights I've had to offer are based on my own intimate and idiosyncratic understandings and experiences of particular media and fan communities. So my scholarship focuses on the texts, fandoms, and practices that I have personal experience with. Yes, this means I may focus on some texts and not others, and that my own biases shape the track of my research, but I feel that this is a necessary dimension of what I do, and I hope that I have presented my work as necessarily partial and qualified, limited subjective knowledge. Not that I shouldn't question my own assumptions and limits—quite the opposite. Rather, I believe those limits need to be transparent as much as possible, and then I can question them and push myself out of my comfort zone, and consider that as well.

[8] Q: Given that what you study is informed by your fandom, how have you brought fannish practices into your scholarly work? What kinds of challenges have you encountered when doing so?

[9] LES: I am increasingly interested in nontraditional forms of scholarship and videographic criticism, and the relationship between videographic criticism and vidding, for example. At the Fan Studies Network North America conference in November 2018, Lori
Morimoto and I organized a vid/crit show that featured videos that overlap, intertwine, and explore the potentials in the merging of these two forms. I'm also interested in developments in online multimedia/multimodal scholarship that is open access and speaks to fan-scholars and scholar-fans alike, something I hope the TWC Tumblr and Fandom issue (No. 27, 2018) achieves to some degree, and that I really want to explore in my next book project (still in the planning/proposal stages).

[10] I feel that broadly speaking, there are two sets of challenges at play in blending fannish practice and fan studies, though they're interrelated of course: internal and external. Over the course of my fan studies career, from masters student to tenured professor, I've faced external pressures—from professors and reviewers and editors who questioned the value of the very topics I was writing on or who sought to tame my attempts at integrating a more personal voice into my writing.

[11] The structural issues there can't be ignored—the sense that fan cultures and especially feminized fan cultures are frivolous and shouldn't be studied, and that if we express enthusiasm for the thing we study, then that overshadows any other arguments we might be making/striving to make. At my first conference presentation as a masters student, one senior scholar said to me after my talk, "Well, I could tell you really love *Roswell*" (The WB, UPN, 1999–2002). The incident was partially my doing—seeing senior (to me at least) scholars winging it rather than read their papers made me want to do so as well, but I hadn't had practice at walking that careful line that academia expects us to tow if we want to express enthusiasm about our topic: keep it caged, separate, containable, don't let it spill over into your analysis, god forbid. That's a line that's not easy to walk, and I have struggled with it in various ways in my career thus far. I struggled with that early on, in that I was determined to study what I wanted and to produce insights from the inside, but then I felt I had to mask the inside of it so I could jump through the hoops grad school demanded. For a while there I took out the word "fan" and replaced it with "audience," because I knew that was just more likely to fly as a legitimate insight that could be legible to the people assessing it as something that mattered.

[12] Of course, not every advisor/senior scholar who was guiding me would have said such drastic measures were necessary. Indeed, it was my advisor, Anna McCarthy, who, seeing my budding passion for fandom, handed me her copy of Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* (1992), thus sending me down my path.

[13] But this is where the "internal challenges" comes in—as much as there are external resistances to fan studies and affect-driven scholarship, even more so how we internalize resistances matters and impacts our experience of our scholarship. When I set out to write *Millennial Fandom* (2015), I was intent on writing it in a more personal voice that showed my investment and highlighted the necessarily personalized and partial nature of my insight. I felt at that point that I had been much better at embodying this felt scholarship position in conferences and maybe blog posts, but that I had reverted to a more traditionally reserved, authoritative voice in my more traditional academic scholarship. At least I had made the switch from "audience" to "fan," but still, whenever I wanted to incorporate my own perspective, it felt like narcissistic navel-gazing, disconnected from my larger argument. But
Alexander Doty's work—most especially *Flaming Classics* (2000)—had a huge impact on me. His voice is so deep in every line of that book; he's so present, it makes the book both a fun and powerful read, and I found myself deeply convinced by his argument, not despite the presence of his emotional self (he even records his own experiences of self-doubt and struggle in relation to his scholarship), but because of all that presence of self. I tried to embody that approach in *Millennial Fandom*. I'm not sure I fully succeeded, but it was a step in the right direction.

[14] Indeed, I think the talk in which I integrated personal emotions and experience the most was in my FSN talk that inspired this interview (and in part, this issue? wow!). I have to confess, I was riddled with self-doubt before giving that talk. Once there was no turning back, in England, talk in hand, headed for the podium, I wondered what I had been thinking, writing something so personal for a keynote speech! It was only when I was speaking the words and feeling the release in the audience—the sense that were in this together even if we are coming from different perspectives, fandoms, and national contexts, that I felt excitement that my career had led me to a place where this was possible, where I was able to give such a personal talk to a room full of scholars in our rapidly expanding field.

[15] Q: It's certainly difficult—and a bit scary—to be vulnerable about our feelings as scholars, but we're definitely inspired by your use of whole self or felt scholarship. Can you tell us more about what those terms mean to you and how you would encourage others to incorporate them into their work?

[16] LES: I don't really see myself as coming up with something new in this notion of whole self or felt scholarship. I've already mentioned Alex Doty as a deep influence on me. But Henry Jenkins's discussion of the necessity of owning personal insight in *Textual Poachers* framed my whole entrance into the field. I do think that's a part of *Textual Poachers* that isn't always recalled—perhaps because it is harder to culturally digest and certainly met with a fair amount of resistance within academia where—even in media and fan studies—notations of maintaining some semblance of critical distance are still held dear. I was recently rereading *Textual Poachers* in advance of my teaching a fan studies seminar this fall, and I was impressed again by Jenkins's argument for why self-location is necessary. And yet, in *Textual Poachers*, even Henry Jenkins himself restrains his personal voice to only the introduction. He then lets that serve as the remembered (or forgotten) frame for the case studies chapters that follow, which on their own do read as more traditional academic analyses. I don't mean this as a critique of *Textual Poachers* but rather as an example of how hard it is to maintain the presence of self in an extended way in academic analysis. It's both enormous emotional labor and a contradictory/impossible set of expectations.

[17] So I don't think I really would advocate for a whole self scholarship where we are present in all elements of ourselves in relation to our work at all times. Rather I would advocate for a strategic personal scholarship where we offer models for the value of personal insight and perspective in key moments—a register we can shift to that in turn can inflect our field's conversation overall. This shouldn't be a checklist, or necessary self-exposure or confessional, or an obligatory listing of fannish qualifiers, but rather an opening within the field to respect and acknowledge the role of lived and felt experience and investment in our
scholar-fan and fan-scholar work.

[18] Q: We're definitely big fans of celebrating those experiences! In particular, we've understood felt scholarship in the context of fan studies as doing our scholarship fannishly—that is, to incorporate our own fannish sensibilities, interests, and communities, as well as bringing nonacademic modes of knowledge production into our work. Doing so seems to open fan studies up to different understandings of fandom. What insights has felt scholarship offered you?

[19] LES: Ideally, when we do research fannishly, we are less likely to see ourselves in the position of assessor and thus less likely to devalue or objectify—or fetishize—the fandoms/fans we study. Of course, the flip side threat might be that we fight fandom battles (say, shipping wars) with academic language, but as long as this is owned and acknowledged, I'd rather see fannish debates mapped onto academia in self-reflexive, thoughtful ways than academic misreading or misuse of fandom. (Although another pitfall here would be wielding academic power/status within fandom circles—something I think it would be really valuable for us to have some further conversations about as academia and fandom commingle and merge evermore online and at cons.) But overall, I think that integrating our fannishness to some degree can ground us and can humble us within the complexity that is fandom. It can also open us to the myriad rich, messy, complex, beautiful, and ugly motivations and interactions that make up fandoms.

[20] Some examples of recent work that do this well: Rebecca Williams's "Tumblr's GIF Culture and the Infinite Image: Lone Fandom, Ruptures, and Working Through on a Microblogging Platform" ([https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1153](https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1153)) in the 2018 TWC special issue on Tumblr and Fandom; and Alexis Lothian's discussion of her own vidding in her 2018 book Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility. On the flip side, the vidding zine Videlicit ([https://vidders.github.io/](https://vidders.github.io/)) brings together vidders and academics (and both at once) in nuanced, accessible, fascinating discussions of vids and vidding.

[21] Being grounded in our fandom can give us insights into the intimate, incomplete, communal, ephemeral, temporary, multilayered, multifandom experience, the flow of an interface like Tumblr in a given moment, the situated use of one interface—say AO3 ([https://archiveofourown.org/](https://archiveofourown.org/))—in conjunction with others, or the personal histories of fans migrating from platform to platform as we might experience such migrations over our fan lifetimes, or the very quality of being a lurker, academic or otherwise. All of this lends us deeper, more nuanced, more specific felt/lived insights into fans and fandom, ourselves included.

[22] Q: It's wonderful to see you include "ourselves" in the list of topics into which we can gain insight, although—as you expressed above—we should be doing so carefully. What are the kinds of identities or aspects of yourself that you bring to your scholarship (and to your fandom, and activism)? How do you negotiate those identities in different contexts?

[23] LES: Necessarily I bring my fan history and my fan present, my academic identity, my motherhood, my political frustrations, my Jewish-otherness, my gender and sexual identity,
my geographic and cultural location—all of these inform my scholarship, my teaching, my fandom, my activism. I don't spell them out all the time. Rather, they bubble up in different ways at different moments—not only in more obvious ways (say in my identification with Rachel Bloom) but also in my identification with alienated angel Castiel, or with Theodosia Burr as imagined in Hamilton fandom, and resultingly with the fandom(s) and media texts I feel able to write about in my academic work. I don't always make these intersections explicit in my scholarship or teaching, and indeed it's easier to do so in my vidding than in my written work, but they're all at play. I used to strive to keep them all much more separate; in many ways its a privilege of seniority and age that I feel I can bring them together in public, here in this interview, or at conferences. But it's also the result of supportive communities—both within fan studies and within fandom (Vividcon folks, I'm looking at you) that helped me to be able to be somewhat closer to my whole self really at any given time with others, in my scholarship or otherwise.

[24] Q: Can you elaborate on how your position and tenure allows you a privilege that other junior faculty might not have? How might fan studies, or a wider academia, provide space for junior faculty and beginning scholars to experiment and engage with felt scholarship?

[25] LES: I have felt the shift acutely over the course of my career. As a graduate student and junior scholar, I used to admire other scholars who performed different variations of whole self or felt scholarship, but I didn't feel that I was in a position to do the same. I lived in fear that my students would discover my fannish activities, that my work would sound too emotional, or too partial, or too invested. These were gendered and generational concerns in part, but not totally. I still worry about all of those things, but to a lesser degree, having found myself in a supportive department and institution that value the insights of fan studies and nontraditional scholarship. Time, professional status, and a supportive work and cultural environment have allowed me to lean into rather than away from these intersections and to explore the way in which they can be productive, if still sometimes uncomfortable.

[26] I believe that the more we create forums that invite exchange of ideas between scholars, junior and senior, in less formal contexts, and the more we create structures for mentorship and collaborative scholarship, the richer our field will become, and the more we will benefit from a wider range of perspectives. I certainly felt this sense of a supportive, multigenerational scholar-fan space when I went to my first Fan Studies Network UK conference, and I hope that the recent North American edition of the Fan Studies Network conference did this both in its panels, roundtables, its mentoring program, and its opening speedgeeking event. I'd also like to see an online forum for fan studies that offers what Antenna (http://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/) did for TV studies—a short form sharing of ideas in a more casual tone, without the pressure of a formal publication. I think we need initiatives like this to build diverse communities of support among fan-scholars with different foci, from different disciplines, and at different stages of their careers.

[27] Q: It seems as though this is a supportive moment in fan studies for expressing a whole self and felt self. Is this true in other contexts? For example, when you name something political as fannish, as you do in your activist work, how is that taken up?
I think it depends a lot on the audience/listener. Someone who has been engaged in media fandom going way back wouldn't likely be surprised at the implication that there's a connection between politics and fandom because fandom for many has always felt/been politically charged, even if we're just talking about the politics of pleasure. For people less familiar with fandom past or present, it's more surprising that there might be a political or activist dimension to fandom because those taboos still exist that fandom is a place for only uncritical celebration rather than a complex landscape of cultural, social, and emotional engagement. From that perspective, on the one hand, I feel that the insistence on the presence of the political within fandom is an important intervention to make over and over again, because dismissive narratives about the simplicity or vapidity of fandom are deeply problematic, recurrent narratives that continually erase and erase again the subjectivities of fans, youth, women, queer, and "nonnormative" identities and experiences of cultures. On the other hand, there's a perception that we might taint the purity of an activist voice with the supposedly compromised, consumerist, culture industry dupe of fandom.

But on the ground in 2018, no such clear divides between activism and fandom exist, as I attempted to get at in my FSN talk. Activism is modeled on fandom and uses fannish approaches to popular culture because activists are already fans and because modes of fan engagement have become modes of cultural engagement more broadly. So of course the two are merged, because they weren't separate to begin with. Calling out that already existing merger is important to me because any suggestion that the two actually are separate reads to me as wishful thinking and cultural policing. To use Harry Potter as an example: Harry Potter was already political; people don't make Voldemort signs for rallies just because of the strategic planning of the Harry Potter Alliance but because Harry Potter has been for many a key part of their cultural lexicon for making sense of the social and political landscape, communicating to one another and making their perspectives heard. That said, the work of the Harry Potter Alliance was critical in transforming the perception that fandom couldn't be political or do valuable social activist work.

What would you say is the effect of the blending of fandom and political activism how we do fan studies?

Well, if fandom and politics were already merged, then fan scholarship and politics are also already necessarily intertwined. To me, this only heightens the need for self-reflexivity and for critical analysis of our own positions and how they shape our work. Yes, our scholar-fan work likely may have political purposes or dimensions (and indeed this has likely always been the case), but we should also be cautious in assuming that all fans or fan-scholars share the same political frameworks and investments.

It's hard to imagine doing anything fannishly, self-reflexively, and with our whole and/or felt selves without including feels in one way or another. How do we share heightened or overwhelming emotions—sadness, joy, grief—in scholarship, fannish or otherwise? How can we use emotional expression responsibly?

There's a place for considering and incorporating such emotions (also anger, frustration, discomfort, or alienation), but thoughtfully and self-reflexively. I don't think it's
always a necessity; it depends on the topic and the meat of the argument. I've already mentioned Rebecca Williams's account of fandom mourning through *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013–15) GIFs; a couple of other examples that come to mind are Maud Lavin's "Tomboy in Love" (2015; [http://situations.yonsei.ac.kr/product/data/item/1535539292/detail/f4aaafaaa8.pdf](http://situations.yonsei.ac.kr/product/data/item/1535539292/detail/f4aaafaaa8.pdf)), which looks in part at the cultural significance of transcultural misinterpretation, including her own situated experience of *1st Shop of Coffee Prince* (2007) as a US viewer, or even, arguably, Rebecca Wanzo's "African American Acafandom and Other Strangers" (2015; [http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2015.0699](http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2015.0699)), which is not a personal narrative but an invested critical argument that indeed argues that we revisit this question of writing about what "we" know, to recognize how an uncritical focus on scholar's fannish comfort zones has resulted in the othering of black fan experience in the face of assumptions of fannish whiteness. Wanzo's piece isn't a confessional narrative of self, but it's a felt analysis that is all the stronger because it feels like it matters in a personal way, and not just to the author. Another piece that comes to mind is Paul Booth's "Tumbling or Stumbling?" (2018; [https://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1252](https://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1252)), again in the Tumblr and Fandom TWC issue, in which he talks about his own failures using Tumblr in the fan studies classroom and about the necessity of failure—or a willingness to fail in teaching (fandom and perhaps in general) more broadly.

[34] I'm struck by this short list that first comes to mind in answer to your question, and how it doesn't include feels in the joy or squee sense. I don't think we're there yet. We're not at a place where we can comfortably incorporate love and fun and joy and pleasure into our research and scholarship; anger, critique, dissatisfaction—those are easier fits, actually.

[35] **Q:** Why do you think we are not yet in a position to incorporate squee, love, and pleasure in our research? What do you imagine it would look like to do so?

[36] **LES:** I want to say that the taboo against (female) pleasure in media runs deep and is still with us around every corner. I do think this is the case. But at the same time I think that fannish squee is never purely positive, never purely love. Fannish pleasure is mixed in with displeasure, or it simultaneously functions as love and critique, distinction and separation. On the ground as media fans, we know this in our everyday interactions with fandom. But when people say "fandom" (in academia and in popular culture), they still think "uncritical love," and anything perceived as uncritical doesn't sit well with academia. So there's the very present risk that including fan emotion (be it squee or ranting, all with potentially a critical edge) will be immediately misread as uncritical and will thus taint our academic work. But if we could get past this, I'd love to see fannish emotion, mixed bag that it is, integrated into our scholarship in thoughtful and self-critical ways, where we engage with questions like, what are these fannish pleasures built on? On what assumptions do they depend? Who do they include and exclude? What releases do squee, love, and pleasure offer? Why, and to whom, and in what ways?

[37] **Q:** Those are important questions to ask if we want to stop erasing nonnormative or minority fannish experiences. What other kinds of pitfalls—for researchers, participants, and/or audiences—should we consider while doing felt scholarship?
There are significant potential pitfalls to felt scholarship. There's the risk of uncritically focusing on the limits of our own experiences, communities, pleasures, and displeasures, and assuming that those experiences represent fandom at large. There's the risk of misrepresenting the communities we study because we're not fully taking into account how our investment in the topic might shape the picture we see and paint. There's the risk of creating a field in which only certain felt scholarships are welcome, with others dismissed or not recognized or simply not invited to be part of the conversation. There's the risk of graduate students and junior scholars feeling the pressure to self-disclose in order to be part of the field, when their specific position, department, or publication needs do not value (or indeed devalue) felt scholarship.

I don't think that whole self or felt scholarship should be a requirement, or a constant state. At different stages in our lives we'll want more or less privacy, more or less of the personal in our fandom, more or less fandom in our academia, more or less academia in our fandom, more or less politics in all of the above. This depends on who the individual researcher/scholar/fan is, what fan communities they participate in, what their relationship is the communities and practices they study, what their personal life demands are, and what point they are at in their academic careers (or perhaps they may be independent scholars working in other fields simultaneously, with additional sets of professional frameworks and concerns). I don't think there's a single answer to this or a right way to maintain boundaries; it's a constantly changing process. These are such personal mergers. We can only perform what feels right for ourselves in a given moment while respecting the boundaries that others choose to keep around us, or that an institution may demand of us or of others.

I do think that when there's a reason to, those of us who feel we can should work to incorporate personal experience, insight, and emotion into our fannish scholarship because doing so will cumulatively make it more of an option and an accepted practice that others can experiment with as well, and then I hope we can move toward having a larger range of voices, perspectives, and bodies performing/enacting felt fannish scholarship. But we also need to be collectively self-aware about whose experiences and feelings are being represented, and who is being left out. Felt scholarship needs to be engaged with self-reflexively and self-critically or it may do more harm than good.

Whole self scholarship should never be perceived as mandatory; nor should felt scholarship necessarily require self-disclosure. It's not about proving yourself or sharing all details of your fan history. It's about being aware of how your fannishness and personal history informs your work and taking that into account (if not necessarily spelling it out in the written work).

Q: Since the rest of the work in this special issue is specifically devoted to fan studies methodologies, let's end with a question about how you see felt scholarship fitting into conversations about fan studies methodologies going forward. What would you like researchers—fans, acafans, fan-scholars, and so on—to think about?

LES: I am moved to see more folks venturing into this territory and exploring the value of integrating personal history, emotion, political investment, and even creative practice in
fan studies work. I don't think people should feel like they must practice this type of scholarship, but the more folks who do, the more we can explore what these mode of fan studies have to offer to our understanding of media culture and popular culture more broadly, and to our community specifically.

[44] But—and this is a big but, which came up as a significant concern at the recent Fan Studies Network North America conference—if we engage with felt scholarship uncritically and let it limit what we study, whom we include in the conversation, or what we consider fan studies (or even whom we consider a fan), we'll be in deep trouble as a field and as individual scholars.

[45] This type of felt scholarship needs to be practiced self-critically and inclusively, and in generous rather than proscriptive ways. This means working to include in the conversation multiple felt scholarships, perspectives, and histories, and even multiple definitions of what counts as fandom, while continually working to create and recreate multiplicity. Moreover, that multiplicity needs to include felt and more traditional scholarship together. We're not there now, and it's going to be hard, ongoing work for the field to be truly as robust and diverse as it should be—and as we need it to be.
Review

*Fans and fan cultures: Tourism, consumerism, and social media*, by Henrik Linden and Sara Linden

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[0.1] Keywords—Brand fandom; Commercialization; Consumer culture; Digital fandom; Fan tourism; Media fandom; Music; New media; Sports


[1] Over the last two decades, as digital fandoms have grown and spread, we have witnessed the increasing (and increasingly visible) commercialization of fan cultures and practices. *Fans and Fan Cultures: Tourism, Consumerism, and Social Media* seeks to address that shift by modeling a broader and more interdisciplinary conceptualization of fandom through the lens of consumer culture. As scholars predominantly focused on cultural tourism and consumerism, Henrik Linden and Sara Linden productively expand their scope beyond media fandom to include music, tourism, brands, and sports. That breadth allows for macro analyses of the qualified power, circumscribed agency, and neoliberal ideologies wielded by consumers in the entertainment and experience economies—regardless of their specific fandoms or industries.

[2] From that macro positioning, Linden and Linden grapple with the discursive dichotomy of fandom in a capitalist paradigm: fans as deviant liabilities versus fans as ideal consumers. In so doing, they situate and deconstruct the enduring stereotypes that have shaped perceptions of fans in popular discourse, industry strategy, and academic study. From fans as pathological narcissists to fans as subcultural activists, Linden and Linden reassess these representations in the context of contemporary consumer culture—how constructions and expressions of fan cultures have (or have not) shifted in the wake of open platforms and industrial cultivation.

[3] This book offers more of a realignment than a revision, (re)considering cultural, digital, and fan studies literature in conjunction and conversation with marketing perspectives and
parlance. Linden and Linden aim to "find some kind of synergy between seemingly disparate fields of scholarly and professional practice, and their take on fans and fan cultures" (38). This synthetic approach (along with its macro perspective) allows Fan Cultures to serve as a primer that explores power, agency, and ideology through the act of consumption. In an era of unprecedented fandom expansion and co-optation, mainstreaming and surveillance, consumption and commercialization, the authors map the new normal and how that shifting valence and valuation impacts the perception of fans within industry and academy alike.

[4] The monograph is comprised of ten chapters, separated into two main sections: the theoretical framework and the application of that framework to a variety of fan cultures. The organization of the book is particularly well suited toward pedagogical ends. In each chapter, Linden and Linden provide extensive synthetic literature reviews on a constellation of topics—divided by subheadings—and apply those lenses to abbreviated examples like Comic-Con and West Ham United. The authors also include a brief summary at the conclusion of each chapter, emphasizing the key takeaways and reiterating the importance of consumer culture analyses in fan studies. This organization, along with the thematic nature of the chapter structure, renders Fans and Fan Cultures: Tourism, Consumerism, and Social Media modular, accessible, and teachable, especially at the upper division level.

[5] Chapters 2, 3, and 4 set the "theoretical 'scene,'" chiefly focused on challenging and expanding traditional understandings of fans to address contemporary (and often conflicting) consumer ideologies and industrial classifications (5). Chapter 2, "Fans, Followers and Brand Advocates," sketches the complex and fluid web of designations and hierarchies adopted by marketers—from fans to followers, advocates to influencers, niches to fandoms—and their implications for industrial co-optation and immanent commodification in digital spaces. In addition to putting industrial and academic definitions in conversation, this chapter highlights the terminological slipperiness of such classifications, claiming marketers are intentionally blurring the boundaries between fans and consumers to encourage increased loyalty and engagement.

[6] Chapter 3, "Fans and (Post)Subcultural Consumerism," builds on this work to argue that as the boundaries between fans and consumers continue to erode, so too do the subcultural subjectivities and transformative potentialities of fan cultures. Linden and Linden seek to qualify the agency and activism often ascribed to fans in fan studies literature: "While most fan scholars would like the opposite to be true, it appears that fans are not able to carve out an alternative to the pursuit of consumption as duty, but attempts at doing so merely heighten the fact that we live in a consumer society where even the everyday and mundane needs to be elevated to meaningful experiences" (49). They argue that social media, open platforms, and neoliberal ideologies have granted brands the opportunity "to spread their net further through the commodification of the alternative and 'independent,' and through immersing contraculture into the mainstream—effectively rendering contraculture impossible" (44). In this conceptualization of contemporary fandom, subcultural incorporation and neoliberal individualism have essentially reduced the active agency of fans to the act of consumption.

[7] Chapter 4, "Text and Representation: The Community and The Individual," continues this thread, arguing that the visibility afforded and commodified by social media
technologies has neutered the politics and normalized the representations of fandom. Here, social media is a double-edged sword: it simultaneously grants fans enough visibility to wield limited consumer power and commodifies that visibility as gratis promotion on public, searchable, and traceable platforms like Instagram. Thus, fans are atomized, quantified, and normalized as idealized neoliberal consumers. This chapter clearly establishes how and why corporations have reappraised fans operating on digital platforms, progressing from fearing their transformative potential to courting their promotional potential. Linden and Linden argue that while the discursive dichotomy persists in industry doctrine—with fan cultures assessed based on perceived threat to intellectual properties and public relations—fan representations are more positive than in previous eras. They note that "the cause for this normalisation in perception and representation of fans is linked to the acceptance of consumer culture and, perhaps, also the acceptance of neoliberalism as a natural order" (75). While marketers certainly do normalize, legitimate, and leverage some aspects of fandom for promotional purposes—as Linden and Linden argue here—it is important that we qualify these claims and acknowledge that this strategy is intentionally limited to a narrow segment of fan practices, communities, and identities. Without qualification, such discursive construction can lead to universalized, myopic, and ultimately misleading representations of contemporary fandom(s).

The remainder of the book applies their theoretical framework to a refreshingly broad swath of fan cultures, ranging from traditional subjects like film and television fandoms to growing areas of inquiry like sports and music. In Chapter 5, "Celebrity Culture and Modes of Participation Through 'New' Media," the authors provide a brief history of film stardom in Hollywood and establish the context of digital (micro)celebrity. In both instances—classical Hollywood and contemporary Twitter—Linden and Linden posit that "the rise of mass celebrity culture was made possible thanks to new technology" (102). While citing material technologies like film stock, this history also highlights the role played by social technologies like fan magazines and social networking sites in modeling consumption and promotion practices. Undergirding the argument that technologies shape fan engagement, this chapter illustrates their earlier claims about the persistence and vicissitudes of fan representations, vacillating from savvy consumers to pathological fanatics and back again over the last century.

The following two chapters address comparatively understudied areas within fan studies: tourism and sports. Chapter 6, "Fans and Tourism," proposes a particularly broad conceptualization of fandom and/as tourism. In addition to fan pilgrimages like Forks, Washington and Platform 9¾ the authors widen their purview to include events and places that attract international attendees like art exhibitions and party destinations, as well as the technological and industrial forces that promote and perpetuate such tourism. For instance, they emphasize the crucial role that Instagram, travel blogs, and DMOs (destination management/marketing organizations) play in helping "local attractions and institutions to promote their destination as fan friendly" (125).

Conversely, Chapter 7, "Football Fans: Representations, Motivations and Place," pitches much narrower. Focusing primarily on English football, Linden and Linden detail the escalating tension between corporate and fan interests. As sports institutions—clubs, teams,
leagues, sponsors, networks, stadiums—leverage their global brands and reach, they effectively lessen the power and ownership of their core fanbases. This chapter aptly showcases the limits of corporate benevolence, as loyal fans quickly become liabilities when one or both parties overstep the tenuous (and unwritten) terms of engagement between franchise and fandom.

[11] In the final two chapters, the authors further explore the role of social media through a broad-based investigation of popular culture fandom. Chapter 8, "Popular Culture Fandom: Broadening the Picture," focuses primarily on auditory fandom, ranging from musicians (Morrissey) to reality shows (Eurovision song contest) to radio personalities (Terry Wogan). Demonstrating the importance of social media in contemporary auditory fandom, Linden and Linden argue that "sites such as Facebook provide opportunities for fans to interact with each other in a more casual manner than specialist fan forums" (173). Referencing the migratory nature of open platforms and the rejection of fannish identities, this chapter feints toward a more nuanced look at the countless ways contemporary fandoms operate and affiliate. Chapter 9, "Social Media: Millennials, Brand Fans and the Branding of Fans," further outlines the process of forging and maintaining relationships with fans (especially millennials) through social networking sites. It is through these sites that brands and consumers collectively and continuously negotiate the meaning of authenticity, as millennials are "independent consumers who know what they want, yet they need other millennials to tell them if something is authentic or not" (196). Together, these chapters highlight the essential nature of social networking technologies and digital promotional strategies in Linden and Linden's framework.

[12] Throughout the book, the authors synthesize marketing perspectives and cultural studies to offer a corrective to utopian web 2.0 rhetoric, concluding that "the superstructures of social media" encourage, shape, surveil, and commodify participatory digital cultures to the extent that "fans in consumerist society are deprived of real agency" (209). In this consumerist paradigm, any individual or communal motivations are unbalanced by corporate gain in an inherently asymmetrical exchange. The only way to win is to not play. With the limited power they possess as consumers—as "perhaps the most important market segment"—fans are only "able to affect popular culture media content as long as it does not threaten the dominant structures and hierarchies" (215–16). This qualification of fan agency is predicated upon the argument that real agency can only be exercised within the strictures of the market. Beyond undermining nonmonetary compensation, this approach to agency also undertheorizes the role communal structures play in shaping fan cultures and norms (Busse 2013). Industrial perspectives are a key component of contemporary fan studies, but limiting agency to the machinations of and impacts on the market—not addressing fan pleasures or communal benefits—artificially limits the scope and stakes of both fandom and fan scholarship.

[13] Fan Cultures endeavors to map the contours of the structure versus agency debate in the digital fan ecology with a productive focus on marketing and business management interests. Indeed, one of the key strengths of this project is its inclusion and examination of industrial perspectives—what groups and practices marketers deem fannish and/or commodifiable, why, and how. This is a perspective that is often (and intentionally) glossed over in fan
studies. However, without corresponding empirical research and/or prolonged study of fan motivations and perspectives, the project remains somewhat one-sided. The value and necessity of top-down, structural research lie in its ability to render the big picture. While Linden and Linden capably articulate the industrial perspective, they do so without directly engaging key stakeholders. In order to sketch that big picture and assess agency in the digital consumer culture, we must also include the voices and agendas of fans, communities, and social media companies.

[14] This book illustrates that the increased visibility of contemporary fandom via social media is a double-edged sword. However, that maxim applies to researchers as well as to fandom and industry. While the newfound salience renders fans, practices, and trends more accessible for scholars, it also slants analysis toward the elements and contingents of fandom that are most visible and best suited for industrial co-optation. For example, Linden and Linden argue that "Comic Con [sic] is all-absorbing and constantly growing as an industry vehicle, rendering alternative readings and expressions harmless" (62). As they note, Comic-Con is an industry expo dressed in the trappings of a fan convention, packaging and promoting a highly curated (and largely sanitized) version of fandom. While Comic-Con is a rich case study—especially for industrial analyses—situating it as a metonym of fandom obscures the diversity of people, practices, and politics in fandom(s). In this paradigm, it is easy to see why the authors doubt the transformative potential of fandom, especially without the countervailing force of fan voices.

[15] *Fan Cultures* is designed to offer "an overview of some of the possibilities available to scholars, fans and brand managers alike" (5). As with any broad-based survey, the project can, at times, trade specificity for universality. That breadth is certainly a boon in terms of their conceptualization of fan cultures—in which they address brand, travel, music, and sports fans without privileging any one culture as the ur-fandom. However, this universalizing impulse becomes an obstacle with regards to representing diversity, both in the variety of fandoms and the identity of fans. Linden and Linden adopt a universal approach to digital fandoms, using consumer culture as a lens to unify disparate industries and ground fan studies in the realities of the market. While much can be gained from this macro perspective, the breadth of their framework also collapses and circumvents the distinctive rhythms, cultures, norms, and hierarchies at work in each fan culture, much less the overlapping fandoms that comprise them.

[16] Between a universal framework and a focus on highly visible fandoms, Linden and Linden run the risk of essentializing the multitudes of fandom down to assumed young, white, Western, middle-class, neoliberal subjects. This risk is magnified by a lack of engagement with race, gender, sexuality, and ability in their theoretical framework and analyses. While Linden and Linden do address issues of age and class—through the vector of millennial consumers—and gesture to the gendered nature of fandom, a more thorough investigation and theorization of identity and positionality would mitigate some of these risks. Without that critical engagement, the assumption of a universal subject—in academia as in industry—whitewashes and sanitizes fan activities, bodies, and ideologies. This forcible realignment to the center may be indicative of consumer culture's construction and exaltation of fans as idealized consumers, but it also perpetuates fan studies' own uncritical
approach to whiteness (Pande 2018; Stanfill 2011). Nuancing a comprehensive consumer culture framework with fan perspectives could certainly broaden our approach to fandom without erasing community, identity, or positionality.

[17] Grappling with industrial co-optation, neoliberal ideologies, and social media, *Fans and Fan Cultures: Tourism, Consumerism, and Social Media* provides a broad survey of contemporary fan cultures that highlights the similarities they share as intersecting market segments. While we must also attend to the diversity of fans and fan cultures, a macro view of fandom's role in the broader consumerist paradigm charts an interdisciplinary roadmap. Tracking the consistencies between media, brand, sports, tourism, and music fandoms, this book connects and contributes to ongoing debates in marketing, business management, digital media, media industries, and star studies. In terms of fan studies, Henrik and Sara Linden remind us that—regardless of how we characterize fan agency—critical examinations of power must remain at the heart of cultural studies, especially as the scale and scope of modern fandom continue to escalate.

**References**


Book review

Fanfiction and the author: How fanfic changes popular cultural texts, by Judith May Fathallah

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[1] In Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts, Judith May Fathallah ingeniously draws upon Foucauldian discourse analysis—the study of the relational dynamics between authoritative and subordinate powers within and through language—to examine the complex relationships between the authors, fans, canons, and fics of contemporary popular media texts. Her analysis centers around three television programs: the BBC's Sherlock (2010–17), HBO's Game of Thrones (2011–19), and the CW's Supernatural (2005–20). She argues that the fan works generated within these fandoms, especially racially, gendered, or sexually transformative other-text(s), appear within the context of what she calls "the legitimation paradox" (9). This means that even while performing radical transformations of canon, fan fiction relies upon the cultural capital that the white male authors and heroes of these canons typically possess. This book is particularly notable in that it excitingly juxtaposes literary analysis of canonical and fan texts with significant quantitative analysis of fan reception as understood through aggregated reviews and comments. As a writer, fan, and academic, Fathallah manages to deftly move through her various subject positions, transparently addressing her autoethnography as both a scholar and a fan writing about her own community.

[2] Fathallah is no stranger to such an autoethnographic approach, as can be seen in one of her early works, "H/c and Me: An Autoethnographic Account of a Troubled Love Affair" (2011). Her more recent work, such as "Digital Fanfic in Negotiation: LiveJournal, Archive of Our Own, and the Affordances of Read–Write Platforms" (2018a) addresses some of the concerns that this volume raises, describing how fics, which generally reside within the
space of the legitimation paradox, can assume some of the cachet of print culture when played out on platforms such as Archive of Our Own (AO3). Meanwhile, "Polyphony on Tumblr: Reading the Hateblog as Pastiche" (2018b) pursues another theme very clearly laid out in this book: to wit, the need to view fan fiction as both praxis and fiction. This perspective animates Fanfiction and the Author, demonstrating how social and literary analysis need to work together to provide an accurate picture of authors, fans, and fan works.

[3] Published as part of the Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence series from Amsterdam University Press, this book is beautifully produced. Its attention-grabbing bright pink cover, complete with its illustration of a fan drawn image of Game of Thrones's Sandor and Sansa on a modern-day motorcycle, is graphically striking. Fathallah also includes several diagrams and charts that visually express her ideas. For example, she illustrates her methodology with a flowchart (41) and demonstrates "the discursive construction of masculinity in Sherlock" (64) and "fandom's reconstruction of masculinity in Sherlock" (67) with diagrams that intriguingly combine word clouds, sequences, and versions of Venn diagrams to cleverly explain the construction of broad concepts like masculinity: the canon associates it with brilliant, penetrating, and central, while fans construct it as eroticized, queer, and damaged. She uses the same type of diagram to show the way Supernatural fandom reconstructs both authorship and fan writer. Authorship is associated with words like prophet, truth, and God, while the concept of fan writer is associated with terms like excessive, juvenile, and guardian of text (169). When appropriate, she illustrates her work with stills from the show; a picture from Game of Thrones, for instance, shows (the white) Daenarys being hailed and lifted by a teeming mass of people of color (111), communicating the white privilege embedded in the series contained in a single image. This use of iconography and design to convey complicated critical theories makes the book extremely readable, from both an amateur and a professional perspective.

[4] After laying out her theoretical framework, Fathallah digs into the meat of her book: a close reading of the media texts Sherlock, Game of Thrones, and Supernatural and the fics (complete with comments) that surround them. In chapter three, "The White Man at the Centre of the World: Masculinity in Sherlock," she identifies "four discursive branches" (53) along which the discourse of masculinity is constructed within the series: mind, body, position, and place. Fathallah writes, "the discourse of masculinity in Sherlock is constructed through the controlling, ordered, penetrating mind, complicated by the suggestion of vanity or pretension; the hard, defined, singular body whether pale and smooth or scarred; and the position of mastery complicated by imbrication in various social networks. It is placed firmly in London, England, and London is the centre of the world" (64). While Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss operate within this framework, fans complicate the discourse. Fathallah demonstrates through a close reading of various Sherlock fics that in fandom, conversely "the male body is constructed as leaky, penetrable, reproductive and with far more malleable borders than canon would allow" (73). Fandom, here, works to "radically denaturalize" the central position of the straight, white man. Fathallah also astutely observes that "fandom does a much better job de-naturalizing the authority of maleness than it does whiteness" (99). While she is cleawWhiteness, both in fandom and out, tends to be the default, and thus disturbingly invisible.
After chapter three's focus on masculinity, chapter four, "'I AM YOUR KING': Authority in *Game of Thrones*," turns to consider how authority itself is constructed within *Game of Thrones* and its fan works. She argues that it can be understood through five discursive branches: traditional/patriarchal; rational-legal; charismatic; the commons; and finally, authorial. All of these forms of authority make their appearance within the book series, the television program, and the fan fiction as well. Most significant, perhaps, is the last of these, authorial. Here, intradiegetic authorship is already tensely shared between George R. R. Martin and David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, even before it is vexed by fandom's extradiegetic contributions. These works already defy Martin's edicts against fan fiction of his work, even as Benioff and Weiss simultaneously perform transformations that often contradict the novels. One might assume that the destabilization of authorship caused by adaptations would indicate a higher level of deconstruction on the part of fans. Oddly, this is not the case. Fathallah notes that in contrast to *Sherlock* fandom, *Game of Thrones* fandom does not dismantle these official authorities in the same radical way. She writes, "the fic that constructs text as stable and inevitable, at least in its endings, is received much better than those which deconstruct it totally" (154). While fan fic, by nature, deconstructs the canon, the content of popular stories remains mostly within the bounds determined by the traditional white male author.

The final research chapter, "'I'm a God': The Author and the Writing Fan in *Supernatural,*" examines how within the text of the series, the author-god (representing Eric Kripke and represented by Chuck) and the fan writer (representing fangirls and represented by Becky) meet. The weaving of these metatextual authorial figures into the canon adventures depicted in the series means that the concept of the author is more intertwined with the narrative than either masculinity in *Sherlock* or authority in *Game of Thrones.* Thus, she concludes that this dyad is governed by "a consistent power relation: (1) That the author-god's text is canonical truth, and (2) The fan's text, though permissible, is secondary, derivative, false" (160–61). Even more than *Sherlock* and *Game of Thrones,* *Supernatural* functions as the clearest expression of the legitimation paradox. We know fans gaze at the show, but, with its portrayal of the relationship of fan writer and author and what Fathallah calls its "textual provocation" (162), *Supernatural* suggests that the show is also gazing at its fans, playing out the legitimation paradox on screen. While the distinction between author and fan writer in the television show is hierarchical, suggesting a primary/secondary or original/derivative binary, it is within this prolific fandom that we find fics in which "the legitimation paradox begins to be tentatively deconstructed" and we "see fics that specifically address the questions of originality, authorship, and the value of fan fic as transformative work that opens categories of interpretation in broader society" (198).

Fathallah's contribution to critical theory in general is significant, as she adds original quantitative reception analysis based on comments and reviews to her Foucauldian methodology. In her conclusion, she stresses the importance of approaching fan fiction in a way that is neither overly celebratory of its radical potential nor overly cynical about industry co-option. She concludes that "by adding its own statements to discursive formations, undermining, contradicting, and consolidating canonical constructions, fandom can and does work to legitimate what is culturally othered, including and especially itself […] but, by the very fact that those transformations depend on a canonical source, the
legitimation becomes paradoxical" (200). Within this paradox, all transformational work can be understood, reframing our understanding of author, fan, canon, and fanon.

[8] The book as a whole is thematically arranged in an ascension narrative for both fan writers and authors. The figure of the author moves from Man to King to God, while the fan writer subtly challenges and complicates their power. This journey is engaging and Fathallah is an excellent guide through these theoretical and fannish waters. While probably not for the casual reader—the book presumes some knowledge of Foucault, for instance—members of the fandoms analyzed, anyone interested in fan studies, narrative theory, media studies, and/or critical theory ought to obtain a copy. As one of the most rapidly expanding genres, fan fiction is going to undergo more and more critical examination. Suitable for both the undergraduate and graduate classroom, this book, which begins by situating its argument within the history of fan studies to date, would be an excellent place to start.

References

