ABSTRACT

Fan Responses to *Orphan Black* and *The 100* via
Blogs, Fan Fiction, and Ship Wars

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This thesis researches the complexities of internet fandoms surrounding femslash communities on the microblogging platform tumblr.com, looking at some of the LGBTQ fans' particular behaviors and practices. In this context, Internet fandom refers to virtual communities where fans of popular culture media, such as television shows or web series, actively engage in "fannish" activities. My research addresses three questions: 1) What are some potential benefits for fans when LGBTQ media representation is positive (i.e. characters don't succumb to damaging tropes); 2) What do fans do to cope with and rectify when representation is negative; and 3) What fans can do to change representation for the better. My research reveals the transformations that can occur in individuals and their communities because of positive representation and how fans can effectively fight against negative narrative representation to change dominant discourse that historically silences and represses LGBTQ persons.

Fan Responses to *Orphan Black* and *The 100* via Blogs, Fan Fiction, and Ship Wars

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Three years ago I saw several images of two women; they were kissing, smiling at

each other, working on computers, working in a science lab. I had to find out what

television show they were on. Several weeks later I had binge-watched the first season of

Orphan Black, started watching season two live, made friends online, and read thousands

of pages of fan fiction about Delphine Cormier and Cosima Niehaus. Since this

experience I have heard countless other fans describe similar stories, not only of falling

into fandom, but that moment of seeing a powerful image, recognizing one's self for the

first time.

I came to this project over two years ago when I was profoundly changed by a

television show and the community I had found in the online fandom built around it. The

show was *Orphan Black* and I discovered it through posts on the microblogging platform

Tumblr. I was immediately drawn into the science fiction narrative and I began to open

up to other fans of the show online. This was to be the start of a journey that would

change my life in all aspects from the personal to the professional.

This project reflects my journey of discovery as an academic and as a fan, two

identities that I recognize exist simultaneously and constantly inflect upon each other. As

Jeanette Monaco argues in "Memory work, autoethnography and the construction of a

fan-ethnography," by acting as scholar-fan my "positioning as a part of a 'knowing' fan-

audience membership [is] therefore not only validated by the fandom but by the media

studies' academic canon" (132). It was my experience as a fan and my curiosity as an academic that got me noticing particular behaviors and practices of some of the LGBTQ fans. I began researching the complexities of Internet fandoms surrounding femslash communities on Tumblr and LGBTQ fan responses to media representation. My thesis seeks to answer three questions: 1) What happens and what is the significance when LGBTQ media representation is positive (e.g. LGBTQ characters don't succumb to damaging tropes; they are not killed off, etc.)? 2) What do fans do to cope with and rectify when representation is negative and characters are killed off, etc.? and 3) What do fans do to try and change negative representation for the better? These questions will be explored using *Orphan Black* and *The 100* and various fan responses in the form of surveys, blog posts, fan fiction, and tweets.

Fan studies examines the fans and the cultures of the fandoms the fans make up surrounding various kinds of media, sports, music, or celebrity. A fan is "a self-identified enthusiast, devotee or follower of a particular media genre, text, person, or activity" (Duffett 293). Fans often interact with the fan object (or fan text)—the specific person or text attracting a fan—intensely and passionately in ways that reinforce or create new self-identities (Duffett 297). The goal of this thesis is to examine the interactions and practices of online fandom surrounding television programs. The text of this thesis is the fandom—the audience—of the television show, and not the television show itself. The purpose of this audience-based approach is to examine how the fandom, or the audience, interacts with, is shaped by, transforms, and influences the text of the television show. The approach of this paper will be to use a case study of a specific fandom in each chapter—the *Orphan Black* or *The 100* fandom—to answer the research questions I have

outlined in an online environment where fans engage and interact with the text. Because the online environment is ever-changing a case study will allow for parameters to be set on the time of the study as well as the participants.

John Fiske argues that television's dominant narrative form is the series/serial, which are "inherently more open texts than the one-off, completed closed narratives typical of the novel and film" (144). The openness of cable television texts allows viewers to "read" the texts in a multitude of ways and to dynamically interact with them. In "The Death of the Reader?: Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture," Cornel Sandvoss argues for a redefinition of reading: "By defining the act of reading as a form of dialogue between text and reader…in fandom and elsewhere, we enter into a wider social and cultural commitment as to what texts are for and what we believe the uses of reading to be" (70). Television shows like *Orphan Black* have the capacity to change culture, and "The way we…engage with the symbolic resources of popular culture does…have a profound impact on our social and cultural environment and interpersonal relations" (Sandvoss "Fans"15). Fans engage intimately and actively with fan objects—whether it's a television show, an actress, or a sports team. Media-based fandoms allow for fans actively to engage not only with the text but also with producers/actors and other fans.

Fan spaces whether online or not, can create safe havens and communities especially for marginalized populations. Tumblr itself is known as a blog site where many marginalized individuals find a safe space and community.[1] Many television fandoms have fan bases on Tumblr. *Orphan Black* and another science fiction television

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[1] While Tumblr does attract many marginalized individuals and provide a space for discussion and

show, *The 100*, have large LGBTQ fandoms on Tumblr. These fandoms are largely formed around the femslash, or female same sex couple pairings on the shows, as well as the representations in general of LGBTQ persons and issues that are discussed in the texts.

I seek to open up research into communities on tumblr.com and the unique way marginalized individuals have found safe haven on this micro-blogging platform. Online fandoms are constantly evolving and their cultures and practices are unique depending on the platform. Almost no research has been done concerning the role of Tumblr and I would like to begin the discussion of fandom here. In addition, fan research into femslash fandoms and the practices of LGBTQ fans is relatively small comparatively speaking. I would like to continue the research that has been started and fill the gaps where necessary. The conversation of fan culture will be enriched by discussion of more perspectives and voices.

In Chapter Two, "'My sexuality isn't the most interesting thing about me:' Creating Discourse and Going Outside the *Orphan Black* Fandom," after discussing four of *Orphan Black*'s characters in some detail, I will show how fans of the show are using its text to represent their newfound identities to others in an effort to seek cultural acceptance and to open up dialogue in interpersonal relationships. I will do this by citing fan postings from the online fan community on Tumblr to demonstrate from the fans themselves the ways in which they have appropriated the text to represent the "self" to their external communities. I have also conducted research through an online survey to gain further insight into the fan community. This chapter explores the significance of positive LGBTQ representation and the impact it has had on the *Orphan Black* fandom.

In Chapter Three, "'Love at First Science:' Queer Female Narrators in Femslash Fan Fiction," I use queer narratology to push the boundaries of "text" in my reading of fan fiction by reading fiction derived from a science fiction television show, written by queer women for women and about queer women characters. In particular I closely read "Love at First Science" by fan fiction author thecirclesquare, which can be found on archiveofourown.org and fanfiction.net (large online archives that house fan fiction). My examination looks at how the writers use Queer, woman-identified narrators to give voice to and privilege perspectives whose views tend to be neglected in public discourse. The authors and readers are filling in the void for queer women characters that are significantly silenced and/or killed in popular media. These fans are coping with negative representation through transformative fiction and rectifying damaging tropes by circulating new narratives in an attempt to resist and subsume dominant discourse.

In the Chapter Four, "OTPs, NOTPs, BROTPs, OT3s, and Can't-We-All-Just-Get-Along-TPs: The Art of 'War' in Online Fandom," I look at the ways fans interact with each other and with producers. The ease of access allowed by social media platforms has broken down barriers between producers and fans (consumers), for better or worse. I explore the good and the bad in this chapter illustrated by fan interactions on Twitter and Tumblr. Ultimately, online media platforms allow vulnerable minorities, such as LGBTQ fans, a space to be heard. Damaging representations of minorities in popular media that dominate discourse continue to affect the real lives of the persons they represent. This chapter explores LGBTQ fan reactions and social activism in response to damaging representations on *The 100*.

Through this research I hope to discover that there are some behaviors unique to femslash fandoms. I further hope to discover practices of online fandoms. I hope to open up avenues for future research into femslash fandoms. My research into femslash fan fiction should reveal new narrative voices and ways to study fan fiction and literary texts. Further research into fantagonism will show that fandom has a negative side, but ultimately fans come together and strive for positivity, and antagonism arises out of extreme passion and desire for LGBTQ representation in media. This project itself has arisen out of a passion to see better representation of femslash fandom in academic study, which I believe is deserving of our time and attention.

CHAPTER TWO

"My sexuality isn't the most interesting thing about me": Creating Discourse
Outside the *Orphan Black* Fandom

At the San Diego Comic Convention in January 2014, one fan of the TV show
Orphan Black moved the lead actress to tears as she recounted to the panel and the
audience how the TV show had literally saved her life. The fan described how watching
the show with her mother had radically changed their relationship for the better. This
young woman is a fan, "a self-identified enthusiast, devotee or follower of a particular
media genre, text, person, or activity" (Duffett 293). Fans often interact with the fan
object (or fan text)—the specific person or text attracting a fan—intensely and
passionately in ways that reinforce or create new self-identities (Duffett 297). In a unique
way, the fandom of the science fiction drama *Orphan Black* moves beyond this self-
reflexivity. These fans comprise the fandom of *Orphan Black*, where fandom is defined
as "a way of identifying oneself on a deep level as being a fan and enacting on that role;
shorthand for the fan community" (Duffett 293). *Orphan Black* fans have strongly
identified with the LGBTQ representation on the show and have begun to move outside
the realm of safety afforded by the fandom community. In this chapter, after discussing
four of the show's characters in some detail, I will show how fans of *Orphan Black* are
using its text to represent their newfound identities to others in an effort to seek cultural
acceptance and open up dialogue. In societies where being LGBTQ is still largely
unaccepted, misconceptions breed hatred and violence; opening up dialog is immensely
important. I will do this by citing fan postings from the online fan community to

demonstrate from the fans themselves the ways in which they have appropriated the text to represent the self to their external communities. I have also conducted research through an online survey to gain further insight into the fan community.

In *Fans: the Mirror of Consumption*, Cornel Sandvoss posits that "the object of fandom…is intrinsically interwoven with our sense of self, with who we are, would like to be, and think we are" (96). Furthering his idea of self-reflexivity, I would argue that how we appropriate the text is how we aim to represent ourselves to others. Fans who find their identity in the object of fandom begin to reflect the self by using the object. Fan objects can become a powerful tool for expressing self-identity to others. And as Henry Jenkins says, "There is something empowering about what fans do with those texts in the process of assimilating them to the particulars of their lives" (284). These texts can be extremely powerful in representing the fan to her or his particular social contexts, such as the family, coworkers, and classmates. Fandoms are a place of community where members of all backgrounds come together united by their shared interest in the fan object. Jenkins writes that fandoms are "an alternative social community" where "fans may articulate their specific concerns about sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism, and forced conformity" (281; 283). The *Orphan Black* fandom certainly embodies this ideal.

Context

Orphan Black (BBC America) is a Canadian science fiction drama starring Tatiana Maslany as a woman who finds out she is part of an illegal human cloning experiment. The show explores themes of identity, individuality, ethics, and nature versus nurture. Since premiering in 2013, the show has garnered numerous awards and

developed a devoted fanbase known as the "Clone Club" with a subset that identifies themselves as "Clonesbians" (an amalgam of "clone" and "lesbian"). The *Orphan Black* fandom exhibits behavior typical of most fandoms—they are a close-knit, accepting community that participates in an active online platform (in this case the microblogging social media site "tumblr.com"). They create fanart, fanvids, fanfiction; they attend conventions and meetups. But what marks the fandom is the large population of members who identify as queer—that is, non-heteronormative or gender-normative. But what has drawn these individuals to this fandom and cultivated such a strong community bond? I would argue that the powerful narrative of the show itself, in its progressive LGBTQ representation, is the driving force behind this fandom.

In a study on teens' responding to representations of sexuality on the TV show *Glee*, Michaela Meyer and Megan Wood concluded that "representations of sexuality and sexual identity formation contained within…narratives hold a unique power to shape individual viewers' perceptions of their own (and others') identities" (444). Furthermore, as John Fiske argues, "television has the 'ability to empower the subordinate by providing the opportunity of making resisting meanings of text, society and subjectivity' in its representations, and to engage with disenfranchised groups" (qtd. in Hanmer 150).

In her article, "Internet Discourse, Fandom, and Queer Identities," Rosalind Hanmer claims that "Queer reading of a text is important for the outcast and dispossessed" (155). Katherine Sender argues that "as with earlier media technologies— photography, 16 millimeter film, VHS—sexual minorities have looked to the possibilities afforded by new media forms and genres in search of images of themselves, social and sexual contacts, information, political engagements, and opportunities to self-represent"

(3). Representation in mass culture and media is essential for minorities such as those

who identify as LGBTQ. Positive representations can effectively change the existing

discourse surrounding LGBTQ identity. The representations of sexuality and gender in

Orphan Black are very powerful and many fans have been drawn to the show initially

because of these representations. Later in the chapter I will expand on the representation

of these characters in specific scenes. One fan comments, in a story similar to hundreds

of other fans[2]:

> I found out about Orphan Black through Tumblr. I was scrolling through my dash one day and a couple of people were posting gif sets from the first season. Cophine[3] caught my attention ("lesbian activity" often does) so I gave it a try. I really was not prepared for what I got myself into and by the time I discovered it, it had already aired 8 episodes. So I definitely binge watched and forced my mother to binge watch. It was fun…. I didn't really start falling into the Clone Club fandom train until the clonepocalypse[4]. Because of that event, I made so many friends and have really found a community I'm proud to be part of on the internet (discourse.cloneclub.co).

Initially, fans are being drawn to the narrative because they see a part of themselves in

the text. The text represents them and in turn the fans begin to appropriate the text in

various ways to show others their identity. The LGBTQ community has lacked adequate

representation in popular media. *Orphan Black* marks a move in a positive direction for

representation, which I will demonstrate through specific scenes and dialog that have

impacted fans. Christopher Pullen writes, "New storytellers for gay and lesbian identity

reinvent the discursive myth [stereotypes]. This occurs in the production of new

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[1] For the privacy and safety of the Tumblr users whose posts I have provided in this paper, I am following the citation guidelines suggested by the *Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures* for the protection of fan sources.

[2] Cophine: relationship name given to Cosima and Delphine

[3] Clonepocalypse: the events surrounding the finale episodes where fans create massive social media buzz

narratives, and the establishment of pathways towards legitimization" (qtd. in Sender 14-15). *Orphan Black* reinvents the narrative discourses that surround LGBTQ characters. Fans are latching onto this representation and using it to say, some for the first time, "Look, here I am on TV. This is who I am, and it is more than okay: it is good." The fandom offers safety and acceptance and empowerment as different members reach out and declare their identities.

In *Understanding Fandom*, Mark Duffett discusses practices of fandoms that are largely populated by members seeking safe-haven as fans of the same text and members of sexual minorities. He comments that these fans usually "formed closer-knit social niches…seeing their own society as more welcoming and supportive of their cultural interests" (204). As queer identities become more accepted, with the help of positive mass media representation, fans' "only access to nonheteronormative space" will no longer be only online or in the company of other fans (Lothian 105).

The text of the show has created a unique space where the fans have been able to use the show as a vehicle for creating discourse with people outside the fandom. In particular, *Orphan Black* portrays several LGBTQ characters, and their experiences have resonated with fans, and non-fans, in ways that most contemporary television programs have failed to do. In their *2014 Where We Are on TV* report, GLAAD informed, "Among the 813 series regulars counted this year across 115 primetime scripted television programs on the five broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, The CW, Fox and NBC), 32 are LGBTQ, an increase from last year's 26, while 781 are not identified as LGBTQ (96%)" (4). When it comes to LGBTQ representation there is still a long way to go. And though the characters may be present, that does not mean they are represented positively. For

example, trans representation has rarely been positive. As Kelly Kessler argues, "Although shows such as *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009), *Dirty Sexy Money* (ABC, 2007-2009), and *Ugly Betty* (ABC, 2006-2010) momentarily provided bright lights of trans representation on TV, for one reason or another each dropped the ball" (140). She argues that although LGBTQ characters may seem to be "everywhere" and rising in numbers as GLAAD's reports show, what characters are suffering from is "mutual mediocrity" (141). Although LGBTQ characters may be represented in a television program, they are suffering from poor narratives as much as other characters.

I propose that the LGBTQ characters represented on *Orphan Black* do not suffer from "mutual mediocrity." *Orphan Black* boasts a powerful narrative with characters that are dynamic and human. The characters are not caricatures or stereotypes; they are not token characters. They are human characters and their sexualities and genders are not their defining identities. Although their sexualities and genders do not define them, those representations are important and powerful in forming identities in fans. Alice Marwick, Mary L. Gray and Mike Ananny argue for the importance of LGBTQ representation in helping form identity: "Not only do LGBT[Q] characters signify social legitimacy, but these newer varied representations may provide models for negotiating sexual and gender identity among questioning youth, their straight allies, and those who identify as LGBT[Q]" (630). Fans have reacted strongly to the characters in *Orphan Black* and have expressed intense self-identification with the characters. They have appropriated the narratives of these characters in multitudinous ways to represent their own identities to the world. In the next section of the paper I will get specific by analyzing four of the characters and then present various fan reactions.

Cosima Niehaus and Delphine Cormier

The characters Cosima Niehaus (one of the female clones) and Dr. Delphine Cormier have struck a chord with many fans, and indeed fans who call themselves "Clonesbians," are fans that "ship"—desire the pair to be in a romantic and/or sexual relationship—Cosima and Delphine. Cosima Niehaus is a PhD student studying evolutionary development in an attempt to learn about her own biology as a clone. She is strong, independent, outspoken, and intelligent. Her sexual identity does not even become apparent until the entrance of Delphine Cormier. Cosima is aware that Delphine is sent to spy on her by the principal investigators of the cloning experiment, but Cosima develops feelings for Delphine anyway, despite logic and reason warning her against the attraction. Cosima begins to pursue Delphine and it becomes apparent that Delphine has not questioned her own sexuality before. Cosima apologizes to Delphine and says, "It's okay: you're not gay" (Fawcett). As viewers, we see Delphine processing her own identity. She approaches it very scientifically and she responds, "Oh, like... I have never thought about bisexuality. I mean, for myself, you know? But, as a scientist, I know that sexuality, is a... is a... is a spectrum. But you know, social biases they, codified attraction. It's contrary to the biological facts... you know" (Fawcett). The pair begin a romantic relationship that has its ups and downs but is mostly focused on scientific research and discovery. At the same time the couple is shown fighting, kissing, in bed, laughing, holding hands, and their relationship is given the same narrative treatment as other lovers on television. Fans resonate with the normalcy with which their relationship is portrayed. The couple has passion, love, jealousy, intimacy, trust—they fight, they break up, they get back together,

they sacrifice for one another. Their close physical contact (as shown in Figs. 1 and 2) in particular whether it's a quick touch in passing, to soothe, to reassure, to heal, these moments ring true with fans.

Fig. 1 Delphine and Cosima working to decode the clones' encrypted genome; cophinecaps; tumblr.com; 2014; Web.

One fan has written:

> As a gay woman, it's so fantastic to see a relationship where the fact that they're two women doesn't matter. They have too many other things to worry about, their genders/sexualities only cross their minds very briefly (and then Delphine does what we all would and falls for Cosima anyway). Even though the OB world is a crazy one where Cosima and Delphine have to deal with things we never would dream of, their love for each other is so real. Seeing that kind of portrayal in a world of TV where gay characters are used to bring in viewers or as a stereotype…it means so very much to me (tumblr.com).

Fig. 2 Delphine and Cosima share a moment of intimacy; cophinecaps; tumblr.com; 2014; Web.

As the show progresses Rachel Duncan, another clone, questions Cosima about her sexuality and she promptly replies, "My sexuality's not the most interesting thing about me" (Manson). Her sexuality does not define her and is not continually discussed on the show as her main narrative focus. As Kessler argues, "The increasing 'fact of gayness'—here meaning the acknowledged presence of [LGBTQ] characters without a *constant* attendance to the specificity of a 'gay lifestyle'— liberates today's well-developed and integrated characters from the pressures of tokenism or exoticization" (144). It is this balance of identity without it being the character's sole narrative function that has resonated with fans. Many of the fans have expressed this fact: seeing LGBTQ representation on *Orphan Black* is important, but the fact that the characters are not bound narratively by their sexual or gender identities has liberated fans to see themselves in the text and to use the text to speak to others about who they are. The fan mentioned at

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the beginning of this chapter from San Diego Comic Con, who moved the lead actress to tears, had this to say:

> Before I started watching the show, I was really in the closet and I was totally ashamed of who I was. I hated myself. I started watching the show and seeing Cosima and seeing that everything is not about her sexuality and that she is more than her sexuality. My parents weren't okay with me being gay. I started watching the show with my mum and its helped us start to rebuild our relationship because she sees Cosima and she sees that it's okay and that people are more than their sexuality (TB FS).

This fan has identified with Cosima and the positive way she is represented as a lesbian woman. She moves beyond self-reflection and uses the text to speak to her mother about who she is. The text empowers her to seek acceptance in her everyday life—beyond the safe community of the fandom. She is able to reform important social ties in her relationship with her mother because for the first time she has the words available to her to represent her true self to others.

Another fan describes the journey she has been on seeking acceptance in her close relationships outside the acceptance offered by the *Orphan Black* fandom and the LGBTQ community. The characters of Cosima and Delphine had a particular impact on her relationship with her mother:

> My mother didn't handle my coming out well, but over the years she has come around. She loves and supports *me*, but she has continued to struggle with the LGBTQ community as a whole. She's reached out and tried, and it's been through tv shows (and books) and mutually loved characters that we've been able to rebuild our relationship. Last year when I recommended Orphan Black to her because it was so important to me, things changed forever…Out of everything that I had suggested she watch, that she read, or sent her, Cophine was the first same-sex couple that she actively shipped (without knowing what shipping was). She wanted them to be together. She wanted Cosima to be happy. She wanted Delphine to stand up and declare her love. I saw my mother change in the way she talked about my girlfriends and my friends. She saw how normal and how okay and how beautiful it all can be (tumblr.com).

She describes how the show actually changed her mother's discourse:

>…I saw my mother open up and accept a wider range of people into her life. I saw her stop using slurs and derogatory language. I saw her stand up and defend complete strangers… She sat there and reflected over her past comments and actions. I watched as she realized how insensitive and oppressive she had been…I watched as she struggled with the realization that sexual orientation, gender, and sex are so much more complex than she had allowed herself to comprehend in the past (tumblr.com).

The more she watched the show with her mother, the greater the impact was on their relationship. She recounts a moment watching the show together when their relationship completely shifted:

>And for the first time, my mother turned to me and apologized. She apologized for the conversion therapy she tried to put me through, she apologized for the preaching about sin and hell, she apologized for suggesting I was mentally ill, she apologized for pushing me out and away, she apologized for missing soo much of the last 10 years of my life, she apologized for not getting it and for not loving me like she should have. For the first time since I began to realize that I was gay, my mother and I were able to communicate and have a moment…My relationship with my mother won't heal overnight because of this, but it has begun to, and because of that, I will forever be grateful to…Orphan Black for the opportunity to reclaim this relationship (tumblr.com).

The fan text fostered a new discourse between these two individuals and ultimately led to a new relationship with more open communication than had previously existed. She was able to use the show to represent herself to her mother and normalize her identity. The fan text directly impacted the discourse of the individual outside the fandom: it changed her language and her life, giving her a voice she didn't know she had.

Tony Sawicki

The character Tony Sawicki makes his debut in *Orphan Black* during the second season of the series. He arrives on the scene with his friend Sammy who dies of a gunshot wound after giving Tony a message to pass on. It is revealed that Tony is one of the

clones, but he is transgender. Tony is confident and determined to get answers. He is sure

of himself and his identity. Fig. 3 shows Tony in a tank top and boxers, confident in his

body and identity. He appears unfazed by the revelation that he is a clone, not suffering

an identity crisis like the other clones have. He remarks, "I did all that work a long time

ago" (Walton). Tony is a female to male (FTM) transgender man. His visibility on

Orphan Black begins filling in the large gap of trans representation on television. His role

has been incredibly important to fans and viewers and to the trans community at large.

One FTM fan in particular has resonated deeply with the portrayal of Tony:

> I'm an old trans dude (10 years post transition) and I often feel faded into the background of the LGBTQ community. Some of that is me, I don't talk about being trans much, it is not the main focus of my life (My trans-ness is not the most interesting thing about me) and so I let it slide to the background a lot. I also, these days, have been known to avoid LGBTQ spaces because I get tired of being clocked as trans. The nice thing about moving through the straight world with passing privilege is that I can just be who I am…they just see me.

> That said, I had no idea how HUNGRY I was for someone like me in media. How starved I was for who I am to be ok. I can pass as any other guy, and really I am any other guy. But I also take T, and had to bind for years (grateful I got surgery and don't have to any more), and have to worry about what I'll tell girls I date if we get to a point where sex is a possibility. And none of those things make me less a guy, but….I think I hide them because I'm tired of them meaning I am a freak. I don't want to be a freak. I just want to be a guy who has those aspects to his life. And that's what Tony is and…I appreciate that. I needed that. I feel that all the way down in my bones.

> When people talk about representation, I didn't really get it. I mean, abstractly, sure, but not like this. Not this bone-deep, heart full feeling of being somehow more human, more validated, more REAL, more OK, more NORMAL than I could ever have hoped for. So thank you, Orphan Black, for that (tumblr.com).

As a fan and viewer, he was deeply moved and validated by the portrayal of Tony. As an

FTM, he largely felt invisible and avoided social settings that drew attention to his

identity as a trans man. Without representation in popular culture and media, individuals

and groups, such as transgender people, feel like outsiders and "freaks." Positive

representation is very important to the legitimization of people as they actually exist in

the world.

Fig. 3 Tony unabashedly displaying his body; gastricrainbows; tumblr.com; 2014; Web.

Another fan remarks on the powerful impact Tony had on her mother as they

watched together:

> Tony changed everything. I saw my mother struggling at first, but as the
> episode progressed, I saw her slowly fall in love with him. She had her
> questions; Felix answered some, Tony answered some, and I answered
> some. This character was in one episode, but he impacted my mother the
> most… I watched as she worked through correct pronoun usage. I
> watched her come to the realization that the question of surgery wasn't the
> most important part of this story or this character. I saw her come to
> realize how hard it must be for Trans* identified people to work in our
> current binaries. I saw my mother's world change…Tony Sawicki just
> changed everything (tumblr.com).

The representation of an individual that most people in society do not see or encounter in

day-to-day life, much less in media, can be very powerful. Indeed, in this interaction described by a fan, the visibility of a trans man and his struggles illuminated a sector of the population that is often portrayed negatively, if at all. Tony is a human character and his portrayal on *Orphan Black* humanizes the lives of trans persons. Tony caused one person to change her mind and rethink her previous preconceptions and prejudices. This fan used the textual presentation of Tony to speak to her mother about gender and sexuality, ultimately leading to changing attitudes.

Felix Dawkins

The character Felix Dawkins is the younger foster brother of the main protagonist, Sarah Manning. Felix is a sarcastic, yet caring, dependable individual. He is a struggling artist who pays for his rent through his side job as a sex worker. Felix is a gay man, and throughout the series he makes no qualms about being open about his identity.

One fan describes how Felix helped change her mother's attitude towards sexuality and gender:

> It wasn't just *me* any longer. It wasn't just cute femme lesbians that appear on TV. This was a gay man that my mother fell in love with and absolutely adored. This was a character that engaged in sex work and drugs to pay the bills. This was a character that is so overtly sexual but is also so much more than his sexual orientation (tumblr.com).

Felix challenges many viewers because he seems to perpetuate many gay male stereotypes. Though Felix is a flamboyant sex worker, he is not presented as a "bad guy" character that is morally corrupt and doomed to death. Felix is above all devoted to his family and all of his actions contribute to the protection of them. In Season Four Episode Seven, "The Antisocialism of Sex," Felix is shown saving his foster sister Sarah Manning and her clone Cosima. At this point in the series, Felix is perceived as a brother by all of

the clones. He is dubbed "Brother-Sestra" by the Ukrainian clone Helena, and he has a

unique bond with Alison Hendrix whom he helps through rehab and a struggling

marriage as well as community theatre and babysitting. In "The Antisocialism of Sex,"

Sarah and Cosima both reach a point of no return and suicide seems to be their only

option. Show Creator John Fawcett remarks,

> The news comes right in the nick of time…It's what makes Felix a hero in
> this moment — he's multitasking. He's trying to save them all and
> somehow he manages to do it. That's the part that gets me. I've seen this
> episode I don't know how many times and every time Felix is in the car
> talking Cosima off the ledge there and saying, "Cosima, you can do this.
> You're not alone" — it gets me every single time emotionally. It's really
> Felix that has to step in with the two girls and go, "Hey, you two, smarten
> the hell up! We can do this!" (qtd. in Ross).

Fig. 4 Felix talking Sarah out of jumping onto the train tracks in "The Antisocialism of Sex"; Ken
Woroner; *BBC America*; EW.com; 26 May 2016; Web.

In these moments between Felix and his sisters, his narrative becomes one of family and belonging. Fig. 4 shows Felix embracing his sister Sarah, talking her out of committing suicide. His adopted family is about more than genetics. His sexuality, similar to Cosima's, does not make him an outcast or deviant. Instead, Felix is depicted as the devoted brother and hero. He subverts popular stereotypes and many viewers, such as the fan's mother previously mentioned, are challenged by his portrayal. Ultimately Felix sheds new light on gay male representations in media. Gay males can be more than token characters defined by flamboyant stereotypes and "coming out" narratives or "bad guy" tropes.

Survey Response

In an effort to gain further insight into the fan community, I conducted an online survey. I posted a link to the survey on tumblr.com and 73 fans responded. I asked four questions: What is your age? What is your gender? Do you watch *Orphan Black* with people you are close to? In what ways has *Orphan Black* opened up or fostered a discourse for you and your close relationships? I chose these questions because I was interested to see what demographic comprises the fandom as well as how the show has affected their lives. I will now analyze the responses.

What is your age?

Fig. 5 shows the responses to the first question. Of the 73 respondents, 72 answered this question. 62 of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 24 (86.11%). 7 are between the ages of 25 and 34 (9.72%). 3 are between the ages 35 and 44 (4.17%). The majority of fans are young adults.
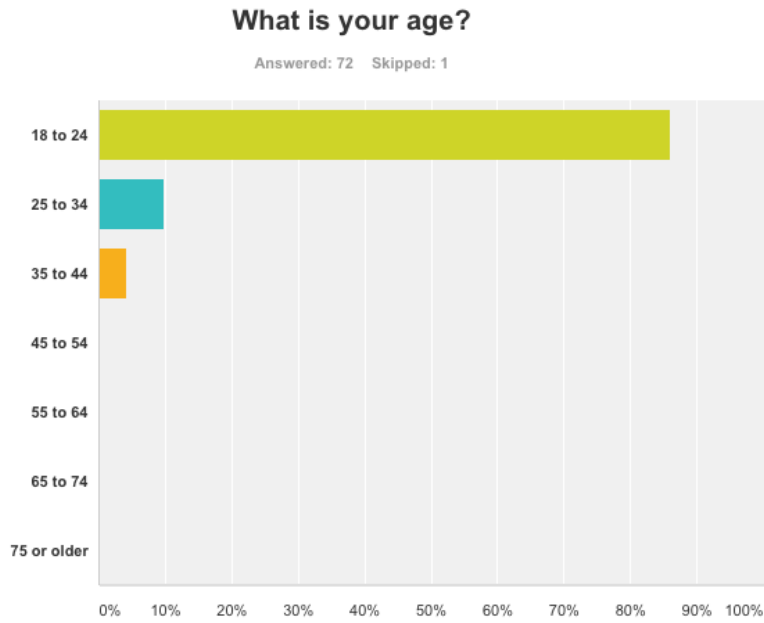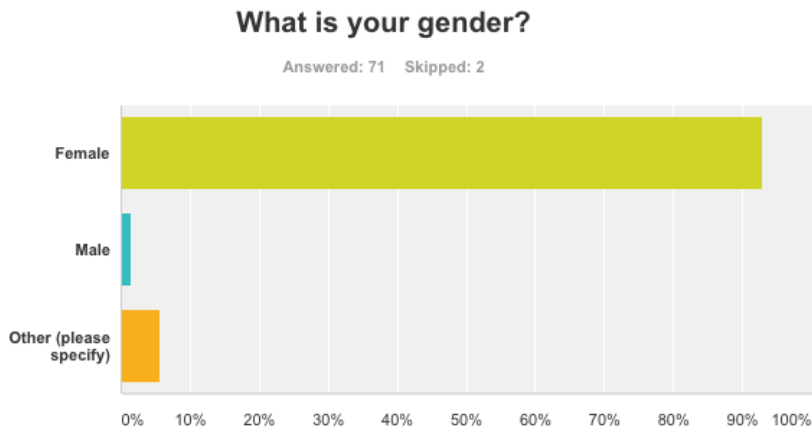
Fig. 5 What is your age?

Fig. 6 What is your gender?

What is your gender?

Fig. 6 shows the responses to the second question. 71 of the 73 respondents answered this question. 66 of the respondents identify as female (92.96%). 1 respondent identifies as male (1.41%). 4 respondents identify as "Other" and they specified this

choice in varying ways (5.63%). One identifies as "non-binary." Two identify as "genderqueer." One respondent identifies as "transgender/genderqueer/demiboy."

Do you watch Orphan Black with people you are close to?

    67 of the 73 respondents answered this question. 21 responded "no," they do not watch the show with anyone. Three responded "sometimes" while one answered "rarely." 39 responded that yes they do watch the show with people they are close to. Of the 39 yes answers, 24 specified with whom they view the show. 9 responded that they watch with friends. 15 responded that they view with different family relations. Many view with sisters and brothers and parents as well as partners and spouses. A few also mentioned cousins and nieces. One respondent answered that she watches with her wife. Two responded that they watch with everyone and force others to watch with them.

In what ways has Orphan Black opened up or fostered a discourse for you and your close relationships?

    38 respondents answered this question. I will provide some of the responses for the purpose of further analysis and discussion.

    Many respondents commented on the various ways Orphan Black has fostered new discourse for them. Several discussed how it brought up discussion of science and feminism. However, the majority of respondents discussed the ways in which Orphan Black has influenced their sexuality and gender and served as a vehicle for opening discussions about it within their interpersonal relationships. Here are those responses:

- It helped me feel like my friends were comfortable or getting more comfortable with my sexuality.

● It helped me determine my sexuality - Cosima, Felix and Tony's characters.

● The show helped me find who I am and made me feel like it's okay to be myself around others.

● Orphan Black gave me the courage to unapologetically be who I am in public.

● I came out as bisexual to my close friends. Seeing a canon bisexual on T.V. really helped build up my nerve.

● I am queer and trans and interested in intelligent shows with strong feminist themes. This has given a good representation for me to reference.

● It definitely allowed me to talk more freely about sexuality and feminism, knowing that these aren't things that define me.

● It's helped me talk about the lgbtq+ community without any discomfort. Without Orphan Black I wouldn't have been able to bring up these topics in a natural way. I previously wouldn't even think to talk about queer women or trans men with my mother but now she is opening up to it more and becoming more accepting and respectful.

● Tony's character helped my little brother to see what a more accurate and proper view of a trans person is. We were able to talk about him (Tony) and his pronouns.

● Orphan Black has helped me accept I'm gay and come to terms with that and it has helped me to accept myself and come out to my best friend.

● Orphan Black has helped me to be more comfortable and open about my sexuality with not only myself but the people I love. It really was the nudge I needed to start accepting myself for who I am, not just who I wanted to be.

Analysis

The survey indicates that the *Orphan Black* fandom is largely made up of young adult women. These fans have been influenced by *Orphan Black* and used the show in various ways. Many have expressed that the show has influenced and directly affected their identity. The show has helped these individuals define their sexuality and to in turn express it to others. In Chapters Two and Three I would like to explore the young, queer, female demographic that comprises the *Orphan Black* fandom and their online fandom practices.

Conclusion

Through analysis of survey responses and social media posts, I have demonstrated the *Orphan Black* fandom's innovative approach to the fan text. Fans have found personal identities through the text and used the text to express this identity to close non-fans. The fans have used the narrative of *Orphan Black* to reflect the self to others. These fans have found solace in the power of community and strength to seek acceptance as cultural others.

Narratives are very powerful mirrors of not only who we are, but who we want to be, and in relation to close others. When we share these narratives—whether we recommend a TV show to a friend or lend our favorite book to our roommate—they say more about ourselves *in posse* than we realize. And if we begin to do this intentionally it can have a powerful positive impact on our interpersonal relationships. The fans of *Orphan Black* have begun to do this and are beginning to live in greater acceptance of themselves in their otherness as members of the LGBTQ community.

CHAPTER THREE

"Love at First Science": Queer Female Narrators in Femslash Fan Fiction

When fans have positive representation in media, the responses are cathartic and have the potential for real life change. But what happens when media representations of minorities are stereotypical and negative, even damaging? Fans respond in various ways to cope with the negative images perpetuated by popular media, and fan fiction stands out as one of the most popular fannish reactions. Femslash fan fiction in particular focuses on female romantic pairings that are largely overlooked in popular media. Their stories are historically untold or mistreated. Fan fiction authors and readers are filling in the void for queer women characters that are significantly silenced and/or killed in popular media. In this chapter I will use Queer Narratology on femslash fan fiction to look at how the writers use Queer, woman-identified narrators to give voice to and privilege perspectives whose views tend to be neglected in public discourse. I will begin with background context on fan fiction and a brief discussion of the importance of the "Bury Your Gays"/"Tragic Queer" trope in media and its relation to femslash fan fiction. I will give a history of Queer Narratology and definitions for the purposes of this chapter on "queer woman-identified" narrators. Lastly, I will closely examine the work of femslash fiction "Love at First Science" from the TV show *Orphan Black* (BBC America) and discuss "Fix-It Fics" and *The 100* fandom.

The function of the narrator in fan fiction is immensely important because the fiction is most often written about specific characters with a uniquely specific audience in mind. This is illustrated through the tagging systems, illustrated in Fig. 7, on the large fan fiction archives like Fanfiction.net, Archive of Our Own, and Wattpad: authors tag their stories with characters and pairings letting readers know who the story features and focuses primarily on. Tags track and archive stories and allow users to find similar stories based on categories such as a certain TV show, specific character, specific genre, etc.
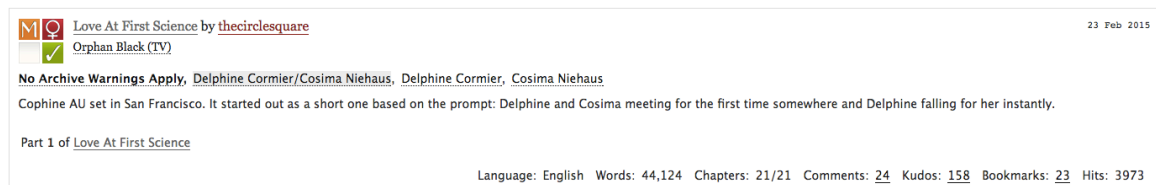

Fig. 7 Entry for story on Archive of Our Own showing the tagging system; in this case tags for Delphine Cormier/Cosima Niehaus allow users to find fic for this pairing

Going into a story, a reader already knows to expect the narration will focus on a specific set of characters. This is the nature of fan fiction; it is derivative, but transformative, and part of the hyperdeigetic world of the TV show or chosen media of that particular fandom. In *Fan Cultures* Matt Hills defines hyperdiegesis as "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension" (137). Fan fiction works hyperdiegetically to build from the detailed storyworlds of cult texts, filling in the "empty" narrative space that is only hinted at in an episode of *Orphan Black*, for example. Fan fiction is possibility and probability, and often it is utopia.

Part of the power of fan fiction is the choice of narrative focus. Historically fan fiction has centered around queer male narrators and homoerotic, sexually explicit stories. Indeed, Sara Gwenllian Jones notes that "slash fiction takes its name from the punctuating of 'slash' in the 'Kirk/Spock' or 'K/s' fan fiction that appeared in the wake of the original *Star Trek* series (1966-1969)" (117). These stories and narrators subvert the media texts they draw from in which the male characters were not involved in overt sexual or romantic relationships. However, the prominence of slash (and the name itself making male same sex relationships the default for fan fiction) reveals the overwhelming preference for and privileging of the male voice in fandom and academia. In their Introduction to *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse argue that

> The history of fan fiction studies for the most part, is a history of attempting to understand the underlying motivations of why (mostly) women write fan fiction and, in particular, slash. As a result, *m/m* (male/male) slash fiction has received disproportionate treatment in both academic and mainstream journalistic representations (17).

Though there are significantly fewer stories, femslash fan fiction similarly centers around queer narrators and homoerotic, sexually explicit stories. I would like to use this chapter to start balancing the treatment of femslash fan fiction in academic scholarship.

"Bury Your Gays"/"Tragic Queer" Trope

There are many who speculate reasons why femslash fan fiction trails far behind slash and hetero fiction in terms of fans and writers, but that is not the focus of this chapter.[1] One reason is relevant, however: popular media stories of queer women have

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[1] For more information on femslash fan fiction statistics on Archive of Our Own (Ao3) see http://centrumlumina.tumblr.com/post/59705055745/a-chart-illustrating-all-of-the-possible and http://destinationtoast.tumblr.com/post/139410106784/toastystats-ff-stats-femslash-february-2016.

historically, and currently, followed several predictable patterns and tropes. One is the "Tragic Queer" or "Bury Your Gays" trope. Ann Matsuuchi describes it as "the narrative cliché…where suffering and death are inevitable conclusions" for queer characters (275). Queer characters are often killed or punished for being "abnormal" and not fitting into the dominant narrative discourses perpetuated by society. These stories reinforce ideologies and rhetoric about queer people and continue to marginalize and oppress them. This trope has had lasting and damaging effects on popular media storytelling, and the ways in which queer women, especially, are represented to society has negatively impacted generations of women. Out of all characters on television shows that reached American audiences between 1976 and 2016, queer women represented less than half a percent. And of those characters one fourth died or were killed and less than one percent had a happy ending (Hogan). In the 2015 to 2016 television season alone "26 lesbian and bisexual women were killed off on shows available to US audiences" (LGBTFans). Many of these characters are violently murdered, and "the problem isn't merely that gay characters are killed off: the problem is the tendency that gay characters are killed off *far more often* than straight characters, or when they're killed off because they are gay" (TVtropes.com). The trouble for LGBTQ representation is lack of representation, poor representation, tokenism, and dangerous tropes. One minority character is not adequate representation: that character cannot represent an entire group. That is a heavy weight to carry, and a minority character death erases and silences that point of view.

In her article "'Happily Ever After': The Tragic Queer and Delany's Comic Book Fairy Tale," Ann Matsuuchi, examines Samuel S. Delaney's autobiographical graphic

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Centrumlumina's surveys of Ao3 users revealed that among many listed reasons, femslash fans believe femslash trails behind slash fic because of a lack of female characters and relationships, compulsory heterosexuality, internalized misogyny, and less writer support.

novel *Bread & Wine: An Erotic Tale of New York*, to ask, "Can queer happy endings be rewritten and redrawn with newly reparative vocabularies and imageries?" (275). She argues, "Comic books and science fiction, granted an automatic exemption from the demands of realism, can be effective platforms not merely for fantasy, but also for actualizing the ways we might construct possible futures and more clearly understand how our present worlds inform these futurities" (275). I would argue that we can revise genres and texts that can inform queer futurities to include fan fiction.

Fandom attempts to cope with poor representation in many ways. Marginalized fans often turn to fan fiction to rewrite damaging stories and rewrite themselves in the process. Femslash fan fiction, in particular, does this. Representation of women in media in general has a long way to go and for queer women the representation has been historically abysmal. The intersection of race and sexuality is almost negligible and the rate at which queer women, women of color, and queer women of color are killed off for shock value is astounding. Fans often take to fan fiction to redress these shocking deaths, to "fix" them, and to rewrite them. Fan fiction becomes a space where the stories focus on the queer women's voices and put them in the center of the narrative. In her article "Gender and Narratology," Marion Gymnich writes that "textual arrangement of focaliser(s) and narrative voice(s) may challenge existing power structures by privileging the perspectives and voices of those narrators/characters whose views tend to be neglected in public discourses in a particular cultural context" (Gymnich 708). Fans challenge media power structures when they cease being passive consumers through online social media platforms like Twitter, for example, which allows direct access between producer and consumer; indeed "fans" are not passive consumers. Fans are

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active producers themselves and they wield immense power when they choose to take back their narratives into their own hands. Fans are constantly responding to representation in media, whether positive or negative. Fanfiction—production and consumption—is one of those responses to media that can form a large part of fan identity and participation.

Queer Narratology

Queer Narratology has its origins in Susan S. Lanser's seminal piece "Toward a Feminist Narratology" (1986) and Robyn Warhol's publication *Gendered Interventions* (1989)[2]. In his article "Recent Concepts of Narrative and the Narratives of Narrative Theory," Brian Richardson wrote that feminism has

> transformed narrative theory and analysis in many ways. Virtually every component or agent in the narrative transaction has been subjected to sustained examination, including space, closure, character, narration, reader response, linearity, and narrative sequence, and even the phenomenon of narrative itself (168).

The marriage of feminist literary theory and classical narratology has advanced both areas of research, birthing a new area of study and fostering innovative thought. In her introduction to *Narrative Theory Unbound*, "A Queer, More Feminist Narratology," Lanser addresses her previous work on queer and feminist narratology and the areas the discipline should explore, expand, and address in the future. Of special interest is her emphasis on a "queerer" narratology. She writes, "Questions of representation, and especially of queer representation, are as much questions of form as of content and that

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[2] Pioneered by scholars such as Susan S. Lanser, Ruth E. Page, Robyn Warhol, and Kathy Mezei, they have produced such diverse works as *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers* (Mezei 1996); "Feminist Narratology? Literary and Linguistic Persepectives on Gender and Narrativity" (Page 2003); "Sapphic Dialogics: Historical Narratology and the Sexuality of Form" (Lanser 2010); and *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (eds. Warhols and Lanser 2015).

narratological concerns thus lie at the heart of debates about the queer capacities and limits of narrative" (24). Thus, examining narratological forms in texts can illuminate queer textuality and representation.

In her article "Towards a Queer Feminism; Or, Feminist Theories and/as Queer Narrative Studies," Abby Coykendall writes, "It is important to remember that the sole center of gravity around which queer or diasporic subjects can circulate is their collective resistance to normativity, or, in other words, to the dominant cultural *narratives* that regulate identity and difference" (329-30). A major site for "collective resistance to normativity" is online fandom, where often members of the LGBTQ community come together to transform "dominant cultural narratives" that misrepresent their identities. They do this through fan fiction, transforming the narratives of popular television shows, books, and movies to retell stories. This is why "…the application of narrative theory to a continuously increasing range of text types and across discipline boundaries" is important and necessary: marginalized groups are telling stories often in unconventional ways (Page 44). These stories are being told in their own voices and need to be heard.

Definitions

Before we look at the fan fiction works and discuss the narrators we must discuss what we mean by a "queer woman-identified" narrator and indeed what we mean by narrative and narrator as well. In the introduction to her 1996 book *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*, "When is a Lesbian Narrative a Lesbian Narrative?" Marilyn R. Farwell discusses the debate surrounding the terms "lesbian" "lesbian theory" "narrative" and "lesbian narrative." Unsurprisingly, theorists have failed to reach consensus. However, Farwell suggests a compromise and a melding of lesbian-feminism and

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postmodern queer theory: "Lesbian theorists can validate the utopian gestures of the lesbian-feminists without being dismissed by reductionist notions of essentialism and can argue that lesbian narratives are constituted by textuality without privileging postmodern texts" (14). "Queer" narratives and narrators encompass people who identify as women (i.e. transgender, cisgender) and identify as a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual (i.e. gay, queer, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual). This is to embrace couples of two women in, what I hope is the most inclusive way possible without misgendering or mislabeling a person's sexuality. The term "lesbian" has connotations that at once mean "woman" and "gay"—it also carries with it political baggage from early feminism that was trans-exclusionary. My purpose in using queer woman-identified narrators is to hopefully be inclusive and to avoid confusion or negative and unwanted mislabeling. That being said, Farwell's work on lesbian narratives is invaluable and well worth drawing from. She comments, "From the pens of women writers of the last twenty-five years, the lesbian subject appears as a powerful discursive and political tool for challenging the asymmetrical gender codes in the narrative and the trap of male homosociality and homosexuality" (17). I would like to take her idea of the "the lesbian subject," which can be radically political and powerful, and expand it to include queer woman-identified subjects in a wider array of narratives—in this case fan fiction. Femslash fan fiction is exclusively about queer woman-identified women. Farwell writes, "Lesbian as a metaphor for woman expands and shifts the narrative codes by securing a place for female narrative agency in the narrative roles of protagonist and narrator" (17-18). The metaphoric lesbian as a "bodily figure" disrupts the traditional heterosexual narrative structures.

To define "narrative" is no simpler a task than to define "lesbian." Farwell writes

that postmodernism believes narrative is a "powerful if not closed ideological system into

which lesbians enter only to be entangled in a heterosexual, male story" and traditional

lesbian theory "treats narrative itself as a relatively neutral tool into which lesbians can be

written" (5; 4). Farwell herself asserts, "Narrative is the way we give meaning to life, the

way we order the chaos of events" (19). Narrative is part of the human experience.

Humans desire to make meaning of life and when we aren't being heard, or our story is

being told for us, we have to find a way to take back or discover our narrative. In her

article "'Reading for It'" Lesbian Readers Constructing Culture and Identity Through

Textual Experience" Sheila Liming writes,

> To write as a queer voice means to resist our society's attempts to hold us
> back, to fight against forces that prevent the illumination of that
> experience and, consequently, to kindle a system of connections between
> readers and writers as part of the vital, requisite task of constructing
> culture. At the same time, reading with a queer conscious requires a
> similar amount of resistance; gay readers are required…to participate in a
> particular process of transformation when approaching a text…It is only
> through transformation that queer readers may extract true meaning from
> texts and may ascribe the significance of that meaning to their own lives.
> Such is the basis of culture, a necessary force that transforms us while we
> transform and challenge the elements that comprise it (100).

It is here that I would like to begin examining "Love at First Science," one of the stories

being told by queer women and some of the ways these stories transform the larger

narratives that dominate culture and popular media.

"Love at First Science"

"Love at First Science" is an original work of fan fiction by thecirclesquare that can be found on Archive of Our Own and Fanfiction.net. The story consists of 21 chapters (44,124 words) and was published on February 23, 2015. It was eventually followed up by "Love at First Science Part Deux" and "The Science of Yes." The paratextual details note that the story has a mature rating and falls under the F/F category, or femslash. It is a story about the TV show Orphan Black and more specifically about the characters Delphine Cormier and Cosima Niehaus and the pairing of the two characters. The summary notes that the story is an "alternate universe," meaning it will not take place in the storyworld of the canon show, but only as fanfic online. In this case it is set in San Francisco and it was started based on the prompt: "Delphine and Cosima meeting for the first time somewhere and Delphine falling for her instantly." Many fan fiction stories (hereafter referred to as fics) start out based on prompts from other fans or writers in the fandom community. They can come anonymously or not, in the form of messages in online platforms like tumblr.com.

"Love at First Science" is told in first person voice from Delphine Cormier's point of view. In The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative, H. Porter Abbott writes

> Narrative voice is a major element in the construction of a story. It is therefore crucial to determine the kind of person we have for a narrator because this lets us know just how she injects into the narration her own needs and desires and limitations, and whether we should fully trust the information we are getting (72). [This statement is such a can of worms. It implies Mr. Abbott has a standard or norm in mind, and that is precisely the kind of mindset you are arguing against: the narrowly exclusive.]

From the beginning Delphine addresses the reader: "It was my first time visiting that city [San Francisco], you see. In fact, it was my first time visiting the States, ever" (Chapter 1). Delphine invites the reader into an intimate journey, as if they already have a unique confider / confidante relationship. In her chapter "The Romantic Lesbian Narrative: Adrienne Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems* and Marilyn Hacker's *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons*," Farwell examines traditional romance narratives and the difficult task of writing a "lesbian" romance narrative. She uses Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems* to discuss how the lesbian subject becomes the romance narrator. Farwell writes,

> …lesbian subjects exist in two parallel and interrelated narratives. The first part of the sequence emphasizes the primary counterplot, the relationship of the lover and the beloved, the subject and the object of the story; the second part of the narrative picks up the narrator's singular journey as an independent, creative lesbian subject yet one who is not defined solely in isolation (119).

Delphine immediately sets up the story to be one of discovery and new experiences. She starts her trip to America with her boyfriend Josh, desiring to see America the way she had envisioned and "traced out when [she] was a teenager" on an old map. But it soon becomes apparent that her boyfriend Josh has plans of his own and Delphine is disappointed and dissatisfied with him. She spends the first ten days of her trip in the suburbs at the home of Josh and his family. In a moment of internal struggle she questions, "Why [do] I feel like a prisoner?" (Chapter 1). Prior to the introduction of Cosima or any other female characters, Delphine feels trapped and dissatisfied. She makes up her mind to go down into the city rather sit in Josh's "nice, big American house [which] sat on a hill that looked down on the San Francisco Bay" (Chapter 3). The couple argues, further alienating Delphine from this man that she had attached herself to for two years. He agrees to accompany her to the California Academy of Sciences to see an

albino alligator exhibit that she has wanted to see, though he has no interest in her career

or in science. The first glimpse of Cosima, who is in charge of the alligator exhibit,

sparks a change in Delphine, evinced by a new inner monologue that begins and is

highlighted by italics. These italicized inner thoughts illuminate Delphine's awakening

(from the heteropatriarchal forces that have held her back) and signal her as a queer

narrator.

Her first thought upon seeing Cosima is: "*She doesn't look like a school teacher*"

(Chapter 1). She hones in on Cosima's hands as she is speaking and examines her

appearance, "First of all her hair was pulled back into neat dreadlocks. She wore an

assortment of colorful bracelets on both of her wrists; I heard the bracelets jingle with

every hand gesture. She had on dark eyeliner and thick rimmed glasses" (Chapter 1). In

traditional male romance narratives like Spenser's *Amoretti,* Farwell notes, "The female

body is not only fragmented, its parts listed and apostrophized, but th[e] body is likened

to precious commodities which are bought, sold, and traded. It is upon this transaction

that the poet builds his persona" ("Romance" 112). Delphine's description of Cosima

stands in stark contrast. She resists comparison in her description of Cosima's physical

body instead indulging in sensory experience. Farwell describes the queer female

narrator's intentions

> Thus, when the beloved's body is described, it is not catalogued
> objectively or voyeuristically; rather, it is most often described
> nonsexually in order to counter the fragmentation violently forced upon it
> in the system itself. On one level, this is an attempt to normalize not only
> the male-defined abject female body but also the grotesque, sexually
> rampant lesbian body of the nineteenth - century sexologists which still
> lives on in popular conceptions of the lesbian (122).

Delphine is inexplicably drawn to Cosima: "Without realizing it, I moved towards her" (Chapter 1). In a subversal of the "love at first sight trope," Delphine falls for a woman at first sight, although she has never been attracted to a woman before. She says, "I couldn't help but stare at her. There was something about her" (Chapter 1). It doesn't occur to her that she might be attracted to her until they are talking: "I was distracted by her lean arms, which she crossed over her chest. *Oh my god*, I thought. *Am I checking her out?* She turned away for a moment, and I was afraid she might leave" (Chapter 1). Delphine focuses our attention as readers on Cosima's body and Delphine's thoughts as she realizes that she is experiencing attraction for another woman.

Delphine's heretofore unrecognized queerness is marked by her inner monologue and it is abruptly interrupted by the entrance of Josh. The two women are speaking alone, having a coy first conversation and Delphine wonders, "*Is she flirting with me? Am I flirting back?*", when suddenly "Josh showed up" (Chapter 1). His arrival disrupts the developing queer narrative. His presence becomes increasingly oppressive and undesired. His departure frees Delphine to connect with Cosima and to express herself freely inwardly as well as outwardly. By the end of the first chapter Delphine admits to herself, "*Oh my god*, I thought. *I think I'm kind of falling for her*" (Chapter 1). This revelation empowers Delphine to take control of her narrative. She tells Josh that she wants to stay in the city to attend a night event at the Science Academy. Josh argues with her, "That's what you really want?" begging the question that maybe what she really wants is Cosima and the city, not Josh and the suburbs. Delphine narrates, "I nodded my head. I stood with my arms crossed. I would not move. I could not physically be moved from that spot" (Chapter 2). She begins to question whether she was ever attracted to Josh: "*Why does*

Cosima make me blush, but Josh doesn't? Did he ever make me blush?" (Chapter 2). The couple's fight escalates until there is a breaking point and the relationship is severed. Josh offers an ultimatum, not thinking Delphine will take the bait. But Delphine has reached her own breaking point and is ready to be free. She leaves Josh and is free to roam the city until her date with Cosima at the Science Academy that evening. She ruminates on this new "feeling of possibility;" no longer a prisoner, she is free to discover herself. She stands in front of a flower shop and contemplates buying roses for Cosima, "As I stood in front of that store, I wondered at the stranger in the reflection. Who was this woman suddenly romantic, suddenly silly, suddenly charmed over a girl" (Chapter 2). Delphine is inhabiting this new queer space as narrator and the narrative becomes a queer space.

While Delphine waits for Cosima on the dance floor, she is hit on by a woman named Erin who was "attractive [and] more butch than Cosima" (Chapter 4). Erin enters the narrative but does not disrupt. She gives Delphine space to examine her attraction to women and to Cosima and to introduce the "jealous lover" trope. The trope is completely subverted in this instance because it involves three women. Delphine narrates,

> Suddenly, I felt someone touch my back. I felt a hand on the small of my back, and I felt a body slide into the space next to me. I already knew it was Cosima, even before I looked down at her smiling face. "Hey, baby," she said. Then she leaned up on her toes to kiss me on the cheek. "Thanks for getting my drink." When she said, *baby*, I think my knees buckled. I had always hated that word before (Chapter 4).

In this scene Cosima is rescuing Delphine from an unwanted suitor, but Delphine's focus on Cosima's physical presence filling the empty space next to her foreshadows the space she will inevitably fill in her life. Their story is a budding romance, after all.

Delphine continually highlights actions and behaviors of Cosima's that she previously has found unpleasant or even detestable, such as being called "baby." When

they are dancing Delphine comments, "I noticed a tiny drop of sweat on her lip. If I had seen something like that on Josh or anyone else, I wouldn't have liked it. But on Cosima, I found myself licking my own lips. I found myself wanting to wipe it away, or even more, to kiss it" (Chapter 5). When they are outside and Delphine is cold, Cosima offers her jacket. Delphine protests, "But she was already taking it off. I felt such strange feelings. I was grateful, because I was really cold. I felt turned on, because she was being so chivalrous. And I also felt silly. I generally didn't like it when guys tried to do that kind of thing for me" (Chapter 7). Delphine continually highlights instances where Cosima does something for her that used to feel oppressive. But now she feels unrestricted by gender roles or the politics of power. When they are dancing together Delphine expresses newfound freedom: "I felt something that I can honestly say I had never felt before. I felt, for lack of a better word, macho. It was kind of uncomfortable and kind of amazing. It was like discovering a new item on the menu at my favorite restaurant. It was something I had never considered before, but once I tried it... it was all I wanted to order" (Chapter 6). Delphine takes this new hunger with her as she progresses in her relationship with Cosima.

As a queer narrator, Delphine is on a journey of self-discovery. Sex with Cosima is her first sexual encounter with another woman and she highlights details of this encounter that express newfound freedom from gender roles and surprise and admiration at queer cisgendered female sex. Ann Matsuuchi writes,

> Sex and domesticity are two of the most important, yet often distorted, locations of everyday life. Happy endings, connoting both physical pleasures in sexual transactions as well as fairy-tale conclusions to stories, inform the linear teleological narratives of possibility that some individuals devise for themselves (275).

Sex and domesticity are often unexplored areas of queer representations because sex, expecially is seen as perverted. This in turn erases the possibility of happy endings for queer characters. Fan fiction explores these areas of queer life and opens the doors for queer futurity. In "Love at First Science," Delphine focuses on arousal, the realities of taking off cocktail dresses and glasses, anxiety and nerves, and asking for consent. Delphine expresses surprise when she realizes how sex will work between their bodies: "Somehow, I hadn't even thought about it, hadn't considered it a possibility before that moment. This whole time, those hands had been sexual organs. I was on fire from my toes to my belly" (Chapter 9). After sex, Delphine confesses that it was

> "Different good, I think. I mean, I felt so…"
> "What? You felt so what?"
> "Manly," I said, and then I couldn't help but laugh.
> "Is that a good thing?" She asked, and she was laughing with me.
> "Yeah," I said. "Unexpected, but good" (Chapter 10).

Delphine pays attention to small details and everyday realities. She opens the door for pleasure and happiness. The two women are unrestricted by heteronormative gender roles, and they are free to express themselves and experience bodily pleasure however they would like.

Throughout the rest of the fic Delphine dances awkwardly around her inward desire to confess her love for Cosima. She worries that it is too soon to have fallen in love, that her feelings aren't returned, and that even if they are returned there is not a way to make their new relationship work overseas when she returns home to France. Delphine does not doubt that she has fallen in love with this woman in two days, only that perhaps it is unrequited or doomed to be just that—"an international love affair." When they end up at Cosima's apartment after their second date, Cosima teases Delphine, "'You'd just

love to take me on a bearskin rug, in front of a fireplace, just like in those romance novels.' She tried to act cool, but I could see that she was imagining it, as much as she was making fun of it, she was also imagining it, and liking the idea. She exhaled again. 'Bien sûr,' I said quietly" (Chapter 17). At the same time that Delphine and Cosima remain at an ironic distance and mock "romance novels," they are themselves wrapped up in their own romance. At the moment it remains shrouded in mystery, perhaps because the traditional heteronormative romance would suggest that theirs is doomed to fail. They rest in a space of panic and limbo, unable to communicate until they cross through the ironic barrier and embrace a queer romance that is uniquely their own. In a moment of sexual intimacy, they are at their most vulnerable. Delphine remarks, "When she leaned over me, I was surprised to find her face glasses-free. *So this is what you really look like*, I thought. I stared. I felt like I was seeing her for the first time. She was beautiful. She fit this place, this room, exactly. And somehow, I felt myself fitting into it, too. Slipping into it slowly, but not quite yet" (Chapter 17). As they get closer and closer Delphine begins to see with greater clarity: "The only light in the room was a small lamp. It cast a weak yellow light across us. I saw my own naked body in heavy shadows and I saw her face, naked in its own way. We both became momentarily uncanny — not really ourselves — in those shadows. *Or maybe it's the exact opposite*, I thought. *Maybe this is who we really are*" (Chapter 17). Being naked exposes Delphine in a way that is new and disarming. She begins to imagine her life with Cosima, but this seems unimaginable and frightening, almost inconceivable: "*Oh, no,* I thought. *This is too dangerous. This is a dangerous dream I'm dreaming*. 'Cosima,' I said. She looked down at me and smiled. I touched her face. 'Are you real?' I asked" (Chapter 17). Their intimate physical

connection and moment of passion releases Delphine's pent up emotions and her inability to speak free Cosima to confess her love. Once Cosima speaks it Delphine can't stop saying it: "After I had said it once, it just kept coming out of my mouth, over and over again" (Chapter 17). Delphine is freed to speak her inner thoughts and emotions directly to Cosima, her beloved.

In the end Delphine chooses to be with Cosima, defying all odds. And rather than going back to Paris, marking the end of their relationship, Delphine tells Cosima that "this is just the beginning" (Chapter 21). This fic is a queering of the traditional romance narrative. These queer romances—and femslash fan fiction in general--"…they leave no room for ambivalence…spare no sexual explicitness…[and] dare the love narrative to harbor a lesbian subject" (109). These characters come from the television show *Orphan Black* where they are canonically in a romantic and sexual relationship. The show itself, however, is not romance driven. In *Orphan Black* Cosima is a genetic clone with a terminally ill disease, and she is being systematically studied for a science experiment on human clones. Delphine is her corporate monitor who has been sent to report on her behavior and biology. Delphine's intentions and ethics are constantly under question when it comes to her relationship with Cosima and the other characters on the show. Consequently, the couple often fight and eventually break up for an entire season and Cosima dates another woman. At the end of that season Delphine is shot and is assumed dead until the end of the next season. "Love at First Science" and other fics like it that focus on the queer female relationships from popular media do many important things for the authors and fans. These fics take representations that aren't the most positive representations of queer female relationships (and are sometimes entirely negative) and

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they seek to refocus the narrative to tell the story of the couple and characters in a more positive light.

"Fix-It Fic"

These positive refigurings of media texts can bring comfort and hope to fandoms in pain. After a traumatic character death on the television show *The 100*, many fans felt betrayed. But the feelings of hurt went beyond. Commander Lexa, leader of the twelve clans of "Grounders," those living on earth after a nuclear apocalypse, was shot by a bullet intended for her female lover Clarke, leader of the "Sky People," or those people surviving in a space station after the nuclear apocalypse. I will go into further detail about the fallout of the fandom after Lexa's death, the infighting between fans, the hatred towards producers of the show, and the social movement that was sparked to bring positive change to LGBTQ representation in media, in Chapter Four. Many fans were angry and depressed, and as members of a vulnerable minority many of these young fans were suicidal. Fans looked to each other for comfort and hope, and writing fic is instrumental in that process.

Often this type of fan fiction is referred to as Fix-It fan fiction, or "fanfiction that changes something about canon that the fan writing the fic wasn't happy with, such as the ending. This can be anything from explaining plot holes or inconsistent characterization to bringing a favorite character back from the dead" ("Fix-It"). If you search for "Fix-It" fan fiction within *The 100* fandom works on Archive of Our Own several hundred works appear. Many of the authors make note that their works take place after Season Three Episode Seven, "Thirteen" (when Lexa was killed), and they aim to fix the show. Some of the various tags used to express this are as follows:

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- After 3x07 because that was some bullshit

- Angst with a Happy Ending

- no one dies, Lexa Lives, You're Welcome

- a.k.a. "The One In Which We Fix This Fucking Shit" because 3x07 was bullshit

- Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence

- Happy Ending

- no one dies, Especially not gays

- I'm gonna fix the show

- none of ur faves die, what a concept

These tags suggest a desire to rectify what has been seen as an egregious error. The writers and readers are seeking happy endings for the characters, as well as themselves. There is also a push to change the canon text and even replace it. Author dangerdonut prefaces their fan fiction "I will follow you into the dark" with this summary, "Post 3x07. Clarke saves Lexa from her gunshot wound and hides her out in the bunker, getting help from an old friend along the way." After this summary she snidely adds, "Fuck Jason [Rothenburg, the showrunner], don't watch anything past 3x07, this is your canon now." Her comment suggests that she felt the representation of LGBTQ persons to be so negative and damaging she found it necessary to recreate the media text and replace the existing canon.

Through the establishment of queer female narrators, fan fiction authors create new stories that defy dominant narratives and the public discourse that seeks to suppress LGBTQ persons. These narrators draw attention to the everyday realities of queer women, suggesting happiness in the pleasures of discovery and intimacy between two

women. Broadening our scope of literary study to include such texts furthers the cause of femslash fan fiction; that is, privileging and giving voice to new voices, voices that have been largely silenced in popular media.

CHAPTER FOUR

OTPs, NOTPs, BROTPs, OT3s, and Can't-We-All-Just-Get-Along-TPs:
The Art of War in Online Fandom[1]

Although many fans have found great friends and a sense of deep belonging and self-acceptance in fandom, fandom is not a monolithic space consisting of safety and community. In his article "Fan-tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom," Derek Johnson suggests "the multidimensional, antagonistic dynamics of cult fandom demand that we avoid utopian models of fan community and productive participation" (299). To focus solely on the harmony and community fostered by fan spaces would do a disservice to the multi-faceted point of debate and discourse created by texts that draw in fans from a wide range of cultural demographics.

This chapter focuses on points of contact where fan factions clash with each other and with producers, and the effect digital fandom has had on these interactions. Online fandom allows fans to instantaneously and continuously interact with other fans, producers, and actors. This access has broken down the "fourth wall" between fans and producers, leading Jenna Kathryn Ballinger to comment that "fans are now more fearless," feeling "they have the right to not only state their opinion but to aim those opinions at people with positions of power in the entertainment world" (3.3). Sites like Tumblr and Twitter have exponentially increased these interactions, allowing some fans to hide behind anonymous functions and feel uninhibited in their responses and communications. Alternatively, this access has given some fans the opportunity to have a

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[1] This chapter was originally published in part in The Learned Fangirl (June 2016).

voice in changing representation in media for the better. Conversely, in this breaking down of the fourth wall, producers and actors have entered the fan space. This break down has led to the potential for great change but also opens up the door for exploitation of fans.

Traditionally in theater the fourth wall refers to the "the invisible wall that divides the characters from the audience" (Romano). The term has evolved with changing technology and media, and in fandom it refers to "the invisible line of cover that shields fans from the outside world" (Romano). The proliferation of social media websites has not only made interaction between fans easier but has given producers easier access to fans as well. In his Afterword to *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, "The Future of Fandom," Henry Jenkins writes "Media companies act differently today because they have been shaped by the increased visibility of participatory culture: they are generating new kinds of content and forming new kinds of relationships with their consumers" (362). Producers are paying attention to what their fans are doing—what they are writing, creating, arguing, what they are dissatisfied with—because the fans are their consumers. As Matt Hills argues, they are "always already consumers" (27). But there is an uneven power structure that needs to be addressed. In this chapter I would like to examine these interactions and imbalances of power between fan interactions, and fan/producer interactions in fans of the science fiction television show *The 100*.

Ship Wars

A major point of schism in fandom comes from "ship wars" and "the inability of the producers'...to satisfy all...shipper interests" (Johnson, 288). I would like to focus on the ship wars and "war tactics" between fans and fans/producers in online fandom. While not all media fandom surrounds shipping, a large part of online media fandom activity revolves around choosing ships—those you love, and those you hate. Your OTP, or One True Pairing, typically informs your fan production and online activity.

For instance, my OTP is Cophine—Cosima and Delphine from *Orphan Black*. This means my fannish identity and online fandom involves reading Cophine-centric fanfiction, watching or making Cophine fanvids, creating angsty or hopeful playlists on 8tracks, buying t-shirts and tote bags on Redbubble, liveblogging new episodes, forming group chats to discuss the show, and, as an academic fan, I even write research papers about *Orphan Black* and Cophine. These activities form my personal fannish identity and experience in my fandom; each fan's experience and the fan activities they choose to participate in will inevitably be different, forming a unique combination threaded through with the colors of an OTP.

However, I would argue that as fans we move in and through a multitude of fandoms; there is not one coherent "fandom" in which we are all apart or that defines every fan. Concurrently, we have a multiplicity of OTPs, NOTPs (ships we adamantly do not want to see), BROTPs (pairings we "ship" as friends or "bros"), and constant dueling identities. Fig. 8 expresses the intense emotions often associated with shipping, even towards friends. There are certainly those of us who will set up strict binaries and engage in active and often aggressive behaviors to defend an OTP. There are others of us who

embrace a more neutral stance, often multi-shipping: the more the merrier. BROTPs and

OT3s (shipping three characters in a polyamorous relationship) abound. And sometimes

it can even be fun to crack-ship or heckle with outlandish pairings, sort of leaning back at

an ironic distance, removing oneself from staunch support of any ship through the posing

of ships that make others cringe and heave.

Fig. 8 Tumblr post expressing the importance of ships; obriengifs; tumblr.com; 9 Mar. 2015. Web.

Perhaps no fandom better displays the multi-faceted intricacies of "fan-tagonism"

in our current cultural moment than *The 100* fandom. Derek Johnson defines "fan-

tagonism" as "ongoing, competitive struggles between both internal factions and external

institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their

prospective interests" (287). He suggests this term in addition and contrast to "anti-

fandom" and "anti-fans" as proposed by Jonathan Gray, "for audiences who approach

texts in negatively charged, uninterested, or irritated ways" (Johnson 293). Johnson

argues that

> Anti-fans who hate a program (without necessarily viewing it) must be
> differentiated from disgruntled fan factions who hate episodes, eras, or
> producers because they perceive a violation of the larger text they still
> love. Fans may follow programs closely, even when meta-text and
> hyperdiegesis[2] become so divergent that one would rather see the series
> end than continue on its displeasing current course (293-94).

Vivi Theodoropoulou argues in his article "The Anti-Fan within the Fan: Awe and Envy

in Sport Fandom," that anti-fandom "encloses cases where the dislike of object A from

liking object B; where the hatred for something is dictated by the love for something else

and the need to protect the 'loved one'…the anti-fan is the person who hates the fan

object of another fan for the simple reason that this object is in direct, straightforward, or

historical competition with her/his own object of admiration. This way, an anti-fan is

always a fan" (318). He suggests that "binary oppositions" are required for anti-fandom

rivalries such as these. Not all fans adhere to strict binaries when it comes to devotion to

fan objects. When it comes to shipping, for example, some fans will ship multiple pairs,

breaking down the rigid and hostile barriers. Other fans see multi-shipping as impossible

and to multi-ship is to show a lack of devotion. These fans will label others as "fake" or

not "true" fans.

I would like to touch on several layered interactions within *The 100* fandom that

illustrate fan-tagonism and the various ways "disgruntled" fans express their displeasure

with other fans, producers, and episodes. The producers of the show encouraged a

particularly vitriolic ship war between fans using social media to disastrous results. The

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[2] Matt Hills defines hyperdiegesis as "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a
fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nonetheless appears to
operate according to principles of internal logic and extension" (137).

fans felt betrayed and exploited for economic gain and reactions range from enraged to a positive, organized social media movement for change.

The 100 is an American post-apocalyptic teen science fiction drama airing on The CW network starting on March 2014. Developed by showrunner, or the person who has overall creative control and management of a television program, Jason Rothenberg, the show follows a group of juvenile delinquents who are sent down to earth in search of life when the space station the remnants of humanity live on begins to run out of oxygen. The "last humans" have been living in the space station following a nuclear war and they assume the earth is unpopulated and possibly still inhabitable. The story begins when the "sky" people encounter the "grounders," the people still living on the earth, and a fight for control of land and territory ensues as the "sky" people attempt to claim land for themselves.

Fig. 9 Clarke Griffin; Deborah Pless; kissmywonderwoman.com; 29 May 2015. Web.

The show is told from the perspective of Clarke Griffin (Fig. 9), one of the 100 juvenile delinquents sent to Earth. Clarke leads the teenagers and serves as the medic. Clarke is also bisexual, a point that proves extremely important within the discussion of *The 100*'s fandom, especially within a discussion of ship wars, the intra-fandom fights about whom Clarke "belongs" with.

Fan/Fan Interactions

Though *The 100* is a dark show full of violence and death, it is still a deeply human show brimming with the capacity for human interaction and relationship. These range greatly, but there are a number of romantic and sexual relationships on the show. Of importance here are the relationships Clarke has with Bellamy Blake and Commander Lexa.

The interactions between shippers that support these ships are infused with intense vitriol. Fans who ship Clarke and Commander Lexa (shown in Fig. 10, hereafter referred to as Clexas) were largely drawn into the show by the hope of this female/female relationship between Clarke and Lexa, the teenage lesbian Commander of the 12 Grounder Clans. The passion of Clexas stem from a desire to see healthy and normalized LGBTQ representation on television.

Fans who ship Clarke and Bellamy Blake (shown in Fig. 11), one of the male leads, are known as Bellarkes. Shippers on both sides employ various tactics to defend themselves and tear the other side down. One tactic is mostly polite discourse, in depth analysis that tries to demonstrate or prove why one ship is superior and the other inferior. Bellarkes often deconstruct Lexa and Clarke's relationship in an effort to prove that it is

Fig. 10 Clarke Griffin and Commander Lexa; Hellen K.; Melty.com; 3 Apr. 2015. Web.

abusive and toxic. Clexas often deconstruct Bellamy and Clarke's relationship similarly to prove that they are only platonic friends.

Interactions between these two groups can also escalate to name calling, "@-ing" or calling someone out directly by their handle on social media, "dragging," mocking, appropriating fanart and other fan productions, and intentionally seeking out tags in order to argue or harass. These interactions are illustrated in Figs. 12a and 12b. Clexas and Bellarkes often engage directly on sites like Twitter to mock each other and to fight over whose ship is "better" or more plausible or actually canon.

Fan/Producer Interactions

Fans often express their feelings directly towards the television show's creators and actors. Writers and actors have never been more accessible than now through social media platforms like Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Persicope. *The 100* took full advantage of this access to fans at first to their complete benefit, drawing in a growing

Fig. 11 Clarke Griffin and Bellamy Blake; Andrea Reiher; zap2itt.com; 28 Jan. 2015. Web.

fanbase. This access soon backfired and fans felt betrayed, leaving the cast and crew, and especially showrunner Jason Rothernberg, completely vulnerable and accountable.

The 100's showrunner, writers, and actors alike participated in livetweeting the episodes with fans. Showrunner Jason Rothenberg took to Twitter to promote the show and often seemed to prefer Clarke and Lexa's relationship, to the joy of Clexas and consternation of Bellarkes.

Before Season 3 Episode 7 "Thirteen" aired on March 3, 2016, Jason Rothenberg urged fans to watch live, saying they wouldn't want to miss this event. During the episode Clarke and Lexa finally consummated their relationship. Unfortunately, the next scene culminated in Lexa's death by a bullet intended for Clarke. Fans who were livetweeting immediately reacted to the death and to Jason's tweets. Many expressed

Fig. 12a Responses to tweet from showrunner Jason Rothernberg; JRothernbergTV; twitter.com; 3 Mar. 2016. Web.
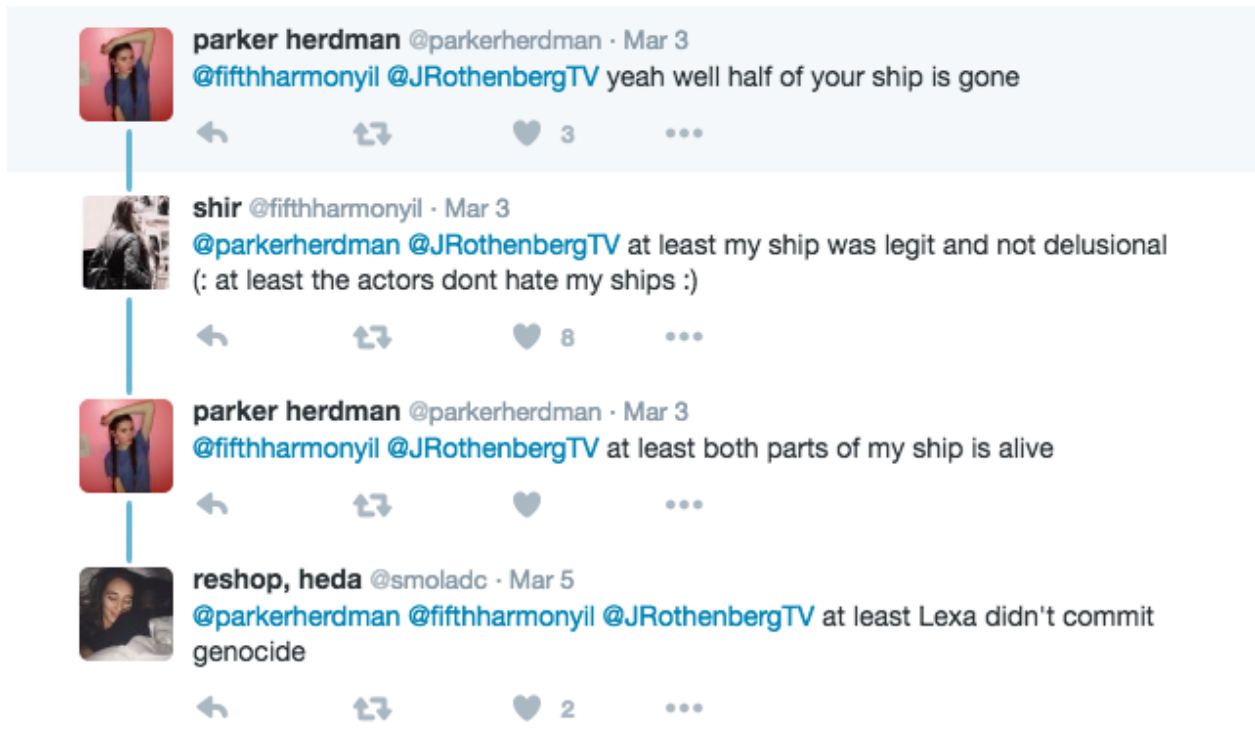
Fig. 12b More tweets between fans arguing; JRothernbergTV; twitter.com; 3 Mar. 2016. Web.

disappointment, sadness, but most expressed anger, tweeting "die" or "kys" (kill

yourself), as shown in the Fig. 13.

Fans felt personally sought out and exploited by Jason Rothenburg and other

members of *The 100*. During the hiatus between seasons two and three, Shawna Benson,

a staff writer for *The 100*, began entering L Chat, a web forum for lesbians. She used the

pseudonym "Your Friendly Neighborhood Lurker" and claimed to be there for "rumor

control and questions about canon" ("Your Friendly"). She dispelled rumors that Lexa

was going to be killed off in Season Three after a signed poster from Alycia Debnam-

Carey to Jason Rothenberg thanking him for "this opportunity" began circulating online.

Benson assured fans this was not the case, though she was already aware that Lexa would

Fig. 13 Tweets from fans to showrunner Jason Rothenberg; JRothernbergTV; twitter.com; 3 Mar. 2016. Web.

be killed off. In an episode of their podcast *Fansplaining* about fandom called "The

Fourth Wall,"Flourish Klink and Elizabeth Minkel discuss the intersection of fans and

producers. Minkel asks, " I don't know, I think of *Buffy*. Do you want them, the writers,

in your message boards? They were coming in there and asking, kind of putting out

feelers to see how things went down amongst fans. And should that be happening?" In

the case of Shawna Benson, she entered an LGBTQ safe space with a vulnerable

population where she at first hid her identity, then she ultimately lied to fans to keep them

watching. She wrote in one post, "Like pretty much everyone else, I am ship-agnostic.

But I have a fondness for Clexa that cannot be denied. And I'm straight, since someone

asked my orientation. I'm here because you guys amuse me. And this is completely

unsanctioned, hence why I can't prove anything" ("Your Friendly"). She admits she is

not allowed to be there by her empoloyers; she does not identify with the community; she

is "amused" by them. Essentially she has no vested interest in the fan community other

than to calm any panic that may arise from rumors, panic that may keep fans from tuning

in and watching the show.

Flourish Klink argues that producers can and should be able to know what their

audiences are thinking, though this makes Elizabeth Minkel nervous (as what happened

with *The 100* has shown):

> **FK:** And I don't think it's wrong for [producers] to try and track the tag
> for *Supernatural* or for whatever else it is, or to even search on keywords,
> because they're trying to find out what the audience response is. And I
> think we want that to some degree! We want to know, if people are mad at
> them for doing something, they should know.

> **ELM:** Well, really though?

> **FK:** Well, when on *Game of Thrones* they rewrote a scene to have Jaime
> rape Cersei, yeah! I wanted them to know I was mad!

> **ELM:** OK, but do you want them to read your fanfiction that you write as
> a critique of that writing decision?

> **FK:** I think some people do and some people don't, and I think whether
> you do or you don't, if you put it on Tumblr and you use keywords it's
> going to get caught up. Because there's no way to separate that out unless
> you choose to put it on a site where it can't be easily crawled.

Klink points out the value of participatory culture and audience response—as fans we can

make our voices heard. And if producers are smart they should want to hear what their

audiences want. Producers should not exploit their consumers and take advantage of as

much capital as possible and then dispose of those fans when they are no longer

necessary. What *The 100* did wrong was make their product without any knowledge or

research into what their consumer needed or desired. And when they wanted to sell their product they sought out the consumers and told them it was what they had been looking for. But they told that to each different type of consumer they encountered. They encouraged their fans to fight and all of this certainly worked for them for a while; they saw a lot of success and popularity, but they didn't expect the fans to push back when they realized they were lied to and exploited. In her response to Devin Faraci's article on fan entitlement, Minkel writes,

> Critique is vital to both individual artists and to art at large. And art, the best art, is in conversation with society. The idea that art or artists exist in a vacuum, rather than in dialogue with the world that surrounds them, is absurd. And the idea that you can put your work in the public sphere, that you can engage in conversation with your fans on social media, and soak up the likes and faves and positive comments but cry harassment and abuse when people disagree with you and push back—well, that's also absurd. You are not entitled to create art without consequence. And no art is ahistorical, or divorced from socio-political structures of inequality, because it's all made by and for humans (Minkel).

As humans we react to art. When we feel deep and distressing emotions sometimes we respond poorly. Unfortunately when some fans react negatively, these are the interactions that are remembered and held up as the examples of fandom at large and what it means to be a fan.

<center>Policing Fandom and the "Golden Age"</center>

Unfortunately, though fandom and geek culture has come into the limelight in the past decade, they are largely seen as entitled and obsessive and their "popularity" can perhaps be seen economically because fans are "moneymaking, valuable audience members" (Klink). Almost weekly, articles are written about fandom being "broken." Devin Faraci cynically argues that Stephen King's *Misery "*is a very, very thinly veiled

<center>61</center>

metaphor for the relationship between pop fiction creators and their most dedicated, most rabid fanbases and the way the creators can be trapped, bullied and tortured by their own creations and the people who love them." He calls Annie Wilkes the "Patron Saint of Fandom," and it is this vision of the obsessive "entitled" and psychotic female that is usually associated with fandom.

Previously in this chapter I showed fans of *The 100* reacting negatively by tweeting death threats to the showrunner, and it is true that there are fans who threaten, stalk, and bully; no one is arguing against these undeniable facts. However, it is erroneous to pathologize all fans as obsessive and dangerous. And often in fandom, fans react to negative and dangerous fan-producer-actor interactions from other fans; these reactions come in the form of policing behavior, pushing for positivity and a return to a "golden age" of fandom harmony, and defending the fan text, producers and actors. Derek Johnson writes, "Fans may hate the current status quo, but their intense feelings and continued contributions to fan discourse stem from pleasurable engagement with the diegetic past" (294).

While many fans of *The 100* stopped watching the show after Lexa's shocking death in Season 3 Episode 7 "Thirteen," and appear to be "anti-fans," they are simultaneously active fans that participate in online fandom. Desiring fandom to be a safe space, some fans take to policing others. Often fans will attempt to call out or shame other fans they view as behaving disrespectfully. Many fans were quick to urge others to refrain from saying things to the producers and actors on *The 100* that were potentially harmful.

> OKAY.We can all agree that Jason's not the best showrunner.
> BUT!! People!! STOP!! TWEETING!! HIM!! TO!! DIE!! He is a REAL

person, WITH KIDS AND FAMILY.. not a fictional character..yes,it's sad that Lexa's dead,but DO NOT TWEET THINGS LIKE THAT.That's disgusting and gross…

IT'S GETTING OUT OF CONTROL!! Every mention @Jason is DIE??? like STOP!!! Yes,he's not the best person ever (not that I know him personally,but from what we know…),but telling him to die??? THIS IS TOO MUCH. COME TO YOUR SENSES, PLEASE!!! (bellarke-always)

Others urge fans to create harmony with other fans and to co-exist with other shippers.

Fig. 14 illustrates one of the ways fans police other fans, by showing disdain for their

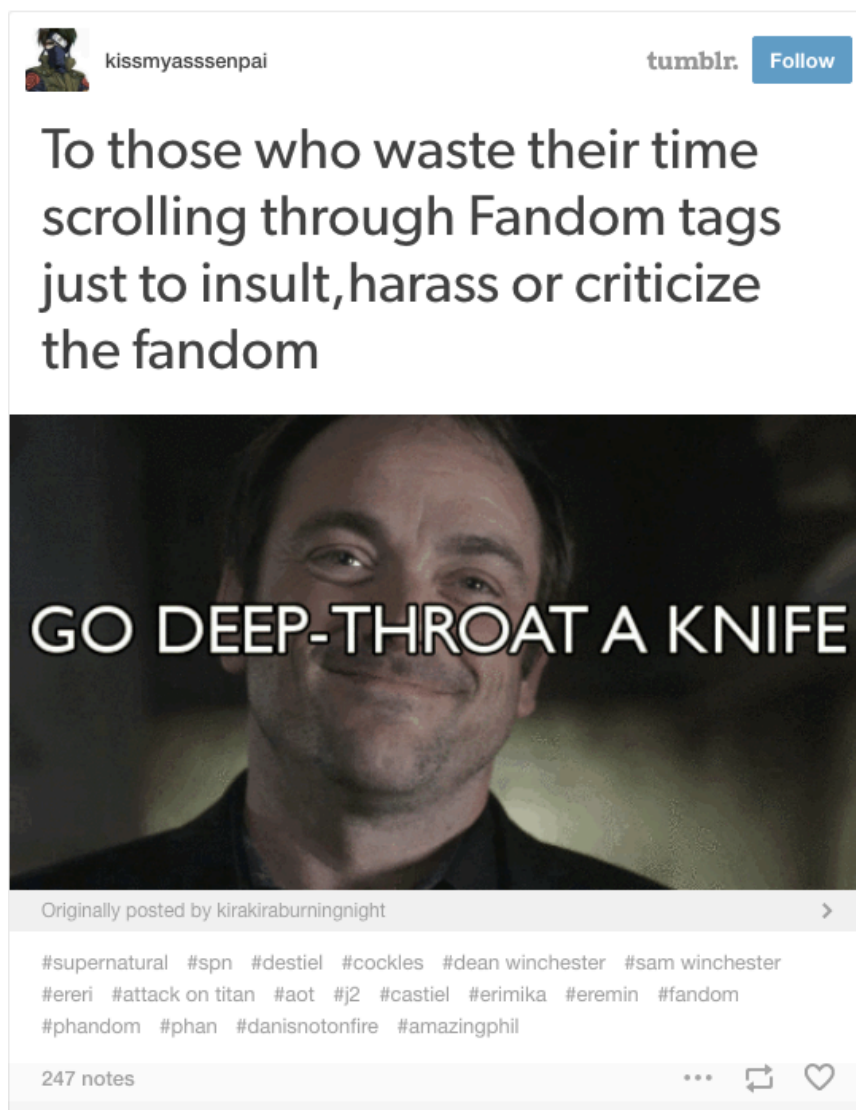negative or damaging behavior.

Fig. 14 Tumblr post showing disdain towards other fans who antagonize and stir up negativity; kissmyasssenpai; tumblr.com; 4 May 2016. Web.

The negativity can be overwhelming and it's understandable why many fans feel jaded and cynical, laughing at terms like "community" and "harmony." Fig. 14 expresses many fans' feelings about fandom, a space that can become toxic the longer it exists and the more invested the fans get in the text of the show.
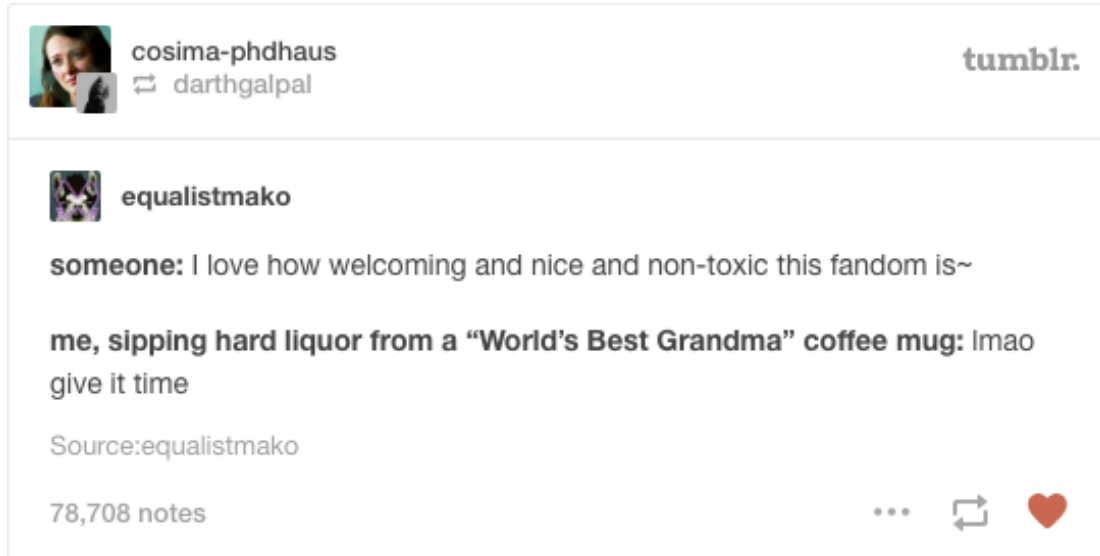

Fig. 15 Tumblr post expressing a jaded attitude towards fandom and community; cosima-phdhaus; tumblr.com; 4 May 2016. Web.

A Re-Purposing of Negativity and Anger

In an environment saturated with emotions where a lot is at stake, it can be hard to believe in the benefits of fandom amidst a cloud of negativity. But it is possible to turn these powerful negative emotions into strength. *The 100* fandom has proved the value in rising up in protest as fans. One only has to visit lgbtfansdeservebetter.com to see the impact of the fandom. In response to Lexa's death many fans quickly banned together and turned their anger into a widespread social movement. These fans started a fundraiser for the Trevor Project, the only national organization providing suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth in crisis, and to date

(June 23, 2016) have raised $133,712. The fans argue that the producers have a duty to fans: "The empathetic reactions of viewers need to be taken into consideration, especially when you have so many young, LGBT or questioning individuals watching and getting involved in this relationship. Not to mention, by many accounts, these were viewers that [the show] bent over backwards to get invested" (http://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/). In an effort to amend what the fans view as an injustice, and to start to build a bridge between fans and producers, LGBTFansDeserveBetter created The Lexa Pledge. This Pledge is "advocating to achieve real change in the quality of LGBTQ representation in the media" and is a statement outlining specific ways media industry professionals will seek to change the way they represent LGBTQ characters and stories in the future. To date (June 23, 2016) it has been signed by sixteen producers, directors, and writers that have pledged to change the way they work and write.

Where Do We Go From Here?

In his groundbreaking work on fandom, *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins argues that "fandom is an aspect of how we make sense of the world, in relation to mass media, and in relation to our historical, social, cultural location" (27). So what do we do when our favorite show has let us down and our fandom has fallen apart and become ravaged with negativity and hate? It can be hard to pick up and move on from a show and a fandom that has been a formative and meaningful experience and safe space. It can also be hard to start blocking people online in your fandom that have started churning out hate and breeding pessimism, people that may have been your longtime friends. Where to go from here?

Many fans move on to new shows and new fandoms, often sticking together. The Clexa fans, for example, did this. They followed the actress who portrayed Commander Lexa (Alycia Debnam-Carey) to the show she left *The 100* for—*Fear The Walking Dead*. The Bellarke fans remain fans of *The 100* because their ship is in tact and the show was renewed for a fourth season. Fans ultimately choose how they will react and how they will represent themselves as fans. There are fans who are routinely destructive and antagonistic, but there are always fans who fight for harmony, community, and positive change in the media that we are all so passionate about. There will always be infighting, antagonism, and discontent within a community, but that means there is something worth fighting for and many chances to work together.

There is hope for producers who listen to their fans. Jenkins writes,

> We should certainly avoid celebrating a process that commodifies fan cultural production and sells it back to us with a considerable markup. Yet these same trends can also be understood in terms of making companies more responsive to their most committed consumers, as extending the influence that fans exert over the media they love, and fans as creating context in which more people create and circulate media that more perfectly reflects their own world views (Future 362).

A lot can change if there is open dialog between fans and producers and if producers recognize how the imbalance of power leaves the fans at risk of exploitation. Much can be gained from producers who listen to the fans, because it is the fans that they have the most to gain from.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Fan studies, at first glance, may seem niche or inconsequential. But studying what we are fans—or not fans—of is important to cultural research and offers great insight into consumer relations. It could be argued that we are all fans; we all have objects that we desire and find pleasure in that inflect our human experience and identity. The level of engagement with cultural products—high to low—varies, but as I hope I've demonstrated, the way we interact with objects and texts has the capacity to change individual identity, communities, dominant discourse, and popular culture media production.

In this project I researched femslash fandom practices in online platforms such as Tumblr and Twitter. I looked at LGBTQ fans' responses to media representations through various fan activities and interactions. I conducted a survey of fans as well as sampling blog posts and tweets. I also closely read a selection of femslash fan fiction using Queer Narratology. These findings will further expand the fields of fan studies, online media studies, and narratology. Fan studies thus far has largely focused on slash fiction and fandom practices. My research into femslash fandom will add to the minimal study that has been devoted to femslash fandom and hopefully spark interest in future research. Further, my research on fan fiction using Queer Narratology helps push the boundaries of classical narratology into digital texts, so expanding the traditional definition of text.

In Chapter Two, "'My sexuality isn't the most interesting thing about me:'

Creating Discourse and Going Outside the *Orphan Black* Fandom," I explored fan

responses found on Tumblr to LGBTQ representation in *Orphan Black*. These fans

experienced positive change in their interpersonal relationships by appropriating the text

of *Orphan Black* and using it to represent their identity as an LGBTQ person. Fans are

experimenting with new technologies and digitization, finding freedom in the open access

and new languages created digitally. In her book *Millennial Fandom: Television

Audience in the Transmedia Age*, Louisa Ellen Stein describes the unique ways

"millennials"—fans born roughly between 1982 and 2004—appropriate and remix texts

and popular narratives:

> When we turn to millennial self-representation, what we find expands and
> confounds the commercial narratives that circulate about millennials.
> Looking at what millennials do with digital technology as they represent
> themselves or as they respond to representations of themselves
> demonstrates the molding impact of commercial representations, while
> revealing how millennials undermine, negotiate, and alter those narratives
> (5).

It is clear from the survey responses in Chapter Two that all of the responders were

millennials and the majority identified as female. Stein comments on the gendered

notions of fandom,

> Understandings of fandom have always been heavily shaped by gendered
> assumptions, be it the incoherent, screaming, excessive Beatles fans of
> Beatlemania, the seemingly failed masculinity of Trekkies, or, in more
> recent years, the recognition of media fandom as primarily female
> collective and as space for articulation of female and queer desire (9).

These findings, on age and gender, could be further explored. The impact of streaming

television web sites, such as Netflix and Hulu, and the importance of YouTube and

webseries platforms are changing the way young fans view and consume media and

interact online. Tumblr has become a site for a large community of young queer women who engage in fan consumption and activity, and media producers are taking notice.

Chapter Three, explores the coping fan fiction of young queer women as a response to negative and damaging LGBTQ representation in the media. Chapter Four further explores the ways fans respond to negative representation, such as the death of Commander Lexa in *The 100*. This character death in particular sparked fan response and social activism in the LGBTQ fan community on Tumblr. Their social movement got the attention of producers in the entertainment industry that have pledged to make a concerted effort to learn from the LGBTQ community and represent minorities with attention and accountability. It will be important to track the next few television seasons for real progress in regards to positive LGBTQ representation.

Although fan studies as a field is very progressive and inclusive there are other areas to push the boundaries in our research, especially on race and disability. While I will continue to open up discussion of femslash fandom and LBGTQ representation, there needs to be a more intersectional approach. I recognize this blind spot in my own research. In the future I will focus more on intersectionality in my research.

Hopefully my contributions to fan studies will open up discussion for more research into femslash fandom and young queer female fans. This demographic of young fans is growing fast and gaining a powerful platform through social media. Their fan practices and transformative works are worth studying; as academics we can learn a lot from their innovative appropriations of media texts and narratives.

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